Understanding Campus Climate Through Voices of Filipino/a American College Students

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UNDERSTANDING CAMPUS CLIMATE THROUGH THE VOICES OF FILIPINA/O AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The purpose of this article is to discuss findings that investigate the experiences of Filipina/o American college students at a large, research I institution in southern California. Qualitative data was collected through one-on-one interviews to elicit responses related to the campus environment, sense of campus community/sense of belonging, and feelings associated with being a Filipina/o student in a predominantly White institution. The findings indicate a challenging campus environment on both academic and social levels for these students. Results also suggest the importance of institutions playing an active role in facilitating a conducive learning environment while being intentional in addressing issues of equity and diversity for Filipina/o American college students.

Campus climate was identified as central to the persistence and attrition of students of color (Bennett, 1995; Smith and Associates, 1997), particularly those attending predominantly White institutions of higher education (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). For example, Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) contend that a positive climate with interaction of diverse peers and strong academic support led to a higher sense of inclusiveness to the campus. Yet, understanding how students of color experience these types of institutions still remains a major imperative for institutional agents (faculty, staff and administrators) as a result of the ever increasing diversity on college and university campuses.

According to the American Council on Education (ACE) (2005), the total U.S. college and university undergraduate enrollment for fall 2003-04 was more than 17.5 million consisting of 14% African American, 1% American Indian, 6% Asian American, 13% Latino/a, 2% other races and minorities and 63% White (ACE 2005). If ACE estimates are accurate, these percentages will be especially profound in the ensuing years for students of color. Current demographic trends indicate, 4 out of 10 (36%) U.S. university students are students of color. Therefore, fostering an institutional environment with a positive, affective and cognitive learning environment for all students continues to be a mandate for higher education institutions.

Although the literature on campus climate provides us with a myriad of relevant issues and topics on how students experience the college environment, a significant amount of the literature focuses on similarities and differences between students of color and their White counterparts (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Hurt-
tado & Carter, 1997). Very few of these studies have disaggregated the data to determine how individual students of color experience and/or perceive the college environment (Ancis, 2000). Of the existing research, only a small percentage is directed specifically at Asian Pacific American (APA) students. This may be due in part to the model minority stereotype that surrounds APA students in higher education (Bennett, 1995; Yeh, 2004). For example, the stereotype assumes APA college students are high-achieving and adapt more easily to majority dominated environments than other students of color, therefore they do not require any support services (Suzuki, 2002; Yeh 2002). Stereotypes, such as these, not only oversimplify the social and intellectual achievements of APA students, but, they also work to “silence” the voices of some in the group who live under the cloak of silence because of these varied stereotypes (Hune, 2002; Nakanishi, 1989). For instance, according to Suzuki (2002) counseling centers have been strongly influenced by the model minority stereotype by assuming that APA students are academically acclimated, motivated and come from well adjusted families. Research in this area, however, showed that in addition to increased racial harassment and violence against APAs, many students were also experiencing tremendous amounts of stress, alienation and pressure to do well academically, thus affecting their well being (Suzuki, 2002).

For this reason and perhaps others, numerous researchers (Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989; Siu, 1996; Yeh, 2004) argue for disaggregating the APA category to gain a clearer picture of the students’ needs and concerns. For instance, in the APA category, the criteria suggested to disaggregate the population include ethnicity, English proficiency and U.S. generation status, geographical location and family characteristics (Hune, 2002; Yeh, 2004). Although the APA category comprises over 50 ethnic groups (Lee, 2006), most of the research on APA college students has been on Chinese, Japanese and Koreans (Siu, 1996). Further, in the state of California, Filipina/o Americans represent the second largest group, yet, research generally does not include this group in discussion (Siu, 1996).

According to the 2000 census, the state of California has the largest Asian population in the United States at 4.3 million; of this number, Chinese represent 980,000 (23%) closely followed by Filipinas/os at 903,000 (21%) (Yan & Ong, 2003). Despite their significant numbers, Filipinas/os are generally excluded in the research on APA students in higher education thus indicating more research is needed. Few scholars have addressed the reasons why research often excludes Filipinas/os; however, Okamura and Agbayani (1997) suggest that Filipina/o Americans fall victim to the model minority stereotype, thus assuming that they are overrepresented and have no academic problems. These researchers discuss Filipino Americans in higher education and provide evidence of institutional barriers to their access to higher education, their declining enrollment in college admission and a severe lack of curriculum that reflects Filipina/o Americans. They also found that, although they have high aspirations for college, second and third generation Fil-
Filipina/o Americans are underrepresented in colleges and universities. The researchers cite a 1988 study that finds, Filipinas/os in high school have a high dropout rate compared to other APA groups. They use the example of Hawaii with the second largest Filipina/o American population in the U.S. (18%) in K-12 public schools but have less than 10% Filipina/o Americans at the main University of Hawaii campus. In 1986, Filipinas/os, as a result of being categorized as APA and under the assumption that they were overrepresented in higher education institutions were removed from affirmative actions programs at the University of California. In 1996, at the University of California, Los Angeles, out of a total of 1,377 undergraduate students only 358 Filipina/o Americans (26%) were admitted, the lowest of all ethnic groups. Although not specific to college students' experience but still valuable in this discussion, the few research studies that do exist on Filipina/o Americans (Aghayani-Siewert, 1994; Espiritu, 1994; Revilla, 1997; Wolf, 1997) have provided discussion around immigration experience, assimilation, family, second generation struggles and ethnic identity. Here, the focus is on identifying challenges facing Filipina/o American students in higher education. Specifically, this study investigates how the students perceive their campus climate, evaluate their sense of belonging, and express their feelings of being on a predominantly White campus.

Methodology

Participants

A large public research I institution in southern California was selected for the study site. Eight hundred ninety-six are Filipina/o students out of a total of 17,505 undergraduates. Given their low representation in the total undergraduate population, the selection of participants for the study was purposeful (Patton, 1990). However, consideration was given to select students that would provide variety in academic experiences and grade levels. A total of 143 undergraduate students participated in the study which included 82 women and 61 men. Of this number, 29 were freshman, 27 were sophomores, 31 were juniors and 56 were senior standing.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research is part of a larger study which utilized a mixed method research design that combined interpretive data with survey data in an attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the status of Filipina/o American students who participated in the study. For the purpose of this discussion, only qualitative data will be presented here to explore the participants' responses in depth. Given the goal of this study is to gain an understanding from the students' perspective, qualitative research methods are used because the paradigm permits the examination of experiences in cultured spaces (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research also provides social inquiry that emphasizes "a complex, holistic picture" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Qualitative data for the study was collected through one-on-one, tape-recorded
interviews, conducted by the researcher who identifies as Filipina American. According to Baca Zinn (1979), it is possible for researchers who are members of marginalized groups to have an “insider” advantage of obtaining candid responses. A semi-structured interview protocol (Merriam, 1998) was used to elicit responses to primary questions related to campus environment, sense of community, and feelings associated with being a Filipina/o student in a predominantly White institution. However, deviations were permitted to allow participants to share experiences they felt were meaningful to their navigation of the campus environment. Member checking was also utilized to “verify one’s data and interpretations with study respondents to help guard against investigator bias” (Padgett, Mathew & Conte, 2004, p. 226). Follow up questions were also incorporated to ensure respondents provided as much detail to their responses as possible (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview data were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of the students’ responses. The responses were then categorized to correspond with each question (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While responses provide a glimpse into the students’ individual experiences, they also provide insight into the collective experience of Filipina/o students at the university.

Findings and Discussion

This study was guided by three research questions about Filipina/o American college students: 1) How do they perceive the existing campus environment 2) How do they perceive community and sense of belonging on campus and 3) How do they feel about being a Filipina/o American student in a predominantly White institution? The research questions served as three broad categories: Campus Environment, Sense of Community/Sense of Belonging and Feelings of Being a Filipina/o American College Student. The participant responses provided "thick, rich descriptions" (Denzin, 1989, p. 15) thus, the data from the interviews helped to elicit strong themes for each of these categories. The following provides poignant accounts from the participants’ college experiences.

Campus Environment

Under this category, three themes emerged that impacted how participants perceived the campus environment: ethnic representation, the need for Filipina/o specific courses, and experience with student services. In general, the students did not feel there was adequate representation of Filipinas/os on campus. They felt there is a considerable lack of Filipina/o courses. In addition, participants felt that student services did not cater to their concerns.

Ethnic representation

Under the theme of ethnic representation, the majority of the participants believed the representation of Filipinas/os in general was extremely low. They consistently expressed the lack of Filipina/o representation of students, faculty and administrators at all levels. For instance, some who knew the actual percentage of Filipina/o students on campus (5%) felt this number was especially low given the location of the university.

One student stated:
I wish there were more Filipina/o
students], so I [could] have more people to relate to because I don't see that many. The most I've seen is when we're all together at a [Filipino student organization] meeting. Other than that, there are a lot of Asians but hardly any Filipinos.

Another student expressed:
Representation here on campus, for Filipinos, is not high, [we are] not well represented. Considering the geographical location, there should be a strong population of Filipinos in the community. That baffled me coming in. Why weren't there more Filipinos?

This study was conducted in southern California, where Filipinas/os number 145,132 or 49% of the total APA population in this area (Dela Cruz & Agbayani Siewert, 2003). At this time, there does not exist a database regarding the total number of Filipina/o college students countywide. However, this current study indicates that 896 (5%) Filipinas/os attend this highly selective research I university consisting of an undergraduate population 17,505. The students were highly concerned about the low representation of Filipina/o students and stressed an even stronger reaction to the lack of faculty of color, most specifically Filipina/o American faculty. At the time of the study, the institution’s research office reported a total of 917 full-time faculty. Faculty of color accounted for 171 (18%) of this number. Of that number, there were only two full-time Filipina/o faculty, one of which was tenured at the time of the study. Okamura and Agbayani (1997) contend that the role of having Filipina/o faculty could influence the number of courses and research published about Filipinas/os as well as affect persistence of Filipina/o college students.

A senior participant stated:
Do we have any Filipino people that teach at this school? ...They've all been White male...just the fact I can't think of anyone is really bad.

When asked to name faculty of color they had encountered on campus, some respondents either could not name any, others named no more than three faculty of color with whom they had interacted or from whom they had taken a course. In speaking of the paucity of faculty of color, all of the students mentioned the level of comfort they might have experienced or had experienced in the classroom with a Filipina/o professor. Several of them shared how Filipina/o faculty reminded them of their parents or another close family relative such as their “lola” (i.e. grandmother) or “tita” (i.e. aunt) which immediately created a sense of familiarity. But some of the students who did not know whether there were Filipina/o professors on campus, considered having such faculty to be beneficial for themselves and the campus.

One participant commented:
I think it wasn’t until now that I realized how comfortable it would be for us as Filipinos/Filipinas to see faculty and professors that are Filipino. I feel disassociated with the culture especially being so far from my parents...having Dr. [X] was the best thing that I probably had expe-
rienced because it sort of relived the personality of my culture.

The responses of “feeling comfortable” and not seeing others who might “look” like them speaks to the need for a “critical mass” of students, faculty and administrators of color on college campuses, most particularly, Filipinas/os. Tinto (1993) points out the significance of a “critical mass (i.e. a sufficient number of persons of like backgrounds and interests from which viable communities can be formed) in the forming and sustaining of diverse student communities” (p. 59). The significance of a critical mass was also addressed in the University of Michigan law school case, *Grutter v. Bollinger* wherein the argument contends that if an ample number of students of color on campus are not present on campus, feelings of isolation and feeling “like spokespersons for their race” are more likely to happen (Anderson, Daugherty & Corrigan, 2005, p 53). Having a critical mass of students of color on campus not only resists the idea of tokenism but also creates a conducive learning environment for all students.

*Need for Filipino Specific Courses*

Students who expressed the need to have more Filipino faculty, also addressed the lack of a diverse curriculum, which led them to question the obvious absence of courses specifically about Filipinas/os. Some students indicated that they learned “close to nothing” about Filipino history in their K-12 and college experience and would like to learn about it. A few seniors took a one-time offered, student-initiated independent study class taught by a Filipino graduate student during their junior year. Consequently, the only major access to Filipino history is through their parents’ and elders’ personal stories. Okamura and Agbayani (1997) support this phenomenon of the continuing marginalization of Filipino American studies/curriculum. Some of the students’ comments follow.

One participant indicated:
You can find so many other classes about different cultures but [not] Filipino classes. So I feel like maybe some people don’t even know that it [Filipino culture] exists. It’s not given any respect.

Another commented:
I really want to know where I came from and what other Filipinos have gone through. I ask my mom a lot of questions. It’s hard for me to understand historical things [about Filipinos]. That’s where everything begins and it’s not taught in school.

Learning about Filipina/o American history is generally not taught at the primary and secondary levels and, unfortunately, the history is further marginalized at the university level. Okamura and Agbayani (1997) discuss Filipino/o American college students in terms of achievement, access, and advocacy in higher education. In their study, they found a severe lack of Filipino American studies at the college level. They contend that “much more has to be done to reach parity and equity for Filipino Americans in higher education…and cannot be accomplished without
continuing to increase the representation and success of Filipinos..." (p. 206).

**Experience with Student Services**

The need for support services on campus to provide programs and services that help promote cultural and social interaction opportunities for students of color has been supported by numerous studies (Pas- carella & Terenzini, 2005; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Tinto, 1993). These support services include academic and social support services, counseling and advising services and financial aid. Overall, respondents feel positive about resources and services that help them as a Filipina/o student on campus, albeit they were few in number. They mentioned both the academic support office and the multicultural center (where large numbers of students of color congregate). These two particular services seem to provide a supportive environment for many students of color.

One student stated:

The multicultural center has provided...that space away from academia...[we] have really good discussions [there]...[the center gives us the] feeling like we’re all part of this bigger thing for students of color and creating that community.

Another student shared:

When I go to the learning center, everyone knows each other...that’s where I feel there’s a community.

Unfortunately, a majority of the students in this study still feel that other services, such as academic advising and career counseling, are often not helpful and that some of the services on campus show a lack of sensitivity to their needs. For instance, one student sought career counseling to discuss the needs and requirements for graduate studies in counseling. She felt attacked and shocked by the counselor’s comments about her career choice. This student shares her experience in the following:

I was telling [the counselor] that I wanted to do counseling and do outreach and he said "Well you probably won’t find a good job. It’s not going to be stable. And outreach? Does outreach really help if you have outreach at high schools? Will it really affect the students? [I then said to myself] He was talking about people of color. Do you see that I’m a person of color? It was hard for me to get into this school and then you’re going to talk all this crap [about students of color] to my face?

An example such as the student’s response above points to the importance of having student advocates. Those who work for the university, which include advisors, counselors, administrators and faculty, must be sensitive and committed to understanding the needs of students of color. Rendón et al. (2000) emphasize the importance of “cultural translators, mediators and role models” to help students of color with issues that might arise as a result of conflicts between their culture of origin and the campus culture. Stanton-Salazar’s (1997) network-analytic framework helps explain the socialization of working class students of color in the educational sys-
tem. Stanton-Salazar discussed the importance of institutional agents (e.g. faculty, staff, and administrators) who help students with resources and opportunities in an institution and proposes a bicultural network orientation. A bicultural network orientation allows for students from ethnic minority groups to participate fully with school and its personnel by learning how to successfully engage and navigate through the mainstream system (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Institutional agents may also assist students with academic support and can provide them with mentorship. The network also assists students of color by providing informational resources and support that allow students to be successful while permitting them to retain their ethnic identity (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). When such networks do not exist, it may negatively affect retention of students of color.

**Sense of Belonging/Community on Campus**

Under the Sense of Belonging/ Community on Campus category, students were asked to describe perceptions of their campus community and sense of belonging. From their responses emerged three main themes 1) their sense of belonging to the campus as a whole 2) campus activity involvement, and 3) creating their own safe space on campus. A need for a strong sense of belonging as well as the importance of being involved in extracurricular activities on and off campus ultimately led the students to strategize ways to create their own space in the university.

**Sense of Belonging**

The importance of a sense of belonging on campus has been affirmed by a number of studies. Hurtado and Carter's (1997) study found that students' academic performance was not associated with students' sense of belonging on their campus; instead they contend that involvement in student racial/ethnic organizations may be the effect of an unwelcoming environment. They found that students involved in racial/ethnic organizations actually showed a high sense of belonging. If students are able to understand their environment through links with peer groups and other activities, then this may help in connecting students to the campus overall.

Students in this study defined their sense of belonging by their "sense of community" on campus. Their descriptions and definitions varied. Many of them make a distinction between the larger university community and their "own" community. Many questioned whether a university community actually exists, and asserted that if it did exist, they did not feel a part of it. Some participants further pointed out that there is not much of a community because the atmosphere is academically oriented, competitive and that students are "into their own thing." Although students did not feel an overall sense of community with the university as a whole, they identified closely with Filipina/o student organizations and/or some student services/resources on campus. They defined their sense of community as participation in Filipina/o or APA student organizations or through association with certain student services, such as the academic support center or the multicultural center.
One student commented:
If I stand back and look at it overall, I don’t think I’ve had a very strong sense of belonging to the campus. Even times when I did live on campus I always felt like I didn’t know what was going on. I always felt isolated.

*Campus Activity Involvement*

Another way the students defined their sense of belonging was how they viewed their involvement on campus. Many of the students in this study are involved in some form of extracurricular activity. While the majority of them are active in student organizations, others spend time with community activities off-campus. Most of the students active off-campus are commuters who keep close ties with church or community organizations. These findings also support Hurtado and Carter’s (1997) study on Latino students where they contend that a student’s sense of belonging may be an important factor in understanding how certain types of social and academic experiences affect students. They also addressed that students’ off-campus involvement with social community and religious organizations furthers a student’s sense of belonging. Similar to their findings, the current study affirms that those students involved in racial/ethnic organizations, show a higher sense of belonging to the campus.

According to Astin’s (1984) theory of involvement, the more involved students are on campus, the more they learn and positively experience college. Here, the study reveals that Filipina/o students continue to invest their energy in the struggle to fully participate in university life. One such way is being involved with campus organizations namely, student of color organizations and the multicultural center.

In her senior year, one student reflected on her active involvement with the APA organization. She credits friends who she met at a freshman summer bridge program and the APA student organization for her positive experience. This student shares the following:

I just feel that people at the bridge program, and eventually the Asian Pacific Islander organization, really opened up a lot of opportunity for community [for me]. Otherwise, I probably wouldn’t have felt as comfortable for my entire four years. I would have felt really disassociated with this university in general.

The level of student involvement on campus for these students varies from being a general member to holding a position in a student organization. Those who are active in Filipino and/or Asian organizations spoke at length about their participation, and the support they receive from being involved with these organizations.

One student expressed:
So now my extracurricular activities are mainly the Asian American organization along with the whole political thing and I really believe in the philosophy that we want to create a space for people because I feel without the Asian American organization, I wouldn’t have had a safe space. I would just go to class
and hate this university. It’s one of the reasons I don’t regret coming here anymore.

Creating a “Safe Space”

For the majority of the students, their lack of a sense of belonging to the university at large led them to carving out spaces of their own. A number of the respondents spoke extensively about the importance of creating their own space and the strategies they used to find and create a “safe space” at the university. The Filipina/o students’ notion of safe space does not necessarily refer to physical safety but more to do with cultural, social and political meanings. To be “safe” in this case is the ability to be and express oneself without the feeling of being tokenized and essentialized. The respondents’ concept of a “safe space” coincide with research studies that address a similar need to create niches and outlets for developing a sense of belonging for Latino students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Tinto (1992) also asserts that ethnic/race communities may serve as “much needed havens or safe places (p. 124).”

One student expressed:
I think we’ve made our own space because the campus [didn’t] really accept us [when they failed to] acknowledge our ethnicity.

Another student stated:
I feel a sense of community…but not with the university. It’s only because I found my safe spaces. [Those spaces are] the Asian Pacific Islander organizations and the multicultural center.

Feelings of Being Filipina/o American on a Predominantly White Campus

A number of studies about students of color have pointed to the importance of understanding their feelings about being a student of color on a predominantly White campus (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Rendón et al., 2000). In the findings of Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo (1994), validation and acknowledgement of students’ life experiences facilitates positive social and academic communities on campus hence, successful adjustment takes place. Under this category, students were asked about their feelings of being a Filipina/o American student on campus. In this section, three themes emerged: 1) feelings of being homogenized, 2) conflict within the classroom environment and 3) feelings of not having a voice on campus.

Feeling homogenized

Under this theme, in general, students feel that ethnic minority cultures are not looked upon highly by the university. A large majority of the students did not feel that the university acknowledges the Filipina/o presence on their campus. Many of them believe that Filipinas/os are “clumped” with the APA category, or generalized as people of color with no distinction among their cultures.

One student expressed:
I don’t know if they [the campus] know [we] exist because they lump us with the whole model minority with Asian and what they don’t see is that the Asian community is made up of different cultures.
As it is important to understand ethnic minority college experience as a whole, it is equally significant to study ethnic groups by disaggregating. The Filipina/o American college students in this study, who like many groups are systematically grouped in the APA category, are not given the opportunity to voice the intricacies and complexities of their experience in college. While the results of this study may show that there exist similarities with other ethnic groups, it also shows that there are areas distinct to each culture, for example, it is important to contextualize the Filipina/o American college experience within its complex historical and present relationship with the United States. This becomes critical in understanding yet another aspect of addressing the experience of Filipina/o college students.

**Conflict within the classroom**

Many students spoke in length about the challenging situations they encountered in the classroom, with professors, teaching assistants or other students, during discussions. Racial conflict becomes evident when respondents do not feel that the university values the life experiences of students of color. In classroom situations, students feel they have to "further explain themselves" or their culture. (It should also be noted that most of these incidents take place, mainly, in smaller discussion sections with teaching assistants, rather than in the lectures, that usually have more than 100 students.)

One such situation involved a student who wanted to conduct his senior research on how social capital is exchanged within different Filipina/o American communities. The topic was not well received by his professor and his teaching assistant (TA) because the student was not able to gather enough material using existing published academic literature and research studies on Filipina/o communities. This student felt the TA was questioning both the topic itself and the student’s efforts. The experience with the professor and TA led this student to question his own abilities and the worthiness of this topic. He proceeds with his story:

> So I was starting to question, am I doing something that’s worthwhile? Am I doing something that’s worthy of academic attention? Those things started going through my head. Like, am I not doing something that it’s not up to par or am I not capable? The process was very frustrating because I’ve never had a problem with research before and now it seems that now that I’m doing something with Filipino Americans, it’s like, oh, so now it’s becoming an issue or something’s being questioned.

Another student described a situation that took place in his organic chemistry lab. He was having a conversation with his teaching assistant about food; his TA criticized Asian food, but instead of commenting further on the TA’s remark, the student decided not to pursue the issue, mainly because he was worried about his grade in the lab class. He shares the following:

> My TA was like, “Yeah Asian food smells” and [I said] “Well not all of it smells.” I don’t think he realized
what kind of effect it had [on me]. Since he was my TA and he was more of an authority to me I didn’t want to say anything just because he’s the one that grades my papers.

Along a similar vein, Rendón et al. (2000) mention that many students of color leave college because of "cultural assaults" to their identity and self-esteem. Those who decide to stay may encounter denying their culture altogether, acquiescence to the practices of the dominant culture or develop a strong consciousness about their ethnic identity. Filipina/o students’ experiences gleaned from this study are related to the need to create a conducive academic learning environment. In addition, incidents in the classroom have also indicated that students have experienced what Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) would label as "microaggressions," which create an unwelcoming and uncomfortable environment for students of color. Bennett and Okinaka (1990) found that Asian students are the least satisfied with classes and do not have strong feelings of accomplishment. They also found that Asian and African American students are less satisfied with their university experience and have negative interracial contact on their campus. Classroom situations as presented above, can offer an explanation to the findings of Bennett and Okinaka.

Not having a valued voice

The feeling of not having a voice was another prevalent theme. Although what it meant to have a voice on campus was defined on different levels by respondents, what mattered most to them was whether or not their voice was being heard by professors, administrators, staff and other students. The idea of having a voice within the educational system has been discussed by Giroux (1992) who, in terms of critical pedagogy, emphasizes the need to create conditions for students “to speak so that their narratives can be affirmed and engaged” (p. 169).

Students defined what it meant to have a voice in various ways. Some describe it as being able to interact with a professor during office hours, being comfortable speaking in class or contributing to a small group discussion. These same students, however, because of class size did not feel comfortable interacting with their professor or speaking out in class. Some students shared that professors were not approachable. On another level, having a voice meant that they could be heard through being involved in protests and stand-ins as well as being involved in student organizations. Overall, students feel they have a voice but not necessarily one that is valued by the campus. In this sense, they feel their campus is not a comfortable environment that facilitates Filipina/o American student voices. These students assert that what is most important is whether their voice is being heard. The students’ efforts to be heard in their own voice and to be affirmed within the college environment is supported by the following.

One student stated:
I don’t know if we’re big enough or solid enough to have a voice. Our voice, it’s silenced in that we’re not listened to.
Another student response:
We learn about science, learn about math and learn a little bit about the social sciences but [my classes are] not much of a place where I would feel comfortable to voice my opinions, voice my ideas.

Another expressed:
The student orgs...that's where I would have the voice ...you can have the ability to express your voice but if no one will listen or not one is willing to understand what's going on, then there's really no point.

Conclusion
This study provided an examination of Filipina/o American students' perception of their college environment. On the Campus Environment level, the students expressed a lack of Filipina/o student, staff, faculty and administrator representation, the absence of Filipina/o specific courses and the necessity for some student services to be more sensitive to their needs. Under the Sense of Belonging category, developing a strong campus community and for creating safe spaces proved critical. Their responses to feelings of being a Filipina/o student in a predominantly White campus illustrated experiences of homogenization, classroom alienation and struggle to have a voice.

Implications
The way in which students perceive their campus environment impacts their academic and social experience. A sense of community and a strong sense of belonging for Filipina/o American college students both encompass critical components in the college experience. Feelings of being Filipina/o Americans on a predominantly White campus point to the need for institutional agents, such as faculty, staff and administrators (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Rendón et al. 2000), to address the areas indicated by students in this study. In addition, participants feel the curriculum excludes them and negative interactions or "racial microagressions" (Solorzano, et al., 2000) are prevalent both within the classroom and student services.

Moreover, Astin (1991) contends that the institutional environment plays a critical role in providing opportunities at the academic and social level. Tinto (1997) suggests the idea of learning communities in classrooms to decrease racial tensions through more interaction and communication. Baird (2000) stresses the importance of understanding the role that the institution plays in affecting students' ability to integrate into the college environment as well as examining the nature of students' perceptions of campus. This is particularly important when the university advocates community, but the standards of "community" do not apply to all students, especially to students of color.

In general, the results of this study point to a campus environment that invites academic involvement yet lacks the educational fortitude to create a climate that values diversity and voice. More importantly, when Filipina/o American students feel "voiceless," it becomes critical to explore how universities can begin to facilitate an environment that encourages engagement where voice and presence are
acknowledged and valued. The Filipina/o American students in this study indicate that the existing college environment, and their sense of belonging within it, are insufficient, in regards to both the conditions in place and their overall academic and personal development. Hence, future research needs to examine the existing institutional practices that contribute to the lack of ethnic representation, curriculum development for ethnic groups and student services offices or centers. Responding to this lack in cultural, social, and academic programs could contribute to the positive experiences of students of color on predominantly White campuses.

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