Subgroup Diversity in Higher Education: A Case Study for Asian American Recruitment

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Subgroup Diversity in Higher Education:
A Case Study for Asian American Recruitment

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in
Asian Pacific Islander American Studies from William and Mary

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of affirmative action and how universities choose to pursue diversity and inclusion. Through understanding William and Mary’s diverse recruitment strategies, the question asked is, “How does this university ensure subgroup diversity for heterogeneous populations such as Asian Americans?” Asian Americans as a whole are overrepresented in higher education, but many Asian American subgroups face significant barriers to higher education. Through researching how colleges enact affirmative action and the demographic make up of Virginia’s Asian population, this thesis seeks to understand if William and Mary can ensure a diverse population of Asian American students without any data to guide their methods.
Colleges across the nation set aside numerous hours and resources in order to increase diversity on their campuses. “Diversity” refers to students who are historically and currently underrepresented in the context of higher education. This includes students of color, low-income students, first generation students, and sometimes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) students. The compelling argument in defense of colleges seeking to increase diversity is that all students benefit from a diverse education, and that exposure to diversity is critical if students are to thrive in a continuously diversifying workforce. Diversity and affirmative action grew from integrationist policies created in the 1960s and 1970s, and have historically referred to racial diversity up until recently.¹ The United States Census predicts that the United States will be a majority-minority nation by 2044, meaning that less than half of the population will be non-Hispanic Whites alone.² This data shows that preparing students for diverse environments and situating them in these environments are critical, not only for the present, but in the future.

The most common practice implemented in institutions of higher education to further diversity is that of affirmative action. Affirmative action policies have changed over time, with the current legally accepted definition being the process of taking into account personal characteristics like race, ethnicity, sex, etc. in order to address and remedy a group’s historical


exclusion from certain spaces. In the case of colleges, the current technique to achieve this goal is using holistic, race-conscious policies to admit students from diverse backgrounds. Given the highly contested nature of affirmative action, these policies have frequently come under attack and faced challenges in the courts, typically on the grounds of their effectiveness and inclusivity.

Those who defend and support affirmative action policies argue it is the most effective and necessary way to remedy past and present discrimination. Affirmative action is also seen as beneficial because it increases diverse representation of historically marginalized groups. The use of holistic review during the college admissions process allows each student to receive individualized treatment and understanding. Applicants are evaluated with their own personal contexts in mind, rather than their admission be decided through comparing them to other applicants, be it due to race, academics, or socioeconomic status.

Holistic review plays a key role in all students being evaluated in a fair and equitable way. While statistically reported data can contribute to the understanding of an applicant, holistic review allows for admissions officers to understand a student’s unique circumstances. It has also been shown that race-conscious affirmative action policies have improved the representation of students of color on campus and enrollment of students of color would drop without them. Arguably, affirmative action is beneficial to all communities, including ones such as Asian Americans, who are an incredibly heterogeneous group, as applicants are able to share their

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unique circumstances, rather than be restricted to a single racial category of “Asian,” which communicates little of their individualized experiences.

In contrast, historically majority groups, particularly non-Hispanic Whites, posit that affirmative action infringes on their rights and ability to access higher education at institutions which make use of affirmative action. Initially, affirmative action was meant for racial minority students, specifically African-Americans, who did not have access to higher education because of previously existing discriminatory laws. In the case of Regents of University of California v. Bakke (1978), the University of California had implemented an affirmative action policy to reserve a certain number of seats for minority students, after recognizing the first entering class of 50 contained only three Asian students, but no Black, Mexican-American, or Native American students.\(^5\) While the quota method and justifications used by the University of California Davis were ruled unconstitutional, the case affirmed that colleges and universities had the constitutional right to seek diversity. In Justice Ginsburg’s dissent of Gratz v. Bollinger (2003), she synthesises the reasoning behind affirmative action saying:

> "The Constitution is both color blind and color conscious. To avoid conflict with the equal protection clause, a classification that denies a benefit, causes harm, or imposes a burden must not be based on race. In that sense, the Constitution is color blind. But the Constitution is color conscious to prevent discrimination being perpetuated and to undo the effects of past discrimination."\(^6\)

Although colleges are not legally permitted to use the argument of practicing affirmative action to remedy past wrongs, it is still a legitimate motivation for institutions looking to improve their student body diversity. Under perceptions of a post-racial era, in which racial

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inequity is a thing of the past, lawsuits against affirmative action are increasing under the premise that they discriminate against majority groups, such as Whites.

In the court cases on affirmative action, whether Asian Americans are considered underrepresented or a minority group varied. Many schools choose to focus their affirmative action policies on Black and Hispanic students only. Occasionally, Native American students will be listed as a minority category, and only in *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California* (1978) and *SFFA v. Harvard* (2016) were Asian Americans explicitly included in their multicultural recruitment efforts. Given that many universities focus recruitment efforts on Black and Hispanic populations, Asian Americans are typically overlooked in discussions of affirmative action. The lack of effort towards admitting and recruiting Asian American students shows that many colleges view Asian Americans as a homogenous group, who because of their overrepresentation are perceived as not needing affirmative action policies. If admissions offices were to understand the diversity of Asian American populations, Asian Americans might still be actively recruited and openly included in affirmative action policies. As of now, that is not the case.

It was not until recently that Asian American groups have been used to argue against affirmative action policies. In a recent case, the organization of Students For Fair Admissions (SFFA), weaponized the argument that affirmative action discriminates against Asian Americans because of their overrepresentation in higher education, despite their status as minorities in the context of the U.S. However, Asian American populations are very divided in terms of supporting affirmative action or not. Between 2012 and 2016, there has been a noted decline in

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Chinese American support towards affirmative action, starting at 78% support in 2012 and dropping to 41% support in 2016. However, other Asian American groups display steady support towards affirmative action policies with 72% in favor from 2012-2016 (see Fig. 1). The SFFA, and its president Edward Blum, have a history of leveraging allegations of discrimination against colleges in attempts to dismantle affirmative action. The organization has also filed lawsuits against the University of Texas (UT)-Austin and the University of North Carolina (UNC)-Chapel Hill positing similar arguments in attempts to challenge the legality of affirmative action. SSFA has also filed a lawsuit against the Department of Education (DOE) to release Princeton University’s admissions data in response to similar allegations that the university discriminates against Asian American applicants. In the cases against UNC Chapel Hill and UT Austin, SSFA used white plaintiffs, specifically a rejected white female applicant in the case of UT, and Asian American plaintiffs for their lawsuit against Harvard. SSFA strategically uses a White female applicant and Asian American applicants in the argument against affirmative action to make the case that race conscious admissions under affirmative action promote discrimination against non-racial forms of diversity, and even then still discriminate against certain minority groups.

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11 “Students For Fair Admissions Files Lawsuit Against Univ. of Texas at Austin.” Students For Fair Admissions.
This perception of Asian Americans as overrepresented in higher education points to stereotypical perceptions of Asian Americans as a homogenous population which has found overwhelming levels of success in the United States. As a homogenous racial category, the Asian American population is large, but examining each ethnic group within Asian America shows there are discrepancies when it comes to educational attainment. Asian American populations trace their ethnic roots to over 20 countries from East, Southeast, and South Asia, and because of the variety of countries of origin, collecting and distributing Asian American data under one category can bury subgroup differences.\(^{12}\) For example, Asian American data as a whole shows that 51\% of the Asian population 25 and holder hold a bachelor's degree or more, compared to only 30\% of the U.S. population. But because of the difficulties in collecting data for such a heterogeneous group, large groups, such as Indians, who account for 20\% of the Asian population and have the highest levels of educational attainment (with 72\% of the population holding a bachelor’s degree in 2015), can greatly skew data, and hide Asian American groups who have educational attainment levels much further below the national average.\(^{13}\) Chinese (including Taiwanese) and Filipino populations are also some of the largest Asian populations in the U.S. Chinese (including Taiwanese) population makes up 24\% of the U.S. Asian population and Filipinos make up 19\% of the U.S. Asian population. With 55\% and 50\% of their respective adult populations holding bachelor's degrees or higher, it becomes clear that large populations of Asian ethnic groups can sway demographic data to show Asians as a whole to be overrepresented.


\(^{13}\) López, Gustavo, Neil G. Ruiz, and Eileen Patten. “Key Facts about Asian Americans.”
in education when that may not always be the case.\textsuperscript{14} As an example, Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians, and Bhutanese populations all have educational attainment levels in which less than 20\% of their adult populations hold a bachelor's degree (see fig. 2).\textsuperscript{15}

For my thesis, I examine the undergraduate admissions process at William and Mary, a small selective public university in the Southeast. I utilize this university to understand how selective public universities recruit diverse students within the confines of the present legal constraints of affirmative action. Most public state universities try to be representative of the state they occupy, and William and Mary is no different, as it is required to enroll around 60-65\% of its students from within the state. The selective nature of William and Mary has led to an in-state admissions rate of 47\% and an out-of-state admissions rate 31\%, with the total admissions rate totalling 38\%. This selectivity means that admissions officers must choose carefully and make a case for who is admitted or rejected.

Admitting diverse populations to universities is complicated by the availability of data. This is particularly true with respect to Asian American students. Because Asian American communities have different population sizes, different income levels, and different levels of access to education, colleges must be strategic in recruitment to ensure they are admitting the most diverse populations possible. However, because William and Mary only collects data on race and not information on subgroup populations, there is no way to ensure the university enrolls and recruits a diverse Asian American population in the most effective and strategic way. Because of the complexities in recruiting and admitting various Asian American ethnicities, I am


\textsuperscript{15} López, Gustavo, Neil G. Ruiz, and Eileen Patten. “Key Facts about Asian Americans.”
looking towards William and Mary’s admissions process to understand how colleges fulfill their mission of diversity and how they do so without collecting more specific data. As a school which is selective, representative of the state, and follows affirmative action practices, William and Mary is suitable as a case study to understand the admissions process regarding diversity and inclusion.

**Literature Review**

Diversity is becoming a very sought after trait of many institutions of higher education. A simple visit to any university’s admissions website will lead a prospective student to a college’s dedication to diversity and inclusion. The category of diversity and inclusion standardly refers to students of color, first generation college students, and low income students. LGBT students may also be considered underrepresented and to be a diverse category, but that varies depending on the school. There are many reasons why schools want to increase the diversity of their student body, as well as limits to the justifications they can use.

The need for affirmative actions sprung from the U.S.’s deep history with integration. As a response to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, varying affirmative action programs were implemented to increase the opportunities for “minorities and women” in terms of education and employment.16 These initial programs varied from bussing African American students to White-only schools, intensifying race-based outreach for colleges, and following informal hiring quotas in the workplace. Protected groups were created to designate who would be eligible to benefit from affirmative action policies. Protected groups, also referred to as

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official minorities, included those who were historically excluded on the basis of race, national origin, color, creed, and sex. Initially created to advance the integration of the African American community, the list of “official minorities” was expanded to include those presumed to be a part of historically discriminated groups, such as Asians and Hispanics, regardless of if they had been personally impacted by outdated discriminatory laws or not.17

Affirmative action is differentiated from anti-discrimination efforts with the main difference being that anti-discrimination are laws meant to protect individuals who have experienced discrimination, and is reliant on the individual to report the discrimination for any action to be taken, while affirmative action policies are meant to prevent discrimination through proactively addressing historical exclusion.18 It has been shown that selective universities which practice affirmative action have higher minority retention and graduation rates compared to schools that don’t practice affirmative action.19 It has also been shown that minority applicants admitted to law schools under affirmative action pass the bar exam at the same levels as students accepted on the basis of their academic scores.20 This makes it evident that affirmative action is critical for minority students’ success, and does not hold them back as some may believe.

Affirmative action is not just meant to improve the opportunities of underrepresented and underserved communities, but is also justified because of its benefits to the whole student body. Affirmative action promotes a diverse learning environment, increases cross-racial

understanding, and dismantles stereotypes. Students who attend diverse schools have improved feelings of commonality towards other ethnic groups and are more likely to have diverse social circles five years post-graduation.\footnote{21}

Despite its benefits, affirmative action and the institutions which practice it must satisfy strict scrutiny, be narrowly tailored in its purpose, and have a compelling state interest. According to the Supreme Court decision in \textit{Regents of University of California v. Bakke} (1978), race conscious admissions are constitutional and justified if there is a compelling state interest. It is a compelling state interest for institutions to pursue a diverse student body because diversity will bring educational benefits to all students enrolled in a university.\footnote{22} These educational benefits refer to better preparing students for entering a continuously diversifying work environment and society. However, institutions of higher education are limited in the methods they can use to pursue diversification by the legal decisions of the courts. Yet the courts have not provided insight into which methods are allowable.

For these colleges to obtain their goals of diversity, there are several tiers of the admissions process which implement affirmative action to diversify and expand the pool of college applicants. Affirmative action is a term that encapsulates any policies attempting to equalize opportunities and increase accessibility to those underrepresented in “significant positions in society.”\footnote{23} The first method colleges use is outreach. Through this, colleges aim to increase the spread of information regarding the school to as many people and prospective

\footnote{21}{Harper, Shannon, and Barbara Reskin. “Affirmative Action at School and on the Job.” 364.}

\footnote{22}{\textit{Regents of University of California v. Bakke} (1978).}

\footnote{23}{Burns-Wallace, DeAngela. 2009. "Diversifying the Ivory Tower." 13.}
students as possible. Examples of this strategy are sending information through emails and mail, or visiting high schools to encourage students to apply. Another level of diversifying happens while deciding who to admit and who to reject. Colleges follow the practice of holistic review to ensure their decisions are inclusive and following legal guidelines set by the courts. The final level of diversification involves hosting accepted students on campus for tours or overnight stays. Many colleges also have uniquely tailored programs for accepted students belonging to underrepresented groups meant to encourage their enrollment.

The use of holistic review is a technique in which an institution attempts to collect as much information on an applicant as possible, such as academics, extra curricular activities, personal demographics and traits, and any other supplementary materials, to evaluate a student’s quality of admission. College application processes rely on holistic review because it allows them to make race-conscious decisions without violating previous guidelines set by former affirmative action lawsuits. Including race in tandem with other identifying factors avoids the pitfalls of race becoming the deciding factor during the admissions process. Seeing a student’s full application and qualifications prevents racial bias from harming a student’s likelihood of acceptance and prevents distilling their acceptance to race over their other qualifications.

Legal History of Affirmative Action

The ways academic institutions practice affirmative action is heavily monitored and has historically been challenged by the legal system over claims of discriminating against majority groups. *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978) was the first case brought to the Supreme Court alleging that the University of California discriminated against White applicants
due to their institution’s quota system. Whether or not students were identified as “minority” applicants, and therefore eligible for these protected seats, was defined on racial and ethnic terms. It was then brought to the Supreme Court under the assertion that the practice of reserving seats for minority applicants was unconstitutional, as it infringed on the rights of Bakke, a white male, because he was not able to compete for seats reserved for minority students and minority applicants who were only evaluated against one another, rather than the whole pool of applicants. The Supreme Court voted in favor of Bakke, and universities were no longer allowed to maintain quota systems, meaning a certain number of admission slots could not be reserved for underrepresented minorities without infringing on the rights of the White majority. Universities were still permitted to enact affirmative action policies in different ways, in order to enhance diversity and obtain its benefits, but could not use the justification of rectifying past inequalities.

Twenty-five years after the Bakke (1978) decision, the cases of Grutter v. Bollinger (2003) and Gratz v. Bollinger (2003) further defined what policies were not acceptable. Gratz and Grutter both filed a course against the University of Michigan after being rejected from the undergraduate program and the law school respectively. Both were White, female applicants who filed suits against the use of race in admissions processes, because had race not been a critical factor, they would have been admitted to the university. The Supreme Court upheld the previous decision that universities are justified in using race in the admissions process to “further a compelling government interest,” but they cannot weigh race to the extent that it is a defining factor of admission.24 At the time of Gratz v. Bollinger (2003), the University of Michigan’s undergraduate program the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) allocated up to 20

points to applicants from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups, which swayed the outcome of admission too much and was therefore decided to be unconstitutional. Along with regulating the amount of points allocated due to minority status, Gratz (2003) and Grutter (2003) set the requirement that minority applicants could not be isolated from the applicant pool and evaluated by separate standards. Applicants must also be evaluated holistically, so that race and ethnicity do not become defining features of an application and that similar “soft” variables do not determine the outcome of an admission or rejection.

Challengers of affirmative action argue that equity and diversity can be achieved using alternative race blind methods. Thirteen years later, in Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin (2013), the plaintiff argues that intensifying outreach to African-American and Hispanic populations, increasing the weight of socioeconomic status in the admissions period, and to uncap the Top Ten Percent Plan to admit most, if not all, students via this program. The courts decided these strategies would not accumulate racial diversity at the same levels of the University of Texas’s current program, and would in fact lessen diversity. Race blind application processes which focus on other aspects such as school district or socioeconomic status would bury the applications of students of color who are not of a low socioeconomic status or in the Top Ten Percent of their high schools. In the case of Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin (2016), the Supreme Court determined race-conscious admissions, although meant to be temporary, were still needed because no other admissions strategy would achieve the same diversity that the University of Texas had identified as a compelling state interest. Fisher also

\[25\] Gratz v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 244, 123 S. Ct. 2411, 156 L. Ed. 2d 2. 255.

critiqued UT’s perusal of gaining a “critical mass” of diverse students because it was never clarified when a critical mass is achieved. Because of the decision in Bakke (1978), universities cannot provide an exact number of what achieving critical mass means, otherwise they would be enacting quotas. UT defended its goal of achieving a critical mass by arguing that students of color are still underrepresented in university classes and experience feelings of loneliness. The Supreme Court decided that colleges’ usage of the critical mass argument, although ambiguous, was permitted as a compelling state interest.

Despite the assertions by affirmative action’s attackers that race conscious decision making was unnecessary, the courts upheld that no alternative to race-conscious admissions policies would fulfill the university's compelling interest in achieving a diverse incoming class. Research shows that turns to race-blind techniques are detrimental to the amount of racial minorities in institutions of higher education. Burns-Wallace cites demographic statistics from the incoming classes of varying selective and predominantly White college campuses, and how they change depending on the university’s use of race neutral or race conscious admissions policies. Findings showed that the percentages of African-American and Latino students across several campuses lessened when race neutral policies were adopted. At the University of Texas Law School, the population of African-American males in the incoming class dropped from 6.2% to 2.2% after the switch to race neutral policies in 1997. The Latino student population at this school reduced from 11.1% to 8.3% during this time period.28

27 Fisher v. University of Texas. 24a.

At the same time, at the University of California, Berkeley and University of California, Los Angeles law schools, the African-American student population decreased by 5% and the Latino population decreased by 6% to 7%. Without affirmative action practices at institutions of higher education, Burns-Wallace argues diversity in the incoming class will only be dampened. It is speculated that African-American and Latino enrollment will drop further because these students will choose less competitive universities under the perception that institutions lacking affirmative will be less welcoming to them, compared to White and Asian American students.

Scholarship on affirmative action often discusses the impacts of diversity and equity in regards to Black/African-American and Hispanic students, but there is little in terms of how these policies affect Asian American populations and tackle the heterogeneity of these groups. Within Asian American populations, attitudes towards affirmative action also vary greatly, but a majority of Asian Americans still support affirmative action policies.

The use of holistic, race-conscious review in admissions and affirmative action has been brought under scrutiny again in the case of Students For Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard (2014), which challenges affirmative action with the unique choice of Asian American plaintiffs rather than Caucasian plaintiffs. Similar to previous cases, SFFA, an organization headed and assembled by Edward Blum who is known for attempting to dismantle affirmative action, launched a lawsuit against Harvard admissions processes alleging discriminate against Asian American applicants through racial balancing. Through a deep analysis of Harvard’s admissions


process, including academics, test scores, extra curriculars, athletics, in-depth guidance counselor and teacher recommendations, essays, interviews, supplementary materials, and more (including personal information), the U.S. District Court in Massachusetts found that Harvard does not discriminate on the basis of race. On the contrary, an amicus brief responding to the lawsuit stated that Harvard’s process of holistic review helps Asian applicants because of its ability to evaluate students with deep knowledge of their personal contexts without restricting them to a racial category. The use of holistic review can even increase Asian American odds at elite universities because of the ability to share educational and life contexts. In fact, Asian American applicants had a higher acceptance rate (5.15%) at Harvard than White applicants (4.91%). The decision on SFFA v. Harvard (2014) also reinforced the need for race-conscious admissions in order for Harvard’s faculty and student body to gain the educational benefits of diversity. In addition, Harvard implements many race-neutral recruitment strategies which allows the college to improve and promote diversity in all forms, racial or otherwise.

Very rarely are Asian American students mentioned in affirmative action cases until Students For Fair Admissions v. Harvard (2014). While the University of California includes Asian Americans as an underrepresented minority, cases such as Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin (2013) identify underrepresented minorities to be African American and Hispanic students. With a minimal awareness of Asian American students displayed in many affirmative


action court cases, it begs the question of whether admissions’ understandings of this racial group are reliant on generalized statistics or a more thorough breakdown.

Attempting to identify Asian American applicants and their diversity during the admissions process may be difficult because of the confines of what data universities are allowed to collect from students. With most universities collecting racial data that is unspecific in terms of ethnicity, it becomes difficult for admissions officers and diversity officers to identify the distinct traits of different Asian American applicants. According to the 2010 Census, Asian is defined as “any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent,” noting that Middle Eastern groups are not counted under the category of Asian.\footnote{Hoeffel, Elizabeth M., Sonya Rastogi, Myong Ouk Kim, and Hasan Shahid. 2012. “The Asian Population: 2010.” \textit{2010 Census Briefs}.}

While Asian Americans as a whole are overrepresented in college statistics, subgroups within the Asian American community have vastly different levels of educational attainment and socioeconomic status. The problems with current data collection methods of underrepresented groups is that aggregation of data into broad racial categories allows less represented groups, minorities within minorities, to slip through the cracks and go unrecognized. Examples of this can be better understood through Pew Research Center’s data on different U.S. Asian ethnic groups (the term U.S. Asian is used to account for any Asians residing in the United States, regardless of immigration status). López, Ruiz, and Patten study the different levels of income, educational attainment, and English proficiency between U.S. Asian ethnic groups, and the disparities are much wider than aggregated data shows (2017).

There is a misconception that U.S. Asian households experience many advantages in the present day. Data shows that, as a whole, U.S. Asians tend to be high achieving and having stable
households (Drake, 2012). A different story is told once one recognizes that the largest groups of U.S. Asian are respectively, Chinese including Taiwanese (24%), Indian (20%), and Filipino (19%). These groups, being the largest, have the biggest effect on what is shown in Asian American demographics. They are also some of the groups with the highest income. While U.S. Asians as a whole had an income of $73,060 in 2015, the income of Chinese, Indian, and Filipino groups were $70,000, $100,000, and $80,000, respectively, with many other smaller Asian ethnic groups falling as low as $36,000, much further below the amalgamated group average.

The need for disaggregation can also be seen in achievement gaps for higher education. Data shows 51% of Asians of the age 25 and older have a bachelor’s degree, while only 30% of Americans with the same background have one. While this may seem to follow claims that Asian Americans have closed, and are now surpassing the achievement gap, smaller groups of U.S. Asians have lower percentages of their adult population who hold bachelor’s degrees or higher, such as Cambodians (18%), Hmong (17%), Laotians (16%), and Bhutanese (9%). All these challenges to calculating and understanding Asian American data complicate the operations of diversity and admissions, especially when college demographics are a much smaller scale and are much more at risk for revealing personal information.

Methods

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I am interested in understanding how Asian American students, as a social category, are understood in William and Mary’s application process. I have chosen William and Mary’s undergraduate admissions process, an institution which is simultaneously public and selective, as the focus of my research. William and Mary often refers to itself as a “Public Ivy,” to imply it has the reputation and academic rigor of an Ivy League school, while fitting the public requirements that two-thirds of its student population be from in-state. This in-state requirement permits me to compare the William and Mary population with that of the state as a whole, allowing me to see in what ways the recruitment and enrollment of William and Mary matches its state’s demographics. More specifically, researching the state composition of different Asian American ethnic populations will aid me in seeing how representative the school’s Asian American population is with that of the state. In choosing a selective institution (with an admissions rate of 38% for the class of 2023), this research will further clarify how William and Mary makes the decision on who will be admitted. By learning how William and Mary admits and recruits potential students, it provides insight on how the university expands its diverse applicant pool and how future students are then selected from the applicant pool.

My broader goal in using William and Mary as a case study is to examine how multicultural outreach is practiced, and how it impacts Asian American enrollment in higher education. Through interviewing representatives from the William and Mary admissions office, I was able to learn how William and Mary carries out its admissions functions, the office’s definition and understanding of “diversity,” what strategies it uses to attain its mission or diversity, and how these methods impact the admissions process for Asian American students. In particular, I aim to understand how the college collects and interprets data of underrepresented
groups, specifically Asian Americans, and how this knowledge influences future admissions strategies. William and Mary’s class of 2023 had an exceptionally high enrollment of Asian American students, pointing to the fact that Asian overrepresentation in higher education is only growing. However, as I discovered, because the college does not collect and store data regarding the details of students’ ethnicities, it is unclear how William and Mary ensures proper outreach and admission opportunities to all Asian American ethnic groups. Through interviews with the Dean of Admissions and the Director of Diversity and Access, I gained deeper insight on the undergraduate admissions process and how they pursue a diverse incoming class under the restraints set forth by previous affirmative action lawsuits and confidentiality standards the university is bound to.

To answer this question of diversity and understanding heterogeneous groups, I have completed a content analysis of William and Mary’s website and mission statement, researched Asian American demographics in William and Mary’s state, analyzed previous affirmative action court cases, and interviewed the Dean of Admissions and the Director of Diversity and Access.

During each interview, I followed an interview schedule that ensured that I asked about all the important themes I was interested in, yet which gave me and the respondent the flexibility to move in unexpected or different directions. The main themes I wanted the admission’s office to address were 1) the general function and process of the admissions office, and 2) the specific recruitment and decision-making techniques used by admissions officers. I also asked specific

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39 In preparation for these interviews, I completed Human Subject Training (CITI), and had each respondent fill out an informed consent form.
questions regarding race, to understand the restrictions placed on race conscious admissions processes. Finally, I asked a number of questions tailored to understand more specifically the review of Asian American applications, and how their status of being both overrepresented and a recognized minority group impact admission decisions (see Appendix 1 for more detail).

To contextualize William and Mary’s pursuit of diversity, I have completed a web analysis of William and Mary’s diversity and admissions websites. I compare William and Mary’s statements on diversity (5 statements) to other competitive state schools, such as University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and Virginia Commonwealth University (7 statements total) to understand how selective, public universities enact goals of diversity and inclusion. I have also researched data methods regarding data collection and disaggregation and examined state-specific data of college-aged Asian American subgroups. In the demographics section of the common application, which all students are required to complete, students are asked to answer if they are Hispanic or Latino and then identify their race. The options listed for students are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White, with the allowance of picking one or more categories. After selecting the race(s) which apply to the applicant, a second drop down menu appears listing several Asian countries to “best describe your background.” The ethnicities listed are “China, India, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam, Other East Asia, Other South Asia, and Other Southeast Asia,” with the option to input any country if one of the “other” options are selected.

Students are allowed to select multiple races and countries of origin, which are then available for admissions officers to see when evaluating each application. While this information is available to admissions officers, if a student selects multiple races, they will be categorized as
“multiracial” instead of Asian in admissions data. Students can choose to share detailed information about which Asian population best describes their ethnicity, which is seen by admissions officers. However, representatives from the Admissions Office have told me that William and Mary does not collect subgroup data on the Asian American population, and only collects and publishes general data on race and ethnicity as mandated by the state of Virginia.

Due to the way these categories are collected and submitted to colleges, my research will not include Middle Eastern applicants. Even if a student of Middle Eastern descent identifies as Asian American, because they must select “Caucasian/White,” they will not be included in my research. International students are also not incorporated in my research, as at William and Mary they have their own separate category in data, regardless of their racial background. I also do not examine multiracial percentages at different colleges. Multiracial groups can include any combination of races and data is unspecified as to which groups are present. Therefore, it will not be helpful in determining which minority groups are over or underrepresented. My analysis does not formally incorporate Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander applicants because they are a separate racial group on the common application. However, their populations will occasionally be mentioned in my research because of inconsistencies in data collection (sometimes separating Asians/Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, sometimes referring to them as a combined group of Asian/Pacific Islander) across institutions. In seeking to examine William and Mary admissions, I have selected the age group 15-17 because it most closely captures William and Mary’s target demographic in recruitment of its incoming freshman classes—high school juniors and graduating seniors. This allows me to compare the demographics of William and Mary and its incoming classes to the demographics of the state.
Analysis

William and Mary defines its mission of diversity and inclusion by stating,

“We are committed to creating a university community that is representative and inclusive of individuals with different backgrounds, talents, and skills... William and Mary is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and complies with all applicable laws regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action in admissions, hiring, and all other programs and activities.”

Universities are required to practice affirmative action by federal law, but what constitutes affirmative action, who should be included, and what methods are used to achieve it have varied depending on the college, state, and time period. In William and Mary’s document “Affirmative Action Plan for Women and Minorities,” the college states its goals are to create an inclusive environment, be able to detect, remedy and prevent discrimination and harassment, and increase the presence of underrepresented groups in “appropriate areas.”

The website further explains the college’s stance on affirmative action in admissions by saying:

“In recruitment and retention efforts, the University actively seeks to improve opportunities for minorities, women, veterans, and people with disabilities in an effort to maintain and grow our diverse campus community.”

The college’s statement on diversity, which was endorsed by the William and Mary Board of Visitors on November 17, 2006, mirrors that which the courts have determined to be a compelling interest of the state,


43 “Diversity & Inclusion.” William & Mary.
“As a community, William and Mary believes that cultural pluralism and intellectual freedom introduce us to new experiences, stimulate original ideas, enrich critical thinking, and give our work a broader reach. We cannot accomplish our mission of teaching, learning, discovery, and service without such diversity.”

William and Mary also commits to “establishing justice,” through increasing and embracing diversity so that “people of all backgrounds feel at home.” In explaining the college’s process, William and Mary’s “We’re Diverse” page states that the university “actively recruits top high school students from every geographic, racial and economic background.”

It is common for colleges to post non-discrimination statements on their websites in accordance with Equal Opportunity Laws. William and Mary’s website establishes that, in accordance with the law, the college is committed to protecting its students and employees from discrimination based on any personal factors unrelated to one’s performance and qualifications, listing “race or color, national origin or ethnicity, religion or creed, political affiliation or belief, age, sex or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, marital status, pregnancy status, height, weight, veteran status, caretaker status, or family medical or genetic information.”

Based on my analysis of other college websites in the same state, I found that all shared promises of their commitment to diversity of the student body, faculty and staff, and its enhancement. Yet, their websites were all somewhat vague about their diversity goals, and use phrases such as using diversity to “advance institutional excellence” or to encourage “equitable”

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45 “About W&M.” William & Mary.

46 “Diversity & Inclusion.” William & Mary.
The ambiguity of these colleges’ statements is expected due to the many legal constraints faced by those using affirmative action programs. Colleges may list diversity as a goal of their university, but are bound to strict legal restrictions about how they may obtain such a goal and how they may define their success. Holistic review is implemented to ensure affirmative action does not infringe on any applicant’s individual rights. In former court cases, the University of California came under fire for using a quota system to admit minority students, and the University of Michigan was challenged for weighing minority applicants too heavily during the application process. By looking at all of a students qualifications and personal factors, instead of separating their grades, test scores, and personal traits, colleges can assure that they are not providing biased or preferential treatment towards one protected class or against another as established by Bakke (1978), Grutter (2003), Gratz (2003), Fischer (2013).

In my analysis of William and Mary’s statements promoting diversity, they all referred to diversity without speaking specifically to race or ethnicity. Rather, diversity was communicated through terms like “cultural pluralism,” and emphasized other forms of diversity, such as diversity in thought and ability. The “We’re Diverse” page, located on William and Mary’s Admissions and Aid page, is the only admissions page which specifically mentions recruiting and admitting students of every race and ethnicity, and even here as part of its broader detail about all the other forms of diversity the school considers and encourages. It is possible that


colleges only speak of diversity in broad terms because placing specific emphasis on race and ethnicity would carry the implications that the school prioritizes and weighs too heavily in favor of race, thus potentially leading to accusations of bias against applicants bringing other forms of diversity. William and Mary goes even further to define diversity outside of standard protected personal factors, stating that they embrace diversity in thought and interest as well.

Through my interviews with two members of the William and Mary admissions office, I was able to gain further insight into the application review process, diversification strategies, and the guidelines universities are required to follow to achieve an equitable, yet diverse, admissions process. The Admissions office works closely with its Diversity and Access team in order to enact their recruitment and admissions strategies. Undergraduate Admissions has a staff of about 20, all of whom share responsibilities and tasks. Distinct positions in the office are that of Assistant Deans and senior staff. Assistant Deans are recent college graduates working in the admissions office. Senior staff members are those who supervise other admissions officers and have over 6-8 years of experience in admissions. All members of the Admissions office, regardless of experience, read applications and travel to high schools around the United States to represent the college and recruit students. Each dean is assigned a region, which they travel to and then review all the applications from that region. Because William and Mary is a public state university, most recruitment resources are dedicated to outreach within the state.

William and Mary uses the process of holistic review to evaluate applicants. During the process, in the first round, the full application is read by two officers. One reader must be a regional dean, but the second reader can be anyone on the staff and is randomly assigned. After this, the application is read over by a senior staff member, who will propel the application to the
committee process. The committee is a final group of admissions officers who read the application one more time, and come to the unified decision if the student will be admitted, deferred, waitlisted, or rejected. At this point in the process, if the student has supplied any supplementary materials they will be passed to departments on campus for review. For example, a student’s art supplement will be sent to the Fine Art faculty for evaluation, or a recorded vocal performance will be sent to the Music department. Throughout this application process, the main priority of the officers is to decide whether or not a student has the potential to succeed at the college. Personal, identifying information such as race, gender, or other protected classes are optional information and only known to admissions officers if the applicant chooses to disclose such information.

Interviewed admissions officers explained their primary strategy for diversity and inclusion is to “cast a wide net.” Many resources are put towards traveling to different schools so students can be encouraged to apply, with a majority of resources being dedicated to in-state recruitment. William and Mary is also a member of the Virginia Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (VACRAO), which allows state colleges to partner with high schools across the state and foster a diverse pool for their outreach programs. Current Diversity and Access initiatives at William and Mary include the Autumn Blast, a program meant to introduce prospective high school juniors and seniors from “diverse backgrounds” to experience life as a student and introduce them to the admissions process. Sneak Peak is another program for admitted multicultural students to meet other students, faculty, and organizations.

When asking how admissions officers take note of racially diverse candidates the representatives stressed that the most important part was understanding each students’ unique
circumstances to make decisions through the holistic review process. They also mentioned designing written statements to give students a space to share as much information as possible, outside of statistical data to be able to fully grasp students’ circumstances. Both representatives stressed that the perceptions around admissions is that it is very statistics focused, which is not necessarily the case for admissions officers practicing holistic review. This prioritization of “statements over statistics” is not uncommon to hear from admissions offices, and is likely influenced by the history of affirmative action legal decisions. The reasons for incorporating race and other personal factors into the admissions process are to give further context to a student’s application and allow them to be reviewed in a holistic manner, as long as they are still evaluated as an individual. The admissions office representatives repeatedly emphasised the importance of individuality and personal story whenever questions on data were asked.

Admissions representatives were also very ambiguous when responding to how they categorized which groups are designated as “minorities.” When asked if Asian Americans are considered overrepresented, the representatives responded saying that the Admissions Office categorizes minority applicants in accordance with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), which defines underrepresented groups as “students who are non-White U.S. citizens and permanent residents, Pell Grant recipients, non-traditional students of ages 25 and older, and students from areas of the state with low degree-attainment rates.” It may be that the admission office chooses to follow these pre-established categories to identify underrepresented


candidates and avoid potential lawsuits. Another possibility is that because resources for outreach are finite and heavily dedicated to in-state outreach, the admissions team and its resources would be spread thin by dedicating specialized recruitment techniques for minority groups within minorities. In terms of recognizing Asian American subgroup diversity, admissions representatives stressed that they do take note when a student marks an ethnic group that is not common in the applicant pool.

“Let’s say a student fills out an application and checks Asian, and in the description for Asian they put Cambodian. I know I’m not coming across a lot of students who are identifying this way in my pool but because we are reviewing holistically, we are able to take note of this portion of the student’s story instead of the statistic alone fueling the definition of who that student might be.”

While this response recognizes the diversity in the Asian population, it relies on individual admissions officers having a nuanced understanding of different racial and ethnic groups. From the interview, it appeared that only regional deans are required to have extensive knowledge on the locations they are assigned to, but other factors outside of location seem to be reliant on the admission officer’s individual knowledge.

The responses were also somewhat general when asked if William and Mary collected data showing enrollment and admissions rates in terms of race, to which they also stated they followed state specific rules regarding data publication. Both representatives stressed that statistics regarding race and demographics limit how admissions officers understand students, and the use of holistic review is a way to understand the student’s story, incorporating their racial and ethnic background without reducing them to it. However, this is specific to the evaluation process and they did not talk about the impact statistics can have on outreach strategies. When asked about outreach programs, I questioned if they tailor their programs and info sessions based on underrepresented groups they are trying to recruit. Admissions officers responded that they
have limited time, staff, and resources which can prevent specialized programming, but through research on different schools can adjust information sessions to address the priorities of students they are speaking to.

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) states that the minimum standard for maintaining, collecting, and presenting data on race and ethnicity is to use the five established categories of race. The categories are “American Indian or Alaska Native,” “Asian,” “Black or African American,” “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,” and “White.”51 In terms of ethnicity the standard categories are “Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino.”52 The DOI also states that “the collection of greater detail is encouraged; however, any collection that uses more detail shall be organized in such a way that the additional categories can be aggregated into these minimum categories for data on race and ethnicity.”53 The DOI’s statement further supports and encourages the need to collect subgroup data for heterogeneous groups.

In Virginia, the total Asian American and Pacific Islander population is 6.6% (559,068).54 The demographic makeup of the largest Virginian Asian American populations is 21.7% (121,109) Asian Indian, 12.6% (70,213) Korean, 11.9% (66,398) Filipino, 10.7% (59,544) Chinese, and 9.1% (50,724) Vietnamese. Smaller, yet significant Asian American subpopulations include 5.1% (28,316) Pakistani, 2.5% (14,052) Bengali, and 1.5% (8,290) Japanese.


52 “Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity.”

53 “Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity.”

54 All state specific demographic data is collected from IPUMS data. For Virginian Asian population variables were set to Ancestry, Virginia, 2018, and restricted to subpopulations of Chinese, Japanese, and Other Asian and Pacific Islander.
Of 15-17 year olds currently in high school, 62.4% (about 193,748) of 15-17 year olds are White, 20.7% (about 64,267) are Black/African-American, 12.8% (39,808) are of Hispanic origin, 6.6% (20,286) are Asian American, and 0.3% (about 942) are American Indian or Alaska Natives. 14.6% (about 310,390) of the entire state population is in school and between the ages of 15-17.

The combined number of Asian and Pacific Islander students in William and Mary’s enrolled class of 2023 is incredibly high (17%) compared to the class’s other incoming minority groups such as Hispanic/Latino students (9%), African American/Black students (9%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native students (2%), all of which are still underrepresented except for American Indian/Alaskan Native students.

At other institutions, percentages of Asian or APIA students point similarly to overrepresentation. UVA’s admitted class of 2023 was 15.96% Asian (not including Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students), with its enrolled class totalling 18.5% Asian. According to VT’s headcount data of student enrollment in 2019 the Asian population (not including Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students) was 10%, although it is not specified if this number is inclusive of international students. While VCU’s demographic data on race and ethnicity is not

55 IPUMS variables were set to Age by Hispanic origin, Virginia, 2018, ages 15-17, currently in school.
56 IPUMS variables were set to, Age by Race, Virginia, 2018, ages 15-17, currently in school.
57 “Undergraduate Admission.” William & Mary.
59 Data has been collected through VT’s enrollment headcount summary. Variables used were Fall Enrollment, University Summary, Race/Ethnicity, On/Off campus, https://irweb.aie.vt.edu/webtest/enrollmentSummary.aspx
published on the university’s website, the SCHEV records that the level of enrolled Asian and Pacific Islander in the fall of 2019 was around 13.7\%.

According to data reported to the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges, William and Mary’s full undergraduate Asian population is 8\%, the Black/African American population is 7\%, the Hispanic/Latino population is 10\%, and the White population is 58\%. \(^{61}\) From VT’s full undergraduate student body, the Asian population is 10\%, the Black/African American population is 5\%, and the Hispanic/Latino population is 7\%. \(^{62}\) At UVA, the Asian population is 15\%, the Black/African American population is 7\%, the Hispanic/Latino population is 7\%, and the White population is 56\%. \(^{63}\) In the case of general student body demographics, Asian students are still shown to be overrepresented at varying levels, and Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino are still underrepresented.

This over-representation glosses over Asian Americans as a group, and hides subgroup variation in terms of ethnic origin, access to education, and socioeconomic status. The median household income in Virginia as of 2018 was $71,564. \(^{64}\) Of the larger Asian populations in the

\(^{60}\)Data has been collected through SCHEV’s Fall Headcount Enrollment data. Variables used were Virginia Commonwealth University, 2019-2020, Race/Ethnicity, Undergraduate/Graduate/First Professional. [https://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E2_Report.asp](https://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E2_Report.asp).


\(^{64}\)Information was collected from the United States Census Bureau, QuickFacts Virginia. [https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/IPE120218#IPE120218](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/IPE120218#IPE120218).
state, such as Asian Indians, 71.8% of the population has a household income ranging from $100,000 to $200,000 or more, but near 9.4% of the Asian Indian population is considered low income and have a household income of $44,999 or less. Low income is defined to be at or below 200% of the poverty threshold. Of the Chinese population, 57.4% make between $100,000 and $200,000 or more per household, but 24.3% of Chinese households have an income ranging from $44,999 to less than $10,000, with 18.4% of the Chinese population is low income. 31% of Vietnamese households are considered low income and 43.2% have a household income less than the state average. However, 40.9% of the Vietnamese population has a household income ranging from $100,000 to $200,000 or more. 54.8% of the Filipino population had a household income ranging from $100,000 to $200,000 or more. However, 15% of the Filipino population is considered low income and 22% of the population make less than the state average.

In terms of smaller Asian populations, 31.8% of the Pakistani population has an income below the state average and 26.7% are considered low income. 44.6% of the Pakistani population has an income of $100,000 or more. 17.9% of the Mongolian population is considered low income. However, 48.7% of the Mongolian population has an income of $100,000 or more. 38.8% of Mongolians have a household income between $60,000 and $99,999. 43.7% of Laotians have an income of $75,000 to $99,999. 26.2% have a household income of $100,000 or more, and 30% have a household income below the state average. About 9.6% of the Japanese population is considered low income, 18.3% have a household income between $60,000 and

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$99,999, and 56.2% of the population has a household income of $100,000 or higher. While this analysis does not breakdown all the economic inequities in the high-school aged Asian American population, it shows that statistics showing Asian Americans as high achieving and economically well off is not representative of the whole population.66

Turning to the representation of Asian Americans at colleges, this means having a large percentage of Asian and Pacific Islander students does not mean all APIA groups are being represented, nor that more economically challenged Asian American groups are being sought out or have access to selective universities. While the largest populations of 15-17 year old Asian Americans are Asian Indian (4,494), Vietnamese (2,478), Chinese (2,386), Korean (2,202), and Filipino (1,928), there are also many smaller APIA populations, such as Bengali (580), Pakistani (514), and Mongolian (465), to name a few.67 However, at William and Mary, while Asian Indians, Chinese, Koreans and Filipinos seem to be well represented (based on my evaluation of the size of student organizations on campus), despite their large presence in Virginia, and Vietnamese Americans appear to be less represented.68 Furthermore, it’s unclear if smaller groups, such as Bengali, Mongolian, and other ethnic groups, have any representation because there are no student groups specifically devoted to them on William and Mary’s campus.

66 My data analysis has excluded the Cambodian population, given that data shows that 59.2% of the Virginian Cambodian population has a household income of $150,000 to $200,000 or more. Although this is possible, it is likely that the outcome is due to inaccuracies in data. This is with the knowledge that the Cambodian annual household income is $55,000 and the Cambodian poverty rate is 19.1%, higher than the general U.S. poverty rate, which is 15.1%.


67 Data has been collected through IPUMS. Variables used are Age by Race, currently in school, restricted to Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry.

68 This may be because Vietnamese Americans are less likely to belong to cultural student groups, however this seems unlikely given the strength of these organizations at other schools.
William and Mary is not the only school to promote the admitted class of 2023 as the most diverse and academically competitive in history, two other colleges, Virginia Tech (VT) and University of Virginia (UVA) also celebrated the record breaking diversity. VT’s incoming class of 2023 was recorded to be the most diverse and academically competitive ever, and UVA promoted the class of 2023 as the most diverse pool of admitted students. Knowing that William and Mary is very competitive with these other institutions, it is likely that the college’s celebration of 2023’s diversity was strategically advertised with these other competing universities in mind. It is also important to note that the classes of 2023 at VT and William and Mary were the most diverse in terms of enrollment (this was until the admissions of the class of 2024 at William and Mary, which now holds the record for most diverse class with 36% of students being people of color, as opposed to 33% from the year before), and UVA’s class was most diverse in terms of accepted students.

At VT, 36% of its students are from “underserved and underrepresented” communities. University of Virginia’s student population is 37% minorities as of 2023. It is important to note different universities define terms like “underrepresented” and “minority” differently. From searching different state college’s websites, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) was the only university to define the meaning of underrepresented minority groups, and the only university to openly not identify Asians / Asian Americans as an underrepresented group. Although this information sheds some light on considerations taken during the admissions


70 Popli, Nik. “U.Va. Offers Admission to 23.8 Percent of Applicants.”

process at VCU, other state institutions, including William and Mary, do not clarify what they mean when referring to students who are “underrepresented.”

Most colleges present their diversity statistics in percentages, however, VT was one of the only schools to post their student demographics by headcount and make it fully available online. This is especially rare when considering many universities avoid this data because of the possibility it will make students easily identifiable if they belong to a minority group. Despite this, Virginia Tech shares the data no matter how small the population is, going as far as to list if there is only one student from a certain demographic. UVA listed their data in percentages, and only shared a head count to define their “other” category which consisted of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native students. William and Mary only posts data in percentages and has no headcount data on their website, but the university’s enrollment headcount can be found divided by class on the SCHEV website.

Based on state data, one would expect that the largest populations of Asian American students such as Asian Indian, Vietnamese, and Chinese, should be well represented at William and Mary. This is not just because student enrollment should reflect the state to a certain extent, but also because they are the most populous Asian American groups. As communicated by William and Mary’s admissions’ representatives, the best way for universities to promote and improve diversity is to expand their pool of applicants. Because these populations are the biggest pool, it would make sense they have a prominent presence on campus if they are being recruited


based on their presence within the state. Although the university does not have data regarding subgroup populations, it is reasonable to believe that some Asian American subgroups are not being adequately represented.

Through my experience as a student on campus, I have noticed the largest Asian American student groups on campus are the South Asian Student Association (SASA), the Chinese Student Organization (CSO), and the Filipino American Student Association (FASA). Given the lack of Asian American sub-group data, I use student ethnic organizations as a proxy for their presence at William and Mary. It is reasonable to assume student ethnic groups with the largest populations also have the largest presence on campus, and thus one can assume that students of Chinese, Filipino, and Indian descent (although SASA encapsulates all South Asian students, a substantial population of its members are Asian-Indian) make up a large portion of the Asian American population on campus. There is also a Korean American Student Association (KASA) and the Agape Christian Fellowship, a predominantly Korean Christian organization, which is larger than KASA, but still appears to be smaller than SASA, FASA, and CSO. This information is significant because although there is a large Vietnamese population in the state, their apparent presence is much smaller, despite the fact that the Vietnamese population is larger than the Chinese population and the Filipino population. This perception is also supported by the fact that our student body does not have a Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) at all, but other state schools, such as VT and UVA, have prominent VSAs. There are student organizations for other ethnic groups with smaller state populations. William and Mary also has a Taiwanese American Student Association (TASA), despite the population of Taiwanese 15-17 year olds
being only 0.2% (about 49 people) of the APIA population. It is important to note that TASA is a fairly small organization, but its presence on campus is significant as it shows the presence of Taiwanese students on campus even if they are small.

It is reasonable to believe that the perceived homogeneity of Asians as a racial group may cause challenges in terms of diverse recruitment and enrollment. While it seems William and Mary are somewhat aware of Asian American diversity, as seen through the school’s prominent populations of East, Southeast, and South Asians, it may be that the university struggles with recruiting diverse student groups from other Asian subgroups. Comparing the presence of Asian student organizations at William and Mary to other college campuses’ Asian student organizations can provide insight to the demographic breakdown of these campuses’ Asian American populations. William and Mary is similar in size to Harvard College, with the undergraduate student bodies totaling 6,256 and 6,699 respectively. Harvard, a university accused of racial discrimination against Asian Americans, has numerous APIA student organizations such as the Bengali Association of Students, the Pakistani Students Association, the Korean Association, the Harvard Philippine Forum, the Taiwanese Cultural Society, the Vietnamese Association, the Chinese Student Association, the Khmer Student Association, the Singapore Indonesia and Malaysia Association, several groups dedicated to general Asian American community, several groups dedicated to broader South Asian community, the Half

74 Data collected from IPUMS.

Asian People’s Association. The depth of these Asian cultural organizations signify a diverse range of Asian American students on campus, who make up 17.1% of the undergraduate student body and 25.4% of the incoming class of 2023, compared to William and Mary’s Asian student populations. The presence of these groups does not confirm if all of these Asian subgroups are equally represented, but does show that Harvard makes an effort to recruit them.

Presence of diverse student organizations also shows that these student groups, through cross-cultural and cross-racial programming, are sharing the educational benefits of diversity with the student body. William and Mary’s total undergraduate Asian American population (8%) is nearly half of Harvard’s (17%), although they have a similarly sized student body. The lack of a similarly large Asian American presence on William and Mary’s campus shows that Asian diversity at William and Mary is not considered to the same extent that Harvard does. This could be due to the fact that Harvard is a private institution, and is therefore not restricted to recruiting a majority of its students from in-state.

Although there is a perception that demographic data is highly sensitive and further detail can compromise student anonymity, I have found that student racial and ethnic demographic data is published and made public online, both in percentage and by headcount regardless of how small the population is. Small populations are not exempt from demographic data, no matter their size. In the case of Native American/Native American students and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations, who tend to have very minute populations on college campuses, although


their student populations may total less than 15 people they are not exempt from headcount data. This is even in the case that data is divided into in-state/out-of-state, in which William and Mary’s Native American/Native American out-of-state population was shown to be only 2. With this in mind, it seems completely possible for a university like William and Mary to collect and publish subgroup demographic data on Asian American ethnic diversity, as state demographic information is also public.

It is not clear why William and Mary chooses to share very detailed headcount data on race but not for minority subgroups. It should be noted that most universities publish their demographics and admissions rates for each incoming class, but university wide data is often not found published by the university themselves, but rather by news publications or college websites not affiliated with the university. Whether or not admission is offered is decided on a case by case basis and relies on the makeup of current admitted students and the officers and committees reviewing the student. For colleges to be successful in their diversity and inclusion efforts, they must rely on expanding their pool of applicants and receiving the most information on a student. In terms of Asian American diversity, the outcome is dependent on how familiar admissions officers are with Asian American heterogeneity.

Conclusion

Understanding Asian American heterogeneity is critical if universities seek to share the educational benefits of diversity with their students. While Asian Americans as a whole are

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78 Data has been collected through SCHEV’s Fall Headcount Enrollment data. Variables used were William and Mary, 2019-2020, Race/Ethnicity, Undergraduate, In state/Out of state. [https://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E2_Report.asp](https://research.schev.edu/enrollment/E2_Report.asp).
overrepresented on college campuses, the aggregation of data can lead one to falsely assume all Asians are equally overrepresented when that is not the case. Asian Americans come from a wide degree of cultures, socio-economic statuses, and education levels. In viewing Asian American students through a homogenous lense, and in turn, minimizing recruitment efforts, universities continue to perpetuate the model minority stereotype rather than disproving it, as a diverse education is meant to do.

Due to COVID-19 I was unable to do further research looking into Asian American demographics according to school districts. This way, in the case that a large, centralized Asian American population existed, it would be possible to know that universities could streamline outreach to diverse Asian American communities. In the case that Asian American subpopulations are very spread out, then admissions officers would know to adopt alternative methods to recruit Asian American applicants. In the case that Asian American communities are not consolidated and admissions officers cannot effectively recruit diverse Asian American students through high school visits alone, other effective options for recruitment would be attending after school programs for Asian American students. For example, Asian American Lead is an after school mentorship program for low income Asian and Pacific Islander students in middle and high school located in Virginia, Maryland, and DC. Because this program is located within Virginia, it would not require the admissions office to expend any further resources towards recruitment, while tackling APIA ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Universities could also attend other Asian American focused programs, such as the East Coast Asian American Student Union’s high school program. However, although these suggestions may
increase the strategic nature of college recruitment, without subgroup data, there is no way to systematically ensure the effectiveness of these techniques.

Through my research, I have done an informal analysis of the Asian populations on campus and my perception of its diversity. It appears that William and Mary’s Asian population is recruited heavily from Indian Americans, Filipino Americans, Chinese Americans, and Korean Americans but because the college does not collect more detailed data, aside from state mandated racial categories, it is impossible to know the official makeup of Asian American ethnic groups. From my analysis of student organizations, I believe Vietnamese American are underrepresented on campus, but a lack of data prevents any corroboration of this perception. I am unable to know if other smaller Asian American ethnic groups are represented adequately because there are no student organizations dedicated to them and no data showing their enrollment rates. With these doubts in mind, admissions officers are also subject to the same doubts in terms of knowing if their recruitment and outreach strategies are effectively working. From speaking with the Dean of the Admissions and Head of Diversity and Access, it was clear that they had knowledge of Asian American heterogeneity, but my interviews indicated that an understanding of Asian American diversity is very dependent on an dean’s individual knowledge, and there is no structural way to ensure Asian American heterogeneity is understood by all admissions officers. When questioned about more detailed data collection, the admissions officers responded about the importance of stories over statistics. However, their responses were regarding the evaluation of student applications and did not address data in terms of how it contributes to improving recruitment strategies.
Knowing that all Virginia colleges publish demographic headcount data online no matter how small the population, it is reasonable to ensure that universities document and publish detailed subgroup data. No matter how many admissions officers at William and Mary are aware of Asian American heterogeneity, the college still has no framework to understand if they are admitting and recruiting a diverse Asian American student population reflective of the state. Without this data there is no way to identify which subgroups are underrepresented, how to recruit these student populations, or if William and Mary is truly effective in its perusal of diversity and inclusion.
Figures

Fig. 1

Asian American Support for Affirmative Action

- **78%**
- **73%**
- **70%**
- **73%**
- **63%**
- **41%**

Other Asians

Chinese

2012 2014 2016


Fig. 2

Half of U.S. Asians have at least a bachelor's degree

- Indian 72%
- Malaysian 60%
- Mongolian 59%
- Chinese 53%
- All Asains 51%
- Filipinos 46%
- Nepals 41%
- Vietnamese 29%
- Cambodian 18%
- Hmong 17%
- Laotian 16%
- Bhutanese 9%

Note: Chinese includes those identifying as Taiwanese. Data not available for all Asian origin groups. See methodology for more.

Bibliography


Interview Schedule

Admissions Functions

1. What is the goal and mission of the admissions office?
   a. In what ways does the office enact their mission statement?
2. What are the roles of the different offices of admissions?
   a. What is the goal of the multicultural recruitment office in relations to admissions?
3. Can you outline the process for recruiting and admitting students?
   a. What are the roles and differences in Senior Admissions Officers and Assistant Admissions Officers?
   b. How does admissions categorize different areas and regions during recruitment?
      For example: identifying rural, low income areas, communities that are predominantly one racial or ethnic group, etc.
   c. How are different admissions officers assigned to these regions?
      i. Do the assigned admissions officers have different specialties or areas of knowledge/experience?
   d. Can you walk me through the application process for prospective students?
   e. What are the different factors students are evaluated on?
   f. What are the ways students can share information about themselves during the application process?
   g. How does the admissions office analyze the advantages of different students. For example, access to tutoring, legacy status, districts with better funded schools, etc.
   h. Is race or ethnicity considered in conjunction with other factors (like socioeconomic status, first generation student status, etc) or separately?
      i. How are these factors evaluated during the application process?

Race & Admissions

i. What specific initiatives or policies do you have to enact your goals of diversity and inclusion?
   i. Does William and Mary do outreach to underrepresented groups who may have small populations in Virginia, but are larger in other states?
   ii. What methods or criteria do you use to categorize a student or demographic as underrepresented or underprivileged?
      1. In the case of multicultural recruitment, what criteria do you use to flag a student as “diverse.”
a. How does your office define “multicultural?” Is it synonymous with students of color or any students of different cultural backgrounds?

b. What happens when their application has been flagged to receive more attention?

2. What steps are taken to recruit underrepresented and underprivileged groups?

iii. How does admissions keep track of information/data on underrepresented/underprivileged groups?

1. Are statistics collected showing the different demographics of the applicant pool, admitted students, and enrolled students?
   a. If yes: What is this data used for and how does it inform future admission pools?
   b. If no: what reasons prevent the admissions office from keeping this data and what techniques do you use to track variations in student enrollment and acceptance?

4. Identifying APIAs

a. Are Asian American students considered underrepresented by admissions?

b. Are there ways admissions accounts for ingroup inequalities?
   i. What happens during the application process when students are flagged as Asian American? Are they flagged for their ethnicity as well?
   ii. Are multicultural recruitment techniques the same across all minority groups or specially tailored based on the group and circumstances?

1. Does admissions have any specific outreach programs to recruit Asian American applicants?

2. If yes: how are these prospective students found and attracted?
   a. What are the methods you use?

3. If no: how do your regular multicultural recruitment strategies ensure outreach is effective amongst Asian American populations?
   a. What are the results you see from these initiatives?

4. How do you target these less represented Asian American groups?
c. Have you heard from recruiters that students are hesitant to disclose their race (like asians)
d. Is William and Mary a minority serving school?
   i. Does william and mary collect data to meet that threshold/include mixed race individual for that
e. Is there anything else i should know about the process, anything admissions considers which I have missed
f. Who else do you recommend to speak to?
Consent Form - “Data Collection and Multicultural Outreach at William and Mary”

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, entitled “Data Collection and Multicultural Outreach of APIA Communities at William and Mary” conducted by Emma Shainwald.

The general nature of the study has been explained to me. I understand that I will be asked questions about my understanding and involvement with the William and Mary Admissions Office, specifically referring to multicultural recruitment techniques and data collection methods of underrepresented students. My participation in this interview should take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. I understand that my responses will be shared from the perspective of an Admissions Office representative, which will be used only for this honors research. No names will be used, but my title and position will be, meaning that this interview will not be completely anonymous. I understand that I may decline to answer any questions asked and that I may discontinue participation in the interview at any time. I understand that with my permission this interview will be audio recorded using a digital recording device. I understand that, if recorded, the interview will be stored as a password-protected electronic file available only to Emma Shainwald and her professor, Deenesh Sohoni and that the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed by June 1, 2020. I am aware that I may report dissatisfaction with any aspect of this project to the Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Jennifer Stevens, at (757) 221-3862 or jastev@wm.edu. I am aware that I must be at least 18 years of age to participate. My signature below signifies my voluntary participation in this project, and that I have received a copy of this consent form.

I give my permission for this interview to be recorded: Yes _____ No _____

Signature: ___________________________________________________________________
Student Organizations
As a substitute for data on Asian American subgroups, I have analyzed cultural student organizations and their memberships to reveal Asian American subgroup populations at William and Mary.

All information is from the academic year 2019-2020 and was collected from Tribelink.wm.edu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Organization</th>
<th># of Dues Paying Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Student Organization (CSO)</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino Student Organization (FASA)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean American Student Association (KASA)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian Student Association (SASA)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agape Christian Fellowship*</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu-Sikh-Jain Students Association</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afsana</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Bhangra</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese Student Association (TASA)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Predominantly Korean organization
Note: The Haasya Dance Team is not included because their membership is not listed on Tribelink