

Asian International Students' Learning in Community Colleges

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### Abstract

Together with the increase of international students in United States, Asian international students is also continually raising in American community colleges. Several outstanding advantages of community colleges are explained. In terms of Asian international students' learning characteristics, this paper will discuss their learning styles, process, aspirations, and obstacles to display the academic performances. Accordingly, recommendations are proposed to address Asian international students' needs in community colleges.

*Keywords:* Asian international students, community college, learning

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### **Introduction**

Along with the world becoming increasingly connected, international students flock to U.S. for the benefits of American higher education. The diversity is one of the outstanding characteristics of American student group, which at the same time calls for attention on various students' learning in schools. This paper will discuss Asian international students' academic learning situations in community colleges and propose recommendations to such institutions for serving students.

According to *Open Doors* (2012)—the annual report from Institute of International Education (IIE), 764,495 international students attended American postsecondary institutions in 2011-2012, which is nearly 50% more than 12 years ago. Correspondingly, community college international student enrollment has become a growing presence over the last few decades, in which Asians contribute the biggest part. In 2011-2012, among all the 87,997 international students entering community colleges, 80% are from Asia. As presence increases, their learning situation is worthy of discussing and relative administration strategies will be important priority.

### **Reasons for Attending**

Several benefits of American community colleges have increasingly attracted international students. First, similar to Asian American students, Asian international students also responded they speak highly of valuable connecting programs between community colleges and four-year institutions(Wang, Chang, & Lew, 2009; West, 2012). A large number of Asian international students intend to get academic preparation and transfer to a bachelor's granting institution. Second, affordability is one of the reasons leading international, especially Asian students to community colleges (Gobel, 2012; Lamkin, 2000). Three quarters at Green River Community

College costs \$17,595 compared to \$43,049 at the near-by University of Washington (West, 2012). Taking the exchange rate into account, American tuition fee is not a small amount of money for Asian international students. Community colleges can provide educational opportunities in low cost that may not exist in students' native countries. Other benefits are intensive English training, small class, accommodation to work-study students, and so forth (Ruiz, 2010; Gobel, 2012). Asian international students are able to get affordable, quality education that prepares them of the America-style education into their future majors and work.

### **Academic Learning Characteristics**

After Asian international students knowing the advantages, they entered American community colleges as the beginning for their higher education in U.S, especially on the condition that they are not accepted by four-year institution temporarily. "Developing Competence", including intellectual competence, is one of the seven vectors for student development in college years concluded by Chickering and Reisser (1993). Asian international students in community colleges hold their own characteristics of intellectual competence.

### **Learning Styles**

Asian international students are studying through a second language—English, who also utilize different learning styles from other international students (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006). Generally for English as a Second Language (ESL) students, English fluency is an extra burden for their study. Students differed by level of English proficiency, advanced adult ESL students choose aural learning more often than beginning-intermediate students.

Specially, according to the study launched by Lincoln and Rademacher (2006), Asian students prefer aural and read-write styles rather than kinesthetic. But note taking is a preferred method of learning by Mexican students. Moreover, ESL females choose the aural learning style

more often than males, while males choose note taking more often than females. In a word, Asian males favored note taking and aural learning. Given the particular learning styles of Asian ESL students, faculty members could choose corresponding pedagogies to help them, which will be described later.

### **Learning Processes**

Findings (Orsuwan, 2011) show that racial/ethnic backgrounds of students interacts the relationship between academic integration and overall college experience. Experiencing higher degrees of opportunity structures, academic integration and sense of belonging were positive determinants of how Asian Americans experience their educational years. These findings also serve as a predictor to Asian international students' processes because the two groups share several cultural value elements. In addition, different subgroups of Asians may vary. Japanese students are positively associated with overall college experience, while Chinese are negative.

### **Influencing Factors**

In 2011-2012, 13% of all the international students at community colleges are Chinese (IIE, 2012). Chinese, as a large group of Asian student representative, express significant academic success compared with domestic students. Chen (2003) found that in Los Angeles Community College District, Chinese students had the highest level of academic success while domestic students reported the lowest. And no significant differences were found between Chinese group and other Asian international students.

Noticing functional factors to Asian international students' learning is essential to better serve them to achieve their academic goals. Aspirations of obtaining a higher level academic degree and transfer to a four-year college or university are the best spurs of academic success for

Asian international students. English language skill is a weak factor and social interaction factors are not correlated to their academic success (Chen, 2003).

### **Aspirations and Obstacles**

In community colleges, Asian international students learning expectations and challenges are different from others for their different social background. Most Asian students intend to transfer to a four-year institution for bachelor's degree, among which Chinese and non-East Asians desire for master's degree. To learn English for future study and work is also one of the purposes (Chen, 2003; Wang, Chang, & Lew, 2009). The "2+2" model—attending two years at a community college with pre-arranged and guaranteed articulation to a four-year institution—is a good practice to capture students' aspirations (Farnsworth, 2005; West, 2012).

It is important to understand the unique challenges Asian international students face when pursuing higher education in U.S. On one hand, Asian international students are facing the same challenges as other newly settling down foreigners, like housing and transportation (Lamkin, 2000). On the other hand, a lack of English preparation, psychosocial development in a different culture, a lower level of interaction with domestic students, and financial hardships are in the way to the academic goal (Wang, Chang, & Lew, 2009; Ritter, 2012).

### **Addressing the Needs**

Irreplaceable advantages and current attendings suggest that community colleges will continue to welcome more and more Asian international students. A number of actions have been done to remove the barriers of international students' learning (Laden, 2004; West, 2012). Based on this, more ways to facilitate Asian international students could be explored by both faculties and student affairs practitioners.

First, teachers in community colleges should understand and honor student preferences of learning styles, which may inspire learning outcomes efficiently. For Asian international students who are the most aural and read-write learning ones, pedagogy could be adjusted into such styles. For example, in English classes, instructors can lead students to repeat conversations and assign appropriate amount of compositions. When planning collaborative groups, the teacher could choose to mix different types of learners together; this may permit everyone do what he or she is good at and learn from each other.

Second, to meet students' aspiration of higher degrees, the passionate and patient work of academic advisors is indispensable. It would be better to have a particular advisor who knows Asian culture well to serve Asian international students. Everyone, no matter in the "2+2" program or not, should be offered detailed explanation on community college life and academic plan. For some students who cannot be self-disciplined when being far away from parents, advisors may play the role of supervisors. Besides, student needs will be addressed more quickly by including international student advisors in policy-making bodies.

Third, when it comes to students' overall college experience, administrators should concentrate on building a campus where diversity is truly valued (Clements, 2000). Nowadays, as the awareness of diversity has been raised on campus, such appreciations should be conveyed by events, projects, as well as in the strategic plan. Ensuring equal access to resources, first-year, first-generation Asian students projects, intercultural-emphasized orientation programs, Asian culture fairs and so on are practical examples. So Asian international students would bring more benefits to colleges and academic integration by enjoy the campus climate.

Last but not the least, on the condition that college gains the ability to serve more students, colleges could reach out to recruit more Asian international students (Hulstrand, 2009). Having

international students on campus is not only providing affordable opportunities to overseas students but also greater cross-culture exposure opportunities for local students. However, the concept of community college is not widely aware within Asian society. Attending recruitment fairs abroad and communicating with prospective students one-to-one is by far the most efficient method (Hulstrand, 2009). At the same time, institutions should reach out for more funding for implementing Asian international education programs.

### **Conclusion**

No matter to the whole body of international students or the ones in community college, the group of Asian international students has always been the biggest part since 1999-2000 (IIE, 2012). Asian international students prefer oral and read-write learning method. Holding the aspiration of higher degrees, they perform a high level of academic success. In order to meet their specific needs, more actions could be carried on to assist such students on yearly retention and transformation to four-year institutions. The study on Asian international students' learning in community colleges is in small number. For the future study, more detailed attention could be paid on the comparison between Asian international students and other international students' learning in community colleges.

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