How Asian American students experience campus culture in their first year attending a rural, primarily White institution (PWI)

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Abstract

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Asian Americans are a diverse population and represent the fastest growing population in the United States with increasing demographic representation in the Southern United States. Additionally, they represent the highest percentage of college enrollees. However, there is a paucity of research documenting the experience of Asian American college students. Exploring how Asian American students experience college culture, eleven self-identified Asian American students were asked to reflect on their first-year experience at a rural, primarily White institution. Utilizing Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee's Asian American student development model along with Kuh and Love's cultural framework of Tinto's propositions from his model on institutional departure, findings reinforced prior theories on identity development and successful

transitions to the college environment. Findings show, despite experiencing subtle and overt discrimination their first year, all students eventually developed a sense of belonging to the institution. Nine of eleven cited intersections of diversity activities as the reason for this progression, either through involvement in cultural clubs/student centers, diverse classroom settings, or perceived university commitment to inclusion. However, only four students were involved in ethnic affinity groups their first year with a few more joining their second year. A model is proposed that describes those developing their identity engage in social systems of the institutional experience, while those developing purpose focus on the academic systems of the institution. Multicultural services professionals should maintain outreach efforts across the studentship continuum and target not only first-year students but all students since engagement can occur at any time and is fundamental to feeling part of a community. Additionally, the university commitment to diversifying impacted the composition of the student body and provided some with a sense of belonging. This practice should continue as belonging enhanced the Asian American college student experience.

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Dedication

For my parents, Yoshie and Kazuichi, who came to America seeking a better life for their children.

Chapter 1: Background

Asian Americans are a diverse population that represents the fastest growing population in the United States between 2000 and 2010. According to the most recent census in 2012, Asian alone or in combination (multiracial) constitute 5.6 percent of the population in the United States. The total Asian American population has increased over 45 percent from the 2000 to 2010 (Hoeffel, E.M, et. all, 2012). By 2015, Asian Americans are predominantly comprised of the following groups - Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese (Lopez, Ruiz, and Patten, 2017). Many identify with multiple races, which adds complexity to this population. From 2000 to 2010, people identifying with two or more races increased by about one-third (Jones & Bullock, 2012) and nearly 15 percent of the Asian population reported multiple races (Hoeffel, E.M, et. all, 2012).

Additionally, they represent the fastest growing group of college-goers (Bauman & Graf, 2003; Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989). In 2017, Asians had the highest percentage of college enrollment rates for 18-24 year old group (Snyder, T. D., et. all, 2019).

While the majority of Asians live in the West, the percentage living in the South increased from 2000 to 2010. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). This shifting demographic can have an impact on the college experience for Asian Americans attending college. What impact will this shift in the population of Asian Americans from the West to the South have on the college experience and their sense of belonging?

The term "Asian American" and "Asian/Pacific Islander American" applies to a vastly diverse group whose origins can be traced back to over 25 distinct groups in Asia and the Pacific Islands (Uba, 1994). While there is a diverse group associated with the term, there are some

commonalities shared by the entire group. Most Asian American students share Confucian influenced cultural values which puts a heavy emphasis on learning, conformity to authority, respect for elders, taciturnity, strong social hierarchy, and male dominance. (Chuong, 1999; Litton, 1999; Nishida, 1999; Park, 1999; Park, 2003).

Another commonality shared by Asian Americans is the label the "model minority" as portrayed in the media and commonplace in society which is attributed to their academic success, higher income level, and lower crime, lower rates of unemployment, and delinquency rates compared to other groups of color (Hirschman & Wong, 1981; Petersen, 1971; Schwartz, 1971; and Sowell, 1975). Due in part to the "Model Minority" myth, there is a paucity of research that examines any topic outside of achievement. Many Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) students encounter difficulties that make their transition into higher education taxing and unexpectedly arduous.

Scholars have challenged the overgeneralization of academic success for Asian Americans (Carter & Wilson, 1997; Tokuyama, 1989). Tokuyama defines the "invisible" Asian population as recent immigrants who must overcome culture shock, socioeconomic and language barriers. This leaves many Asian immigrants vulnerable, as illustrated by Hmong, Cambodians, and Laotian students being "at risk" for dropping out of school (Tokuyama, 1989). Universities combine Asian Americans into the same "model minority" umbrella rendering them ineligible for certain scholarships, affirmative action or special assistance programs.

Similarly, the representation of Asian Americans as highly successful is controverted by the diminished participation of vulnerable populations from the Pacific Islands in higher education. This bimodal success rate is reflected in college enrollment rates for 18-24 year olds.

Pacific Islanders were nearly half as likely to enroll in college in 2017 as Asian identified students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Most concerning is the enrollment of these groups are trending in the opposite direction.

In their research findings, Chou, Lee, and Ho (2016) categorized how Asian American students navigated the racial climate at a Southern university as either resignation or resistance. They describe resignation as Asian American students "directing their behavior and responses toward fitting into White space in an attempt to make it a safe space for them. They use resignation to affirm notions of Asian Americans as irregular and Whites as normal" (Chou, Lee, and Ho, p. 97).

Resistance is described as acknowledging the difficulties in being Asian American in White-dominated spaces and creating a safe space that affirmed their ethnic identity (Chou, Lee, and Ho, 2016). This was accomplished by using an alternative frame which diverged from the White racial frame of institutional space and oppressive ideologies (Feagin, 2009).

What happens to Asian American students when they attend a Western rural, primarily White institution? What does their transition look like in their first year? How do they negotiate a sense of belonging when they do not homogenize with their White peers? Interviewing self-identified Asian American students at Rural State University (RSU), I will investigate the following questions: How do Asian American students' experience campus culture in their first year attending a rural, primarily White institution (PWI)? How does their culture impact their experience (or transition)? What had the most positive impact on their first-year experience? What had the most negative impact on their first-year experience? Who or what helped them feel that they belonged at RSU?

Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review

Asian American students experience unique issues in higher education. From barriers prior to arriving on campus, such as the perception of admissions quotas and the "Model Minority Myth," these students are often left feeling invisible and misunderstood. While it is important to understand the scope and breadth of the Asian American experience in higher education, this inquiry focuses on the Asian American student experience and their first-year transition to a rural, primarily White institution. Key to their transition is understanding the campus culture, their own identity, and how they fit within this structure.

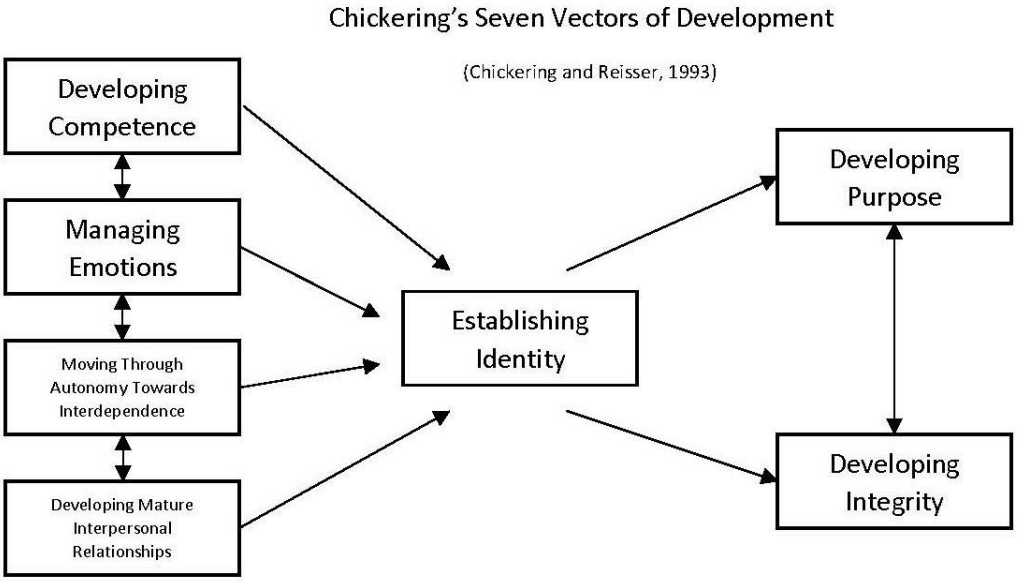
Campus culture is multifaceted and complex. Kuh and Whitt (1988) describe the properties of institutional culture as both a process and product. The ongoing interactions of people is the process in which campus culture is established. The product of campus culture reflects interactions among history, traditions, organizational structure and the behavior of students, faculty and staff. Observable artifacts, such as institutional mission statements, architecture, academic programs, all impact campus culture (Kuh and Whitt, 1988). For Asian American students that lack understanding of these mores or fail to see any or adequate representation in the history of the institution, additional barriers to their successful transition to college emerge.

The student experience in college has long been the focus of student development theorists. Chickering's theory of psychosocial development (Chickering, 1969) is the first major theory to specifically examine college student development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). However, despite a revision (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) that included the development of women, African American, and Hispanic students, Asian Americans were overlooked (Evans

et al., 1998). This led to a development theory outlined by Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee (2002) modified for Asian American students.

Chickering's modified theory of student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) involved seven vectors for psychosocial development during the college years. *Developing competence* encompasses intellectual, physical, and interpersonal development. *Managing emotions* includes a student's ability to recognize, accept, and appropriately display and control their emotions. *Moving through autonomy towards interdependence*, formerly called "developing autonomy", results from increased emotional independence. During this stage, an acceptance and understanding of interdependence and their interconnectedness with others is realized. *Developing mature interpersonal relationships* occurs when tolerance and appreciation of intercultural and interpersonal differences occurs. *Establishing identity* is the manifestation of having mastered all prior vectors. *Developing purpose* is influenced by lifestyle and family influence and involves finding not only a career but also a life calling. Finally, *developing integrity* involves three overlapping stages, humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Thought processes progresses from rigid, moral thinking to balancing personal interest with social responsibility (Evans et al., 1998).

Figure 1: Chickering's Seven Vectors of Development



The model of psychosocial student development for Asian American students proposed by Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee (2002) focuses on identity and purpose, which are closely related in the model and serve as the foundation for other areas of development. Identity and purpose interrelate in this model due to Asian Americans' pursuit of higher education being pragmatic, goal oriented, and job-related (Hune & Chan, 1997). As explained in the model, "for a student whose identity is defined primarily by personal career goals and family commitments, new experiences and point of view may have little influence in challenging the student's development around purpose or identity if they do not fit into this already established self-definition (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002, p. 48). A change in either (identity or purpose) could alter the other and, subsequently, influence other areas of development such as competency, emotions, interdependence, relationships, and integrity (Kodama et al., 2002).

While Chickering's model is relatively linear, the Asian American model is circular, non-hierarchical and fluid in nature (Figure 1). Identity and purpose are influenced by family/cultural and societal factors. These factors rest on opposite ends of an axis and influence the individual in different ways.

Asian American students differ in the area of competency from Chickering's model by focusing on intellectual development, not physical or interpersonal. This may be due to the cultural value emphasizing education (Wong & Mock, 1997), or a result of a perception that academic success would ensure success in a racist society (Hune & Chan, 1997). Additionally, interpersonal competency may be a struggle for those first-generation students struggling with language or cultural adjustment barriers (Kiang, 1992).

Emotional influences in the Asian American student development model differ from Chickering's theory by incorporating the reserved manner in which Asian Americans express emotions. In their work as student affairs practitioners, Chew and Ogi (Chew & Ogi, 1987) observed how Asian American students withhold free expression of feeling in order to maintain group harmony. Additionally, Asian culture places others' feelings above one's own (Wong & Mock, 1997). It is well documented that emotional exploration differs for Asian Americans students.

While college often represents a time when students are able to explore and develop their individuality, Asian Americans remain closely tied to their families. This is reinforced by "frequent phone calls, monetary ties, working in the family business, or returning home on the weekends" even when students go away to college (Wong & Mock, 1997, p. 196). Unlike the Western norm of independence, this reinforces the Asian familial value of interdependence

(Shon & Ja, 1982). Sometimes, students will serve as translators or written communicators for limited English-speaking parents. When comparing Asian American student experiences with Chickering's model, Asian American students are moving in reverse order from interdependence to autonomy (Kodama et al., 2002) (See Table 1).

The collectivist perspective of Asian Americans encourages maintaining harmonious relationships. Consequently, developing mature interpersonal relationships may be more difficult for Asian American students who may have an upbringing of formality to navigate. Without an open line of communication, any relationship is limited. Moreover, Asian American students who experience a college environment different from their home communities may have additional difficulties in developing relationships (Kodama et al., 2002).

Integrity, for Asian Americans, is upheld within the context of one's family or community. When comparing the two models, Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee (Kodama et al., 2002) state:

> Because of the interdependent nature of Asian Americans, making a clear distinction between individual values and those of the family can be difficult. Thus, Chickering's framework of understanding integrity may not be appropriate for use with Asian Americans, who may not be trying to separate their own values from others' values as much as maintain a sense of self within the context of values from family and society (p. 54).

Palmer (2001) suggest Asian Americans may face limited choices, unlike the efficacy assumed in the literature on racial or ethnic identity development, because of a lack of belonging to a desired group. Asian Americans often must straddle two different worlds, one of their ethnic heritage and that of the dominant society. In his study on Korean college students, Park (2001b) discovered multiple dimensions of ethnic identification. Some students identified as "Jaemi

Kyopo" (Koreans living in America), Korean American (or Americans with Korean heritage), Asian American, or some multi-dimensional combination of the three (Park, 2001b).

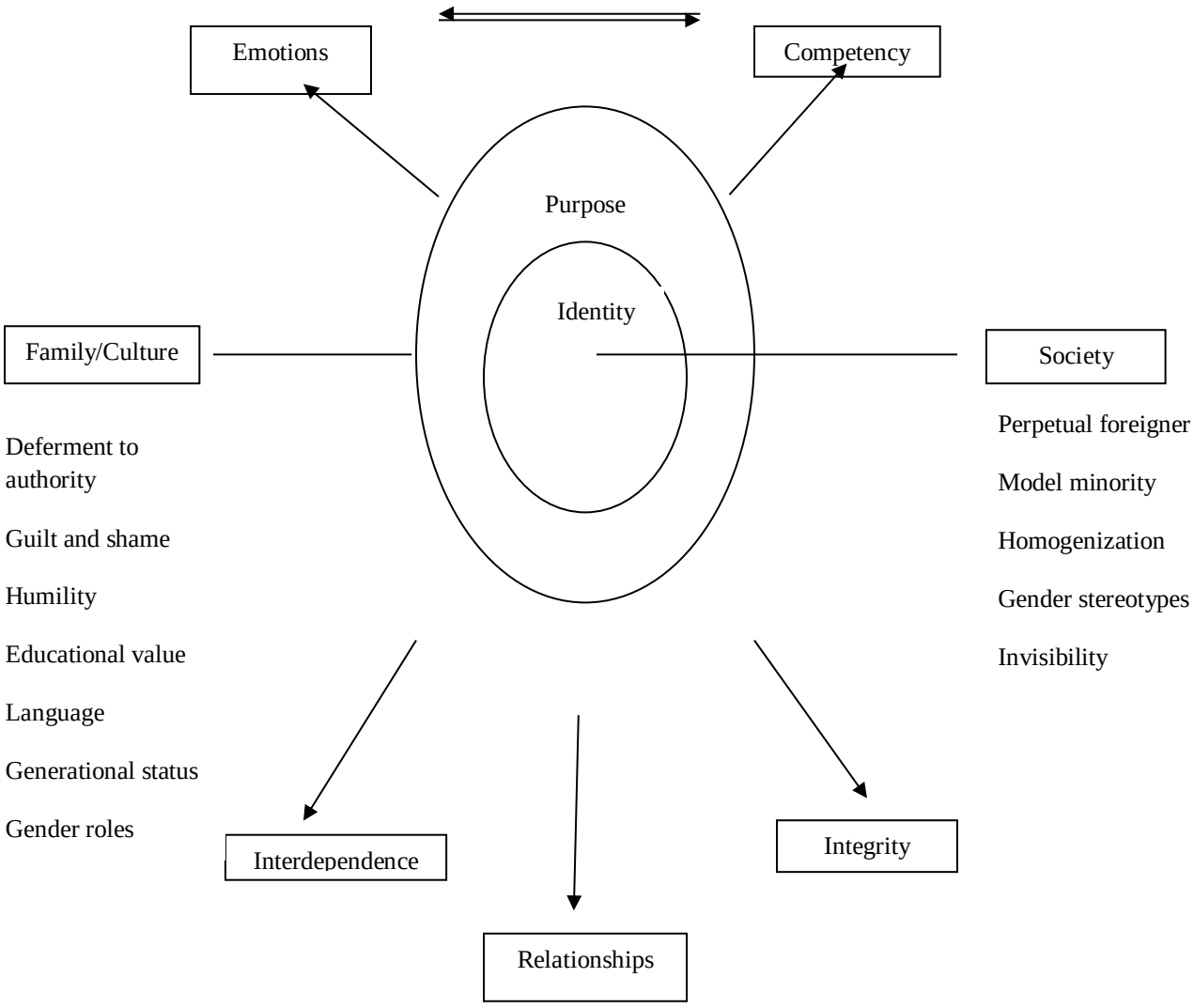
Table 1. Asian American development compared with Chickering's Vectors

Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee (2002)	Chickering and Reisser (1993)
Focus on Identity and Purpose	From Developing competence to Developing Integrity
Circular	Linear in nature
Competence – mostly intellectual development	Competence includes intellectual, physical, and interpersonal development.
Emotions – Others' feelings above own; managing emotions part of cultural value	Development through managing emotions
Interdependence to autonomy	Independence/autonomy to interdependence
Collectivist perspective maintains harmony and formality in relationships	
Integrity within the context of family and community	Integrity within the context of individual development

Within the Asian American student development model, family/cultural influences would include the following factors: deferment to authority, guilt and shame, humility, educational value, language, generational status and gender roles. Societal pressures influencing the identity and purpose of Asian American students would include the perpetual foreigner stereotype, the model minority myth, homogenization, gender stereotypes, and invisibility (Kodama et al., 2002).

Figure 2: Asian Americans: Negotiating Identity and Developmental Tasks

Kodama, McEwen, Liang, Lee (2002)



Aside from individual development, it is beneficial to view the student and their experience on a college campus. Early attempts to explain student attrition focused principally on individual characteristics and personal attributes rather than the interactions with college environments (Bayer, 1968; Heilbrun, 1965; Marks, 1967; Marsh, 1966; Rose and Elton, 1966; Rossman and Kirk, 1970; and Summerskill, 1962). As one of the most cited student retention models, Tinto's interactionalist theory of student departure highlights a longitudinal process involving student interactions and the meanings deciphered from those interactions in formal and informal dimensions of a university. (Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson, 1997; Tinto, 1986; Tinto, 1993). Within this model, individual characteristics, goals and commitments, social and academic experiences and integration impact the persistence of a student (Tinto, 1993).

The first segment of Tinto's 1993 model (Figure 2), categorized as pre-entry attributes, highlights the individual attributes of individuals entering college. Family background includes social status, parental education, and size of community. Pre-entry skills and abilities refer to personal attributes such as gender, intellectual and social skills, and disposition. Prior schooling such as college preparatory classes and grades point average help define pre-entry attributes (Tinto, 1993).

After pre-entry attributes are goals and commitments, which refer to the student's intentions regarding their educational experience. Tinto explains, "Intentions or goals specify both the level and type of education and occupation desired by the individual. Commitments indicate the degree to which individuals are committed both to the attainment of goals and to the institution into which they gain entry" (Tinto, 1993, p. 115). Both pre-entry attributes and goals and commitments establish where a student enters the college experience.

Institutional experiences include formal and informal interactions within the university setting. These interactions are separated into academic and social systems (Tinto, 1993). Within the formal academic system, student departure may result due to incongruence or variations between the pre-entry attributes and the demands of the institution. This can present as academic difficulty if underprepared, boredom if not scholastically challenged, or a "substantial mismatch between the intellectual orientation of the student and that of the institution" (Tinto, 1993 p. 117). Informal systems of academic experiences, such as faculty and staff interactions, can have an impact on the level of commitment from the student as this interplay is often influential.

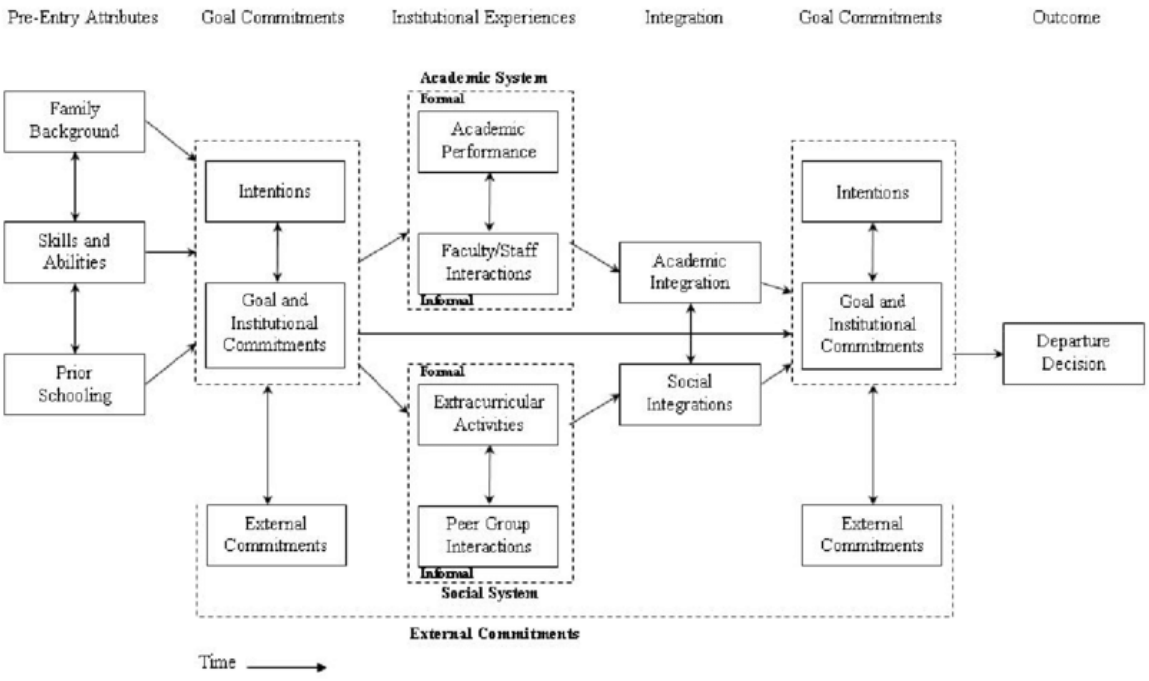
Social systems can lead to early departure if there is incongruence or social isolation. Tinto (1993) explains, "Interactions among students in that system are viewed as central to the development of the important social bonds that serve to integrate the individual into the social communities of college" (p. 118). Referencing Durkheim's theory of suicide, egotistical suicide occurs when individuals are unable to integrate and establish membership within society (Durkheim, 1951). Tinto uses the analogy of integration and community membership as basic concepts when comparing departure, either in the form of suicide or college attrition (Tinto, 1993).

Integration is the result of successful academic or social institutional experiences. These concepts are interdependent due to the interactive nature of the college environment and involve the same members - faculty, staff, and students. An event in one system can impact the other (Tinto, 1993). For example, a highly engaged student can struggle academically if they are not able to balance their social commitments. Likewise, a student that isolates themselves in their studies without social connections may not develop affinity to the institution. Tinto further explains, "When the cultures of academic and social systems are supportive of each other, then

the two systems may work in consonance to reinforce integration in both the academic and social systems of the institution" (Tinto, 1993, p. 119).

Finally, Tinto highlights the external community as influencing persistence over time. While the model explains the influences internal to the college environment, Tinto leaves the possibility of external influences impacting persistence. These external communities include family, neighborhoods, or peer groups outside of the university environment (Tinto, 1993). These external communities could aid persistence, in the form of financial or social support, or detract by drawing students away through demands of time or exerting undue influence of incompatible values.

Figure 3. Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1993)



From this model, there are 13 propositions (Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson, 1997):

Table 2. Testable propositions of Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1975)

1. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution.
2. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
3. Student entry characteristics directly affect the students' likelihood of persistence to college.
4. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of academic integration.
5. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of social integration.
6. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of social integration.
7. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of academic integration.
8. The greater the degree of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
9. The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
10. The initial level of institutional commitment affects the subsequent level of institutional commitment.
11. The initial level of institutional commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of graduation.
12. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.
13. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.

Tinto's theory has been critiqued for not being sensitive towards minority students. It implicitly suggests that minority students must assimilate into the cultural mainstream and abandon their cultural identities in order to succeed on predominately White campuses (Tierney, 1999). Tierney (1992), noted when minority college students are able to affirm their own cultural identities, their chances of graduation increases. This has led some to embrace the need

to revise Tinto's theory and propose alternative theories (Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon, 2004).

Kuh and Love (2000) highlight the limitations of the popular approaches to student departure and argue for using culture as an analytical framework. This is articulated in eight cultural propositions about premature student departure:

Table 3. Cultural Propositions about Premature Student Departure

1. The college experience, including a decision to leave college, is mediated through a student's cultural meaning-making system.
2. One's cultures of origin mediate the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.
3. Knowledge of a student's cultures of origin and the cultures of immersion is needed to understand a student's ability to successfully negotiate the institution's cultural milieu.
4. The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin and the cultures of immersion.
5. Students who transverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.
6. The amount of time a student spends in one's culture of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.
7. The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's sociocultural connections to the academic program and to affinity groups.
8. Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence.

In his study of student leaders, Museus (2008) studied the role ethnic student organizations played in fostering African American and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominately White institutions. Exploring Kuh and Love's fifth proposition on students who transverse a long cultural distance, they found that ethnic student organizations helped students' adjustment to and membership at the predominately

White institution. These groups provided students with venues of cultural familiarity, allowed for cultural expression and advocacy, and provided cultural validation.

As with most institutions, RSU provides a lot of engagement opportunities and the Multicultural Center office does intentional outreach to students that are identified as minority. However, for Asian Americans that may not choose to engage in a cultural group, what is their experience on a rural, PWI campus? What factors impact their first-year experiences and what can we do to assist in their transition?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Participant criteria

In order to accurately investigate the first year of college, an appropriate amount of time must have elapsed in order to reflect back on the lived experience. This distance allowed students to gain perspective on their first year and more accurately analyze their experiences than reflecting in the moment. In order to mitigate the highs and lows of the first year experience, only students who had been at RSU for more than one full academic year were recruited for this study.

Phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized to understand the experiences of Asian American students in a rural, White campus. Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010) describe the primary objective of a phenomenological study is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person around a specific phenomenon. Investigating the first-year experience of Asian Americans at a primarily White institution (PWI) and how students were able to successfully navigate their transition to college is the phenomenon being studied.

Setting

Rural State University is a research-intensive institution with over 18,000 undergraduate students. It attracts an abundance of traditional students, whose average age of the student body is 21.9 years. Over 28% self-identify as minority and 34% are classified as first-generation college student. Nearly 25% of all students are affiliated with the Greek system. There is an extraordinary level of school spirit and pride as demonstrated by the frequent donning of the

school name and logo on attire by students on campus. A significant number of students know the school fight song and will boisterously belt it out at sporting events.

The university is located in a college town of under fifty thousand total residents. The nearest large city over 100,000 residents is located 80 miles away. The majority of students attending RSU come from the metropolitan part of the state, which is approximately 300 miles away. The institution boasts a robust athletic program and is member of one of the "Power 5" athletic conference. Due to the remote rural location, RSU has been described as an island in the middle of an agricultural landscape where most activities in town are affiliated with the university.

Participant selection

Interviewing a diverse Asian American population was vital for my research so findings would not be monolithic. Diversity of ethnic identity provides a richer picture of the Asian American student experience. The two criteria for students to participate in the study were self-identification as Asian American and enrollment in their second year or beyond at RSU. Working with RSU's Asian/Pacific Islander Center staff, a recruitment email was sent out to various Asian American student list serves. When additional volunteers were needed, a follow up email was sent. Flyers were also posted around the Asian/Pacific Islander Center in an effort to appeal to students who did not check email regularly.

In order to attract students that were not engaged with the Asian/Pacific Islander Center, I enlisted staff at the College of Engineering and the Department of Housing. These areas were selected because of existing relationships with staff members with direct access to students. Emails and personal outreach were conducted by various staff members with interested

participants replying to the original recruitment email (Addendum 1). Those who met the criteria and agreed to be interviewed, confirmed their interest through an emailed response and an individual interview was scheduled.

While the eligibility requirements was clearly defined in the recruiting email, there was one individual that contacted me who did not meet the qualifications as they were still in their first year. Eleven individuals were interviewed for this project and received a thank you card and twenty-five dollars in cash as a token of appreciation.

Participant demographics

Resulting from the combined recruitment strategy, the final group of participants represented a diverse group of students. Five male and six female students shared their experiences. The students represented a broad range of the number of years matriculated at RSU. Four were in their second year, two in their third year, three in their fourth year, and two in their fifth year. All, but one, were undergraduate students. However, the one graduate student had spent his entire academic career at RSU and was able to reflect on his experiences as a first-year student at the institution.

Ethnicity also varied among the group. Three were of Filipino heritage, two were Japanese, three were Korean, two were from the Pacific Islands (Chamorro and Bruneian/Malay heritage) and one was Vietnamese. Four were biracial (Japanese and White, Korean and Salvadorian, Chamorro (Guamanian) and White, and Bruneian and Malaysian). Two of the Korean students described their ethnic identity as Asian and Asian American.

Experience with diversity prior to attending RSU was also documented. The demographics of their high school, hometown neighborhood, and friend group prior to attending RSU showed a variety of responses. Table 3 summarizes the demographics of all participants while Table 4 details demographics by individual participant.

Table 4. Participants – Summary

Demographic	Total count in each category			
Gender	Male – 5	Female - 6		
Year at RSU	2nd – 4	3rd – 2	4th – 3	5th – 2
Ethnicity	Filipino/a – 3	Japanese – 2	Korean -3	Other – Pacific Islanders
Ethnic Composition of High School	Predominately White – 7	Predominately Asian – 2	Diverse mix -2	
Ethnic Composition of Neighborhood	Predominately White – 9	Predominately Asian - 2		
Friends prior to RSU	Predominately White – 4	Asian – 6	Mixed Races – 1	

Table 5. Participants - Detailed Demographics

Student's unique identifier number	Yr. at RSU	Gender	Self -Described Ethnic Identity	Other descriptors	First-year involvement	What contributed to belonging
1	4th	Female	Filipino American	Multicultural Sorority sister	Filipino Association (FSA); ACT (Drama) club	FSA
2	4th	Male	Filipino American		None	FSA
3	2nd	Female	Chamorro	Bi-racial; Transfer student	Transfer club; Asian Alliance of Women (AAW)	AAW
4	5th	Male	Japanese	Bi-racial; Engineering major	None	Friends in major
5	5th	Male	Asian	Korean; Engineering major	None	Diversity in major
6	3rd	Male	Asian American	Korean/Salvadorian; Resident Advisor (RA); Engineering major	Hall Leadership	RA staff; Friends in major
7	2nd	Female	Vietnamese	Resident Advisor (RA)	Hall Leadership	RA staff; Classes; RSU commitment to diversity
8	3rd	Female	Bruneian/Malay	Self-identifies as SE Asian; Multicultural Sorority; Business major	None	MC office
9	2nd	Female	Filipino American	From Hawaii	FSA, IC	Affinity groups
10	4th	Male	Korean American	Resident Advisor (RA)	None; just worked	RA staff
11	2nd	Female	Japanese American	From Hawaii	Hawaii club; IC; MC	Hawaii club members

Key: AAW – Asian Alliance of Women; FSA- Filipino Student Association; IC – Islander Club; MC – Multicultural Center

Data Instrument

Semi-structured, face to face interviews were conducted and recorded to ensure accuracy. Interview topics ranged from general demographic information to experiences on the RSU campus during their first year and what helped their sense of belonging and assisted in their success. Eleven questions were asked with a few branching questions (Addendum 2). The semi-structured interview allowed for the conversation to easily shift to related topics that might have impacted their experience. Follow up questions were asked when answers were unclear and employed for clarification and to ensure data accuracy.

Interviews lasted between 20 minutes to over an hour depending upon the communication style of the student. I tried to establish a trusting environment by explaining the topic, their right to refuse to answer questions, and compensation not being tied to their answers. I would infuse my own experiences, when appropriate, in order to establish an understanding between myself and the student. My positionality as a fellow Asian American aided in the interview process since I could relate to many of their challenges in negotiating the college environment. For those that grew up in traditional Asian households, my ability to empathize in the struggle of straddling two different cultures was beneficial

Most interviews flowed freely which allowed students to describe their experiences at a pace in which they were comfortable. On more than one occasion, students asked to go back to a prior answer to elaborate as they recalled more information. Several asked to introduce other topics that they thought should be specifically addressed or diverged to include experiences they felt elucidated their story. This opening allowed students to provide a more complete picture of their experience without being restricted to a specific question or topic.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by applying the process informed by Grounded Theory. The data gathered for the study consists of audio-recorded interviews and transcribed manuscripts. The dilemma of managing a vast array of data was handled through preparation and data reduction, the techniques and procedures of grounded theory informed by Glaser & Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Germane to application of Grounded Theory is microanalysis of the data. Microanalysis looks to closely examine and interpret the data. This was accomplished by a comprehensive and detailed inspection of the information from interview transcripts. After the data was read multiple times, categories were formed around common themes. Every statement given by each participant was analyzed from multiple perspectives. Always in the forefront for consideration was if any given statement could possibly hold an alternate meaning and if each word made sense given the context of the interview.

Additionally, in microanalysis, my personal interpretations of the interview transcripts were closely scrutinized by reviewing the themes multiple times. Am I being objective in my interpretation of the data? Am I overanalyzing the data and not letting it speak for itself? Did I understand the interviewee's perspective? It is vital to keep the participants interpretation in mind so premature conclusions are not drawn.

The final consideration for the valid application of microanalysis is the interplay that takes place between the researcher and the data during the collecting and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this situation, my knowledge of college students and their first year of transition issues helped in data analysis as my entire professional career has involved working

with this population. Additionally, personal knowledge of the issues Asian American college students face assisted me in understanding some of the emerging concepts. While not a substitute for data, prior experience with the population made it easier to organize the data into workable components while remaining approachable and accessible to the thoughts and concerns of these students.

Two key operations for the development of theory within the Grounded Theory framework are asking questions and making comparisons (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Some of the principle questions, which guided my analysis were:

- What is the main idea?
- How does the student understand their college experience?
- How are they describing the positive impacts in contrast to their most negative experiences in their first year?
- How are they describing their home culture and comparing it with the culture of the PWI?
- What are the emerging themes?

Chapter 4: Findings

As articulated in the Asian American student development model (Kodama et al., 2002), interdependence was often discussed as part of the early experiences of students as they were adapting to life on campus. For some, ties to family were expressed as having had a positive impact on their transition. Student 4, Japanese American male, chose RSU because of the proximity to home and family and his ability to return home on weekends. Student 7, Vietnamese female, talked about calling her mother and how getting food care packages helped bridge the gap between home and RSU. Student 9, Filipino American female from Hawaii, discussed how her mom visiting on certain parent weekends helped in her transition and sense of belonging to the RSU community.

Conversely, Student 5, a dual citizen born in America but raised in Korea was sponsored by a White family in the United States during his high school years. He lacked a connection with his surrogate family and brought with him to RSU a sense of hopelessness. He spent his first year hanging out with the wrong crowd and had an acknowledged problem with drinking and smoking. He recalls his arrest for smoking marijuana as a profoundly significant event. As a dual citizen, he was required to go back to Korea to serve in the military which allowed him to reconnect with his family after an unsuccessful first year. He conveyed his mom's happiness during his prior to his first day at boot camp, unlike other dismayed parents, simply because he would be nearby. He explains:

> Most parents were crying, but my mom, she had this big smile. She was happy the entire day. I was like, 'mom, I feel like I'm going into hell, why are you so happy?' And she said, 'well, it might feel that way to you,' but for her I was close. And then after five weeks of training, I get to come out, I get to see my parents again. And then after I go back, and I get assigned my actual base. But even after that, I get to come out every two or three months. And that is what

> made her happy. And after realizing that, of how much hope or whatever they had for me, that is when I got a good taste of it. And then having to go through some pain in the Army, plus understanding what my parents are thinking about me, that was a good boost for me.

When preparing for college, Student 1, Filipina American female, described her most negative experiences as a result of, "home lifestyle was way different just because I hadn't been exposed to be fully individualistic." Her collectivist upbringing was perceived to be a significant challenge that first year. Similarly, student 6, Korean/Salvadoran male, discussed how his White brother in law helped him branch out by encouraging him to be more independent. The brother in law impacted the student's Korean mom, who reinforced the same sentiment to her son, "you need to be more independent and do things on your own." This clear message demonstrated the need to move from interdependence to establishing a sense of autonomy.

Central to Kodama's Asian American student development model is identity development and purpose. Nearly half of the students interviewed grew up in a traditional Asian household while the rest described their households as a mixture of Asian and American cultures. Having to straddle two different cultures inside and outside of the household may add additional challenges when transitioning to one environment. In this case, a a rural, predominately White college environment.

Student 7, a Vietnamese female raised in a diverse town, shared the impact of racism and stereotypes on her identity at college. She discussed having an accumulative awareness due to "normal" acts of racism prior to her time at RSU. She explained how she was now vested in confronting these comments with educational corrections and conversation. "Before, I was kind of like 'oh why did you say that' and then not say anything more about it. So, I think these

experiences have taught me to be more okay talking about my identity because I never had to do it really before."

Conversely, Student 4, Japanese American male, who grew up in a White town, delineated the differences between his hometown and the college environment. "I felt more Japanese, more Asian American in high school than anything because coming from a severely predominately White area, nobody ever let me forget that I was Asian American, specifically Japanese American. And I got to college, it's still fairly White but I felt more accepted here." Despite the small number of students of color, he never experienced the overt racism and "terms of endearment" at college. This was especially notable when he broke away from his high school friends who also attended RSU.

Student 1, Filipina American, discussed the being raised in an immigrant household with traditional foods and cultural expectations. Reflecting back, she can now see the cultural differences between her parents and herself. She recalls her home Filipino culture mixed with her American culture outside of the house and being "stuck in the middle, and that's definitely how I am right now." She reveals what helped her in the transition to college, "connecting it to RSU, I came into the Filipino Student Association and made lots of friends who were also first born in America. So, I could definitely identify a lot with them, they would understand a lot of jokes I would say, and not have to explain anything."

In a study of identity development in black, first generation college students in South Africa during their first year of college, the researchers found these students experienced instability in their transition resulting from inadequate preparation for the psychological, social, and academic challenges. However, their ability to remain connected to their family while

forming new social connections allowed them to feel safe and aid in their transition (Liversage, Naude, and Botha, 2018).

Similarly, in a study examining academic persistence of undergraduates from six different Asian American groups, social connections played an important role. Examining three variables (comfort in the university environment, social support, self-belief), and the impact on academic persistence, they discovered social support as the strongest predictor of academic persistence across all Asian American groups (Gloria & Ho, 2003)

Utilizing Kuh and Love's (2000) cultural analysis of Tinto's student departure model (1993), the collective experiences of the students in this study affirmed many of their propositions. Highlighted are some of these experiences which reinforce the various cultural propositions:

Analysis using Kuh and Love's eight cultural propositions of premature student departure

Proposition 1: The college experience, including a decision to leave college, is mediated through a student's cultural meaning-making system.

Kuh and Love (2000) explain the meaning-making system as values, assumptions, and beliefs about what to expect from college, being a college student, and value of a degree. So an inadequately defined meaning-making system will adversely impact a student no matter how committed they are to the institution. For example, Student 8, Bruneian/Malay female, spent much of her first year trying to navigate RSU since she was a first-generation college student.

She conveyed her challenges:

> So as a first-generation student, like I didn't really know what my first year would entail. And so, um, just because I didn't have resources back home, like my mom obviously wouldn't tell me what college was about. And so, coming here I think my only support was my twin sister and we kind of figured things out together.

Her experience mirrored that of many of the students in the Liversage, Naude, and Botha (2018) study on black, first year generation college students in South African where the lack of institutional knowledge negatively impacted their transition.

In difficult situations, these students highlighted their cultural meaning-making systems and how they adapted during their first year. Student 1, fourth year Filipina American female, experienced the primarily White environment as hostile and had to develop a coping mechanism to persist. She discussed how after encountering racist comments or stereotypes from the many "outspoken people here" she had to "quickly toughen up and learn how to be outspoken." Her strategy on how to listen to and respond to others, while successful, was in response to what she learned early on in her college experience.

As a freshman, student 10, fourth year male Korean American, lived on campus in a large, predominately first year residence hall. His expectations about college did not include partying, which was the opposite perspective of many of his fellow floor mates who he believed spent too much time drinking. He shared that during his first night on campus, his roommate got so drunk that the hall staff asked him to check up on him throughout the night. He described it as "an interesting first impression of RSU."

Proposition 2: One's cultures of origin mediate the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.

Many Asian cultures emphasize education as a value and place great importance on achieving academic success. According to Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee's model on Asian American development, this cultural value impacts purpose and identity (Kodama, et al., 2002). There were many examples where the expectation or pressure to succeed was discussed. Two students clearly exemplified this value over the arc of their academic experience. Student 8, Bruneian/Malay third year student, had some academic struggles her first year where she felt she could have done significantly better. When asked if she ever considered transferring or not returning for a second year, she stated, "I think, growing up in an Asian household, I don't think, like, quitting was even an option for me." She was encouraged to "keep pushing" by both parents so dropping out was never discussed or considered.

Student 10, Korean male, described how his family moved to a specific part of the state for high school because of the excellent school system. He stated,

> I don't want to be generalizing here, but I think a lot of Asian parents, or at least first-generation parents, want their kids to be in a, higher tier of high school. I don't say higher GPA but they do focus on high schools who have a good track record. So I think that is the reason why it was heavily Asian dominated in that aspect, because the parents saw that it was a good high school and send their kids there.

Proposition 3: Knowledge of a student's cultures of origin and the cultures of immersion is needed to understand a student's ability to successfully negotiate the institution's cultural milieu.

Many of the students discussed differences between their home culture and RSU and the need to develop strategies to navigate the adjustment. Student 1, fourth year Filipina, discussed

the "individualistic" culture at RSU and having to be more outspoken as a strategy. She went on to highlight her connections with other Filipino Americans in a cultural club which helped her acclimation since "a lot of times I would clash with my parents because they wouldn't understand my American way of thinking."

Being raised in a Japanese household, fifth year student 4, being cautious to not inconvenience others and self-reliance are cultural values modeled by his mom. He recalled not asking for assistance during his first year at RSU despite being aware of all the resources available to students. Reflecting on his adjustment that first year he states, "I kinda wish I would've done that because, it's kind of weird asking for help when I'm not used to it. But it's something that in college you should really get used to doing."

Student 7, Vietnamese American fourth year student, experienced a lot of racism her first year, which had a negative impact on her transition. When reflecting on the racist comments in her life, she explained, "it's interesting because most to them started when I came to RSU. Growing up, I never experienced that." It was such a jarring transition, she would journal the racist comments to help her process and navigate the social environment.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron coined the concept of cultural capital in their chapter on cultural and social reproduction within the educational system where they asserted the educational system contributes to the reproduction of power relationships and class differences (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973). Factors such as race, gender, and nationality often determine who has access to various forms of knowledge. For our students, especially first-generation college students, the lack of knowledge in navigating the college environment can pose a big challenge. If their household culture of origin differs from that of the cultural majority at a

primarily White institution, various strategies, such as being 'individualistic' or asking for help are lessons learned in order to survive and ultimately succeed.

Proposition 4: The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student's culture(s) of origin and the cultures of immersion.

Similar to proposition 3, there were many examples where students experienced cultural distance from their peers at RSU. Some examples were overt racist/insensitive comments, awareness they were not like others, and recognition that their home culture greatly varied from their peers.

Student 1, Filipina first year student, discussed being "the Asian friend" in high school, not identifying with anyone on her floor community her first year in the residence halls, and noticing she was the only Asian at church and the theater club in Rural Town. While she grew up attending a White high school and living in a White neighborhood, her involvement in church and the theater club waned when she was unable to connect with her peers. When discussing her residence hall floor, she described her hall as the 'overflow for (White) sorority girls' and noted a wide cultural difference.

Student 7, Vietnamese American second year female, experienced a lot of ignorant or racist comments when asked about the most negative impact on her first-year experience. As a coping mechanism, she wrote them down in a list or journal to help her reflect. She describes it in the following manner, "I don't know if I would call it a negative impact but I, for sure, started

making a list of all the times people around me were ignorant about me being Asian." She further explains, "for me, it was just kind of like I look back and be like, 'oh, ha ha, they were so ignorant but I taught them you don't say things like that.'"

Student 6, Korean/Salvadoran 3rd year male, articulated a similarly unwelcoming floor environment and receiving "funny looks" from his Chicano neighbors because were unsure of his biracial background. He explains it in the following manner:

> Because most of my floor was primarily Hispanic, I feel like, in my eyes, they kind of look at me funny, in terms of like, how did they distinguish whether I am Korean or Hispanic. And I've had had that problem before, in middle school. So it was kind of like, 'I can talk to them and be friendly with them' but it was never like, 'I'm going to be part of that clique or I'm part of that friend group.' It was more like, 'hey how's it going?' and then it just sort of dropped off.

Even in a setting where there were other people of color and having a Hispanic surname, he felt singled out for not being from the same background as his floor community. This had the most negative impact on his first-year experience.

Similarly, Student 9, Filipina American second year female from Hawaii, observed that her first-year experience required her "just getting used to seeing more, um White (people) here." While she was optimistic and didn't articulate her first year as too negative of an experience, she highlighted that "sometimes I feel like everyone's looking at me or something because I'm darker than everyone." This was a big cultural shift from Hawaii to Rural Town.

Even in situations that were not seen as overtly negative, there were reminders of the differences in background. Student 8, third year female from the Southeast Asian region, experienced the alienation of being one of the few Asians in her business classes. She states, "It was definitely a culture shock, in the sense that like everyone around me was White because I

noticed like ‘where’s everyone else (of color) at?’ And so in my classes, I definitely felt like I a minority.” She laments, as a first-generation college student, the struggle to find connections with others her first year at RSU. Even though she was assigned an Asian mentor through the Multicultural Center, she didn’t understand their role so she did not utilize this resource. In retrospect, she wished she had role models during that first year.

Student 10, Korean American male, commented on feeling welcomed by a “taste of Korea” program hosted in the dining center in collaboration with the Korean Student Association. He discussed the importance of food as part of his culture and seeing authentic dishes in the dining center proved to be a significant moment in his experience and feeling his culture was valued.

Proposition 5: Students who transverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.

During their time at RSU, every student adapted to the predominately white environment through an affinity group, job, or academic connection that allowed them to feel connected to the university. However, their involvement and recognition of that need varied. Of the eleven interviewed, four joined ethnic affinity groups their first year.

Student 1, Filipino female fourth year student, reflected on being “THE Asian” friend within her predominately White high school and friend group. She was “fascinated” with the idea she could join a Filipino club and with all of the other resources available to her on campus.

Similarly, Student 3, female bi-racial Chamorro and White, grew up in a "very White" neighborhood and joined the Asian Alliance of Women group her first year on campus. She reflected on this group as having the most positive impact on her first year as she was able to make connections through this group.

Two students from Hawaii, second year females, one of Filipino heritage and the other from a Japanese background, shared common reasons for joining the Hawaii club and the Islander club. Having been raised where they were part of the majority population, coming to the rural college town was especially challenging. Both experienced covert discrimination in the form of subtle looks from others because of their darker skin, to overt discrimination in the residence halls such as having lights turned off while showering and others banging on the door when walking by their room. Affinity clubs and the Multicultural Student Center provided the most positive impact on their first-year experience.

Three students were Resident Advisors (RA) on the Residence Life staff and engaged in hall government leadership roles. Two were involved during their first year and felt a sense of belonging and support from their fellow members. Student 7, second year Vietnamese American female, described it as she "felt supported and like I belonged because they needed me."

Proposition 6: The amount of time a student spends in one's culture of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.

At the time of the interviews, everyone had successfully navigated at least one year in the rural, predominately White setting. Student 10, male fourth year Korean American, explains his

strategy of minimizing the cultural stress between his Korean household and his life at school. He stated, "I really don't share my experiences at RSU to my parents as much. So, I don't want to say I am living a double life, it's just that I don't interact with my parents as much as the other people might have." He further explains his parents are immigrants from Korean and struggle with differing thoughts on sexual orientation and interracial dating. He had intentionally avoided the topic because of his current White girlfriend.

Proposition 7: The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's sociocultural connections to the academic program and to affinity groups.

As part of their ability to navigate the environment, all students have found a connection with affinity groups, diverse peer group in their academic program, or leadership roles in the halls. For some, it was the social connections and friends made through affinity groups such as the Filipino Student Association or Islander Club. Additionally, the Multicultural Center Staff and professional staff in the residence halls helped them in their early connections and skill development.

> Student 8, female Bruneian/Malay third year student stated, "The Multicultural Center (MC) definitely made me feel more at home. I feel like if I didn't ever get involved with them, MC, I would still feel like an outsider in a sense." As she reflected back on her first year, being "shy" prevented her from getting involved, despite being assigned an Asian American mentor. She stated, "Like I was very shy and like, the idea of coming up to someone and saying 'hey, you are my mentor' and not really knowing what that was, um, I wish I had like, role models, during my first year."

Student 11, Japanese American female from Hawaii, reaffirmed this perspective when discussing the Asian American/Pacific Islander center (AAPI) within the office of the Multicultural Center. She discussed the ameliorating impact it had on her experience in the following way:

> I think, having people that I related to helped me, um, identify myself here. Because I think that if I didn't, like, know about the AAPI center, or didn't have a (MC) mentor, or know other people from Hawaii, I don't think I would have had as much of a good experience. Just because, yeah, I don't feel like I related to the other people. So I think that just helped me, um to feel like I belong here.

Student 1, Filipino American female, articulated feeling culture shock when cooking rice in her residence hall floor during her first-year experience. She stated,

> Little things like that and how I live my lifestyle. I definitely had a culture shock into thinking there are little things that definitely some people did not grow up with. Now I'm understanding this because I am living in a floor with people who have not lived like that. So that was pretty hard too, that's why joining my (multicultural) sorority was really beneficial for me.

These are a few examples of the affirming impact affinity groups or student support offices had on the student experience. Other students found comfort and a sense of belonging in the classroom setting. However, the diversity of peers in their academic program was attributed to their favorable sense of belonging.

Student 4, Japanese American male fifth year student, recounted an organic connection to his diverse classmates. When talking about his classroom friends, he explains, "because I'm an engineering major and I feel that engineering has a pretty high amount of Asian Americans in there. Like, my engineering group of friends, is very predominately Asian Americans. With a

handful of African American and a handful of Hispanic." He goes on to talk about campus as home. "When I refer to home now, when I'm at where I grew up in Richfield, and I don't say, I have to come back to Ruralville', I say I have to go home."

Student 5, Korean American male, expressed similar feelings. He felt like he belonged because of the demographics of the civil engineering classroom. He stated, "I never felt like an outlier. Especially in the civil engineering community. I would say it is quite diverse, there are quite a few international students as well." He goes on to compare his major to other majors, "…I know that in, like, business or economics or places like that, it is mostly White."

Proposition 8: Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence.

Tinto (1993) discussed one method students manage cultural distance is to join affinity groups with similar values of the student. Persistence is greater if the student group is academically focused or values persistence. Determined by Kuh and Love, "This positive pull towards persistence is even greater when the group has formal status, such as departmental clubs, or if the group has official responsibilities for institutional functioning, such as resident assistants or student government officer" (2000, p. 207).

Three students in this study served as Resident Advisors (RA) and spent their first year involved in hall leadership roles. Serving in hall government connected them to the university, helped in their transition, and led to acquiring the residence hall staff role the following year. Student 7, Vietnamese American female, discussed her involvement in hall government in her first year as a gateway into belonging. She stated, "Just being there for someone else, if that

makes sense. Needing them needing me, for Hall Government, they needed me to do all of our programs and stuff. So I felt supported and, like, I belong because they needed me."

Student 6, biracial Korean and Salvadoran male, articulated his close relationship with his hall director as being the most positive impact during his first year. He described it as, "…we had a one on one (meeting) each week and he always pushed me to do more and kind of step back, reevaluate, and make things better." His encouragement developed him as a leader and resulted in application for, and receiving, the RA job the following year.

Student 10, Korean American male, discussed meeting students from another residence hall with a rich hall culture as being impactful to his experience. His assigned hall was filled with students that were focused on drinking and partying. He moved halls, joined hall government, and eventually became an RA. He mentions his hall staff team as a key part of why he felt like he belonged at RSU.

Student 5, Korean American male, reflected on his first-year attempts at connecting with other Koreans. He sought out other Koreans by attending the Korean Student Association (KSA) meetings but soon discovered the group's focus was not aligned with his academic goals. He explains the membership in the following manner:

> The level of students there weren't really good. I've heard about the KSA at URBAN U, and I know they're pretty active, about academics and stuff. But here, it wasn't so much. Their primary interest was in partying. And it wasn't really legal for me to be drinking here, and they kept trying to hook me up with that. And the reason why I went there was so I could, kinda, set aside from getting in trouble and stuff and have some people I could talk with in my own language. But all they wanted to do was party and I didn't think it was a good fit for me.

Due to his lack of connection with this affinity group, he spent most of his free time with his high school friends that attended RSU. He later was arrested for a marijuana violation and left after his first year, only to return later after serving his military obligation with a new focus.

Analysis of student experiences: foundation for a new model

The collective experiences of the students provided insight into common themes and unique situations. Analysis using demographic background, first year experiences, academic engagement, sense of belonging, and involvement activities, set the foundation for a model on first-year development and university engagement. These are shape the interplay between identity and purpose with social and academic integration.

Experience of students raised in White neighborhoods with predominately White friend group.

Museus and Quaye (2009) modified Kuh and Love's propositions when applied to students of color at predominately White institutions. They discovered a student's culture of origin can shape their perception and experiences in that setting based upon where they were raised. Four of the students interviewed in this study grew up in primarily White areas and had White friends in high school. Of those four, three of them chose to get involved in ethnic clubs. Student 1, a Filipina American female fourth year student, discussed being referred to in high school as "the Asian friend" in her group of friends. When disclosing why she chose RSU, "I was also very fascinated of the Filipino club because there was none or anything remotely

multicultural in my high school." For her, the institution felt more diverse despite the primarily White institution designation.

Similarly, a biracial Chamorro American female, second year transfer student to RSU who grew up in a "very White town" discussed her first-year involvement activities. She stated:

> AAW (Asian Alliance of Women), it is also another small club and drawing those connections and having those people, like, was awesome. AAW puts on events and being able to figure out the logistics and plan these events and see how many people...when you plan a big event, and it's this big cultural event, and a lot of people come, you realize there are SO many people (of color).

For these two women, who grew up in White neighborhoods and had White friends prior to RSU, the allure of being around students of color was intriguing or surprising. They chose to get involved in Asian affinity groups in their first year at RSU, which provided them with the support they did not have in high school. These groups were attributed to contributing the most positive experiences during their first year at RSU.

However, a Japanese American bi-racial male, fifth year student that grew up with White friends in a White high school did not engage in Asian affinity groups or support services at RSU. He compared the two learning environments,

> I would say, I felt much more Japanese, more Asian American in high school than anything because coming from a predominantly, a severely predominately White area, nobody ever let me forget that I was Asian American, specifically Japanese American. And I got to college, it's still fairly White but I felt more accepted here. High school was really White and if you weren't completely White, people said things. They didn't mean it most of the time, when they said things, but I got called all sorts of, like, a 'term of endearment'. It really wasn't, they said pretty awful things. And eventually I just kinda, grew really thick skin to it. But when I got to here, everybody was so nice. Nobody would ever risk saying something borderline racist. I could be, Asian American and nobody would say, like, wouldn't comment on my lifestyle or make fun of me.

The stark contrast between how he was treated in high school and college allowed him to feel more comfortable at RSU, despite continued participation in a predominately White environment. While he recalls getting an email from an assigned Asian American mentor, he later regrets not responding. However, at the time, he did not feel the need to get involved with affinity groups of support services his first year because of his positive experience at RSU.

Experiences of students raised in majority Asian environments with Asian friend group: Finding a home away from home.

Student 9 and Student 11 were raised in Hawaii and described their friend groups prior to RSU as primarily Asian. They experienced culture shock being in such a vastly different environment. Both were involved in the Hawaii Club and the Islander Club their first year and frequently visited the Asian American Pacific Islander Center for support.

Student 9, Filipino American female second year student, shared what had the most positive impact on her first-year experience and motivated her to stay at RSU in the following manner:

> I think it was the, do you know the API communities in the second floor? [student union building, home to the Multicultural Center]. They have a really good community, like the Hawaii club, the Filipino club, um, the Islander club, all of those, like, I was very involved in my first year. So, I went to like all the events and just, seeing people over and over again, there's just a positive vibe over there and you feel welcomed. So I'm always in the fourth floor, I'm actually an API mentor right now.

While the student knew academic engagement strategies that would benefit her future, the primarily White environment had an impact on her. She explains her first-year involvement joining the Pharmacy club, which would benefit her as a pre-pharmacy major with aspirations of applying to professional school. She explains her plans and struggles with fitting in this group.

> I'm planning on running for officer for them (Pharmacy Club) too. Um, I don't know, um, just knowing I'm like not from that background. Um, and also I didn't want to, I was kind of intimidated knowing that the majority was White, right. So I just wanted to find that, um, little group where I belong. So I joined FSA, Hawaii Club, and eventually learned about IC (Islander Club).

Likewise, Student 11, Japanese American female second year student also found a home within various ethnic affinity groups. When talking about the positives of her first-year experience, she talked about the Asian American Pacific Islander center on campus as being instrumental in her transition. When asked how she got involved in the center, she elaborates:

> So, um, I originally went up there because my mentor invited me to go there. And then, um, I just started to, like just hang out there. And then I was able to meet a lot of people. And I also, like even though like there is not as much Hawaii people here, I feel like I hang out with a lot of Hawaii people. So, I would say most of my friends are from Hawaii. I think that kinda help me too because it is so different here, compared to back home. And having people that are like from where you're from, it's like, you are able to relate better.

That assistance went beyond connecting with others. She discussed, "the Hawaii club really helped just because they, um, in my first year I was not prepared for the cold weather. With anything, I had no clothes for that, or coats so the Hawaii club will take, um, like people to Spokane to go coat shopping and boot shopping and things like that."

Impacts of a limited social group

Tinto (1993) speculates, "individuals seek to retain past friendships while attending college may find the transition to college especially problematic" (p. 62). This reticence can impede social integration into the university and conceivably impact retention. If that group does not value academics, as was articulated in proposition 8 from Kuh and Love, this could have dire consequences.

Student 5, Korean male fifth year graduate student, reflected on his first year with a bit of embarrassment. He spent time with his high school friends, limited his other interactions, and got into trouble. He explains, "I was too busy hanging out with my friends from high school that came here all together. So probably not the best route. They weren't doing so good. No. Half of them dropped out and the other half did get their degrees, but they are working at construction sites with their degrees. So not so well." He ultimately was arrested for marijuana possession in that first year and went to Korea to serve a mandatory two-year military obligation while avoid being a repeat offender and having the charge permanently on his record.

Student 2, Filipino American male, discussed the negative experiences of his first year revolving around his roommate from his hometown. He explains,

> I think it was just rough because I think his personality wasn't as outgoing as I thought it was from Channel Harbor. So here in Ruralville, during Orientation Week, I was ready to try to go to events but he wasn't so willing to leave. And because he didn't want to leave, I didn't want to leave him behind, so I kinda stayed in the dorm with him. And, yeah, just stayed in the dorms a lot.

He later discovered his roommate suffered from depression. The environment during his first year took a toll on him to the point where he merely went to class, the dining center and restricted his socialization with other friends or groups. He planned on transferring to a university closer to home but changed his mind when an alternative housing arrangement was presented.

Student 3, Chamorro female, discussed her negative first year experience as being impacted by limiting her social group. She explains, "Being outgoing and going to all these meetings and meeting all these different people, there is a lot of people in choosing who to hang out with, was sometimes not the right choices."

Student 4, Japanese American male, conveyed a similar experience with his hometown roommate and friends. He did everything with his friends from home and limited himself to that group. However, they all joined fraternities which left him isolated and lonely. He recalls, "All my friends would be gone, they'd have things to do and I would just be in my dorm room, playing Call of Duty for hours."

Student 8, Bruneian/Malay female, roomed with her twin sister her first year on campus and never really ventured outside of this social relationship. It wasn't until the following year, when her younger brother came to RSU, that she got involved with the Multicultural Center. And it was only because he chose to get involved and convinced her to participate in the center. She attributes the Multicultural Center office as making her feel like she had a home at RSU.

Finding where you feel like you belong

Tinto (1993) argues that students must find compatible academic and/or social group membership in order to have some level of congruence between themselves and institution. He notes,

> Membership in at least one supportive community, whatever its relationship to the center, may be sufficient to insure continued persistence. Nevertheless, it does seem to be the case that students who identify themselves as being marginal to the mainstream of institutional life are somewhat more likely to withdraw. Of course, they themselves are less likely to leave than are students who see themselves as incongruent with any of the available communities (Tinto, 1993. p. 60-61.).

Nancy Schlossberg (1989) developed a theory on building community describing marginality and mattering as core constructs within the college experience. She explains,

> Every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises. The larger the difference between the former role and the new role the more marginal the person may feel, especially if there are no norms for the new role. The first students of nontraditional age to attend traditional campuses, for example, faces such problems. They had no norms to anticipate their pioneering role. (Schlossberg, 1989. p. 7)

Marginality is a sense of not fitting in and can lead to feelings of increased sensitivity, self-consciousness, and feelings of inferiority (Stonequist, 1935). Robert E. Park (1928) described the marginal individual personality as a cultural hybrid, "a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted,

because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place (Park, 1928. p. 892).

Mattering was described as, "a motive: the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercise a powerful influence on our actions" (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981, p. 165). Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) defined five aspects of mattering: attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence. Schlossberg (1989) built onto Rosenberg's four aspects of mattering and added a final construct of appreciation.

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) describe attention as the feeling that one is noticed by others and is the most elementary form of mattering. Importance is believing others care or concerned with our fate. Ego-extension is the feeling that someone will be proud of our accomplishments or show empathy in our failures. Dependence refers to the feeling of being needed by others. Schlossberg (1989) added appreciation as the fifth aspect of mattering. It is the importance of feeling our efforts are appreciated.

Within the group of students in this study, nine of the eleven conveyed a sense of belonging due to an affiliation with a group that included their preferred attribute of diversity. Schlossberg notes, "people within a culturally defined marginal group may not suffer from marginality when they are centrally involved in that group" (Schlossberg, 1989 p. 8). Feeling a sense of belonging was through various affinity clubs or services for Asian American students, a diverse classroom setting, or a perceived commitment to diversity from the university. The remaining two students in this study were Resident Advisors where team, inclusion, and equity are core department values.

Connections through Asian American affinity groups in the first year

Student 1, Filipino American female, fourth year, described her sense of belonging as "…I definitely had a culture shock into thinking they're little things that definitely some people did not grow up with. Now I'm understanding because I'm living in a floor with people who have not lived like that. So that was pretty hard too, that's why joining my (multicultural) sorority was really beneficial for me."

Student 3, Chamorro American female, second year, credited her feeling of belonging to, "…the student org involvement (Asian Alliance of Women and Transfer club). Definitely. Um, this isn't the first research study I participated in, so just being very involved with events and RSO (Registered Student Organizations) and studies on campus, definitely made me (feel) very, in there."

Student 9, Filipino American female, second year from Hawaii, when asked who or what made her feel like she belonged at RSU, stated, "I think it was the community, um, my close friends are here now." She highlights the need for the affinity group when describing her overall involvement in the university.

Student 11, Japanese American female, second year from Hawaii, describes her experience in the following manner,

> I think, having people that I related to helped me, um, identify myself here. Because I think that if I, didn't like, know about the Asian American Pacific Islander Center, or didn't have a mentor, or like no other people from Hawaii, I don't think I would've as much of a good experience. Just because, yeah, I just don't feel like I relate to the other people. So I think that just help me, um, to feel like I belong here."

When asked to elaborate if it was the Asian or the Hawaiian connection that made her feel like she belonged, she stated "Um, I think it's both. I just think like the (Asian American/Pacific Islander) center, is just like a, very welcoming place. So it just allowed me to meet like so many new people. And I think that just helps. And it's not like it's just Asian there. It's just like different multicultural people."

Sense of belonging due to RSU's commitment to diversity

Student 7, Vietnamese American female, second year, discussed the feeling of belonging in the classroom setting and the efforts of the university to diversify. She stated,

> Definitely my friends and my classes make me feel like I belong. Because it's like when we are in the classroom, we are all the same, we are all learning the same things. And we all end up taking the same tests and stuff like that. So we are all struggling together, that makes me feel like I belong. Um, why… I know that like talking to people, they always say like 'RSU is so diverse.' So that makes me feel like we are really trying to be diverse. So then it makes me feel like I do belong here.

When asking if she feels like RSU is a diverse place, she stated, "no. I kind of laugh at them when they say that. But I know they are trying." Despite the lack of diversity at the university, she recognized it was a commitment and institutional value, which helped her feel appreciated. And because of the common classroom experience, she never felt like an outsider.

Connections through Asian American affinity clubs in the second year

The transition to college is vital for the retention of students and where a great deal of resources are dedicated. On RSU's campus, the First Year Living Learning Community, first year live in requirement, and the mentor program through the Multicultural Center are examples of initiatives tailored towards first year students. However, two students were disengaged their first year despite being assigned an Asian American mentor through the Multicultural Center.

Student 2, Filipino American male, fourth year explained his plans for his second year in the following manner:

> So basically the end of my freshman year, I was planning on transferring out to go back home to just a community college or something. But the friend that initially reached out to, like, me to even attend RSU, he said all of his roommates were leaving. So before the end of the year, he kinda, reached out to me and my other friend saying that we can live with him next year. And I was going to turn him down and tell him I was probably going to transfer out because I don't like it here. But, I don't know, because he was a good friend of mine at Channel Harbor, so I thought maybe, if not living in the dorms, I took a chance and lived with him for the next semester and if the semester didn't work out I was planning on leaving. If the fall didn't work out then I would probably transfer out again.

Fortunately, he "took a chance to go live with him" and met other Asian American students. He described the experience with his new living situation in a favorable light, "to put it simply, they are, like, Asian friends and I was able to connect with them easily. Or a lot more easy." He tagged along with his roommates to the Filipino Student Association meetings which changed his experience. He explains the difference as "ever since the fall semester of my sophomore year, it kinda spiraled into belonging here."

Student 8, Bruneian/Malay American, female, third year, also was disengaged from various multicultural resources. She did not utilize the Asian American mentor assigned to her because she was shy and spent her first year "trying to figure out everything about RSU." She described her first-year engagement as siloed due to the First Year Focus Living Learning community:

> Yeah, so I feel like, um, in the residence halls, like, just the community that I met, um, I just found myself hanging out with them. Like, after going from class, it's just like immediately friends that I had in the residence halls. So it was easy to just kind of like, go day-to-day, just hanging out with them. And then like once I moved out of the residence halls, it was more like 'okay now I have to make more of an effort to get involved'. Because it's not like I'm coming home to like, a group of friends that I can hang out with.

As a business major, she experienced a "culture shock, in the sense that everyone around me was White." In an effort to expand her social network, she joined a multicultural Greek organization her second year and started to go to the Multicultural Center (MC) office with her brother, who was a first-year student and initiated the trips to the Asian American and Pacific Islander center within the MC office. She attributes her sense of belonging to the MC office and explains, "I feel like if I didn't ever get involved with them, MC, I would still feel like and outsider in a sense."

Diversity in class

Two students mentioned the diversity of their classroom promoted a sense of belonging in an otherwise primarily White institution. Student 4, Japanese American male, fifth year, also

had an outreach by an assigned Asian American mentor regrets not taking advantage of the opportunity. He did not join any Asian affinity groups or utilize the Asian American student center, other than to utilize their printers. However, he did find comfort in his classroom setting as an Engineering major. When asked who or what made him feel he belonged at RSU, he discussed his relationships with classroom friends, "I'm in engineering and I feel that engineering has a pretty high amount of Asian Americans in there. Like my engineering group of friends, is very predominantly Asian Americans." He later elaborates, "I kind of got a group of people we all took almost all the same classes together. So, it just felt like, home."

Similarly, Student 5, Korean American male, fifth year graduate student, tried to connect with Koreans in the Korean Student Association his first year but realized they have different interests. So he spent much of his first year with his friends from high school. When asked if he feels like he belongs at RSU, he stated,

> I never felt like I was an outlier. At least here. Especially in the civil engineering community. I would say it is quite diverse, there is quite a few international students as well. A lot of study groups. At least the people I was studying with wasn't primarily White. It was, I hang out with a lot of Iranians and Iraqis, Mexicans, there is an old Venezuelan girl, a couple White people. I would say about 30 to 40% were White. At least the people that I studied with.

His experience in a diverse classroom setting helped him feel like he belonged and that he was not "outlier." As previously mentioned, he ran into legal trouble and left RSU to fulfill a two-year military obligation in Korea. When he returned, he had a different focus and sense of purpose, analogous to the student development model for Asian Americans, Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee (2002). Identity and purpose being the core task of developmental focus for Asian Americans, his engagement with his

academics provided him a sense of purpose and the diverse classroom setting helped him feel a sense of belonging.

Found a sense of belonging in residence halls

Three of the subjects were Resident Advisors (RA) during their time at RSU. Two of them mentioned hall staff as being instrumental in their sense of belonging at RSU. Student 6, Korean/Salvadoran American male, third year, when asked if he felt he belonged at RSU: "I would say I'm kind of in the middle about it. Um, like I have my friend group in the College of Engineering and I have my friends that are RA's." He talks about his close relationship with his first staff and the differences between his current staff.

In discussing his first-year involvement, he mentions key relationships in "Hall government, I got Rick's (Hall Director) support and I got friends to support from the executive board. And they were good friends, they were friends I could talk to and hang out every once in a while but nothing big." His main priority was to try and become more social since he was such a serious person and he was able to expand his experience because of his hall leadership roles.

Likewise, Student 10, Korean American male, fourth year, attributed his sense of belonging to his fellow hall staff. "I feel like it is definitely my staff members at Jackson (Hall)." He further explains the relationship building of the staff began early because of a lengthy selection process for the position. He states, "Um, and I do feel like, I really don't want to be a PR move for Jackson Hall and say the RTP (RA Training Program) program is the best

but, that program really, really helped me feel like I was part of the team even before I joined them as an RA. So, we went out to camp, you know, staff relationships were just amazing."

The path to belonging at RSU varied for the students in this study. Some needed and found immediate Asian American peers with common experiences in clubs or through the Asian American student center. Others made those connections after their first year by stumbling upon Asian American affinity groups or found repose in a diverse classroom setting. But for all the subjects, being comfortable and having those connections were vital for their success.

Negative interactions with others in their first year.

The journey to belonging in the primarily White, rural setting had challenges for most of the students. Six of the students discussed experiencing covert or overt discrimination. Student 1, female 4th year Filipina American, discussed her experience with culture shock living on a floor full of White sorority women. She summarized her experience:

> Culturally, oh my gosh, I could not identify with anyone, literally, on my floor. Every time I cooked rice everyone knew it, they knew it was me because they could smell it down the hall and that kind of had to be a conversation in itself, 'like yes, I have a rice cooker, it doesn't mean that I am different than you and that I am not approachable.' Little things like that and how I lived my lifestyle, I definitely had a culture shock into thinking their little things that definitely some people did not grow up with.

Student 4, male 5th year Japanese American, reflected on his negative experiences in his first year due to his treatment from his friends from high school, who also attended RSU. "It was pretty bad actually, they were not very nice." He explains, "I got called all sort of, like, 'terms of

endearment'. It really wasn't, they said pretty awful things. And eventually I just kinda, grew really thick skin to it."

Student 6, Korean/Salvadoran male, third year with a Latino surname, reflected on his negative first year experience on a floor with a lot of Hispanic students. He talked about how "they kind of look at me funny, in terms, like, how did they distinguish whether I was Korean or Hispanic." This self-consciousness is the outcome of feeling marginalized by his floor.

Similarly, Student 9, female 2nd year Filipino American from Hawaii, explains her negative first-year experiences when comparing and contrasting to home. "I think there's no real negative, I, I guess it was just getting used to seeing more, um, White here. Sometimes I feel like everyone's looking at me or something because I'm darker than everyone."

Student 7, Vietnamese American female, second year, experienced a lot of ignorant comments about her Asian identity. She discussed a situation where there were chopsticks in the common area suite kitchen and a visiting friend made an offensive comment. She explains, "They weren't mine but he was like, 'oh does Susan use these chopsticks to make sushi?' And I look at him and was like, 'they're not my chopsticks, I don't make sushi.' I mean, I could but Vietnamese people don't make sushi." She highlights the chopsticks were the disposable take out variety that her White roommate had left on the counter.

Student 11, year Japanese American female, second year, from Hawaii described her negative experiences living in the residence halls. She was the victim of overt targeting and harassment that first year.

> Me and my roommate had a really hard time in the dorms. I mean, I just feel like our experiences were really bad, like, at first, um, people, I don't know how but we locked our door but somebody broke in and stole our stuff. Also, with the

> laundry how it's like shared, I would put my laundry and people would like take certain items of my clothing. Um, and also we didn't have very nice floor mates so we ended up moving floors, just because, um, they were just constantly like being loud. They were like rude to us so we requested to transfer so we just moved up a floor.

Lacked a connection in their first year

Student 2, Filipino American male, fourth year, talked about wanting to get involved but feeling an obligation to hang out with his roommate. He explains, "during Orientation Week, I was ready to try to go to events but he wasn't so willing to leave. And because he didn't want to leave, I didn't want to leave him behind, so I kinda stayed in the dorm with him. And, yeah, just some other things – just staying in my dorm a lot." His commitment to not abandon his roommate impacted his level of involvement as he spent all of his time in class, the dining hall, or his room.

Student 10, Korean American male, fourth year, talked about living in a hall with a party reputation and the negative impact on his transition to RSU. He stated, "…not particularly to the school, I mean I say this with a grain of salt, but that was the reason why I got off put by Cullinan Hall. That res hall in particular, just because of those experiences I had there. And when I saw that my friends had, low conduct at Jackson, I figured it was the community I wanted to live in, instead of a high stressful environment."

Additionally, he spent most of his free time working in the dining center his first year. He explains, 'you know my first year I didn't branch out to the clubs or organizations as much. I focused a lot on part-time jobs. I worked in the dining halls until I became an RA. And it was

mostly for financial reasons. And I did that, so that was a lot of time consuming on my part for me…"

Arrested and took two years off

Student 5, Korean American male, fifth year, explains his negative first year experience hanging out with the wrong crowd.

> I had a problem with drinking. And smoking, at the time. I got caught once. So it was possession of marijuana, in the car. It was the police. I got arrested. I got cuffed and I got written up. And I hired a lawyer and he just made a deal. I'm not sure what they call it but if I weren't to get caught for two years, it was going to go off the record. It was about the time I was going to the Army for two years, so I was like, 'alright, I'll do that.' And now it's off the record.

His initial plans did not include leaving after his first year to serve a mandatory two-year term of service in the Korean military, which resulted in him losing an academic scholarship. Fortunately, the time away and the lessons he learned from the arrest allowed him to refocus his attention on school.

Sought affinity group but did not fit in

Two students associated with affinity groups their first year but did not make connections or share the same values. Both identified as Korean and attended Korean Student Association (KSA) meetings looking for kinship. Student 10, male fourth year, talked about his lack of

connection to more recent immigrants from Korea that were members of the KSA. When asked what he thought about joining KSA, he explains:

> For some reason, although my friend group is mostly Asian, I have this weird like, attraction, plus opposition to Koreans who identify as first gen. Who speak more Korean because, although I am fluent in Korean, I'm more accustomed to speaking English. And I guess that aspect kind of puts me off for interacting with Korean students who are, like you know, international students, who just moved here from Korea. Even in my, like decade that I've been here, more than a decade, that generation has dramatically changed. So their mannerisms or the way of speaking is way different from my Korean experiences.

Student 5, male fifth year graduate student, looked forward to participating in the KSA since he heard good things about the KSA at the Rural University. He perceived their primary purpose was to party, which he was trying to avoid since he had already been in trouble with the law. He explains, "And the reason why I went there was so I could, kinda, set outside from getting in trouble and stuff and having some people I could talk with my own language in. But all they wanted to do was party and I didn't think it was a good fit for me."

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Limitations

Model for Asian American first year student development and institutional engagement

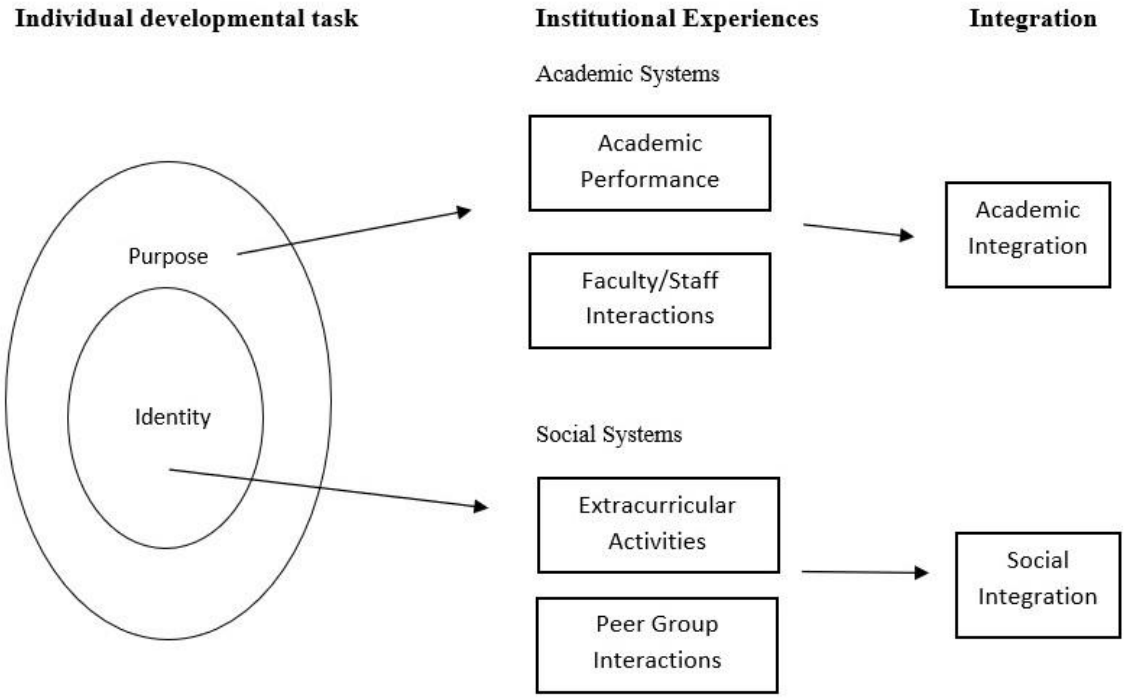
Manifesting Kuh and Love (2000) proposition 5, needing to acclimate or join enclaves, six students joined ethnic or regionally specific groups (e.g. Filipino Student Association, Hawaii Club, or Islander Club). This group affiliation is where they found home, especially for the two Hawaiians that were unable to return home as frequently as students who lived in the state. There was great comfort in being surrounded by peers that looked like them and understood their experiences.

However, for the three students that connected to their academic STEM programs, a diverse student population within their major was attributed with supporting their sense of belonging at RSU. They did not feel they were an outlier in the classroom. Conversely, a business major noted the absence of other Asians in the classroom as having a negative impact on her since she did not see many peers that looked like her in the classroom. For her, the solution for connection was to join a few ethnic affinity groups and engage with the Multicultural Center.

For the three Resident Advisors, their hall and staff communities were attributed as a positive impact on their experience. Aside from the focus on community building as a responsibility of the job, one of the department's core values was diversity and inclusion, resulting in a multicultural staff more diverse than the general university population. Being part of a diverse team with an actualized value system helped them engage and feel a part of the larger university.

It appears that all of the students benefitted from consociating with other people of color, either directly through clubs and the Asian/Pacific Islander student center or indirectly through a hall staff and department focused on diversity. However, only four joined Asian American affinity groups their first year. Since identity is a fluid, evolving, and a multi-layered process, most of the students might not have seen that aspect of identity as important during their first year. As highlighted in Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee's (2002) Asian American identity and developmental task model, identity and purpose were at the core of Asian American development and non-linear in nature. Purpose, such as academic success, could have been the primary focus for those not involved in Asian American groups or services. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. First Year Asian American Development Focus and Institutional Engagement: Identity and Purpose and Institutional Integration



Focus on identity

The students that joined affinity groups their first year can be perceived as focusing on identity as their primary developmental task. Student 1, Filipina female, grew up in a White neighborhood and discussed being "THE Asian friend" in her primarily White high school. She divulged being "fascinated by the Filipino club" since she had no prior exposure to a multicultural club. The opportunity to explore her culture with her peers was one of the attractions of RSU. Subsequently, she joined a multicultural sorority and the Filipino Student Association.

Student 3, Chamorro female, grew up in a "very White" neighborhood and joined the Asian Alliance of Women group her first year on campus. As a 4.0 transfer student, affiliation with other Asian Americans appeared to be a goal her first year and part of the explanation for her feeling a part of the larger university community.

Students 9 and 11 were from Hawaii and experienced culture shock in the rural, White institution. For them, being engaged with other Asian Americans, more specifically Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, helped in their transition and proved to be a necessity for survival in the disparate environment. Navigating the rural, White setting proved to be markedly challenging for these students when accounting for the divergence of Island culture from the mainland United States.

Focus on purpose

Students that focused on purpose as their primary developmental task their first year engaged with the academic system in a manner that was central to their institutional experience.

It can be argued that the main purpose of attending college is to earn a degree, which requires maintaining the minimum academic standard of the university. Three students illustrate how purpose was more central to their first-year experience than identity.

Student 4, did not participate in clubs or frequent the Multicultural Center their first year. After failing an exam, he changed his focus and study habits since he had never failed previously in his schooling. Academics became the top priority in his life and he became fully engaged with classes, tutoring, and study groups.

Student 5, left after a disappointing first year as he was arrested for marijuana and performed below academic expectations. His two-year departure to fulfill a military obligation as a Korean national was the impetus for refocusing of priorities; this experience allowed him to return with the explicit purpose of becoming an engineer. He maximized his second chance at RSU, where he received his undergraduate degree and subsequently enrolled in a Masters program. Neither of these two students engaged with an affinity group during their time at RSU. Both overcame academic challenges during their first year and subsequently dedicated themselves to their scholarship which lead to their successful integration.

Likewise, Student 2 did not participate in clubs and almost transferred out of RSU after his first year. He mentioned a calculus professor that challenged him to do better and noted that relationship being the most positive experience of his first year. However, his inability to integrate was the reason he nearly transferred, which he intended prior to being asked to join some friends in renting a house off campus. Coincidentally, he engaged with an affinity group his second year and credits that organization and the friends he gained through the club as instrumental to his sense of belonging.

For Tinto, engagement is a key component of retention. For the students in this study, most not only needed to engage, but to engage with diversity. For many, this happened after their first year as they found diversity in the classroom or in the social setting. Others experienced validation through their perception of the university's commitment to diversity which contributed to retention because of the positive impact on their sense of belonging. All of our students mentioned the Multicultural Center, diversity, or hall staff as being instrumental in contributing to their sense of belonging.

Implications for practice and future research

In its pursuit to support of students of color, the doctrine that similarly identified peers are fundamental in assisting in the transition to campus is the default position of the university. Information regarding support services are shared upon arrival to campus, outreach from multicultural student centers or mentoring programs often occurs prior to arrival. While this is a constructive approach to addressing the needs of Asian American students, the interviewed students provide further insight into what facilitates a successful transition.

For those involved in ethnic clubs or utilizing services specific to their identity, these students benefitted from the university's broad approach to supporting students of color. This group constituted the majority of the participants studied, and the university's efforts could be self-identified a success because the students attributed positive feelings and a sense of belonging resulting from involvement in these clubs or diversity initiatives.

For the remaining students, they were able to find a sense of belonging in other ways: three students found a home within their academic programs, two students with their residential community, and one who overlapped both categories. However, even while they had found a feeling of belonging in this manner, the need to ethnically or culturally connect with others did not subside. While these students did not directly utilize an affinity group or minority focused student service, their experiences were positively impacted by other peers of color, either in the classroom setting or hall/staff setting. Consequently, the larger university efforts to diversify the general student population can impact the demographics in the classroom and provide a climate in which Asian American students feel comfortable and a sense of belonging. These university efforts should continue, even if it might not appear that Asian American student are utilizing ethnic specific services or groups.

Acknowledging that Asian American students benefit from specific support services is a positive change from the "model minority" orientation of the past. However, the importance of connections with peers should not be disregarded, even if this group is predominately academically successful. The students in the study found positive experiences and different ways to connect to the university. When one method of engagement was unsuccessful, such as a club or floor community where they felt like the minority, they moved on to find other ways to participate, albeit sometimes accidentally through new friendships and other university connections.

The university needs to continue in their efforts to support different programs and offices that provide services specific to this population. On more than one occasion, students that did not engage with these services fully their first year but did so their second, often when becoming friends with someone that already had a connection to these groups or services. While the focus

on first year students is a valuable strategy in addressing transition issues, encouraging returning students to engage and view these clubs and services as a viable opportunity is important. Identity development is a complex and continually evolving process with intermittent needs arising in step with the student's growth, which is often independent of the student's year of matriculation. Affinity groups and the Multicultural Center should never be viewed as only a primarily first year opportunity to engage. As this study has illustrated, it took some students at least a year to find their 'home' at RSU.

Practitioners would benefit from a more robust assessment of incoming Asian American students in order to tailor services more effectively. As demonstrated by those interviewed, some sought out peers from the similar backgrounds. Being with peers that shared common cultural knowledge proved to be beneficial for these students in their success at RSU.

Others ignored outreach by the Multicultural Center and spent their first year engaging in opportunities outside of the center. Work, hall leadership opportunities, or a focus on academics were strategies utilized by these students. For a few students, their engagement was very limited and had a negative impact on their first-year experience. These students would benefit from broader opportunities for engagement that still recognized their ethnic identity. For example, forming study groups or academic clubs around majors for Asian Americans or other students of color if initial interest is low.

Children from immigrant households have the challenge of straddling two unique cultures, which can be in conflict at times. Often Asian parents' value on education, as highlighted in Proposition 2 of Kuh and Love (2000), could conflict with social systems engagement as highlighted by Tinto's model (1993). Convincing immigrant parents that

extracurricular clubs and peer group interactions are vital to academic success may seem illogical. Information tailored to parents, possibly in various languages, could help in the understanding that these groups foster a sense of belonging and result in academic success.

Finally, despite RSU being considered a primarily White institution, not everyone experienced the environment in the same manner. For some, RSU lacked diversity compared to the student's hometown. For others it was a diverse setting with opportunities to engage with peers with similar identities. It is important to keep this perspective in mind when sending out communication, developing programs or initiative, or establishing policies.

Limitations of study

As noted in a study by Liversage, Naude, and Botha (2018), they warn that "a retrospective approach depends on the accuracy of information students are able to recall and reflect" (p. 79). For this study, one student had to recall experiences from six years prior while others had to reflect on experiences that occurred in the preceding months. While the benefits of a bigger picture view of their first year encompasses more than a snapshot during the experience, there is the possibility of a more optimistic view since those students successfully navigated their first-year experience. In future research, a longitudinal study with a cohort of students might provide further insight, especially for those that have not successfully persisted beyond their first year and understanding the reasons behind their departure.

The subject size provided another limitation if trying to apply the findings to a broader group. While the diversity of group (ethnic identity, year in school, gender, connections with the

university) was broad, the limited size meant each subgroup was smaller. Possibly narrowing down and focusing on a specific group would have allowed insight into that one population's experience.

My identity as an Asian American enhanced my understanding of the student experience. However, this positionality could potential bias the data if proper collection and analytical protocols are not followed. Researchers that do not identify as Asian American would need to be intentional in establishing a positive rapport with the subjects in order to solicit candid responses. Additional follow up questions would assist in providing a more complete picture of the student experience.

Finally, the model on identity and purpose and institutional integration needs further exploration. More specific inquiry on identity development along with exploring the idea of purpose on a college campus could expand the model. Utilizing a different data analysis methodology is vital in order to test the model. A larger sample size would also provide more data to support the revised model.

Postscript

It would be irresponsible of me not to acknowledge the current climate during my defense of this dissertation. The Black Lives Matter movement and international protests regarding police brutality, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting xenophobic treatment of Asians due to the "China" virus, and a president that continues to divide the country mark this historically volatile time that students are experiencing first-hand. Community connections have been impacted by social distancing and self-isolation as mandated by state governments in order to curtail the spread of the coronavirus. University instruction moved online across the country in the spring and assorted plans for delivering instruction will continue to influence students in the fall and possibly beyond.

Given the context of these current events and how the study might have played out if the data were collected in the spring of 2020, it is undeniable there would have been some impact on identity, purpose, feeling of community, sense of belonging and university connections. I wish I could guarantee these young scholars the resilience they articulated during their time at RSU would assure success under any circumstances. I would point to the long history of Asian American success under extraordinary conditions. The long and successful history of Asian American activism show the ability to build coalitions in order to activate change. But that might be a pep talk that feels too distant.

It is clear the larger system is broken and discrimination is still evident as documented on personal cell phone videos, live streams, and anonymous posts. The voice of the few is finally being heard by the masses. As many of the students in the study figured out, when one strategy failed, another one was employed. I am hopeful that there is enough of a critical mass to make meaning change.

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Addendum 1

Hello fellow Asian American student,

My name is Edwin Hamada and I am writing a dissertation on how Asian American students experience campus culture in their first year at a rural, primarily White institution. I am seeking out students that **identify as Asian American**, are **at least in their 2nd year at RSU**, and willing to talk about their experiences at RSU. My goal is to gather information that might be beneficial in helping future Asian American 1st year students in their transition to RSU.

The recorded interview will be approximately an hour of your time. The study has been approved by URBAN U's Institutional Review Board (Study #00006134) and your information will be anonymous (no real names used). For your time and willingness to talk, I will provide a small token of my appreciation, **$25** in cash or whatever gift card they may have at Safeway 😊.

If you are interested, please email: toshio@Urban U.edu or text 509-592-7562 so we can set up a time. Thank you for reading this email and potentially agreeing to an interview.

Sincerely,

Edwin Toshio Hamada

Addendum 2

Interview Questions:

1. How many years have you been at RSU?

2. What do you consider your ethnic identity?

3. Tell me about the ethnic composition of your friends prior to coming to RSU?
    a. What about your high school?
    b. Neighborhood?

4. Why did you choose to attend RSU?

5. How academically prepared did you feel prior to coming to RSU? First Gen student?

6. Are you meeting your academic expectations?

7. What had the most positive impact on their 1st year experience?

8. What had the most negative impact on their 1st year experience?

9. Do you feel like you belong at RSU?
    a. Who or what helped them feel like they belonged at RSU?

10. How would you describe your home culture? (1st gen?)
    a. What helped bridge the gap between your home culture and RSU?

11. What activities or clubs were you involved with your first year?
    a. What did the club/activity provide that you perceive as support?