

Statement of Concern on the Finalists for De Anza College Presidency

From the Department of Asian American and Asian Studies and the Asian Pacific American Staff Association of De Anza College

18 May 2020

Dear Chancellor Miner and the Presidential Search Hiring Committee,

De Anza College's department of Asian American and Asian Studies (ASAM) and the Asian Pacific American Staff Association (APASA) wish to express our appreciation for the extensive work of the Presidential Search Hiring Committee. We know the demands that are required for such an endeavor, especially one done well. Thank you for the opportunity for faculty, classified professionals, and students to weigh in on the decision through multiple channels, including attendance at various finalist interviews with shared governance groups.

Our Reservations

We—the undersigned faculty, classified professionals, and community members affiliated with ASAM and APASA, however, feel compelled to share our reservations about the three finalists for the position of De Anza college president.

Based on our various involvement in the hiring process, ASAM and APASA are disappointed and, quite frankly, stunned that none of the three finalists have indicated a track record that demonstrates substantive knowledge or notable work experience with Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) student populations.¹ It is inconceivable that

¹ During the interviews with the Academic Senate, none of the three finalists conveyed particular insight in understanding the unique challenges and needs of AAPI students, nor pointed to specific competencies that would suggest their demonstrated effectiveness in working with AAPI students, faculty, and classified professionals.

Two of the three finalists, in response to direct questions about Filipino, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian students in the context of the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) program, stated in their respective interviews that they had no special knowledge about or direct work experience with these AAPI student populations. Both of these finalists responded broadly. One spoke about “transferable skills” based on his experiences with African American and Latinx students. The other spoke about “disfavored groups” based on his experiences with African American and Latinx students. The third finalist

a finalist for De Anza college president has little or nothing to say about one of the largest segments of De Anza's student body (nearly 50%)² in the context of a metropolitan area that has one of the densest populations of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders on the entire U.S. mainland (nearly 40%).³

The Context of De Anza

Aside from a demographic imperative, the common institutional dynamics that surround AAPI students in higher education contexts warrant a particular sophistication for navigating the nuances of racial politics.

At large, AAPI college students face many popular characterizations that put them at-risk for institutional invisibility, neglect, and even disdain. They are frequently misconceived as "taking over," "model students," "un-American," and/or "inauthentic minorities" who siphon resources away from minority groups thought to be more deserving.⁴ Sadly, these perspectives do exist at De Anza.⁵

Therefore, engaging in institutional efforts that involve AAPI students requires De Anza's next college president to be knowledgeable of, skillful, and savvy with these complex

was not asked a question about AAPI student groups in the context of the AANAPISI program, nor did he make any statement pertaining to them during the full interview.

In the recorded interviews posted on De Anza's "President Search" webpage, none of the three finalists made any direct statement relating to AAPI communities, not even when asked questions about diversity, equity, and inclusion. One candidate did reference "Asian" in terms of his own self-identification and a general mentioning of the "local demographics." Notably, when asked pointedly about diversifying "the full-time, tenured and part-time faculty to reflect the student demographics we serve," none of the finalists commented on the college demographics of AAPI students and faculty, nor spoke about any needs of the AAPI communities.

In summary, the finalists' responses in the Academic Senate and the recorded interviews highlight the utter invisibility of AAPI communities in their considerations of becoming De Anza's next college president.

² Worth noting, over 60% of De Anza's international student population is from the greater Asia region or of Asian ethnicity. See also "De Anza College Census Enrollment Comparisons Report Spring 2018 [sic] to Spring 2019 [sic]" Institutional Research, De Anza College, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.deanza.edu/ir/deanza-research-projects/enrollment/DA%20F16%20and%20F17%20memo.pdf>

³ "Leading Metropolitan Areas with the Highest Population of Asians in the U.S. in 2018," Statista. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/432719/us-metropolitan-areas-with-the-highest-percentage-of-asian-population/>

⁴ "Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: Facts, Not Fiction, Setting the Record Straight," National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008.

⁵ Mae Lee and Rowena M. Tomaneng, "Power in Partnerships: Racial Politics in Reciprocity and Transformation at an AANAPISI," in *Transformative Practices for Minority Student Success: Accomplishments of Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions*, eds, Dina C. Maramba and Timothy P. Fong. Stylus, 2020.

dynamics of race. This is all the more important given the multiplicity of AAPI students, a population that encompasses at least fifteen ethnic groupings at De Anza.⁶

Our college's commitment to serving all students—including AAPI students—requires a president that has demonstrated their ability to pay attention to and be insightful about the unique needs of AAPI students. In our view, none of the three finalists met this baseline standard.

The National Context

Moreover, this is a pivotal time in our nation, when anti-Asian scapegoating and acts of aggression have highlighted the distinct and vulnerable place of Asian Americans in the American racial landscape. Asian Americans have been singled out for their racial appearance and targeted as symbols of foreign-originated danger.⁷ In response, Asian Americanist scholars and community leaders have reminded us that xenophobic anti-Asian hostility and violence have a history as long as the presence of Asians in the U.S., extending back to the late 1800s.⁸ Responses to the current pandemic urge us to recognize that “Yellow Peril” movements can be re-invigorated in moments of crisis, endangering Asian Americans.

The national crisis at hand has implications for De Anza. The next De Anza college president would do well to have an attuned sensibility and set of skills capable of recognizing when bold college leadership is needed, particularly when a minority group of the college community becomes an exposed target across the country. This underscores the need for a college president who can exhibit foresight, courage, discernment, and action in speaking up for historically marginalized communities. Importantly, this includes speaking up for AAPIs. From our perspective, none of the three finalists presented themselves in this light.

⁶ De Anza's Institutional Research use of the “Asian American” and “Pacific Islander” student categories include the following groups: Asian Indian, Asian/Other Asian, Cambodian, Chinese, Fijian, Filipino, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Other Pacific Islander, Samoan, Tongan, and Vietnamese.

⁷ Sabrina Tavernise and Richard A. Opiel Jr., "Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese Americans Fear for Their Safety," *New York Times*, 23 March 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html?referringSource=articleShare>

⁸ "Treating Yellow Peril: Resources to Address Coronavirus Racism," Jason Oliver Chang, Associate Professor of History and Asian American Studies, University of Connecticut. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-DLnAY5r-f4DRLZgndR_Bu47nqHVtAOKem5QRmbz7bg/edit

Holding De Anza Faithful to Its Values

While each of the three finalists is no doubt a quick learner and open to working with De Anza's AAPI communities, it would be a disservice to the college and the surrounding Santa Clara Valley community to have a new college president who would be "learning-on-the-job" when it comes to the racial dynamics of meeting the specific educational needs of AAPI students. As with any essential job skill, we would expect a new college president to bring those competencies with them to the position, with previous experience.

We believe any finalist for the position of De Anza president should have a track record of knowledge, skills, and abilities in working with AAPI students, classified professionals, faculty, and local communities, and have something substantive to say about their specific histories and challenges.

In short, ASAM and APASA cannot in good conscience advocate for the hiring of any of the three finalists given our commitment to holding De Anza faithful to our stated values of "promoting and advancing educational excellence, equity, social justice and diversity."⁹ In our evaluation, all three finalists fall short of a truly inclusive approach to these values given their lack of familiarity, unproven abilities, and missing work experience with AAPI communities. We expect more for De Anza College.

Our Expectations

Regardless of the outcome of the presidential search, ASAM and APASA are prepared to work with whomever becomes the next college president.

It is important for us to state, however, that we do have clear expectations for the incoming president. To facilitate ongoing, direct communication and informed decision-making, ASAM and APASA expect to hold regular meetings with the new president upon the start of their tenure. We also expect that the new president acquaint themselves with research on the challenges that AAPI students experience, the misconceptions about this student population, and best practices for supporting the success of AAPI student communities. Moreover, we expect the new president to mindfully develop their competencies in working effectively with AAPI students, and with AAPI faculty, classified professionals, and community members.

⁹ De Anza College Presidential Search Position Announcement. Retrieved from <http://www.deanza.edu/president-search/position.html>

Lastly, should there be an opportunity to ask a follow-up question to the finalists ahead of any final decision on the college presidency, ASAM and APASA would urge Chancellor Miner to ask each finalist: *Given your lack of direct experiences with AAPI students, what specific steps will you take to ensure the access, retention, and success of our AAPI students?* ASAM and APASA believe such a question would help cultivate thoughtfulness on the part of the finalists in developing a clearer vision of how they will support De Anza's AAPI student populations.

In closing, ASAM and APASA want to express our appreciation in having Chancellor Miner and the members of the Presidential Search Hiring Committee seriously take into consideration our expressed reservations about the finalists. We raise our concerns to make sure that AAPI students are not overlooked because our sincerest hope is that De Anza College truly does serve all students.

Respectfully,

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Sherwin Mendoza • Faculty, ASAM; Member, APASA

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Scott Olsen • System Support Tech II, ACE CS VP, DA CS Treasurer; Member, APASA

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Tom Nguyen • Counselor, Biological Health & Environmental Sciences Division; Member, APASA

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