

# ANTI-ASIAN RACISM AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

ASIAN AMERICAN &  
PACIFIC ISLANDER  
POLICY INITIATIVE

**D**uring the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were more than 9,000 anti-Asian racist incidents reported in just one year. The incidents ranged from verbal harassment to destruction of property, as well as physical assaults. While many higher education institutions publicly released solidarity statements in support of the Asian American community, there is a need for closer attention to the ways in which race and racism are salient issues for Asian American college students.

Asian and Asian American college students have been victims of bullying, online harassment, and verbal assault and have endured racist and xenophobic comments such as “Go the (expletive) home” or accusations of bringing diseases from China to the U.S. Overt and covert Anti-Asian racism and violence have long existed in higher education institutions—and have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This brief explores some key themes in the literature related to anti-Asian racism and campus racial climate.

## Key Findings

1. **Asian Americans are too often overlooked and underserved** when it comes to campus services and institutional priorities. The dominant narrative that Asian Americans are a model minority creates a perception that Asian Americans do not face challenges related to race and racism, which excludes them for campus commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Teranishi, 2010).
2. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a **hostile environment already existed on college campuses for Asian and Asian American students**. Negative stereotyping about race and ethnicity has manifested into aspects of student life, such as racist themed parties (Johnston and Yeung, 2014).
3. Higher education institutions must acknowledge that **Asians and Asian Americans are a highly diverse group** who range in ethnic background, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, immigration histories, and cultural practices (Teranishi and Kim, 2017). For example, in a study of campus climate at UCLA, Southeast Asian students’ perceptions of campus climate were significantly less positive in comparison to their peers’ (Ngyuen et al., 2016).
4. Aggregated data on Asian Americans is most harmful for marginalized and vulnerable sub-groups, **masking the extent** to which certain Asian American sub-groups are disproportionately facing the reality of low-income status, being undocumented, etc. For example, it is estimated that approximately twenty-five percent of undocumented students enrolled in U.S. higher education identify as Asian American (Feldblum, 2021), yet the unique needs and challenges of undocumented Asian American college students are often unacknowledged.
5. Campus climate also means thinking about how Asian and Asian American students may **feel increasingly physically unsafe**, yet they have often failed to acknowledge Asian and Asian American students as a target of verbal and physical assaults.

## Recommendations

1. If higher education institutions are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, **supporting Asians and Asian Americans must be a part of this conversation.**
2. It is imperative to go **beyond solidarity statements and listening sessions.** Campuses need to work with their Asian and Asian American students, faculty, and faculty to understand their unique needs and challenges.
3. There is need for **greater investment in ethnic studies programs**, which have been designed to critically examine intersecting and layered forms of racism, sexism, and classism across all historically racialized groups.
4. It is imperative for the colleges to **use disaggregated data** to understand and help mitigate the ways in which anti-Asian racism is having a negative impact on the educational experiences and outcomes of Asian and Asian American students.
5. Higher education administrators have a responsibility to create an inclusive campus climate that is **conductive to the academic and personal well-being of all students** and there needs to be greater attention to the physical safety and unique emotional needs of Asian American students.

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