



**Asian and Asian-American Faculty Response
to the Draft LSA Strategic Plan on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

December 2, 2016

Indigo: The LSA Asian and Asian-American Faculty Alliance is an organization whose mission is to promote an inclusive climate in which Asian and Asian-American faculty flourish in teaching, research, service and leadership, and productively contribute to the rich diversity within the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) at the University of Michigan. It is an advocacy group by and for Asian and Asian-American (AAA) faculty in LSA. Indigo came into existence as a direct result of networking enabled by the open meeting on issues of concern to AAA faculty hosted by the LSA DEI Task Force in January 2016. For this, the Indigo members express our great appreciation.

The Draft LSA Strategic Plan on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI; August 2016) is a comprehensive and thoughtful document representing LSA's contribution to a critical initiative at the University of Michigan. Indigo greatly thanks Dean Andrew Martin and all those who contributed the substantial effort that generated this work, opening important conversations in the College. In what follows, we offer our perspective on enhancements to the Plan based on our experiences and knowledge as AAA faculty.

The Climate for Asians and Asian Americans

Asians and Asian Americans are themselves an extraordinarily diverse group that is defined differently by different entities. In this document, AAA individuals are

defined to be those with ethnic origin in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.¹ Pacific Islanders are often grouped with Asians, but socio-politically they also share concerns with Native Americans. Those with different ethnic origins share certain experiences--especially with respect to historical experiences in the United States--but these experiences may interact with different cultural backgrounds in varying ways. There are also variations in the way these different subgroups interact with, and are perceived by, the rest of society. Moreover, U.S.-born Asian Americans have substantially different experiences from immigrant Asians.

Asians and Asian-Americans are racialized as distinct from White people and other Peoples of Color. This differential racialization has been the basis for a legacy of legislative and judicial exclusion from citizenship, membership in society, and civil rights in the United States. It is also at the root of a history of anti-Asian bias and violence in the United States, as documented by historical and current research. The state of Michigan is the site of the historically notorious, racially motivated murder of Vincent Chin in metro Detroit in 1982. While the climate for AAA in the US has improved in the intervening years, it still remains decidedly chilly. For example, recent media incidents demonstrate the continued prevalence of anti-Asian bigotry: 1) the “Chinatown” segment on *The O’Reilly Factor* show (Fox News) that aired on October 3, 2016²; and 2) the “Go Back to China” incident on October 9, 2016 that sparked the viral #its2016 hashtag.³

In the academy, AAA appear to fare better than in American society at large. AAA students and researchers are present in larger numbers, and contribute to academic advances at all levels, including winning the Nobel Prize (e.g., UM alumnus Samuel C. C. Ting, Physics, 1976). But while many AAA faculty have ostensibly successful careers, studies show that a chilly climate for AAA exists even in academic environments, including here at the University of Michigan. This diverts AAA faculty and students from reaching their full potential and making their greatest contributions to the community. For example, in 2013, Vietnamese-American UM students attending a football game at MSU reported, “our apparel had already caught the eyes of State fans, enough for us to get decently grilled. We initially laughed it off until we heard “Fuck you, Michigan Asians!”⁴

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, “The Asian Population: 2010 Briefs.” “Asian” refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam . <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf>

² Liam Stack, “Protest Against Fox Correspondent Accused of Racism for Chinatown Interviews,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/07/business/media/fox-reporter-accused-of-racism-for-chinatown-interviews-on-trump-clinton-and-china.html>

³ Michael Luo, “An Open Letter to the Woman Who told my Family to go back to China,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/10/nyregion/to-the-woman-who-told-my-family-to-go-back-to-china.html?_r=0

⁴ “Vietnamese Americans at University of Michigan racially harassed by rival fans”, *AsAm News* (Dec 17, 2013); <http://www.asamnews.com/2013/12/17/vietnamese-americans-at-university-of-michigan-racially-harassed-by-rival-fans-ht-ecaasu/>

Perhaps the most detrimental aspect of the climate for AAA faculty is the existence of a well-documented⁵ glass ceiling in the career ladder. For example, the 2016 *Chronicle of Higher Education Data Almanac* shows that while “Asians” constitute 8.6% of faculty at 4-year, public universities nationwide, they constitute only 3.7% of administrators.⁶ In contrast, “Blacks” and “Hispanics” constitute 5.2% and 5.0% faculty, respectively, and 10.2% and 5.6% of administrators. Data for the University of Michigan from the ADVANCE program are consistent with these trends. Within LS&A, for example, representation of AAA faculty in leadership positions (e.g., deans, chair professorships, college-level executive committee, etc.) are significantly lower than that of White faculty as well as faculty in other underrepresented minority groups (See “Institutional Indicators of Diversity for Faculty in the University of Michigan”, <http://advance.umich.edu/indicators.php>).

Invisibility

While AAA faces are often included in marketing material to promote diversity, the true stories of the AAA individuals, their American experience, and history of these ethnic groups in the US are largely invisible, and AAA contributions to conversations on diversity in the UM community remain untapped⁷.

Our students and colleagues, like most Americans, generally know little, if anything, about the history of anti-Asian exclusion laws, US imperialism in the Philippines, or Japanese-American internment camps during World War II. Yet the history of our own institution, like the rest of America, is intimately linked to our nation’s involvement with Asia. UM alumnus Dean Conant Worcester served in several high-level positions in the early 20th-century American colonial government of the Philippines. His link to the University is largely responsible for the extensive Philippines materials in the University Libraries and other UM ties with this country. During and immediately following WWII internment, Japanese-Americans were barred from enrolling at UM. The Gerald Ford Presidential Library is a significant resource for research on the US involvement in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

⁵ Ruttiman, Jacqueline (2009), “Breaking Through the ‘Bamboo Ceiling’ for Asian American Scientists”, *Science* (May 29, 2009); DOI: 10.1126/science.opms.r0900072; <https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/features/2009/05/breaking-through-bamboo-ceiling-asian-american-scientists>

⁶ *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Data from the 2016 Almanac” (Aug 14, 2016); http://www.chronicle.com/interactives/almanac-2016#id=9_108

⁷ Museus, Samuel D. & Chang, Mitchell D. (2009), “Rising to the Challenge of Conducting Research on Asian Americans in Higher Education”, *New Directions for Institutional Research* 142, 95; DOI: 10.1002/ir.299; <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ir.299/epdf>

Among the federally recognized categories of minority populations in the US, AAA are the least discussed and the least understood⁸. Thus, the irony for AAA members of the UM community is that, despite the relatively large population, AAA individuals and their experiences are largely invisible.

Furthermore, there is a widespread narrative that AAA are overrepresented in academe, and therefore AAA individuals need not be considered in relation to diversity issues. It is imperative that this narrative be replaced. *There must be a decoupling of the terms “diversity” and “underrepresented minority.”* It is when these two terms are used interchangeably and synonymously that AAA persons are rendered invisible. First, AAA contribute to diversity; this is an incontrovertible fact. Second, healthy numerical representation of the AAA population does not preclude the existence of a chilly or hostile environment that inhibits AAA productivity. Research demonstrates that climate issues faced by AAA faculty and students are directly linked to the way AAA are racialized as non-white.⁹ These climate issues may also account for the under-representation of AAA faculty in leadership positions at UM and in academe more generally. Third, while statistics of AAA presence in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields have contributed to narratives of perceived overrepresentation, the statistics show steep declines in the presence of AAA faculty and students in humanities and especially the social science fields, nationally¹⁰ as well as here in LSA.

While the Draft LSA DEI Strategic Plan makes a welcome and admirable start in addressing issues of concern to AAA, Indigo members believe that it is critical that the unique perspectives of AAA should be added. Our recommendations are offered below, and Indigo is available as an active partner in implementing them. Many of these recommendations will benefit all demographic groups, and not just AAA. Since Indigo is a faculty advocacy group, this initial Response focuses more directly on faculty concerns, but we stress that AAA student and staff concerns should also be reviewed and addressed.

General Recommendations in Response to the Draft DEI Plan

1. *Establish a clear distinction between the terms “diversity” and “underrepresented minority”* in all conversations, reports, and strategic plans related to DEI initiatives. It is vital to acknowledge that AAA are included in the definition of Diversity and

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See Samuel D. Museus and Julie J. Park. “The Continuing Significance of Racism in the Lives of Asian American College Students. *Journal of College Student Development* 56 (2015), 551-569

¹⁰ See, for example, “Racial/Ethnic Composition of Humanities Faculty” on the site Humanities Indicators: A project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. Data was drawn from the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, 1998-2004.

<http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=315>

contribute to Diversity, even in circumstances when they are not the focus of DEI initiatives that address underrepresentation of other communities of color.

2. *Develop a transparent, single, consistent, comprehensive policy that specifies criteria for when AAA are considered a target group for College DEI initiatives, and when not.* AAA are often faced with the statement that they “do not count” in terms of diversity. These statements are not only dismissive, but also serve to render AAA invisible, or even rationalize AAA exclusion. It is essential for everyone to have clarity on the status of AAA in relation to DEI activities, and how AAA are defined for these purposes.

3. *Enhance the visibility and participation of AAA community members in DEI activities.* The existing DEI plan does include some discussion of AAA concerns, but this can be significantly improved. Moreover, AAA voices need to participate at a leadership level in planning and implementing DEI activities.

4. *Gather information about the status and climate for AAA faculty, students, and staff in LSA.* Any plans to address this group’s concerns will need to be predicated on reliable and comprehensive data. Existing data are limited, not widely known, poorly understood, and, in Michigan’s post-Proposition 2 era, even legally constrained. The collected information should be shared with the LSA and UM community, to raise awareness of AAA concerns and help address them.

5. *Further develop the DEI Plan to differentiate between different minority groups and address their varying needs.* It is clear that AAA and other demographic groups interact with the broader community in different ways and therefore have concerns that vary in important ways. Even within the AAA demographic, there are varying concerns that all need to be addressed. The DEI Plan therefore needs to be both flexible and comprehensive, and allow for ethnic and intra-racial intersectionality.

6. *Confirm support for the Asian/Pacific-Islander American (A/PIA) Studies program in the Department of American Culture.* A/PIA Studies serves as an important nexus for teaching and scholarship on AAA issues, for both faculty and students. A/PIA Studies also serves as Indigo’s administrative home.

Specific Recommendations to Address AAA Faculty Concerns

7. Leadership nomination process: Develop and circulate best practices and protocols for identifying candidates and for making appointments to leadership positions.

a. Make Chairs, Directors and office of the LSA Dean aware of the need to fairly consider *all* qualified unit members for leadership positions. This includes systematically reviewing all members for candidacies and setting objective criteria for both candidacy and appointment decisions.

- b. In the nomination process, implement procedures to obtain broad candidate pools and circumvent hierarchical nomination procedures in which, e.g., department Chairs act as gatekeepers. Consider a more formal and transparent application procedure.
8. Cultivating leadership talent: Develop and circulate best practices and protocols for identifying candidates for leadership development opportunities on campus, as well as regionally and nationally.
9. Leadership mentoring: Provide more emphasis on the need for faculty mentoring and career nurturance at the Full Professor level and beyond, including the administrative career ladder.
10. Include AAA faculty in ADVANCE initiatives.
11. Recommend that the Dean's Office meet individually with minority advocacy groups on a regular basis.

Indigo Provisional Steering Committee:

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