UMB Receives Federal Education Grant to Support Asian American Students

The University of Massachusetts Boston’s Asian American Student Success Program (AASSP) received another five years of funding through the awarding of a $1.5 million U.S. Department of Education Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) grant. The grant will build upon and move toward institutionalization of the successful program’s accomplishments of the initial 2010-2015 AANAPISI grant. The principal investigators are Joan Becker, Vice Provost for Academic Support Services, Peter Kiang, Director of the Asian American Studies Program, and Paul Watanabe, Director of the Institute for Asian American Studies (IAAS). Patricia Neilson is AASSP’s Director.

AASSP has two overarching goals. The first is to increase college access for Asian Americans who are low-income or first-generation college students, the risk for problem gambling among college undergraduates at a public university in the northeastern U.S., focusing on comparisons between Chinese Americans, Vietnamese Americans, and whites. Adolescents are known to be a population group vulnerable to developing gambling problems. In addition, the racial-ethnic minority status of adolescent Asian American college students potentially places them doubly at risk.

To address this lack of research, IAAS, led by Research Associate, Carolyn Wong conducted a pilot study that examines gambling behavior and

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IAAS Pilot Study on Gambling Among College Students Completed

The advent of casino and slots parlor gambling in Massachusetts has increased the need for research on problem gambling. While many Asian Americans enjoy recreational gambling without becoming addicted, studies in the U.S. and Canada suggest that a disproportionate number of them suffer from problem or disordered gambling, although research is scant.

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and for traditionally under-represented Asian American ethnic populations. A second goal is to increase Asian American student retention and graduation.

Over the next five years, the program will build on strategic partnerships with three high schools, three community-based organizations, and the region’s largest community college to recruit high-need Asian Americans as first-year and transfer students. As it has since 2010, AASSP will offer students who do enroll at UMass Boston a wide range of campus-based activities and services including intensive advising, mentoring, tutoring, workshops, and career counseling. Campus faculty and staff who interact with Asian American students through AASSP activities will enhance their understanding of how best to serve these students.

In addition to expanding the university’s capacity to address the urgent needs of under-served, low-income and traditionally under-represented Asian American students, the new grant will address critical needs for assessment, evaluation, and new empirical research focusing on Asian American college access, completion, and educational equity. Scholars, who will conduct this new research under the direction of IAAS, will be encouraged to utilize talented Asian American undergraduates as research assistants. The new grant will allow opportunities for this research to be shared with practitioners at UMass Boston and other college campuses. The production of this new research from scholars throughout the country, therefore, will remain a key component of IAAS’ role as a partner in the ongoing AASSP initiative.
Visualizing Highway Pollution, a project funded by the National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health, has entered its second year of operation. In the first year, a web-based visualization tool was developed. The tool allows users to see pollution levels in Chinatown and how they are affected by such variables as weather and time of day. During the fall, the focus of the project was to teach high school students from Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) Youth Center how to educate adult immigrants in Chinatown on air pollution data. This winter, adult immigrants from ESL classes at BCNC are participating in two-hour long training session with the high school students. The project is led by IAAS Research Associate, Carolyn Wong, with Prof. Doug Brugge at Tufts University, and Prof. Georges Grinstein at UMass Lowell. An enthusiastic team of staff and consultants has been assembled to carry out the tasks, including Terry Yin and Pong Louie as community educators, Hsin-Ching Wu and Alan Xie as research assistants, and Lawrence Li and Billy Wen who are undergraduate students at UMass Boston.

To prepare for the training sessions, the team collaborated with its community partners to develop an informational but simple presentation to disseminate methods for limiting one’s exposure to particulate matter pollution. The presentation underwent multiple revisions to improve its accessibility and emphasize awareness of ultrafine particles as a major pollutant. By incorporating a variety of props, infographics, and multilingual presenters, the team hopes to maximize their outreach to a diverse immigrant population in Chinatown.

Before and after the training sessions, the project utilizes a pre- and post- survey to measure the effectiveness of the intergenerational co-learning method in changing the adult immigrants’ knowledge of and attitudes toward air pollution. Using a series of cognitive interviews with Chinatown community members conducted in both Mandarin and Cantonese, the team collected feedback to fine tune the design of the survey.

In addition, the project team organized language training sessions with BCNC to help high school students understand and utilize scientific terms pertaining to air pollution in Chinatown. The students were divided into Cantonese and Mandarin speaking groups and paired with mentors to simulate the small group bilingual discussions with the immigrants. By utilizing this co-generational learning method researchers expect that this process will help spark civic engagement with environmental health issues among both the youth and elderly. The youth played a vital role in suggesting ways to make the informational presentations lively, accessible, and memorable for the adults. In one youth-led art project, for example, the youth are helping adults make refrigerator magnets with messages written by the adults themselves about how to reduce exposure to traffic pollution in their daily lives.
records in the sampling design. A survey asked participants to identify their race-ethnicity, which could include one or more of several racial-ethnic groups. Equal sized randomly drawn samples of Chinese American, Vietnamese American, other Asian, white, and a residual category, i.e. all others, were drawn from a list of enrolled undergraduate students. The residual category included sufficient numbers of blacks and Latinos to enable comparative analysis. An online version of the Canadian Adolescent Gambling Inventory (CAGI) scale was used, supplemented by questions on socio-demographic background and other topics of interest.

For example, survey respondents were asked how often they have participated in gambling on lottery tickets, table games at casinos, the internet, sports, and other activities in the past three months, and how much money they have wagered.

While the full results of the study will be reported at a later time, some highlights are presented here:

• Among white students a larger percentage reported gambling at all in the past three months (68) than the comparable proportions among Chinese (53), Latinos (46).

• Among the Chinese, Latino, and black students who had gambled at all in the past three months, a larger proportion were in the high-severity category of risk for problem gambling, using the CAGI criteria. The percentages were for whites: 2.7; Chinese 14.9; Latinos: 18.2 and blacks: 15.7.

Other researchers have similarly found that Chinese American adolescents tend to gamble less than their white adolescent counterparts; but among the Chinese Americans who do gamble, there is a greater risk for problem gambling than among the whites.1 To date, the reason for this pattern is unexplained.

• Among Chinese students sampled in this pilot study, a larger proportion of Chinese students (43.4 percent) reported concern about parental gambling problems than the comparable proportion among whites (22.2 percent).

In many Asian American families, adult immigrants are typically reluctant to reveal private information about gambling problems or other concerns about mental health for fear of stigmatization. The researchers plan to further explore how young adults may be a source of information about how gambling behavior affects family relationships.

The racial-demographic mix of the population at the study site did not include a sufficiently large number of enrolled Koreans, South Asians, or Filipinos to draw samples equal in size to the Chinese or Vietnamese samples. In future studies at other sites, it will be important to study these other Asian ethnic groups.

In light of the disproportionate risks for problem gambling faced by Chinese, Hispanic/Latino, and black students, there is a need for college health services to develop and provide culturally tailored screening and diagnostic tools that will identify students prone to gambling disorders.

IAAS graduate student, Hsin-Ching Wu assisted Dr. Wong with the development, execution, and analysis stages of the project. This study was partially funded by the Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling.

Recent Activities

IAAS Hosts Multimedia Performance by Kimi Maeda for Day of Remembrance

The dust and sand whistled through the cracks, coating the floor and desks. We coughed and wheezed. My eyes burned. My mouth filled with grit.

- Lily Yuriko Nakai Havey

Sand and dust were constant irritants for many Japanese Americans who were incarcerated in internment camps during World War II. But theater artist, Kimi Maeda uses sand to create beautiful images in her live performance, *Bend*, that tells the story of her father, Robert, who was interned in Poston, Arizona at the age of nine.

The Institute for Asian American Studies was very pleased to bring *Bend* to UMB on February 19 in a special Day of Remembrance event in Snowden Auditorium. The event was also made possible by the New England Japanese American Citizen’s League. The Day of Remembrance marks the day that Executive Order 9066 was signed into law in 1942 which enforced the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Over 110,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast—most of them citizens—were sent to internment camps that were located in remote and desolate areas.

*Bend* tells the story of Mr. Maeda and Isamu Noguchi who were both interned in the Poston Relocation Center in Arizona. Noguchi, a sculptor and biracial Japanese American volunteered to be interned at Poston to offer his services as an artist. Noguchi, some 25 years older than Mr. Maeda, made a great impression on him as a boy. Later, Mr. Maeda became an art historian and began to write a book about Noguchi.

Through projected images, live drawings in sand, building blocks, and narration, Ms. Maeda explores the lives of the two men, as well as questions about the internment and how it will be remembered both collectively and individually. In his eighties, Mr. Maeda began to suffer from dementia and loss of memory. His voice and words are heard during the performance. *Bend* is a breathtaking display of history, art, and creativity, and a memorial as Mr. Maeda passed away early this year.

After the performance, Ms. Maeda received comments and questions from the audience. A reception was held behind the auditorium.

Ms. Maeda, who grew up in Concord, Massachusetts is now based in Columbia, South Carolina where she co-founded Belle et Bete, a puppet production and promotion company. She has designed sets and costumes in Columbia, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Boston, New York, London, and Seville and was a puppeteer for several years for the Columbia Marionette Theatre. Visit her website at www.kimi-maeda.com.

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For more information about classes, independent studies, community internships, a six-course program-of-study or 10-course individual major, and graduate program opportunities, contact the Asian American Studies Program: W-2-097; peter.kiang@umb.edu; 617-287-7614; www.umb.edu/asamst; www.facebook.com/UMB.AsAmSt