

The Academic Challenges of Southeast Asians at Fresno State

Submitted by:

Gena Lew Gong, Lecturer, Anthropology
Hiromi Kubo, Librarian, Henry Madden Library
Dr. Yoshiko Takahashi, Associate Professor, Criminology

Research sponsored by:

Fresno State Asian Faculty & Staff Association (AFSA)

SUMMARY OF NEEDS

Despite having an 8% four-year graduation rate and a 43% six-year graduation rate in 2013¹, Asian Pacific Islander (API) students at Fresno State lack academic support services targeted to their needs. These API students lag behind not only their White and Hispanic Fresno State peers, but also lag significantly behind their API counterparts at peer CSU campuses in overall retention and graduation rates.

Using student demographic data provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the researchers found that API students comprise the third largest racial group at Fresno State (14.9% in Fall 2013, trailing Hispanics at 40.6% and Whites at 26.1%)². Additionally, the ethnic composition of the API student group is quite unique in that Southeast Asians (primarily Hmong, but Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese are also included in this category) comprise a majority (54.5%) of all API students enrolled at Fresno State³.

Nearly all (97%) of Fresno State's Hmong students are first-generation college students and require English remediation⁴. Also, nearly two-thirds of Fresno State's Hmong students (62%) are from families with combined incomes of less than \$24,000 a year, ranking them by far the most financially disadvantaged of all racial student groups (by comparison, 42% of African American, 29% of Hispanic, and 14% of Native American students fall into this low-income bracket)⁵.

¹ From Office of Institutional Effectiveness data reports, Enrollment Reporting System, Fall 2013.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ From *Academic Characteristics of 2009 First-Time Freshmen Hmong College Students at a Western University* (p. 1), by F. M. Lee, 2013, n.p.

⁵ From *Hmong* (p. 1), by N. Rudd & M. T. Fernandez, 2010, Fresno, CA: Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning at California State University, Fresno.

Lastly, although Fresno State is a federally-designated Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), no coordinated programs or services currently exist on campus to specifically address API students' needs.

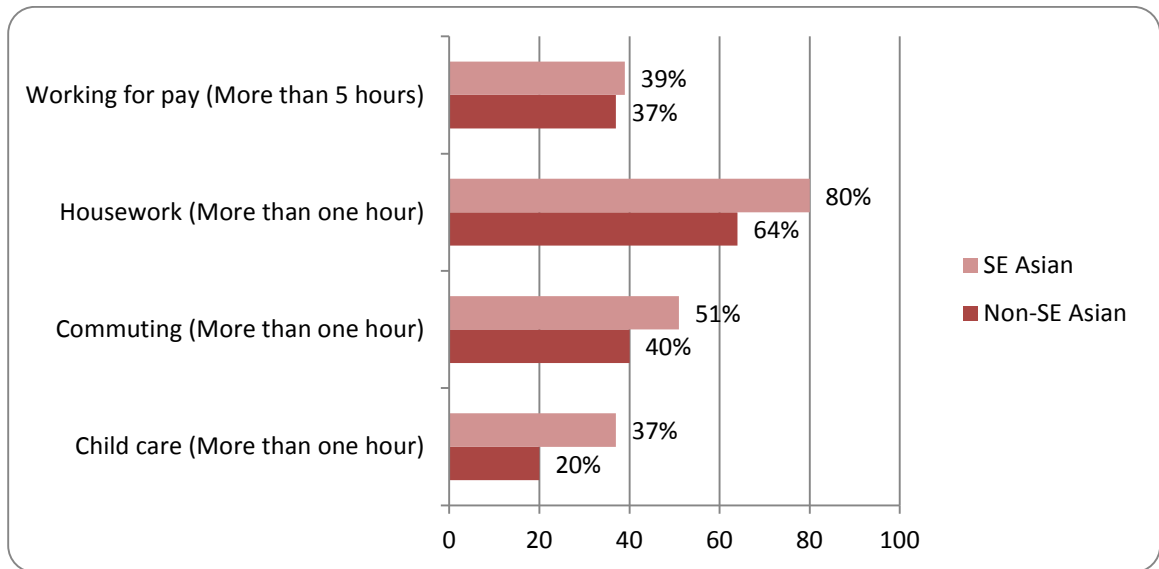
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In Spring 2014, the researchers administered a survey to randomly selected Fresno State undergraduates to assess the impact of various factors on academic performance. The researchers also interviewed several Southeast Asian faculty, staff, and students to gather additional qualitative data to supplement the survey results.

In addition to finding that Southeast Asian students come from much larger families with lower household income and parents with lower levels of education, we also found that Southeast Asian students have significantly more conflicting demands on their time than do other students:

Hours Usually Spent During an Average School Day

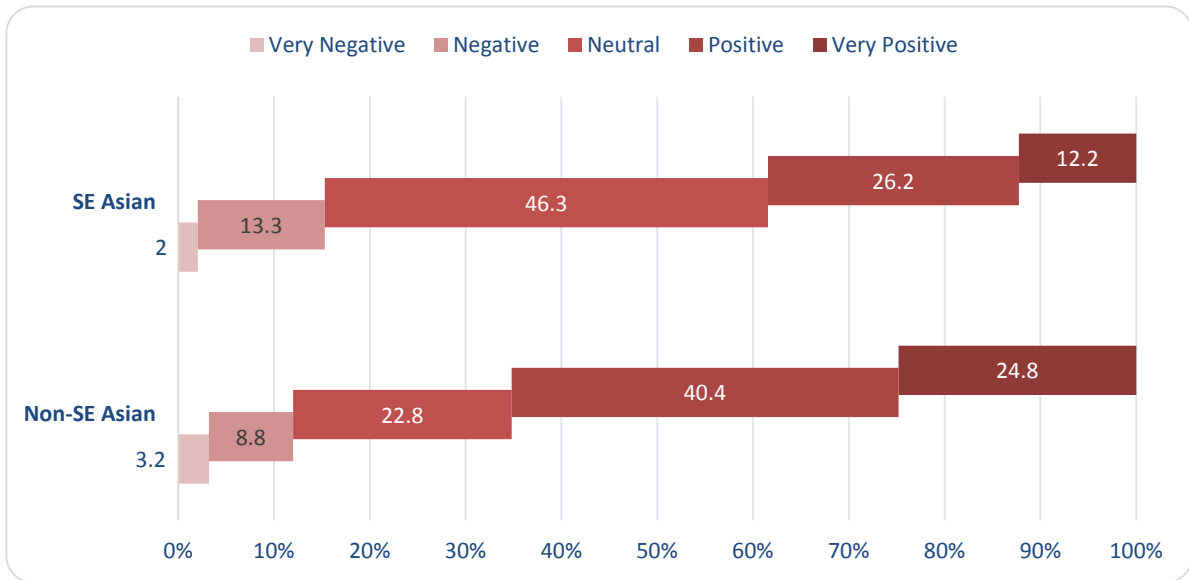
SE Asian *N* = 294, Non-SE Asian *N* = 250



Further, more Southeast Asian students reported living in home and neighborhood environments that are not supportive of their academic success:

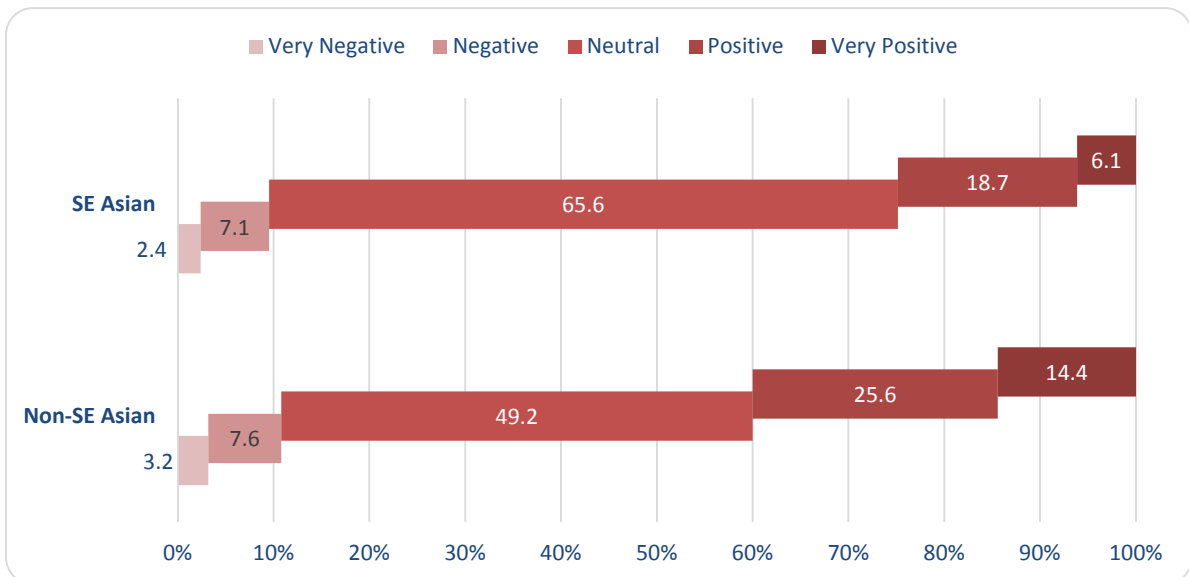
Impact of Home Environment on Academic Success

SE Asian *N* = 294, Non-SE Asian *N* = 250



Impact of Local Neighborhood Environment on Academic Success

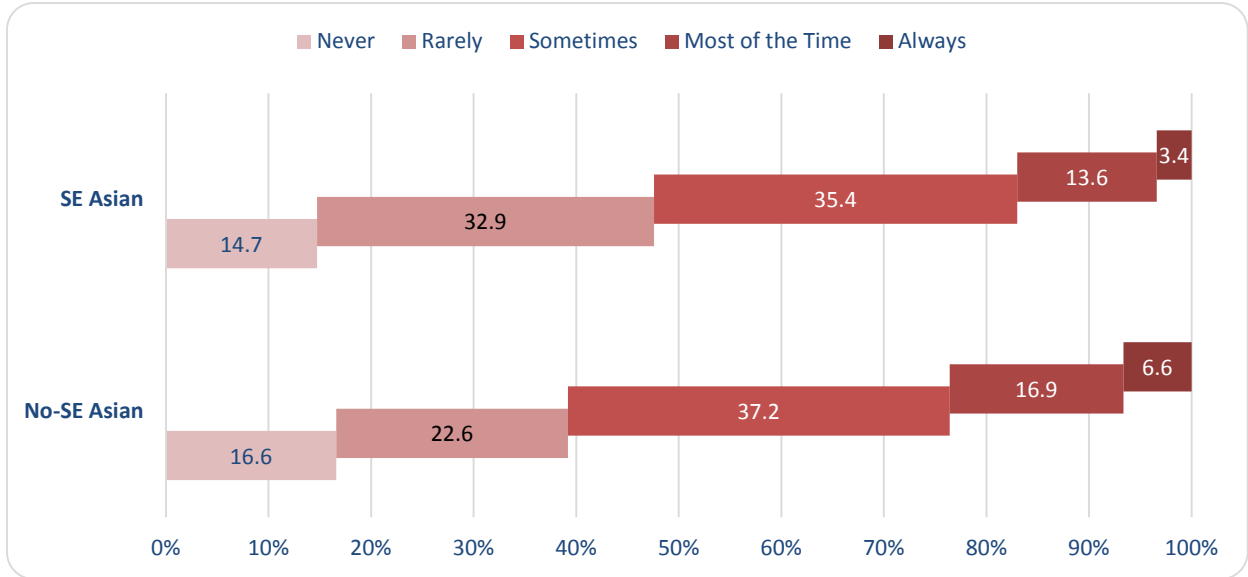
SE Asian *N* = 294, Non-SE Asian *N* = 250



The researchers also found that Southeast Asian students are much less likely to engage with faculty members to discuss academic assignments and they perceive faculty to be less supportive of their overall success as compared with all other students.

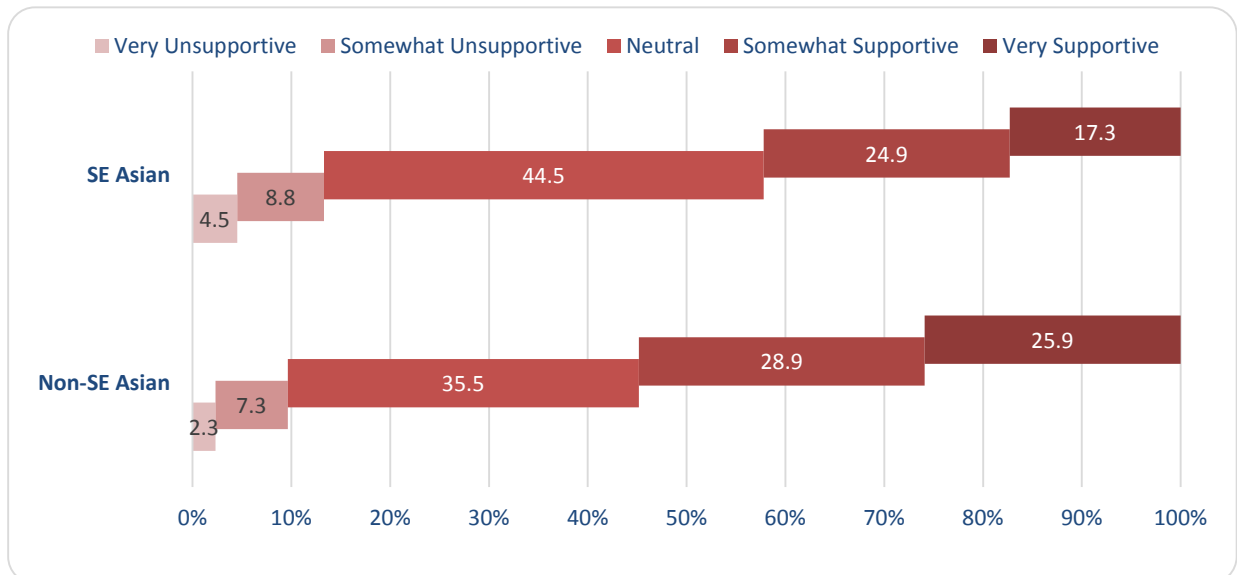
Experiences with Faculty in Discussing Ideas for a Term Paper or Other Class Project

SE Asian N = 294, Non-SE Asian N = 250



Relationship with Faculty on Academic and Extracurricular Success on Campus

SE Asian N = 294, Non-SE Asian N = 250



CONCLUDING REMARKS

Upon considering the student demographics, survey findings, and interview data as a whole, the researchers made the following **general conclusions** about Southeast Asian students at Fresno State:

1. Most Southeast Asian students struggle with balancing family obligations against their own educational goals.
2. The majority of Southeast Asian students must overcome significant academic deficits, yet lack the necessary parental guidance to help them succeed in college.
3. Most Southeast Asian students welcome and are appreciative of existing academic support services on campus, yet are not fully benefiting from these services.
4. Some Southeast Asian students feel overlooked by programs that target other minorities and would welcome more proactive support by Asian and other faculty and administrators to help them achieve academic goals.