



The U.S. Department of Education's

**HIGHER
EDUCATION
CENTER**

for Alcohol,
Drug Abuse, and
Violence Prevention

PREVENTION UPDATE

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders *Alcohol and Other Drug Use and Problems*

Overview

According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), from 1976 to 2009, the percentage of Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) college students rose from 2 percent to 7 percent. According to the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) (NIAAA), although many surveys treat AAPIs as a single ethnic group, this population is in fact ethnically highly diverse. The 1990 census identified 30 Asian and 21 Pacific Islander ethnic groups. Asian Americans include people of Chinese, Japanese, Indian (e.g., Pakistani, Indian, and Sri Lankan), Korean, Filipino, and Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Malaysian, and Thai) origin. Pacific Islanders include Polynesians (e.g., Hawaiians, Samoans, and Tongans), Micronesians (e.g., Chamorros), and Melanesians (e.g., Fijians). Even within each of these groups, various subgroups may exist. For example, Chinese Americans and their ancestors may have come to the United States from mainland China or Taiwan or Hong Kong. Among the Laotians, the Hmong, who live in the mountains of northern Laos, form a distinct ethnic group.

The 2010 report [Federal Higher Education Policy Priorities and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community](#) points out that the complex demography of the AAPI population is also evident in their geographic distribution throughout the United States. “While there is a high degree of representation in California, New York, Washington, and Hawai’i, the Gulf Coast also has a number of communities with Southeast Asians and Filipinos, while pockets of the Midwest have a growing representation of Southeast Asians, South Asians, and East Asians. These residential patterns are a reflection of AAPI ethnic enclaves dispersed throughout the country. Thus, if there is any conclusion that can be drawn about the AAPI population, it is that they are an incredibly heterogeneous group of people, and there is simply no single narrative that can capture the range of educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes they encounter. . . . In existing higher education research, few studies have documented the campus experiences of AAPIs, adequately disaggregated data for AAPI subpopulations, or looked at AAPIs in different institutional contexts (community colleges, public four-year institutions, predominantly white versus predominantly AAPI or racially mixed institutions, and the for-profit sector). As reported by many scholars across many disciplines, AAPIs are, in many ways, invisible in policy debates, in educational research, and in the development of campus services and programs.”

What the Evidence Tells Us

According to [NIAAA](#), among adolescents, AAPIs generally have lower rates of alcohol consumption and appear to be at lower risk for alcohol abuse compared with other ethnic groups. Similarly, the rates of drinking and heavy drinking have been found to be lower among AAPI students than among other ethnic groups. However, Wayne Sugita, chief deputy director, Alcohol and Drug Programs, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, cautions that while statistical reports show AAPIs with lower rates of alcohol consumption and heavy drinking than other ethnic groups, that does not mean that there are no significant problems in AAPI communities. “There may be differences among specific AAPI groups. Some local communities, either geographically or ethnically, may indeed have rates higher than the general



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population. For example, driving under the influence offenses have been a growing problem in the Korean and South Asian Indian populations in Los Angeles, but the numbers are so small that they get buried in the large numbers within the L.A. County population.”

Much of the research literature focuses on acculturation and how that affects health risk behavior among AAPI college students. “[Dimensions of Acculturation: Associations With Health Risk Behaviors Among College Students From Immigrant Families](#)” addresses heritage practices and ethnic identity among first and second generation students from immigrant families in relation to alcohol and other drug abuse, and driving while impaired. The authors suggest that greater retention of heritage culture generally equals less risk. It does not suggest that adopting U.S. cultural practices is problematic, but that the protective factors of the heritage culture, when lost, create an issue. Another [study](#) indicated that there are protective factors against alcohol abuse among Asian Americans specifically when there is a stronger ethnic identity. “[Breaking Down the Silence: A Study Examining Patterns of Sexual Assault and Subsequent Disclosure among Ethnic Groups of Asian American College Women](#)” found that of the Asian Americans comprising 30.1 percent of the University of California system, 26 percent of Asian American students experienced a sexual assault in their lifetime. Of those, 63 percent experienced the most recent sexual assault in college. Alcohol or other drugs were involved in the sexual assault by 30 percent of Chinese, 19 percent of Asian Americans, and 48 percent of Filipina college women in the study.

Lessons Learned From Colleges and Universities

With support from a U.S. Department of Education Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) grant, the [IMPACT AAPI program at DeAnza College](#) (Cupertino, Calif.) is expanding its existing student success and counseling programs and services that target historically underrepresented and first-generation college students, to include resources tailored for the educational needs and experiences of AAPI students. Its goal is to address Asian Pacific Islander subgroups that are historically underrepresented in higher education. IMPACT AAPI includes, among other activities, a First-Year Experience program and a Veterans Initiative.

The [AANAPISI program at South Seattle Community College](#) has focused on developing programs, activities, curriculum, and other resources to promote student success. While the program focuses on developing strategies that are culturally relevant to AAPI students, these resources are available to *all* students and will promote the success and retention of South Seattle Community College students overall. The project features these four categories of strategies:

1. Improved AAPI Freshman Experiences
2. Increased AAPI Transitions to College Coursework
3. Improved AAPI Retention, Intervention Strategies, and Outreach
4. Increased AAPI Graduation and Transfer to Four-Year Institutions

Higher Education Center Resources

- **Publications:** [Prevention 101 Series](#)
- **Web pages:** [Environmental Management Approaches](#)

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