

Non-Income Characteristics Affecting Financial Aid Participation of Vietnamese Students Compared with Other Ethnic Groups

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This paper will provide a case study of financial aid participation rates of Vietnamese American students at a California community college. Currently the percentage of Vietnamese American students enrolled that receive financial aid is nearly twice that of all other ethnic groups, with an initial review suggesting that it is not due to differences in incomes. In the last three years the state has increased funding for community college outreach activities with the goal of increasing the number of low income students participating in financial aid programs. Given this investment, it is important to explore non-income variables associated with increased financial aid participation. The goal is to use the information gathered from the analysis to inform future financial aid outreach efforts.

Emerging research suggests that Vietnamese Americans' college-choice behavior is distinct from other Asian groups such as Chinese Americans (Teranishi, Summer 2004). The social structures of the ethnic enclaves in which they live influence the postsecondary aspirations of Vietnamese Americans in ways different from other subpopulations of Asian Americans (Teranishi, Sep 2004).

A 2005 GAO report suggested that "Little is known about the effectiveness of federal grant and loan programs and education-related tax preferences in promoting attendance, choice, and persistence" (United States Government Accountability Office, July 2005, p27). The literature does include a discussion of the potential impact of "sticker shock" on a students' decision to attend college (Heller, Hung). Many first time and low income students make attendance decisions based upon the real price of tuition rather than the effective cost they are likely to incur because they lack information on financial aid opportunities. To date there appears to be little research on the effectiveness of outreach programs aimed at informing low income students of financial aid opportunities.

This research will compare financial aid participation between ethnic groups. Five different data sets may be used, including institutional data, FASA information, information on participation rates at other community colleges in the county (from the state community college office), information from a Noel-Levitz survey conducted in fall 2005, and information from an institutional survey on financial aid outreach. Variables to be examined may include, income, ethnicity, immigration status, location within the county, first generation status, and responses to survey questions such as "This institution helps students identify resources to finance their education" and "Adequate financial aid is available for most students."

The hypothesis of the research is that financial aid participation for Vietnamese students is related to their parent's acceptance of aid programs. This acceptance may be linked to the assistance many Vietnamese immigrants were given by the United States government. For other students there may be an "equation of financial aid programs with welfare" (MacCallum, 2005, p 131), that Vietnamese students do not have. All else equal, a view of financial aid as a "hand out" may decrease participation. Students that have this view may not seek out information on financial aid resources or may "tune out" advertising campaigns aimed at providing the information. If this were the case, it may suggest that a component of financial aid outreach include advertisements aimed at overcoming this bias among some students.

Significant funding is being spent for financial aid outreach at California community colleges under the assumption that providing low income students' information on the effective cost of education will preserve access. To date there has been limited research that would help target those efforts. This paper will attempt to isolate the non-income characteristics that lead to higher participation in the financial aid program by Vietnamese students at a community college in California. Given the extent of financial aid outreach efforts in other states, this work should be applicable to a wide range of institutions.

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