

# Filipino Recruitment and Retention at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa

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This article is concerned with the recruitment and retention of Filipino students at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. The research study for this paper had three objectives. The first objective was to identify the various obstacles that a Filipino student faces in seeking higher education, i.e., recruitment barriers. Studies have shown that there are many such obstacles that Filipino students encounter in entering college such as financial barriers, lack of effective outreach programs, underpreparation in high school, articulation problems with the community colleges, and lack of educational role models (Agbayani and Takeuchi 1987; UH Task Force on Filipinos 1988).

The second objective of our research was to determine the obstacles faced by Filipino students in remaining at the University. Our approach to analyze the retention situation for Filipinos was first to review the various aspects of the problem for students. For example, what was their socioeconomic background, were they the first generation of college students in their family, did they receive any moral or financial support from their parents, how were their financial needs to remain in college met, and what kinds of academic problems did they encounter and how did they address them.

The third objective of our study was to develop recommendations on approaching and overcoming the recruitment and retention obstacles faced by Filipino students. For example, based on our review of the literature, one possible suggestion is that the University focus its recruitment efforts on high school sophomores and juniors since it is to the students' advantage to set their future educational goals prior to their senior year. Some may argue that the sophomore year is a bit early for students to be planning for higher education. However, sufficient college preparation requires several years of planning. Also, the well prepared student will not feel as much pressure in the senior year in high school as the others who did not consider college until their last year.

## Methodology

During the Fall 1989 semester, we drafted a five page questionnaire which consisted of questions on the high school background of students and on their

academic experiences in college. The questionnaire included both objective and open ended questions. It was pretested on five Filipino students at UH Manoa who were not enrolled in any Filipino language or culture courses. After the pretest, some adjustments were made to the questionnaire. For instance, the open ended questions were interspersed between the multiple choice questions so that the respondents would fully complete the former questions. Administering the pretest also allowed us to determine the appropriate amount of time needed to complete the questionnaire which was about 15 to 20 minutes. In general, the questions asked referred to recruitment to UH Manoa, retention activities to remain in the University, and recommendations to improve the recruitment and retention of Filipino students at the University.

To obtain our sample of Filipino students, we originally planned on visiting Psychology 100 courses or randomly selecting participants from the student files of Operation Manong (a UH Manoa support services program for Filipino students), but both ideas were not feasible. The Psychology classes would not have had sufficient numbers of Filipino students, and by randomly selecting students from the Operation Manong files, our chances of reaching juniors and seniors, our intended sample group, would have been restricted. The reason for focusing on juniors and seniors as the respondents was because of their probably greater experiences with recruitment and retention obstacles and with developing solutions and strategies to meet them than younger students.

Through the assistance and cooperation of Philippine language instructors, the questionnaire was distributed in several of their classes at the University only to students who identified themselves as Filipino and who were willing to complete the questionnaire. We believed that this procedure would result in a combination of both immigrant and American born Filipino students in our sample. Five Tagalog and Ilokano language classes were surveyed which resulted in a total of 45 completed questionnaires. The instructions to the students were stated on the questionnaire itself. We verbally told them the purpose of the survey and stressed the confidentiality of their responses. The last 15 to 20 minutes of class time were used to complete the questionnaire.

The last question of the survey requested students interested in assisting us further with our research project through a personal interview to write their name and telephone number. Nineteen of the 45 students (42.2%) were willing to be interviewed. Initially we tried to interview junior and senior students but found it necessary to interview a few sophomores as well. Given the unbalanced male to female ratio of Filipino students at UH Manoa, six females and four males

were selected to be interviewed. The interviews were approximately 30 to 45 minutes long and were tape recorded with the students' consent. Questions that were asked included: "What obstacles did you face in entering and remaining in college?;" "How did you cope with these obstacles?;" "Do you have any recommendations for improving the education of Filipino students at UH Manoa?" Written notes of some of their previous responses on the questionnaire were used as prompts for the students to explain and expand their ideas verbally in the interview. Interviewing students was an important part of our research since it allowed for intimate conversations with Filipino students who are concerned with the educational progress and welfare of our ethnic group.

The following section discusses the results obtained in our survey. The first section is concerned with the high school and socioeconomic background of the students and the second section with their academic status and experiences in college.

### Pre-College Background

The questionnaire sample totaled 45 respondents, 24 of whom were males (53.3%) and 21 were females (46.7%). This result was not expected since there are more Filipino females at the University than males (Institutional Research Office 1991: 29).

The students were graduated from 25 different high schools. Thirty-six students attended public high schools (80.0%) and 9 were from private schools (20.0%). Three-fourths of the students were graduated from an O'ahu high school, 13.3 percent from a neighbor island school, 6.7 percent from a U.S. mainland school, and one student each from high schools in Guam and the Philippines. There was a ten year span in terms of the year the students were graduated from high school (1979 to 1989). The largest number of graduates in a given year was in 1988 (28.8%).

The students were asked who influenced them to attend college. Over forty percent (41.5%) gave their parents as the most influential persons, while other persons cited were high school counselors (18.4%), high school teachers (13.8%) and other relatives (10.7%). Our anticipated finding that parents generally encouraged their children to work right out of high school was not quite accurate for this sample group. Of course, we also have to take into consideration those who are working instead of attending college who were not reached in our survey.

All 45 students in the survey had parents with some kind of formal education. Their fathers' educational background ranged from elementary school (24.4%) to high school graduate (24.4%) and college graduate (22.2%). Four of the fathers even attended graduate school (8.8%). Very similar results were found for the mothers' educational level: elementary school (22.2%), high school graduate (24.4%), college graduate (24.4%) and attended graduate school (11.1%). These results indicate that not only parents who are college graduates are concerned about their children's educational future. It did not matter if their parents' highest educational level was elementary school, high school or college; the students still were most influenced to pursue higher education by their parents.

In reviewing the parents' occupations, the fathers were craft workers (26.6%), service workers (24.4%), professionals (17.7%), laborers (13.3%) and managers/administrators (4.4%). The mothers were in the professions (24.4%), craft or skilled work (17.7%), laboring jobs (15.5%), administration (8.8%), operative or semiskilled work (8.8%) and service work (6.6%). Seven of the mothers (15.5%) were not employed, whereas all of the fathers were employed. Almost two-thirds of the fathers had blue collar kinds of jobs, while the mothers were predominantly in professional and skilled work. These findings were not expected since we thought that a majority of the parents would be in service work such as room maids and food service workers in the tourist industry. Examples of the professional positions of the parents included medical doctors, electrical engineers, registered nurses, teachers and an economist.

A little more than half (51.1%) of the parents had a combined annual income under \$35,000. A majority of the students thus come from low to middle income families. Most of the parents were in the \$25,000 to \$29,999 (15.5%) and the \$30,000 to \$34,999 (13.3%) income brackets. A few families were in the \$5,000 to \$9,999 range (6.6%). The highest annual income for one family was \$70,000. However, over one-third (35.5%) of the students did not know their parents' combined income.

### In-College Background

The students had majors in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences and Social Welfare, and Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources. A plurality (28.8%) of the students were in Arts and Sciences (e.g., Political Science and Sociology), while substantial numbers were also majoring in Business Administration (26.6%) and

in Health Sciences and Social Welfare (e.g., Nursing and Social Work) (20.0%). Significant percentages of the students were in Education (8.8%) and Engineering (8.8%).

The students had a wide range of cumulative grade point averages (GPA) from 2.00 to 4.00 with a plurality of them having a GPA of 3.00 or better.

We initially intended to focus our study particularly on juniors and seniors. However, due to the difficulty in finding respondents in only those two grade levels, the students ranged from freshmen to seniors. Nonetheless, the two largest groups were juniors (33.3%) and sophomores (35.5%).

There was a notable finding concerning the highest degree that the students planned to obtain. Over forty percent (44.4%) of the students wished to earn a master's degree, while about one-fourth (26.7%) hope to obtain a bachelor's degree. Lower percentages of the students planned to obtain a professional diploma (8.9%), juris doctorate (8.9%) or doctorate (11.1%). A professional diploma certifies one to teach in the State of Hawai'i educational system. In the College of Education, Filipinos represent only 6.0 percent of the undergraduate and graduate students (Institutional Research Office 1990: 2). Therefore, it can already be seen that within five years the number of Filipino teachers will increase very little. It also is clearly evident that not many Filipino students desire to earn a degree higher than a master's which implies that the number of potential Filipino faculty members will remain low. But because most of the students are young (18-23 years old), they may later decide to seek a doctorate and to pursue an academic career.

One of the primary obstacles for entering and remaining in college is financial need. One way to deal with this problem is to work while attending college. Two-thirds (68.8%) of the students were employed on a part-time basis. The number of work hours ranged from 6.5 to 30 hours per week with a majority of the students working between 15 and 20 hours. Another way that students can cope with their financial needs is by applying for financial assistance. There are different forms of financial aid such as Pell grants, guaranteed student loans, work-study grants, State and private scholarships, and tuition waiver awards. Almost one-third (31.1%) of the students reported that they were not receiving any type of financial assistance, while the others were on tuition waiver (35.6%), scholarship (17.1%) or work-study (8.8%) or had a loan or some other type of financial aid such as Veteran's benefits (6.7%). While one of the greatest obstacles for Filipino students in pursuing a college degree is financial in nature, the significant percentage of the students who were not beneficiaries of financial

aid could be explained by their not being aware of the various forms of assistance available or by their not qualifying. However, a majority of the students had parents with an annual income below \$35,000 and therefore should be eligible for some form of financial aid. As for guaranteed student loans or work-study grants, many students may not be aware of these other options, or they may not be attracting applicants.

With regard to where the students were residing, the greatest number was staying in a campus dormitory (44.4%). The next highest group was living with their parents or relatives (42.2%), and the remaining students resided in off campus accommodations (13.3%). Living on campus can have beneficial academic results for students primarily because of their proximity to university facilities and activities. The UH Manoa dormitories are within walking distance of the central campus. Living on campus, a student can easily study at the library, work at the computer and science labs, and meet with friends for a study group. In one of the interviews, a student said that commuting from Waipahu was one of his biggest obstacles in staying in college because of the considerable time taken up by traveling to and from the University.

#### Recruitment to UH Manoa

As noted above, the students indicated that the persons who influenced them to attend college were primarily their parents and high school counselors and teachers. No student indicated a specific Filipino role model such as a public figure or professional as influencing their decision to seek a college education. Our own ideas as to who would be considered a role model did not correlate with the views of the respondents since we had initially thought a role model to be an elected official or a public individual of some sort. The students' not reporting a Filipino public figure could mean one of two things: either they are not aware of such Filipino professionals, or there is an insufficient number of Filipino professionals who are recognized as role models.

Based on our literature review, we identified various obstacles that a Filipino student encounters in entering college. We thought that financial need would be the most significant problem for them, and indeed almost one-half (48.0%) of the students said that financial need was the greatest obstacle they faced in entering college. The second most significant barrier they reported was lack of information on college (26.0%). Only 2 percent of the students said that lack of family encouragement was their biggest obstacle.

There were many significant responses given by the students concerning the ways they approached their greatest barrier when they entered UH Manoa. The most common way of dealing with these problems was to initiate action on their own to address them. For example, students said, "I had to learn on my own through experience;" "I attended the college fair;" "I obtained course outlines and application forms;" "I saved my money since my freshman year in high school;" "It was a big shock! I just learned to adapt quickly." While we believe that every Filipino student has the capability and initiative to act on these various obstacles, support services should be provided by the University to assist them.

The second most frequently given response in coping with recruitment barriers was that students applied for financial aid to meet their college expenses. The third most commonly reported means of overcoming obstacles was to join various student support services programs such as the College Opportunities Program or summer college preparatory programs.

#### Retention at UH Manoa

The most significant problems that the students reported facing in remaining in college were academic problems (25.3%), financial barriers (20.6%), lack of a support system (19.0%) and lack of role models (9.5%). Other obstacles mentioned included "lack of self motivation," "stress," "no guidance," "burn-out" and "no one to teach me about the system."

A majority of the students (60.0%) reported having no problems with their studies at UH Manoa, while the remainder (40.0%) requested assistance of some kind. The major areas in which these students stated that they needed help were time management, failing grades, comprehension of text material, taking notes, and being assertive in large lecture classes. A few students also expressed concern with the high student to teacher ratio at the University and for the need for more encouragement and a sense of direction in their major field.

Regarding classroom situations, the students indicated that they feel most comfortable in smaller classes which allow for one-to-one interaction between the instructor and individual students and in classes with other Filipino students to help them feel accepted and not intimidated by being the only Filipino in class. They also preferred instructors with innovative teaching methods to break the boredom of straight lecturing.

#### Recommendations

##### *Recruitment*

The third objective of our study was to develop recommendations on approaching and overcoming the recruitment and retention obstacles for Filipino students. Financial need was found to be the greatest recruitment barrier for Filipino students, and so the first recommendation is that students should be informed about and encouraged to apply for financial assistance even if they believe they may not qualify. By submitting the financial aid form students can receive: 1) Pell grants - money that does not have to be paid back to the federal government; 2) guaranteed student loans - funds that the student does not have to begin paying back until six months after graduating from college; and 3) work-study grants - campus employment opportunities. Oftentimes students ask, "Where do I begin to find information on scholarships?" High school counselors should have knowledge of locally available scholarships. Also, State and privately funded scholarships are listed in a book which is published each year by the State Department of Education called *Bulletin 15*. Each high school and the public libraries should have a copy of this book. We also recommend that the University continue to have scholarships, tuition waivers and other forms of financial aid available specifically for Filipino students. On its part, the Filipino community should establish more scholarships like the Justice Ben Menor Scholarship sponsored by the Operation Manong Alumni Association.

The second greatest recruitment obstacle for Filipino students was the lack of information on college. Many of the respondents said that they dealt with this problem by taking the initiative themselves to obtain the information they required. Our recommendation to the University is that more UH students, professors and representatives of campus organizations such as Operation Manong should go to the high schools and inform and recruit students to UH Manoa. Many Filipino students have entered UH Manoa with the help of organizations on campus such as Operation Manong, the College Opportunities Program, the Upward Bound Program and the Fil-Am Students Club. These organizations should continue to meet with high school students and inform them about the programs and services available at the University because it is evident that they have benefited many students. We also recommend that individual colleges and departments at UH Manoa send a Filipino faculty or student representative to talk about their degree programs with high school students.

High schools should designate a college counselor and a college information office at each school. If a high school already has a college counselor, his/her services should be made known to the students so that all seniors have the opportunity to meet with the college counselor. About three-fourths (73.3%) of the students indicated that their high school offered some kind of preparatory training for taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). All schools should offer specific training for the SAT examination given the importance which has been attributed to SAT scores as admission criteria.

In terms of higher education, it must be understood that the cultural background of Filipino and other minority students is such that they need a little encouragement and support from the community. If the education of Filipino students is to be enhanced, support services have to be made more available to them. We believe that every Filipino student is capable of becoming whatever they desire, but it must be remembered that they need assistance. The only way that there can be an increase in Filipino enrollment at the University is to have Filipino college students, faculty, administrators and community leaders work together for the benefit of future Filipino university students.

It does not seem that lack of family encouragement to attend college is a major problem for Filipino students. Given the parents' encouragement, we recommend that more parent information sessions on college admission, financial aid and degree programs be conducted at all high schools. These sessions will enable parents and students to understand and communicate better with each other about the student's future education. Parents should become actively involved in their child's education by having an understanding of their aspirations and career plans.

The students said that more Filipinos can be encouraged to attend college by recruiting, informing and supporting them at the high school level. Accordingly, Filipino role models, such as educators, politicians and businessmen, should speak at the high schools. More importantly, in order to have Filipino teachers in the private and public schools serve as immediate role models to students, there is a need for more Filipino college students to be interested in teaching as a career. We recommend having Filipino Education majors recruit high school students into teaching.

Lastly, a very important recommendation to high school students is to develop self motivation and individual effort. Students must realize that others will not always be there to give them information. Therefore we ask that all high school students take the initiative to obtain information on their own by seeking

out counselors and teachers, joining various organizations in high school such as Fil-Am clubs, taking part in the Sariling Gawa leadership conference and by asking college students for information about college.

#### *Retention*

As stated above, the biggest obstacle faced by Filipino students in remaining at UH Manoa concerned academic problems. In response to this barrier, very few students sought assistance from campus organizations such as Operation Manong or the Learning Assistance Center (LAC). Other students relied on their friends for support such as in study groups or by taking courses from certain instructors recommended by their friends. More information should be made available so that Filipino and other minority students seek assistance from student services programs that can help them to continue at UH Manoa.

Many freshman students can become easily discouraged by their first semester's grades, not realizing that the adjustment from high school to the University is not that easy, especially when 80 percent of Filipino students were graduated from a public high school where the curriculum may not have been as difficult as at a private school. The LAC is a wonderful resource in teaching students basic college skills such as time management, notes taking, test taking, research paper development, and writing skills. Students should also be informed about other services on campus such as the writing, mathematics and computer labs, academic advising and personal tutoring. Lastly, another excellent means of assistance is to meet with the Teaching Assistant (TA) for extra help in a course. Only one student reported using the TA for help, and not one student mentioned seeing the course instructor directly for additional instruction or assistance. The reason for this could be the intimidation factor for minority students of approaching a White male professor, especially since the great majority of the professors on the UH Manoa campus are White males. Students must be encouraged to be more assertive and aggressive in the classroom setting and in their relationships with instructors.

The second most frequently reported retention obstacle was financial need. Students already have enough responsibilities keeping up with their courses, yet wondering where the next semester's tuition and housing fees are going to come from can be a constant source of stress. Operation Manong and the Centers for Hawaiian Studies and for Women Studies are a few of the units on campus which offer minority students tuition waivers or other kinds of financial aid, but there should be more assistance available to minorities especially since tuition is only part of the cost of attending college. Therefore we recommend that more

educational seminars be presented to parents and the Filipino community to make them better aware of the financial assistance available and perhaps to help them establish new scholarship programs within the community.

The third concern reported by the students in remaining in college was the lack of support systems. This concern has many different forms, for example, the lack of fellow Filipino students on the UH Manoa campus, feeling unassociated in some way with the other students, not feeling accepted because of differences in culture and economic background, not having any minority faculty or staff to help them with their courses and not having bilingual tutors available to assist them. The recommendation in this case is to establish a peer support system similar to Operation Manong's Buddy-Buddy program which provides a "big brother" or "big sister" to incoming students at UH Manoa whether freshmen or community college transfers. For some students, just having a friend with a common background helps them to make the adjustment to the large campus. To see familiar faces on campus and to have a few close friends would make any student feel much more accepted and comfortable. This is especially true for Filipinos since they comprise just 7.9 percent of UH Manoa students (IRO 1991: 18). Both faculty and students of other ethnic groups need to see the importance of and be sensitive to the very real adjustment problems which Filipinos face as minority students at the University.

With regard to instructors, the recommendations are for them to establish personal relationships with Filipino students, to make themselves available to assist students and to make students feel more like equals with them. Instructors also should be energetic, enthusiastic and friendly, besides being knowledgeable of their subject matter and having well planned, organized and prepared lectures.

### Conclusion

We were very pleased with our research findings since we did not initially anticipate being able to correlate so many concerns and recommendations to improve the educational system at UH Manoa for Filipino students. Many significant issues were raised which need to be addressed by University administrators and faculty as well as by community leaders. The Filipino community also needs to be informed so that it can contribute to the recruitment and retention of Filipino students at UH Manoa. Family support is the most essential factor in having Filipinos attain higher education and rise out of their low social status in the State of Hawai'i.

### Note

The research for this article was conducted through our participation in 1989-90 in the Hawai'i Minority Pregraduate Program which is sponsored jointly by the UH Graduate Division and Operation Manong.

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