



## Beyond Myths The Growth and Diversity of Asian American College Freshmen: 1971-2005

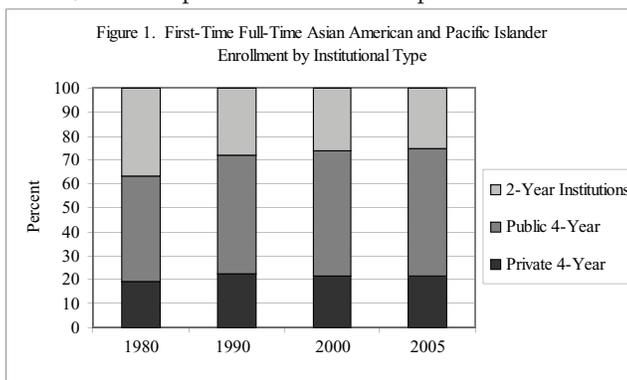
This brief summarizes key findings from the new report, "Beyond Myths: The Growth and Diversity of Asian American College Freshmen: 1971-2005," which illustrates the significant trends and status of Asian American college students over the last 35 years. Based on the 361,271 Asian/Asian American first-time, full-time college students from 1971-2005, this report provides the largest compilation and analysis of data on Asian American college students ever undertaken. Results are drawn from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey, administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

### Demographic Shifts

Asian Americans are currently the fastest growing sector of the U.S. college-going population and are an extremely diverse one with tremendous variations in ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and immigration patterns. Notably, Asian American first-year students are not a regionally situated group but are attending a wide range of institutions across the nation.

### Asian American Student Enrollment Increases

Asian American students' representation has nearly doubled each decade, from 0.8 percent in 1971 to 8.8 percent in 2005.

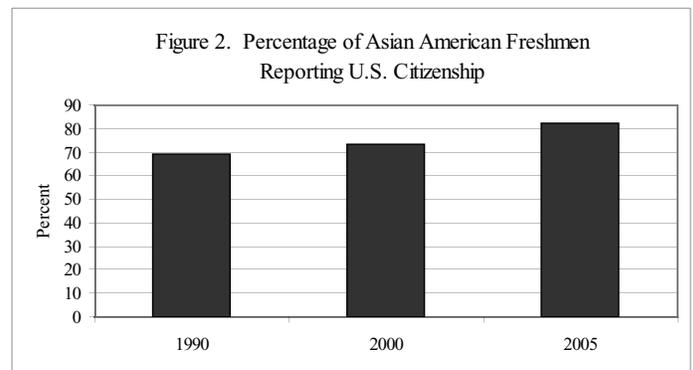


Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, U.S. Department of Education

Similar to national college-going trends, the proportion of Asian American women enrolled in higher education increased over the years. While women have outnumbered men in the national student population since 1978, the first year Asian American women exceeded men was 1990, when they comprised 50.5 percent of the Asian American student population.

### Multilingualism Trends

Over the decades, an increasing percentage of Asian American freshmen identify themselves as U.S. citizens. Likewise, an increasing percentage of Asian American students are native English speakers (48.1 percent in 1987 and 58.6 percent in 2005). The proportion of entering freshmen who reported speaking a language other than English at home has also risen from 45.8 percent in 1987 to 53.4 percent in 1995. With respect to language, non-native English speakers are consistently more likely to come from low-income families.

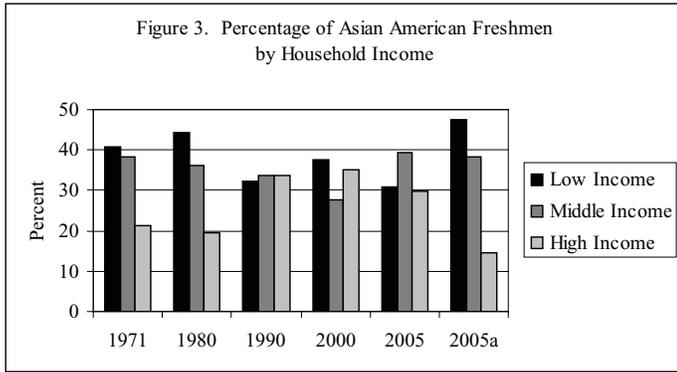


### Financial Capacity

In 2005, entering Asian American college students were more likely to come from families with a household income of \$40,000 or less (30.9 percent) compared to the national population of freshmen (22.7 percent). Because the average Asian American



household size is larger than the national mean household size, and because the Asian American population is concentrated in metropolitan areas with the highest cost of living, we created a supplementary set of income categories for the year 2005. Using \$60,000 as a cut-off point is a more realistic threshold to determine household capacity to pay for college, particularly with the average private college cost exceeding \$30,000 per year. Using this adjusted measure, considerably more Asian American families would be classified as low income (47.4 percent) compared to the national population (39.5 percent).



Since 2000, a higher percentage of Asian American women than men have come from low-income backgrounds. Although substantially more entering Asian American freshmen in 2005 now plan to work during college, especially those from low- and middle-income households, Asian American women were 12.9 percentage points more likely than their male counterparts to anticipate working.

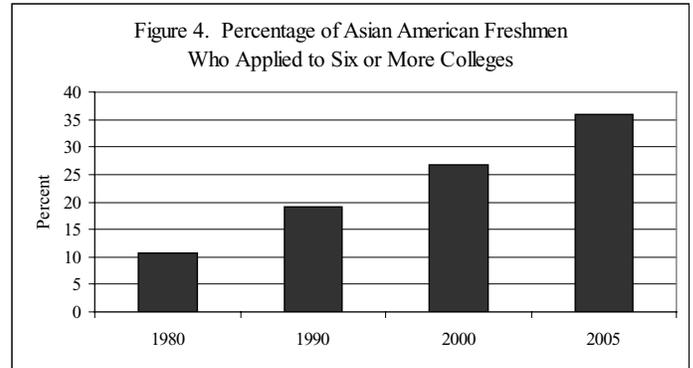
Among various financial support options, Asian American students continue to depend more heavily on parents/relatives and employment instead of loans to finance their college education. Subsequently, receiving adequate financial aid appears to be a considerably more important factor in determining where Asian American students attend college.

### College Preparation and Access

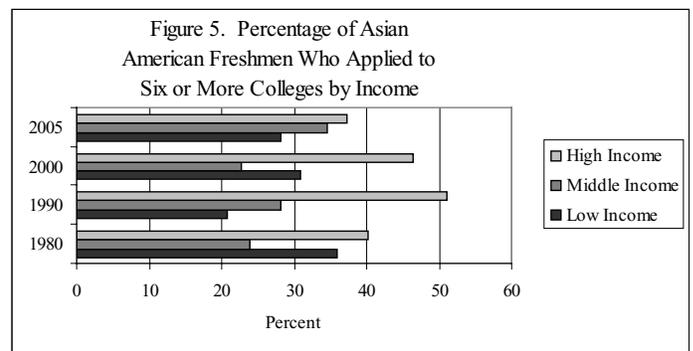
Over time, entering Asian American students generally appear to be better prepared for college, although one in nearly five Asian American freshmen in 2005 believes she or he will need special tutoring or remedial work in English during college. This proportion is similar to that for incoming Latino/a students and higher than that for all other racial groups, thus highlighting a critical remediation need that colleges and universities should address.

While Asian Americans' interests in going to college have generally remained fairly stable, their approach to the college application process has changed dramatically. The percentage of those who applied to six or more colleges has increased by more

than 200% in 25 years: in 2005, 35.9 percent of Asian American students reported applying for admissions to six or more colleges, whereas only 10.7 percent reported doing so in 1980.



However, Asian Americans from low-income backgrounds were least likely to apply to six or more colleges.



Additionally, Asian American students are more than twice as likely than the national population to apply to six or more colleges. In 1980, 4.6 percent of the national population of students reported applying to six or more colleges, whereas 17.4 percent did so in 2005.

Despite the trend to apply to more colleges, fewer Asian American freshmen in 2005 report to be attending their first choice institutions (51.8 percent) compared to previous Asian American cohorts (68 percent in 1974) and the national population of entering college students (77.2 percent in 1974 and 69.8 percent in 2005).

### Shifts in Self-Concept, Civic Engagement, and Political Attitudes

Across the decades, entering Asian American college students are increasingly more likely to rate themselves as above average or in the top ten percent in the areas of social self-confidence, public speaking, and leadership abilities. Likewise, they are increasingly more likely to have volunteered during high school and to value becoming a community leader, having administrative responsibility for the work of others, and influencing social

values and the political structure. Although 82.7 percent of Asian American students in 2005 indicated that racial discrimination is still a major problem in America, they were about evenly split on support for affirmative action.

## Conclusion

In sum, the freshman trends examined in this report help to address several myths about the Asian American college student population. The examined trends do not support popular claims that Asian Americans are enjoying unprecedented, collective (or universal) academic success in U.S. higher education. Even in the absence of data from the community colleges where students tend to come from more disadvantaged backgrounds than those who attend four-year colleges or universities, the findings here suggest that Asian Americans still have to overcome a number of obstacles, such as discrepant levels of family income and financial aid, to earn a coveted spot in higher education. Further, the trends suggest that financial capacity plays a significant role in both the college application and choice processes for Asian Americans.

The trends also underscore that Asian Americans are benefiting from civil rights gains made in higher education over the last several decades. Asian American enrollment in higher education surpassed one million students in 2001 and continues to increase each year. However, incoming Asian American college students and educators alike must not take these achieved gains for granted. It is important to recognize the discrepancies among Asian American ethnic subgroups in their educational attainment and to address the challenges that especially low-income or first-generation Asian American students face in higher education. By highlighting the freshman trends to point out the problems associated with an unrestrained mischaracterization of Asian American educational success, which uncritically takes achievement for granted, we seek to reverse the most problematic trend of all—namely the intractable trend of under-serving this growing student population in higher education.

## The CIRP Freshman Survey

*The CIRP Freshman Survey has been conducted annually since 1966. The data in this CIRP trends report come from responses of over 12 million students at over 1,900 of the nation's baccalaureate colleges and universities over the last 40 years. Results of the CIRP Freshman Survey provide a comprehensive portrait of the changing character of entering students and American society at large. Information on the CIRP Freshman Survey, research and publications based on these data, and other research projects conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute can be found on the HERI website ([www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri)) or via email to [heri@ucla.edu](mailto:heri@ucla.edu).*

*Additional reports for campuses can be requested by contacting the HERI Data Services at [heridata@ucla.edu](mailto:heridata@ucla.edu).*

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## The Cooperative Institutional Research Program

CIRP is a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system. It is regarded as the most comprehensive source of information on college students. Established in 1966 at the American Council on Education, the CIRP is now the nation's largest and oldest empirical study of higher education, involving data on some 1,900 institutions and over 12 million college students. The Higher Education Research Institute has administered the CIRP since 1973. The CIRP longitudinal program consists of the Freshman Survey, Your First College Year Survey, the College Senior Survey, and the triennial Faculty Survey.

Information on the CIRP Freshman Survey, research and publications based on these data, and other research projects conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute can be found on the HERI website at: [www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri).

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