Leadership Perception Among Asian American College Students

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**Research Question**

How do undergraduate Asian American students at a highly selective research institution perceive their personal leadership involvement, and how can the institution support their development as leaders?

All research materials were kept under the control of the researcher and data was stored on a password-protected computer during analysis.

**Conclusion**

This study examines the identities and leadership perspectives of Asian American college students at a highly selective research institution. The examination was conducted through three separate data collection methods: AAVS-M, student interviews, and staff interviews. Student participants also completed a demographics questionnaire that included their age, year in college, ethnicity, generation, and generation to attend college. The AAVS-M provided context for the study and revealed students' adherence to or departure from Asian values. The student interviews presented an opportunity to further explore students' a) participation as student leaders; b) perceptions of their leadership ability; c) views of how their culture does or does not influence their leadership involvement; and d) insights of how the model minority stereotype does or does not influence how they are seen as leaders. Lastly, the researcher conducted interviews with staff members who work closely with Asian American college students to obtain a more informed and multidimensional perspective. The interviews explored the experiences of Asian American student leaders and campus dynamics impacting leadership. Utilizing these three methods, the researcher analyzed the many dimensions of Asian American identity and leadership amongst college students at the research institution.

## Data Results Summary

**Introduction**

Data was collected using three methods: AAVS-M inventory, student interviews, and staff interviews. Thirty-two students participated in the AAVS-M inventory. Nine

semi-structured interviews with students gave insight into the perceptions students have on leadership as an individual and for Asian Americans in general. Interviews with two staff members who interact with Asian American students provided information on the perceptions staff have of the needs of Asian American students as it relates to leadership development. Student and staff interviews were analyzed using bottom-up coding. The subscales from the AAVS-M were cross-referenced with themes that emerged from the student and staff interviews.

**AAVS-M demographics**. The AAVS-M was distributed to students participating in a leadership program sponsored by the university's Asian/ Asian American Student Affairs department and student interviewees. The 32 participants consisted of 15 women and 17 men who were between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 0.91$). Students were all undergraduate students with two (6.3%) first-year students, six (18.8%) second-year students, eight (25%) third-year students, fifteen (46.9%) fourth-year students, and two (6.3%) fifth-year students (masters program). Students' ethnic backgrounds can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Ethnic Backgrounds of AAVS-M Participants*

| Ethnicity | Count |
|-----------|-------|
| Chinese | 16 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Korean** | 5 |
| **Taiwanese** | 3 |
| **Chinese and Other** | 3 |
| **Filipino** | 2 |
| **Indian** | 1 |
| **Thai** | 1 |
| **Did Not Identify** | 1 |

Students came from all six undergraduate colleges at the research institution: eighteen from the College of Arts and Sciences, one from the School of Communication, eight from the School of Engineering and Applied Science, one from the School of Journalism, three from the School of Education and Social Policy, and one from both the School of Engineering and Applied Science and School of Music. While students in attendance were all leaders of Asian ethnic/ cultural organizations, they also represented other organizations on campus: Associated Student Government, Philharmonia, Students for Sensible Drug Policy, Panhellenic Association, Interfraternity Council, Orientation, and the Neuro Club.

**AAVS-M Scores**. The AAVS-M was used to understand student's adherence to Asian values and composed of a total score and five subscales: 1) collectivism, 2) conformity to norms, 3) emotional self-control, 4) family recognition through achievement, and 5) humility.  Example items were "One's academic and occupational reputation reflects the family's reputation" and "One should be able to boast about one's achievement" (reverse worded). The scale contained 42 items, each rated on a 7-point

Likert-type scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = mildly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = mildly agree, 6 = moderately agree, 7 = strongly agree. The number of items in each of the five subscales was as follows:

- Collectivism: 7 items

- Conformity to Norms: 7 items

- Emotional Self-Control: 8 items

- Family Recognition Through Achievement: 14 items

- Humility: 8 items

Scoring the AAVS-M consisted of adding the participant's ratings on all 42 items and then dividing by 42 to obtain a total scale or mean. Subscale scores were obtained by adding participant's ratings on each item in the subscale and diving by the number of subscale items. A total of thirteen items needed to be reverse coded across the five subscales (see Appendix B). Statistical analysis was not conducted because of the limited sample size, however average scores were analyzed holistically. The scores, or means, were calculated after reverse scoring. Higher means reflect greater endorsement of the Asian value, with seven being the highest score, while a lower score indicates a greater endorsement of American values. The overall AAVS-M score of the participants was 3.89 (SD =0.58), the low range was 2.93, and the high range was 5.17.

The subscales resulted in scores (or means) in the middle of the scale (4 or slightly above), with the exception of emotional self-control and family recognition through achievement as presented in Figure 2.
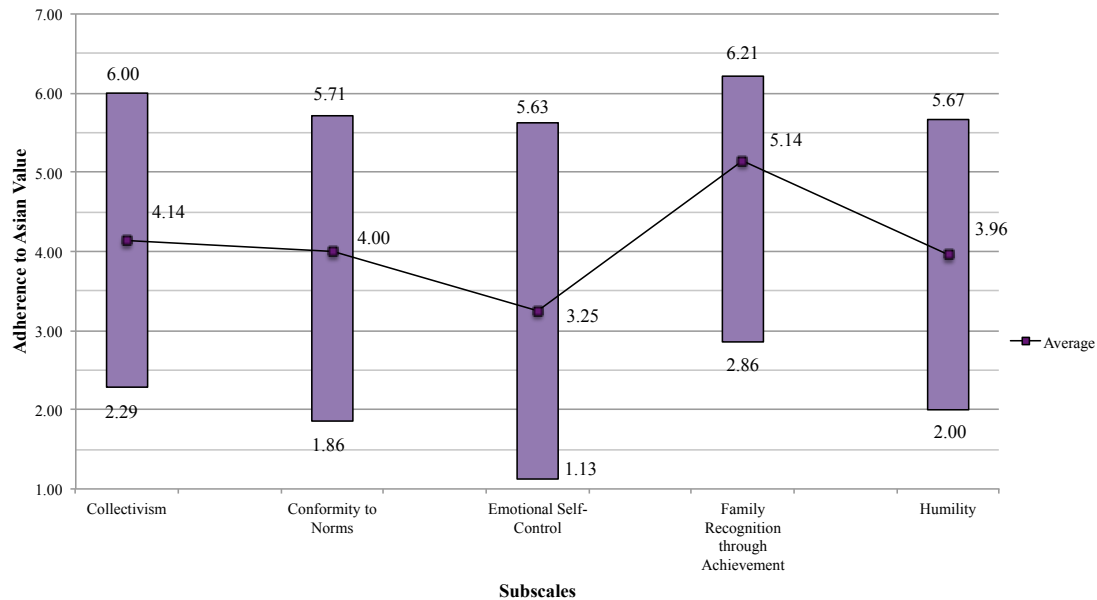
*Figure 2*: AAVS-M Subscale Scores and Ranges

Student participants scored 4.14 (SD = 0.89) on collectivism, 4.00 (SD = 0.86) on

conformity to norms, 3.25 (SD = 1.05) on emotional self-control, 5.14 (SD = 0.89) on

family recognition through achievement, and 3.96 (SD = 0.71) on humility.

**Student interview demographics.** Nine interviews (5 females and 4 males) were

conducted with undergraduate students at the university. Of these students, one was a

sophomore, five were juniors, and three seniors. Five students were only involved in

Asian ethnic/ cultural organizations, while the others were involved in range of other

organizations not advised by the multicultural center. All student interviewees completed

the AAVS-M and the demographic information sheet. Table 3 outlines the pseudonyms

used and demographic information for each subject.

Table 3

*Student Interview Demographics*

| Student | Demographics |
|---------|--------------|
|         |              |

| | Gender | Age | Ethnicity | Year in College | Generation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Brian** | Male | 21 | Chinese | Senior | 2nd |
| **Harper** | Male | 20 | Filipino | Junior | 1st |
| **Jessica** | Female | 20 | Chinese | Junior | 2nd |
| **John** | Male | 21 | Korean | Senior | 1st |
| **Kevin** | Male | 21 | Chinese | Senior | 1st |
| **Laura** | Female | 20 | Korean | Junior | 1st |
| **Paige** | Female | 21 | Taiwanese | Senior | 1st |
| **Sarah** | Female | 20 | Chinese | Junior | 1st |
| **Taylor** | Female | 20 | Chinese | Junior | 1st |

*Note:* Pseudonyms were used for interview participants. Generation is defined as generation to be born in America.

**Staff interviews.** Two interviews were conducted with staff who interact or have interacted with Asian American students on a regularly basis. The first interview participant was a director within student affairs who has worked at the university for nine years. The second interview participant was a director in development at the university. Before starting a career in development, the interviewee spent a considerable amount of time establishing a case for an office for Asian and Asian American students at the university and holding leadership positions in national Asian American organizations, such as the National Association of Asian American Professional. Additionally, it should be noted that both staff participants are Asian American and male.

**Coding for student and staff interviews.** In order to organize and analyze the data collected in the interviews, the researcher analyzed student data and staff data

separately to discern differences in perspective based on relation to the university. From there, categories were examined in cross-case analyses to identify larger themes across the full data set. The themes that emerged from the interviews with students and staff included the following: 1) encouragement from friends, 2) passion for an issue, 3) giving back, 4) campus culture, 5) future career, 6) Asian vs. American conflict, 7) uncertainty, 8) model minority barrier, 9) focus on grades first, and 10) practical experience. These themes were then organized into categories as shown in Figure 3. Conversations with staff members were heavily focused on the last three categories: reasons for leadership, leadership hurdles, and beyond college.
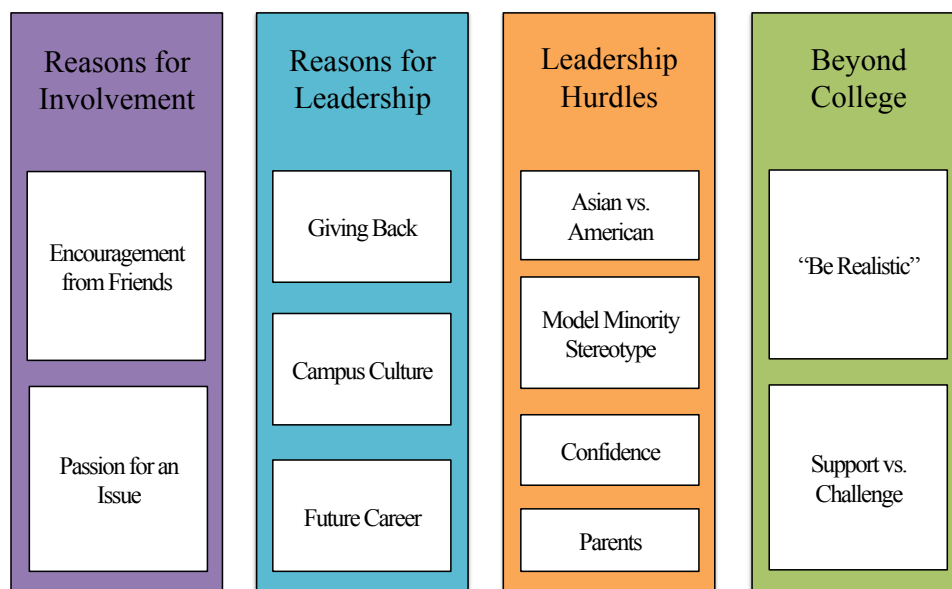


*Figure 3*. Coding Map Based on Student and Staff Interviews

For the first category of reasons for involvement, all student respondents provided their reasons for becoming involved in student organizations with encouragement from friends and passion for an issue mentioned frequently. The next category included themes that surfaced from students reflecting on what led them to take on leadership positions

within those student organizations. The subsequent category highlighted the hurdles and/ or challenges students faced trying to hold leadership positions, including these three themes: dichotomy of being Asian versus being American, the model minority stereotype, and parents. The last category, titled "beyond college," which looked at the skills students need to be leaders after graduation, was divided into "being realistic" and provided support and challenge. The next sections will further examine the themes that emerged from student and staff interviews.

   ***Encouragement from friends.*** Student leaders interviewed stated that they initially got involved in campus organizations because of encouragement from peers, with 35 mentions, and/ or passion for an issue(s), with 31 mentions. Interestingly, the students' peers were of the same ethnicity, and half of those students noted that they did not really associate with people of the same ethnicity (outside of the family) until coming to the university (four students). Also, unexpected based on the highly selective nature of the university, was discovering that three students were minimally involved in high school and had little interest in student organization involvement before stepping onto campus. Kevin, a pre-med junior from the west coast stated, "I hadn't planned to be involved [in student organizations] my freshmen year. I just wanted to focus on my classes, but then I met someone who was a part of APAC [Asian Pacific American Coalition]. I went to one event and others convinced me to apply to be on the junior exec board." Meanwhile, John discussed how a classmate from high school, a year older, recommended student organizations for him to get in and he became involved in all of them.

>It seemed he really liked everything he did. I got to campus and went to every
>
>meeting, event, and party with him. I got involved in things without really
>
>knowing why, like TASC [Taiwanese American Student Club]. I then found
>
>myself getting involved in APAC [Asian Pacific American Coalition] and the
>
>neuro club. (John, senior)

Another student, Taylor, shared that a friend, who went to a different school, told her there were benefits to being a part of Greek life and that she should get involved.

>I hadn't considered being in a sorority, but my friend Sarah said it gave her an
>
>opportunity to meet people she wouldn't have otherwise met. I really looked up to
>
>her, so I decided to go through with it. I love it. (Taylor, junior)

>***Passion for an issue***. Students mentioned passion or believing in a cause almost

as many times as friends, with 31 mentions. Brian shared that his friend asked him to help her start an organization as a sophomore. At this point he was not involved in any organizations. Brian decided to get involved because he agreed with the cause and felt he could connect with fellow students at a deeper level.

>I didn't know much about drug policy, but wanted to be supportive. I went, and I
>
>learned about how the war on drugs had a lot of social justice issues inherent in
>
>the policy. We learned a lot. I connected with people in ways I didn't expect to in
>
>college. It was cool. We got a ton of resources to start our own group. (Brian,
>
>senior)

The passions for issues/ causes ranged from social justice, Asian American identity, politics, drug policy, diversity and inclusion, affirmative action, and cultural awareness.

All but two students noted that the causes they supported in college were not similar or even on their minds previously. Quotes from the student can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

*Student Quotes Regarding Passion for an Issue*

| Student | Quote |
|---------|-------|
| **Kevin** | "I got involved in ASG [Associated Student Government] specifically to join the diversity and inclusion committee. I found myself among people who were committed to social justice and who cared about me. Me in my entirety. And in experiencing this community, I became more passionate about making sure everyone feels that way on campus. It's important to be a part of community that accepts you and challenges you to be the best you." |
| **Harper** | "I get a sense of self-fulfillment making sure that people who do identify, the same way I do, as a Filipino person, to make sure that they are able to take advantage of everything that's available." |
| **Paige** | "I came to college knowing that the war on drugs was an inefficient drug policy but didn't really think about being a part of an organization focused on it until I started doing more research. The more I learned about the issue, the more I wanted to do something about it. I wanted others to understand the policy and its impact on society." |

***Giving back.*** The most mentioned reason for taking on leadership positions was to give back to their organizations, with 28 mentions. Three of the nine students stating this theme throughout their interview were leaders of Asian American organizations and two of them were leaders of non-Asian American organizations. John discussed how he was presented with a number of leadership opportunities, but decided to decline all but student government.

> When I was imagining what I would accomplish before I leave, there was very
> different opportunities that sounded great, but they seemed limited within the
> community. I really wanted to address larger student needs. I wanted to take all

those experiences I had in other organizations and pour them into one

organization. That's how I ended up as an exec member. (John, senior)

Sarah talked about taking on a leadership position because she was concerned about the

future of the organization. She was motivated to build up the organization.

I wanted to build APAC's [Asian Pacific American Coalition] community. APAC

is a place for people who are interested in social justice, particularly in an Asian

American context…I just want…in the future…I am trying to enlarge that space

because I want more people to be concerned about these kinds of issues. (Sarah,

junior)

*Campus culture.* Students and staff frequently mentioned (23 times) that the

campus culture was a large reason they decided to pursue leadership positions.  Seven of

the nine student participants discussed the expectation to be a leader on campus at the

university. Furthermore, some students used the words "failure" or "unsuccessful" if you

were not in a leadership position on campus.  The quotes in Table 5 support this

perception.

Table 5

*Student Quotes Regarding Campus Culture*

| Student | Quote |
| --- | --- |

| Taylor | "Well, I think, this campus is pretty pre-professional. So like you can put [on a resume] that you're on an organization, but it doesn't matter unless you are a president or something really important. I also think, maybe, it's just the nature of who we are. A lot of us came from high schools and we were very high achieving and maybe presidents or like, I was not valedictorian. But some people were valedictorian or salutatorian. They want to be on top. If they're not then they're failing. So there's an expectation to do, like, what they have and more. They want to excel." |
|---|---|
| Sarah | "We shouldn't be like this, but I think a lot of us find ourselves judging our peers who aren't in a leadership position by junior year. You wonder if they've been unsuccessful in their attempts to be a "leader" because everyone seems to be one on this campus. It's like you can't graduate unless you've been the secretary or the PR chair of an organization." |
| Laura | "Everyone is involved and leading some pretty awesome things on campus. It motivates me. It challenges me. I wasn't really involved in anything in high school. It seemed scary at first, but the campus culture has really been a good thing." |

Staff member, Charlie, also spoke about the leadership culture extensively at the university. He spoke about what it means to be a student leader and how it is different from the other universities he has worked at.

I think it means, for our students, to be involved, and to be heavily involved in not only two things, but also three or four things and to be the point person. The person that's going to make decisions on this campus. What I've noticed about our students on this campus is that everyone wants to become a leader. It's not to say that they can't, the question then becomes if everyone wants to become a leader, who's going to follow? Is it different [from other campuses]? Not necessarily, but I think how leadership is perceived here is by those that have the highest authority, as well as who's in certain positions. I think because of the fact that everyone wants to become a leader, they're aiming for those higher titles. Leadership and titles, I think, play a role here on this campus. (Charlie, staff)

The other staff member, Andrew, also spoke about this culture and the challenges that are presented to students:

>   It can be very daunting and very challenging to be a student leader here. Everyone, I said, wants to be a leader because they're all leaders at their own respective institutions and all that. We're talking about students in general. We're not even touching on Asian or Asian Americans. I think that's one of the things that can be tough here is because you're not competing with everyone else that was the best of the best in their own high schools. I think that's the challenge of being a leader here. (Andrew, staff)

*Future career.* The third prevalent theme for taking on leadership positions was related to their future career or job, with 21 mentions. Networking and resume were often mentioned together: "Being a leader in a fraternity proved to be great for networking and resume building purposes. I got to know upperclassmen who went into consulting and who helped me build set of skills I could put on my resume." Taylor emphasized how being a leader in an organization seemed necessary for her resume for law school.

>   I want to get into a top ten law school. I've been told to seek out leadership opportunities to make my resume better. That pretty much got me into the position I'm in today. Don't get me wrong, I really enjoy the organization and the people in it, but to be honest, I'm not sure I would be putting this extra effort to be a leader if it wasn't for law school. (Taylor, junior)

*Asian vs. American.* After learning about students' reasons for being involved and becoming leaders, the interviews focused on students' Asian American identity. Within those conversations with students and staff, a prevalent theme that arose was the

conflict students face between being Asian and being American on campus and in society. Brian mentioned that "People expect us to act like the Asian way because of our physical appearance. I feel that many of us are in between Asian and American." Laura also mentioned something similar, stating, "There should be a category between Asian and Asian-American. It's for those who move to the states early in age but they're not fully assimilated yet to be Asian American but they can't really identify with their traditional Asian identities anymore. It's just stuck between Asian and Asian American. Yeah, that's kind of the boat I'm in." Kevin noted that he has teetered on the spectrum of being Asian and being American, but that coming to college has helped him solidify his identity further.

> I'm so grateful that I was raised to love my culture, to be proud of being Korean.
> I'm very thankful for that, but I also felt trapped because I also felt like I wasn't
> having the American experience that I know that this world, really when it comes
> down to it, is white-centric. It's like I wanted to be American, too. I've learned to
> love both during college by being a part of different organizations – being a part
> of APAC and a fraternity. (Kevin, senior)

Paige had a different experience defining her Asian American identity coming to college, growing up in a predominately white community.

> When I first came here, I was terrified of the Asian community because of my
> experiences in high school. My high school demographics were pretty similar to
> here. It was very segregated. But then I go t here and I went to a TASC
> [Taiwanese American Student Club] party and I met my now friends there. Then,
> afterwards, the Asian Project was happening where we explored our Asian

American identity. I really learned a lot. But then I got frustrated when I was

starting SSDP. It seemed like no one in the Asian community was interested or

supported it. Eventually, these two Asian boys ended up joining the club and the

executive board. It was really amazing to me to see that the university community

would look at the club and look at the issue and be like this is strange. This isn't

just a bunch of white kids who want to smoke weed. Asians are generally

stereotypically more serious, so this must be an important cause. It was like as the

Asian community moved further away from supporting this group, the general

Northwestern community was more in support of this group. I feel like I am

constantly on one side or the other. (Paige, senior)

Staff members also spoke about the paradoxes that can confuse Asian American students

in exploring their identity. Andrew noted that the model minority stereotype contributes

to this confusion:

It's [model minority stereotype] is one where as Asian Americans, we are taught

to be, again, the term, the model minority, which we fit into the culture, in which

we work hard, in which we contribute to society in a way that doesn't necessarily

wave the boat, or rock the boat. That stereotype is one that, it's difficult to have

conversations about that with students and with people in many ways, just

because it's perceived to be a good thing [in the Asian culture]. However, that's a

stereotype. I think there's a conflict, in some ways, for our students, particularly

those who are very interested in breaking the model minority myth. (Andrew,

staff)

Charlie had the same sentiments:

With the Asian culture, you don't question authority. In the white male culture

you do question authority and it's okay. In the Asian American culture you need

to be very academically studious. I would say in the white male culture you can

be that but you also need to get involved in every activity and become the

president. That's not always going to come together. (Charlie, staff)

***Model minority stereotype.*** Many students, when asked about the model minority

stereotype, felt it was imposed on them, but that they did not think about it much.

However, further questions elicited different responses that aligned with staff comments.

Brian felt that other people (non-Asians) amplify the model minority stereotype, applying

more pressure on him.

For example, if I'm the only Asian in my class and I do really well on this specific

test or exam and then people will make it like a big deal. Be like, oh, wow,

congrats. I mean, they're not going to criticize you for your accomplishments,

they'll praise you of course but they're exaggerated to some extent that you feel

that you don't deserve that much praise. If it is another student who accomplished

the same thing, that person probably won't receive that much attention or praise

but since you're like a model minority, sort of, then people will put more

pressure, more attention on you. I think this also happens when people are in

leadership positions. There's more pressure. (Brian, senior)

Andrew (staff) also highlighted this pressure and the barriers that come along with it.

In general, students are over-committed. There's a sense of trying to fit in, is a

barrier. Being able to manage their emotions and everything that they're doing,

just trying to manage their own experiences, I think it's a barrier in the fact that

there's so many things that end up going wrong. There's so many different

pressures that Asian American students face. I think the pressure to perform, the

pressure to succeed. For many of the students I interact with, that involves going

to professional school or having very very stable jobs. It doesn't allow students to

examine passions that they might have and then take on leadership positions.

(Andrew, staff)

Kevin talked his reactions to the model minority stereotype throughout his life, upholding

parts of it while challenging others.

…The way I look at the model minority myth is, you choose what means the most

to you and none of the societal stuff should matter…There was a phase where I

completely ignored my parents. I am not proud of it, but I think I had to do it in

order to develop that whole American ideal of individualism. But it's easier said

then done. I think, to many Asian American students here, it's probably not an

obstacle. We're all high-achieving. We haven't experienced a bamboo ceiling, but

eventually we will and I'm not sure people will be able to handle that. (Kevin,

senior)

Staff members mentioned that the model minority stereotype could prevent students from

participating and leading non-Asian American organizations.

I got see many of them [students] through the various organizations, but there was

still that trend that I saw, that theme. That theme is, one example, they may be

very active, very hard-working student leaders, but they're only in the Asian

American groups. They're not even spreading themselves out to the non-Asian

groups that candidly the decision-makers in their future only know of. When they

hear AAA, they're thinking the automobile insurance. They do not know there's a

thing called the Asian American Association. (Charlie, staff)

***Confidence.*** Each student was asked, "do you see yourself as a leader"? Seven of

the nine students were uncertain if they were despite being in leadership positions.

Students responded with "umm, I guess so" or "it depends who you ask" or "that's not

easy to answer". This resulted in 19 mentions of uncertainty or similar words. Even for

students who responded yes, didn't necessarily come to that conclusion easily. For

instance, Brian said:

> That's an interesting question, something I've had to think about a lot. This year I
>
> had a tough decision in my life and that was whether to run for student body
>
> president actually…No matter how much a care about this school and thought
>
> what was wrong about it currently and thought that the people in it just didn't
>
> understand the students, I was not comfortable enough to list my qualifications as
>
> a leader that specifically what people want to hear, your experience, why you're
>
> qualified. I was not confident in whether I was qualified for the job. I knew I was
>
> qualified in that I felt like I truly understand the student experience and the lack of
>
> relevance of student government in it, but I didn't feel confident in saying that I
>
> had the concrete leadership qualifications to go for it. (Brian, senior)

***Parents.*** Parents were mentioned 18 times. Every student noted that support from

parents was contingent on if their academics and grades were okay. If their grades were

good then their parents were proud and supportive in general of their leadership

involvement, but this usually took some explaining. Jessica shared that her parents were

fine with her extracurricular involvement as long as she got her schoolwork done. She

said, "As long as I get my work done, I can still have involvement. So I've in a way taken advantage of what they said and just gone out of my way to keep up with the social life as well." The quotes in Table 6 further support this perception that parents are not a source of leadership encouragement.

Table 6

*Student Quotes Regarding Parents*

| Student | Quote |
|---|---|
| John | "My parents haven't really ever worried too much about me in terms of extracurriculars because I've always built a trust in them, as long as I'm showing them I'm doing well in school, they're fine with whatever I choose to do." |
| Paige | "My parents have been supportive of my leadership in SSDP [Students for Sensible Drug Policy] and being a leader in Greek life, but they were very hesitant at first. Both of these organizations are not traditionally something that a lot of Asian women do." |
| Harper | "I'm pretty sure they [parents] have no idea that I'm involved in any activities outside of the classroom. It's never been a point of discussion." |

Staff were also cognizant of this pressure on Asian American students. One of them discussed pressure of major choice and career choice. Extracurricular activities were okay because they were exploring their culture, however, grades were still the ultimate priority for parents. He mentioned that this is certainly true for newer immigrants, but seems to be the case for third and fourth generation parents, too.

A number of our Asian American students on this campus do deal with a lot of family pressure in terms of what are appropriate majors and career paths to be looking at. I think that limits students into those boxes. And I think involvement even within Asian cultural organizations is approved because you're exploring the

heritage and honoring the past and the traditions. Parents are excited their son or

daughter is participating in dances and plays, but then quickly focus on the grades

and their careers. It's very much tied to immigration. But then I have talked to

students who are now parents and they still sometimes don't' get why they need

to be in these extracurricular activities. (Charlie, staff)

*Be Realistic.* When asked about faculty and staff support, most students agreed

that staff encouraged and supported their leadership; however, they thought faculty could

do a better job on campus. In particular, John felt that the faculty on campus were too

consumed with their research.

They [faculty] spend less time interacting with the student body or trying to get

know us. That's another thing about University A professors, I don't know if it's

just me that always has a hard time talking to teachers or professors. I just feel

like they're really hard to get close with. It's hard to break beyond the teacher-

student barrier. I wish I could discuss things with them beyond the classroom. To

discuss real life things. (John, senior)

Laura also spoke about lack of faculty engagement, specifically freshmen advisors,

beyond the classroom, sharing her disappointment that they were not there to help her

navigate resources.

I guess our freshmen advisors can be more approachable, because personally, I

spent a lot of time trying to go to my advisors office hours and just try to talk to

him about, oh, is there anything I need to know in my freshmen year, regarding

adjustment issues and about a career in medicine. He doesn't seem to genuinely

care about students. It's kind of the hard thing to say, but I just feel like he's

doing his job but he doesn't really care about helping students here. Which I was

kind of disappointed about. I just wanted someone to talk to. (Laura, junior)

Brian had a better experience with his professors, but did not think their guidance and

advice was not as useful as their peers, which three other students also mentioned.

One thing I have learned from the past three years is you learn the most from your

peers, from interacting with your peers, like how they handle things. Sometimes

the professors or older people will tell you one thing but it doesn't work out

necessarily the way you want to, since there's a generational gap. (Brian, senior)

Both staff members agreed with students that more honest conversations need to happen

on campus to further growth in their development (personal, moral, etc.) and to better

prepare them for life beyond the walls of the university. Andrew shared some thoughts on

this subject, but noting that the university needs to recruit other Asian Americans to take

part in those conversations.

I think the university, what could be done is allow genuine, real conversations of

what it means to be a student on this campus. Helping student identify early on

what success is for them. I think the establishment of this office [Asian American

Student Affairs] has been one large step. It's allowed students to feel supported,

in terms of their extracurricular activities, in terms of their social network, as well

as any other academic things that they might be coming across for them. It's how

we [multicultural center] are changing, I think it's going to allow students to see

things more broadly…I think if we're able to encourage and maybe help recruit

other Asian American individuals, may that be administrators, or other faculty in

fields outside of STEM disciplines, I think that's going to give a good framework

for out student to see their own experiences, but then help and learn about the

leadership experiences of those individuals as well. (Andrew, staff)

***Support vs. challenge.*** Staff and even some students were cognizant of a glass

ceiling, or bamboo ceiling, for Asian Americans. In particular, staff expressed concerns

that most Asian American students at the university are not full aware of the challenges

they may face when they graduate. Charlie discussed that universities tend to coddle

students too much. He sees plenty of support and not enough challenge.

> I don't think we're preparing our students with enough realistic outside the real
>
> world challenges that they're going to face. They're protected in this bubble
>
> called a university. Which they have every right to but to complain about
>
> something, and they can be exasperated and be okay, but when you get in the real
>
> world…you've been in corporate America…that ship won't fly, or they'll hear it
>
> but that's about as far as it will go. It'll go in one ear and out the other, but
>
> ultimately it's getting your tasks done. (Charlie, staff)

Charlie continues on with this later in the interview, sharing specific advice he has given

to seniors:

> My advice to them is, "Take everything you've learned here, but know that your
>
> comfort, your support group, I hate to give you the reality, but you're not going to
>
> have that when you get into the real world. You're going to have to find it
>
> externally. You are going to face lots of microaggressions, and outright
>
> discrimination. Are you ready for that?" I don't think we're preparing them to
>
> deal with that. (Charlie, staff)

Similarly to Charlie, Andrew also noted that the bamboo ceiling exists outside the

university setting and the skills the university could help students develop while holding

onto their Asian values.

> I think the bamboo ceiling does exist, particularly outside of the university setting.
>
> I think the university setting is one that, it's controlled in many ways, but not
>
> controlled. When we go outside of the university setting, particularly in business
>
> and other roles that is certainly there. I think what we can do to help students
>
> reach the ceiling and then break through it is teaching them the lifelong skills of
>
> negotiation, being able to speak up for what they're looking for and what they're
>
> hoping for. That's one of the things, as an Asian American, we don't necessarily
>
> do too much. We can speak up in different ways. We don't' necessarily have to be
>
> loud all of the time, but it's being very purposeful in how we're loud. (Andrew,
>
> staff)

**Conclusion**

Ten different themes emerged through the student and staff interviews. The first

category was reasons for involvement, which consisted of two themes: encouragement

from friends and passion for an issue. The second category looked at their reasons for

leadership and three themes surfaced: giving back, campus culture, and future careers.

The next category focused on students' Asian American identity, in particular how they

are conflicted with being Asian and being American. The next category, Asian American

leadership, delved further into students and staff's perceptions of leadership for Asian

Americans. Uncertainty and the model minority stereotype as a barrier came up as themes

within this category. Parental involvement was discussed with every students, but

specifically that their involvement was contingent on their grades. The last category,

beyond college, had one consistent theme: be realistic and provide practical experience.

These themes were similar to the themes (i.e., values) on the AAVS-M. The highest score

among students who participated in the AAVS-M was family recognition through

achievement. Every student and staff interviewed shared extensive thoughts on this value.

Subsequently, this was true of the lowest value, emotional self-control. While there was

some mention of it during the interviews, it was not a focus with any student or staff. The

other AAVS-M values (forms of them): collectivism, conformity to norms, and humility

were discussed at length with one or more of the students and staff.  These results support

existing research that students continue to struggle with their Asian American identity,

which contributes to the varied perceptions of their leadership ability.