

Assisting Hmong and other Southeast Asian students achieve academic success and overall well-being

Alyssa Kaying Vang, PsyD,LP, BC-TMH

Universities of Wisconsin - Culturally Responsive
Approaches to Mental Health Conference

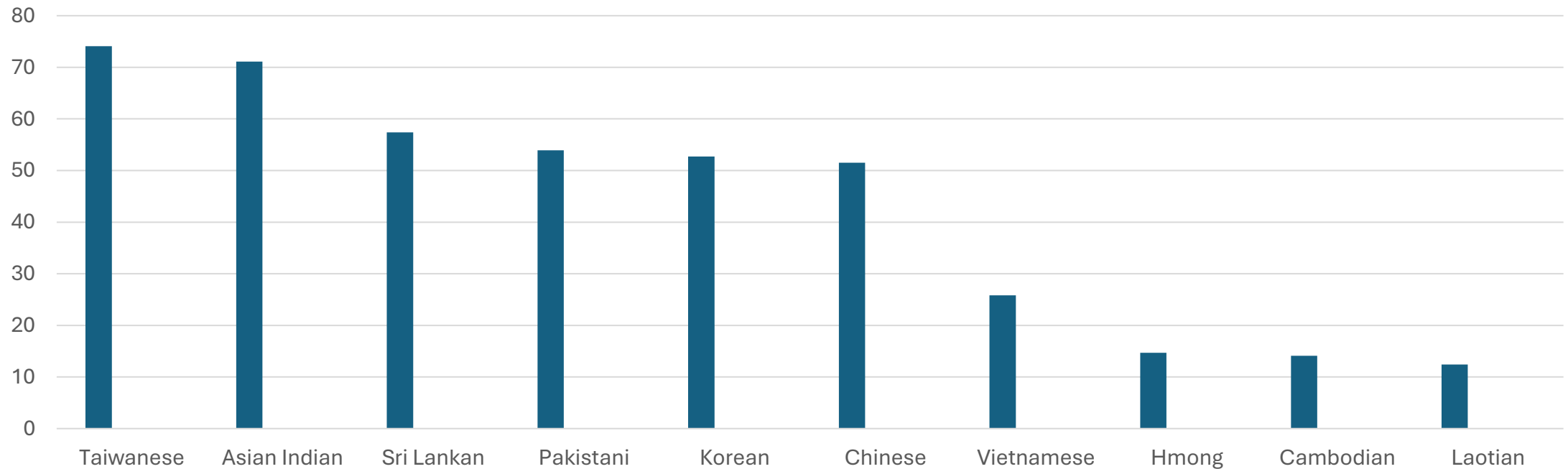
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Model Minority myth

Disaggregated data on educational attainment data on adults of 25+ years old (US Census Bureau, CARE, 2013) for those receiving Bachelor's or higher degrees



The Role of Institutional Data: A Focus on Hmong American Student Success; Fresno State University, Jan 2019.

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Summary of Findings

Hmong students are competitive applicants to the university. They apply with higher-than-average high school GPAs and are admitted into the university at higher rates than other students. They are also more likely to enroll at Fresno State as first-time full-time freshmen (FTTF) than other applicants. However, Hmong FTTF graduate at disproportionately lower rates than other students across all high school GPA groups, which indicates that Hmong students may be facing systematic challenges not currently addressed by institutions of higher education.

The Student Success Survey Revealed:



Hmong students experience more barriers



Hmong students experience certain challenges at higher rates



Hmong students experience unique challenges



Experiencing more barriers had negative impacts on Hmong students' cumulative GPA

Hmong Students Reported:



Lower perceived capacity to graduate



Lower perceived sense of institutional support



Lower sense of belonging



More likely to rely on advisors for information

However, despite reporting experiencing more challenges than other students, Hmong students had similar academic progress to other students. Hmong students had comparable cumulative GPAs, and number of cumulative units earned to other students. This suggests that Hmong students are working hard toward their degrees, and the institution should do more to better support our Hmong students.



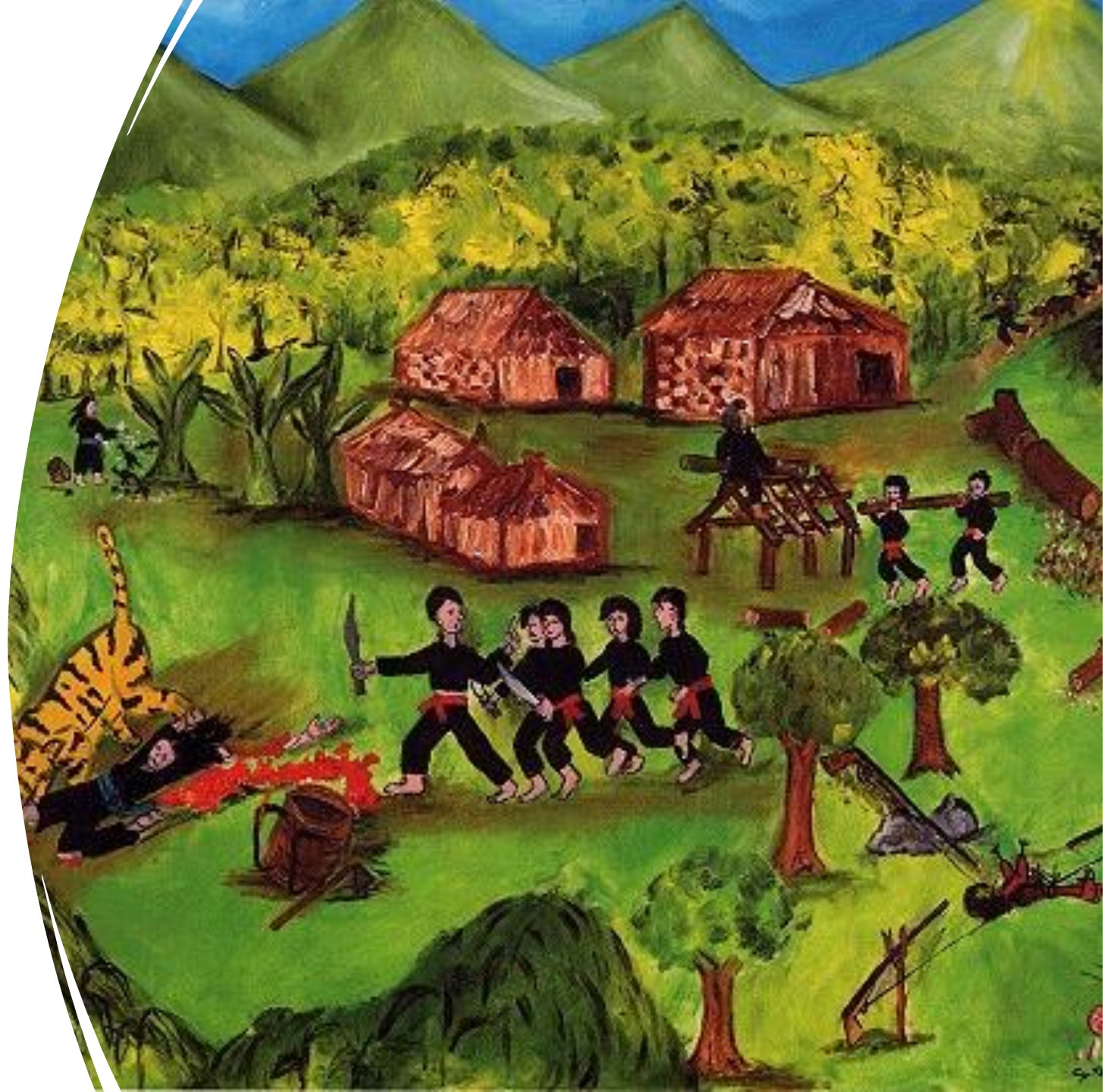
History of Hmong people and SEA

- Impacted during the Vietnam War



History of Hmong people

- First Hmong family to enter the United States was in 1975
- Recent refugees from Wat Tham Kabrok Thai Camp (2004: US -7345; Minnesota 3257)





Refugee vs. Immigrant:

Body vs. Mind

Safety vs. Opportunity

Returning to homeland is
a choice vs. not an option

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Data on Asian American youth

In Asian American culture, mental health is viewed as a weakness and talking openly about anything emotional (i.e. sadness, disappointments, various life events, etc.) is rarely encouraged.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among Asian Americans aged 20-24 years

Hmong adolescents are 5x more likely to engage in self harm behaviors.



Current challenges:

- “Mental health does not exist in our community”
- Stigma – “Crazy”
- Mental health seen as a physical or spiritual suffering
 - What happens when traditional healing practices are not effective?

THE IMPACT:

- Hmong are twice as likely to be diagnosed with a mental health disorder
 - 43% compared to the Western at 15% - 20%
- Compared to their Southeast Asian counterparts, the Hmong population reports higher mental health symptoms
 - 80.4% of the Hmong participants reported symptoms of depressive disorders compared to Cambodians (70.7%), Laotians (59.29%), and Vietnamese (54.1%)
- Divorce rates for Hmong doubled from 2015 ACS to 2000 Census (2.33% to 4.7%) compared to total US population which did not change much – 9.75%
- Hmong suicide/homicide cases

What does it mean to be Hmong?

- Prescribed roles
 - Success of the family is dependent on how each member played his/her role, not on how well they relate to each other
 - Filial piety
 - Foster family relationships and interdependence
 - Facilitates social and psychological security



Neeg Zoo – Hmong definition of a “good person”

- Absolute respect and obedience to parents/elders
- Follows prescribed roles according to gender and order in family
- Reciprocity with responsibilities to family, clan, in-laws, community
- Personal qualities: patient, generous, fair, even temperament, communication skills

Generational differences

- Hmong
 - Collective
 - Prescribed roles
 - Success belongs to everyone
 - High Context
 - Comparison as motivation (foster interdependence)
 - Filial piety
 - Ua siab ntev, uv (suffer & endure)
 - Honor
- American
 - Individual
 - Unique skills
 - Success is self-driven
 - Low context
 - Praise as motivation (foster good self-esteem and self confidence)
 - Accountability to having children
 - Process and communication
 - Burden

The Hmong, Education, and Cultural Expectations

- Highly valued
 - Great equalizer
- Parents don't know how to support or don't have the ability to
 - Educational
 - Emotional
 - Financial
- Local educational institutions

The Hmong, Education, and Cultural Expectations

- Most families expect their children to carry out the responsibilities of their roles within the Hmong family unit and culture
- Collective culture vs. Individualistic culture
 - Prioritize others before self
 - Often, students struggle with guilt over choosing self vs others
- Critical thinking is discouraged.
- Highly valued is knowing your place and your role, and honoring it well.
- Modesty and humility is valued. Assertiveness and self-promoting is seen as bad
- You scratch my back, I scratch your back (Sib pauv zog)
 - This can make it hard for students to ask for what they need, to advocate for themselves, and to seek help

Trauma and its role in student's success

- Historical trauma
 - Epigenetics
 - Hmong diaspora (China, Laos, US)
 - Stateless people (orphans)
- Intergenerational trauma
 - What happened to them that shouldn't have happened to them
 - What didn't happen to them that should have happened
- First generation Hmong college student

Other intersectionalities of their identities

- Sons vs Daughters
- Birth order
- Family dynamics (blended families)
- LGBTQ+
- Class in their community

Additional challenges to college student success:

- Parents who sheltered their children, restrictive environments
 - Not knowing how to manage their new-found freedom
 - Not knowing how to manage social situations (stress, anxiety)
- Pressure to do well academically was too much
 - Carry weight on their shoulders

Family factors that help students achieve greater academic success and thrive in college

- Parents who also have some education, etc.
 - Parents can then help students understand and navigate college
- Parents who can offer support and instill pride
- Having an older sibling who had attended college to help

What colleges can do to help students succeed:

- Offering individual, increased guidance and encouragement to students who are struggling
 - Get to know your student and help advocate for them at first, then empower them to do the same
- Educators obtain cultural understanding and foster attitudes of respect and empathy for diverse cultural backgrounds
 - Recognize the way they look at the world and what they value may not be the same as yours
 - Example: student reporting that they are worried about their younger siblings, that they are now a college student, no one is home to care for their siblings. Don't impose your own values of individualism to them.
- Creating safe spaces for students to talk about their personal stories, being Hmong, and identify helpful resources
- Providing spaces of belongingness and community (student association or with other organizations)

Studies have found these to be helpful for Hmong students to succeed in college:

- Connection with Professors
- Connection with colleagues
- Tutoring
- Personal growth
- Academic Counseling
 - Counselors who validated Hmong students led to students being more successful
 - Those who were not validating led to students being not as successful.
- Mental health support

Therapeutic recommendations:

- Know enough about your students' cultural background and the intersectionalities of their identities
- Hold safe space to process struggles
 - Help to make sense of these struggles, provide framework
 - Increase understanding and self-awareness, validation and affirmation, normalizing
- Help student understand their own cultural values
- Identify current patterns that are harmful
- Identify new patterns that will be helpful

Conclusion from a study about what Hmong students need to do to be successful

Hmong students must sacrifice parts of their cultural heritage to reach their full academic potential.

As Hmong students continue to pursue academic achievement, they must learn to perceive for themselves what academic success is, and how they can accomplish their academic goals while holding onto their cultural identity.

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THANK YOU

Alyssa Kaying Vang, PsyD, LP

Vanguard Mental Health & Wellness Clinic, LLC

651-283-3794

akvang@vanguardmhclinic.com

www.vanguardmhclinic.com

