Study Analyzes Asian American Political Contributions in 2014 Gubernatorial Race

In a recent analysis of donations in the 2014 Massachusetts gubernatorial race, the Institute for Asian American Studies (IAAS) found that local Asian American political engagement measured by political contributions has increased. The 2014 results were compared to a previous IAAS analysis of contributions in the 2002 governor’s race. The number of Asian American contributions grew by 90% from 2002 to 2014, while overall contributions grew by about 75%. The total dollar value of Asian American contributions rose to $297,884 in 2014 from $121,030 in 2012. The average Asian American contribution in 2014

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Conference Addresses Role of Research in Enhancing Asian American Student Success

Focusing upon and facilitating research on Asian American college students were the challenges addressed at The Second Conference on Enhancing Asian American Student Success: Linking Research and Practice. IAAS as a partner in UMass Boston’s Asian American Student Success Program (AASSP) assisted in the design and implementation of the conference.

Researchers, administrators, staff, and students from throughout New England gathered at the Ryan Lounge for presentations by two research panels and discussions in six breakout groups. Progress on fourteen research projects funded through the AASP’s Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) Grant was discussed. The range of topics relating to Asian American students was vast including, for example, examinations of the impact of changes in federal financial aid policy; parental and familial influences on Southeast Asian American students’ college and career decisions; a student mentoring program at the University of

Continued on page 4
Korean Americans Describe Challenges in Being Outside Religious Mainstream

Ethnic religious communities can provide invaluable support for members of minority groups. Aside from assisting immigrants with practical needs, religious institutions can also promote a sense of belonging and cultural identity. But what happens to those individuals who are not affiliated with the dominant religion practiced by their ethnic group? IAAS Research Fellow, Dr. Jane Yeonjae Lee examined this question and presented her findings at a campus talk this past April. Lee is a Post-doctoral Fellow at Northeastern University.

Some 70% of Korean Americans are affiliated with Korean Christian churches, most of which are Protestant. The remaining 30% are Catholic, Buddhist, or non-religious. Lee interviewed 21 Korean American young adults in the Boston area who are not practicing Protestants to see how they have been impacted by being outside the dominant religious community. All were between the ages of 25 and 35 and had spent their early childhood and adolescence in the U.S.

There were various reasons the interviewees gave for not affiliating with a Korean Protestant church as adults. Aside from those that were not Protestant, some had negative experiences in church when they were younger, while others simply did not believe in Christianity.

As Lee described, many felt their teenage and college years had been difficult due to their religious minority status. They often felt estranged from their Korean American peers whose social lives were strongly associated with their church community. At times they were teased or shunned because they were not Christian. As they grew older, some felt a strong desire to connect with other Korean Americans, yet at the same time felt marginalized from the mainstream Korean community.

Fortunately, as the interviewees entered adulthood, they were able to overcome their earlier struggles by creating their own social networks or finding alternative communities. For example, some felt more comfortable as part of a wider Asian American community, rather than a Korean American community. Some felt a sense of community through their workplaces. One woman created a social group of Korean Americans that revolved around a love of Korean food. Overall, in adulthood, the interviewees were able to find a sense of belonging as well as satisfy a need to maintain their Korean identity without compromising their beliefs. Lee will describe the interviewees’ experiences and reflections in much more detail in a paper to be published by IAAS soon.
A Revealing Look at the Dynamics of Indian American-Owned Motels

At a talk at UMass Boston this past May, Professor Pawan Dhingra of Tufts University presented his engaging research on the practices and attitudes of Indian American motel owners in the United States. The event was co-hosted by IAAS and the Sociology Department Colloquium Series.

Indian Americans, primarily with roots in Gujarat state, own over half of the motels in the U.S. This is particularly pronounced at the budget motel level but extends up to franchises of major hotel chains such as Hilton and Marriott. Their trade group, the Asian American Hotel Owners Association, has hosted a succession of U.S. presidents and major political figures as speakers at their annual conventions.

Despite this success and seeming affirmation of neoliberal ideals of self-reliance and hard work, Dhingra says, Indian American owners must deal with many challenges. These challenges encompass the racial, gender, cultural and political spheres. He described the environment of the motel lobby that initiates and frames the relationship between the motel and the customer. In order to minimize social distance between them, the lobby is often staged to be Christian, “American,” and/or local. Indian American motel owners prefer to hire white women to obscure the real identity of ownership. In another example involving lower budget motels, Dhingra noted that Indian American families often live in apartments behind the front desk. In such cases, however, physical indicators of family presence are suppressed. For example, no play facilities for children should be evident, and meal preparation is planned to minimize Indian cooking smells.

Motel ownership also reinforces gender roles. Wives are typically more responsible for housekeeping and laundry, while husbands deal with the business end and interface with the outside world of vendors and franchisers. Even in cases where female co-owners assume a more equal status, other circumstances constrain that status. Dhingra cited one case where the wife managed the hotel in the garb of a maid; this was a role for a woman of color with which customers were more comfortable.

Racial hierarchies develop in the staff of Indian American motels as well. The back of the motel is typically made up of people of color. There is a preference for Indians American workers, followed by Latinos. Indian Americans are judged as being the hardest working and most flexible. Latinos, while not as skilled, are seen as having similar immigrant values as Indian Americans. African Americans on the other hand are perceived as unwilling to work for their prevailing motel wages. When whites are hired for the back of the house, they are overwhelmingly female.

Indian American motel owners are justifiably proud of their success and progress. Dhingra’s research shows that this neoliberal, model minority success story however is more complicated and compromised than evident from the innocent lobby. For those more interested in this subject, Professor Dhingra’s research is documented in his book, Life Behind the Lobby: Indian American Motel Owners and the American Dream.
Making Invisible Pollution Visible

Visualizing Highway Pollution is a research project in the first of its two-year long activities. The project is led by principal investigators at UMass Boston, UMass Lowell, and Tufts University. Carolyn Wong, researcher at IAAS, is a principal investigator coordinating the research.

In Chinatown, pollution emitted by cars and trucks reaches some of the highest levels in the Boston area because of the community’s proximity to two major highways and dense traffic congestion in the neighborhood. One challenge faced by health educators is that ultrafine particles emitted by vehicles are invisible to the human eye and odorless but highly toxic. The research team is working to make the invisible particles visible with the help of a novel computer tool.

The first phase of the project, which is nearing completion, is to create an interactive map displaying how levels of pollutants vary across census blocks in Chinatown on the WEAVE platform (Web-based Analysis and Visualization Environment). As developed to date, the visualization allows a user to manipulate variables and see pollution levels change with wind speed and direction, temperature, and levels of traffic congestion. Map labels are bilingual in Chinese and English. The data used in the model and visualization were collected by the Community Assessment of Freeway Exposure and Health Study (CAFEH).

During the 2015–16 academic year, the research team will use a “train the trainer” approach to teach teenagers how to use the tool; in turn, teenagers will help teach adult immigrants. It is expected that this educational approach will spark lively bilingual conversation about what younger and older residents can do together about the pollution problem. Community partners include the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center and the Boston Chinatown Resident Association. This research is funded by the National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health.

AANAPISI conference, continued from page 1

UMass Boston Professor Peter Kiang introduces a panel at the Second Conference on Enhancing Asian American Student Success (right). The audience engages in the Ryan Lounge (left). Photos: Sokpagna Chuon.

Connecticut; the impact of linguistic modification of test items on nursing student test performance; and Hmong American students at California State University in Sacramento.

The afternoon breakout sessions provided opportunities for attendees to discuss specific areas in greater depth where research and practice could be linked. These areas included Southeast Asian American students’ college preparation and experiences; Asian American experiences in non-selective institutions; Asian American centers and clubs
Study Explores the Views of Chinese Adoptees on Searching for their Birth Parents

Between 1992 and 2012, over 80,000 children from China were adopted by American parents. With some of these adoptees now reaching adolescence and young adulthood, IAAS Research Fellow, Leslie Wang has been interested in exploring their feelings about searching for their birth parents. Dr. Wang, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at UMass Boston, is conducting a study on this topic and presented preliminary findings at a talk on campus this past April.

Finding birth parents of children adopted from China is very difficult. This is because giving up children in China is illegal and records are rarely kept on the parents. Adoptive parents and their children who want to make connections in China commonly visit the orphanage where the child lived, according to Wang.

Thus far she has collected over 200 responses to an online survey and conducted 19 in-depth interviews with adoptees aged 13–21. Almost all of the survey respondents were female (97%), and most had spoken to their parents about their feelings about searching for their birth parents, indicative of more openness now about adoption issues. Overall the respondents showed ambivalence to searching for birth parents: 45% expressed a desire to find their birth parents, while 37% were not sure, and 18% were not interested.

The primary reasons that respondents gave for wanting to search for birth parents were to see someone with a physical similarity to them, to find out if they have siblings, to learn about their medical history, and to find out why they were abandoned. Some expressed a desire for a deep relationship with her birth parents, while others just wanted to make a connection. Previous research has shown that some adoptees experience a sense of loss and abandonment and often have a need for emotional resolution in thinking about their birth parents. Female adoptees from China may believe that they were given up because of a traditional preference for male children and the one-child policy. As one 15-year old female stated regarding her desire to search for her birth parents:

*I want to know if there was someone in my family who wanted me. I want to prove to them that I... am just as good as a boy. I want them to be proud of who I became, even though they weren’t the ones who raised me.*

Fully two-thirds of the survey participants had already been to China at least once, indicating a desire to make linkages with China, even if birth parents cannot be found. When children are young, it’s generally the adoptive parents who instigate the visit to China and the search for more information on the adoption. In some cases, parents wanted to confirm that their child was adopted legally.

As the oldest adoptees are now about 25 years of age, they may develop their own interests in finding out more about their roots and developing linkages with their country of origin. As a consequence, Wang predicts there will be a wave in return travel to China soon.

and mentoring; Asian American students and alternative testing design; student civic engagement and long-term impact; and financial aid barriers.

The dominant themes and ideas for further research identified in the breakout discussion groups were reported in a closing plenary session.
rose as well to $243.97 from $187.93.

Through an Asian name identification technique, the report’s authors, Michael Liu and Paul Watanabe, searched the Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance’s database for likely Asian American contributions to candidates running for governor in 2014, Charlie Baker (R), Donald Berwick (D), Martha Coakley (D), Evan Falchuk (United Independent), Mark Fisher (R), Steven Grossman (D), Scott Lively (I) and Jeffrey McCormick (I). Only individual (excluding candidates’ personal contributions) and not business or organizational contributions were examined.

Overall there were nearly 108,000 contributions of which 1,221 were from Asian Americans, 1.1% of all contributions. Baker received the largest number of Asian American contributions followed by Coakley. As a share of the candidate’s total contributions, Berwick’s Asian American contributions accounted for the highest percentage at nearly 3%. Grossman followed with 1.6%.

Looking at the percentage of all Asian American contributions made, Baker received 36% of total Asian American contributions. He was followed respectively by Coakley, 24%, Grossman, 20%, and Berwick, 18%. Falchuk had 1%, while McCormick had 0.5%. While Baker received the most Asian American contributions individually, 63% of Asian American contributions went to Democratic candidates.

In terms of dollar amounts, total individual contributions were $27,142,737. Of this amount Asian Americans contributed $297,884, also about 1.1% of all contributions. Baker received $116,611 from Asian Americans followed by Grossman, $72,469, Berwick with $60,197 and Coakley, $44,672.

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Vietnamese Parents’ Perspectives on Education Examined

A study capturing the voices of Vietnamese parents of English language learner (ELL) students in Boston was discussed at a fall semester research forum. In her talk, “Shifting Parent Perspectives on ELL Education,” Dr. Rosann Tung, Director of Research and Policy at Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and IAAS Research Fellow, began by summarizing the Boston public school policies following the elimination of bilingual education as a result of the passage of Question 2 in 2002. Tung’s work looked closely at family choices in the Mather School which had a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) language specific program for Vietnamese ELLs.

Parents were asked about such things as why they chose the Mather school for their children and why ELL students ended up in SEI or regular classrooms at the Mather. Critical to making these choices was the level of parents’ knowledge of their children’s English language assessment scores and English language development levels. On these matters, Tung found that parents were often quite confused and unfamiliar with these concepts, the placement process, and the options available to their children.

Tung also found that parents of students at different ages often articulated different desired outcomes for the ELL children. Generally speaking, parents wanted their children during the early years of their schooling to learn to speak fluent English. Later on, however, they became more committed to the idea of their children maintaining their native language.

Addressing misconceptions and misinformation are areas that Tung maintained the district and school could address readily. Along these lines Dr. Tung recommended, for example, that the intentions of specific SEI programs be made clear; that parents be better educated about ELL assessment tests, development levels, and available programs; and that SEI-language specific programs be strategically sited geographically.

Contributions by non-Asian Americans averaged $251.57 while Asian American contributions averaged $243.97, 3% lower than the figure for non-Asian Americans.

The IAAS study also includes an analysis of contributions by Asian subgroups. Chinese Americans made the largest share of Asian American contributions at 40%. Indian Americans followed closely behind at 38%. Japanese Americans were third with 9%

The study is part of the institute’s continuing research on the civic participation of local Asian Americans. Other topics have included voter registration, voter turnout, and political attitudes. The full report of this study will be available on the IAAS website this summer.

About the Asian American & Pacific Islander “Corner Office” Forum Series

In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick’s Asian American Commission and Advisory Council organized the “Corner Office” Forum Series, a landmark, non-partisan effort featuring the candidates for Massachusetts Governor in dialogue with the Asian American & Pacific Islander community. With a diverse and wide-ranging network of 25 Asian American & Pacific Islander community partners from throughout the state, the Forum Series represented an historic show of unity and civic engagement by community. In total, ten forums with individual gubernatorial candidates were held.
2015 IAAS Research Fellows Selected

IAAS is pleased to announce the selection of three new Research Fellows who will be conducting original research in a wide variety of areas. George Chigas, a Lecturer in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at UMass Lowell, will write a history of the Lowell Cambodian American community from 1980–2015 using archival sources and interviews. Despite the size and importance of the Cambodian American community in Lowell, there has not been a comprehensive history written about it thus far. Dr. Chigas’ involvement with the community dates back to 1985.

MinJeong Kim will explore how Southeast Asian American children in preschool participate in the classroom and how their life histories can be incorporated into their educational experiences. Dr. Kim will observe classroom dynamics and interview parents and teachers to try to close the gap between home life and school culture. Kim is an Assistant Professor of Language Arts and Literacy in the Graduate School of Education at UMass Lowell.

Ms. Yuqing Zhang, a PhD student in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at UMass Boston, has had extensive experience in oral health. She will be examining the relationship between oral hygiene practices of Asian American women who are pregnant and gestational diabetes. Asian American women are much more likely to have gestational diabetes than white women. This also puts them at higher risk of developing gum disease. Zhang seeks to identify barriers to better oral hygiene for Asian American women who are pregnant and find ways to improve their dental care.