

Intentional Student-Centered Design to Improve Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Outcomes

Hi, this is Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. And you're listening to another episode of the California Community College's Chancellor's Office podcast. Welcome back, everyone. Today, I have the great pleasure of highlighting Asian-American and Pacific Islander AAPI Heritage Month.

This is an opportunity for all of us in the California community colleges, our faculty or staff or administrators and our students from across our system to highlight the great contributions of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, and most importantly, to put a focus on AAPI student success.

Our Asian American and Pacific Islander students are such an important part of the fabric of the California community colleges. And this month gives us a chance to put a focus on that. Asian-Americans are the fastest growing population among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States between 2000 and 2019.

The AAPI community in the U.S. grew 81% during that span. And so, as you can see, the AAPI community is critically important to the success of our communities, of our state and of our country. In a recent survey in January 2023, 1% of Asians reported that they'd been the subject of slurs or jokes since the COVID 19 outbreak, and 26% said that they had feared someone might threaten or physically attacked them because of their race or ethnicity. So as we in the California community colleges continue to focus particularly on racial equity, it's important for us to highlight the tremendous contributions our AAPI community is making, but also the challenges that our students face.

And of course, we also know that the AAPI community is extremely diverse. They speak more than 100 languages and dialects. They're diverse from all walks of life. So it's important for us to put a focus on this issue and to help our students in our community colleges succeed students from all backgrounds.

So with me to talk about this and to talk about AAPI student success are some remarkable guests that we have today. We have with us Board of Governors member Hildegard Aguinaldo. We also have Dr. Eric Ramones, who is Associate VP at West Valley Mission Community College District, as well as Jenn Galinato, who is a student at Sacramento City College and is also student trustee at the Los Rios Community College District. So it gives me great pleasure to have them with us. And let me just say a little bit about their background. Dr. Ramones, as I said, is the Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources at West Valley Mission.

He serves as the President of the Board of Directors for the Northern California Community College Pool, Joint Powers Authorities. Also a board member for the Association of Community College Administrators, otherwise known as Baca, a board member of the Association of Chief Human Resource Officers and a member of the Human Resource Advisory Committee for the Statewide Association of Community Colleges. And I mentioned we have one of our amazing students from Sacramento City College, Jen Gallinari, though, as I mentioned, she is currently serving as a student trustee at the Los Rios Community College District and is the Vice President of regional affairs of the Student Senate for the California Community Colleges.

So welcome to the podcast. Great to have you with us and thank you for joining us.

Thank you. It's a privilege and honor, Chancellor Oakley, to sit here in this space and especially with our student here, to just really engage in a conversation centered around AAPI empowerment, really and really uplifting and amplifying our community.

So thank you so much for the opportunity.

And Jenn, it's great to have you as well.

Thank you so much, Chancellor Oakley, for having me. As I like to say in my native tongue, Mabuhay. That means a lot in the dialog. And it's so nice to be here as well as joining a few others on this podcast.

It's incredibly a moment for not just myself, but many other students who are very much in a similar position of me of breaking down so many glass ceilings that have been placed before us. I've had the great honor in serving in the roles that

I've had the opportunity to do so. And even being on this podcast is an honor on behalf of our API population among all 100 of 16 of our colleges. Super excited and thank you so much for again having this podcast during such a crucial time in our community college system right now.

All right. Well, thank you to all of you for joining us on this very important topic. So let's jump right into the questions. As I mentioned, May is a time of the year that we get a chance to celebrate and hold up the contributions of the AAPI community.

We get to highlight culture, politics, those in education and in business and from all walks of life. So let's begin with Jen. Why don't you tell us what makes you especially proud of your heritage and what do you look to for inspiration within your community?

I actually get really excited to answer whenever someone asks me that. So I'm the daughter of two immigrants from the Philippines. My mom comes from Cavite, then my dad comes from Ilocos Norte. So I am proud to be their daughter, as well as one of many students who also have a similar background to me.

Unlike my parents, who both have four year university backgrounds, I'm the first in my family to go to community college. In fact, great. I know it's a little bit controversial to say, but I categorize myself a little bit in that category as a first generation community college student, because my parents didn't start their education right away in a four year university, and they both came to the States. I was born here. I had this opportunity to go to a community college, and I'm glad that I did. As a Filipina American, I am told so many times to limit myself or to fall within a certain category of things.

I've been limited to a stereotype, which I can't wait to get into the nitty gritty of later on. But this year alone has been, for me at least personally, a very groundbreaking one, because I've been able to showcase my Philippine heritage.

Now that we're seeing more and more Filipinos take on positions of power and also be well-represented for me, as again, a first Gen Filipino American who is the daughter of two immigrants, I get excited when I get to tell people that. And more particularly in one draft of a speech that I was writing for graduation, I wrote that I was proud to be the daughter of immigrants and a Filipina American, and now, finally, a proud byproduct of the California Community College District.

Having attended, Los Rios Community College District, the second largest in our system, and more particularly from Sacramento City College. How it relates to my culture as a whole is that I don't get to see very many people like me in my area.

I grew up in College Glen near the heart of California and itself near the legislature and whatnot. So in 15 minutes, if I'm lucky, with no traffic by the capital. Right. But I had a hard time finding that when I was 15, I joined a Filipino performing arts association for the very first time, and I saw myself finally represented. I go to a college where it's historically Hispanic serving, and then my first course that I took it was a sociology course. I met a professor who was also Filipino American, and I remember kind of crying and sobbing because we got to kind of talk a little bit about our favorite foods like lumpia, synagogue, Adobo and all those things that make me proud to be a Filipino. But outside of my Filipino identity, I'm also proud to identify myself as AAPI as well, which also comes at controversy of its own. Many people will say, Oh, Filipinos are not considered as Asians or you're not considered as Pacific Islanders.

I consider as part of that because of several things, because of how diverse our culture is as a whole within the Philippines, with the influences of the Chinese culture, a little bit of also the Pacific Islander side of things.

I consider myself that just because of the history and also the government has also identified Filipinos as Asians. Right? So I'm more than welcome to have that conversation with anybody. But the biggest part, right, for me in this being Filipino-American during AAPI Heritage Month is that I get to showcase my cultural background loud and proud, without being apologetic about it. For so many times I've been told, you know, keep it down on the DL, don't be too brash, don't be too loud, don't be too Filipino. But this is the one time of the year where I get to be unapologetically that although I have no problem showcasing this 365 days out of the year 24 seven. So for me it's about being proudly Filipina. I am proud of my ancestors. I got to work off of the foundation they gave me and I've been told multiple times, you are your ancestors. Wildest dreams. I'd like to turn that statement around and say that my ancestors are my wildest dreams. Because without them, I wouldn't even be in this podcast with you, with Dr. Ramones right, and with board member Aguinaldo. This is everything I wished five year old me wasn't too ashamed about when trying to come to terms with her identity.

I did this in a webinar which the SSCCC put on and I talked a little bit more in depth, but that's what it means to me, and this is why I'm happy to be here, and this is why I'm proud that it's AAPI Heritage Month.

Wow. Thank you so much.

Well, as you said, we want you to celebrate this 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. So thank you for that. You mentioned the importance of seeing a faculty member who you could relate with, who you saw reflected your own culture.

How important was that to you when you were in that classroom?

So incredibly important to me. I felt like I was finally being seen. I don't have very many mentors that are Filipino-American growing up. I actually found them much. Later on, especially in the professional world, because so often I had mostly white identifying individuals, especially in the area I grew up, which is College Glens. I went to schools where it was dominated by Caucasian individuals and sitting there as one of the very few, in fact the only person of color in the room. Always felt weird until I came to Sacramento City College.

Then I found I'll give him a quick shout out. Dr. Pinero. He teaches sociology and we had these lively discussions about race, ethnicity and getting into the nitty gritty about it. And I remember him being one of the first individuals.

I told that I was the student trustee for my district when I got it, and then telling him I became the vice president of regional affairs. He noted how notable it was for me because my district, we've had several AAPI students serve as student trustees.

It's just for the first time in the midst of the time I was elected as well in the scope of the pandemic and the scope of anti-Asian hate. At the height of it, I was elected to serve as the district's first female AAPI student trustee and also serve as, I believe, the second vice president of regional affairs that is AAPI identifying that is a female, but the first as a Filipina.

Wow, that's great. Dr. Ramones, let me bring you into this conversation as well. So tell us a little bit about what do you celebrate about your background and your culture and how do you bring that celebration and that identity to the work that you do in the California community colleges?

Thank you, Chancellor. I just have to say that I'm just amazed by what I'm hearing from Jen, our student, and just everything that she said. Just give me goosebumps, because I too had issues of identifying and understanding my culture at a very young age.

And I think it was because we didn't see any of the Asian-American stories. We didn't see the content in history classes, and we didn't see anyone that really reflected how we look in up here. And so because there was that invisibility, if you will, or if there was that lack of representation, it kind of led me to inquire more and try to go deeper into why and how come, because I too am Filipino-American and very proud of that. I do remember as a child that my parents would pack me lunch and they would give me the traditional Filipino dishes.

And I was a grade school kid eating rice and dinner go on. And it's basically pork loaded in pork innards, you know, all together. But it's so delicious. And I'll still eat it to this day, even though most of my friends and Filipino family members won't.

But I have to say, at that moment, I knew there was something because people would go to me and come to me. Yes, some would be just very inquisitive. Some would make fun. But all in all, I realized that, hey, there's something about my identity that differentiates me and I need to really seek out what this is. So I'm so proud of the heritage of being Asian-American and identifying specifically as Filipino American only because we know the stories and the contributions that we did for the United States. We are more American than most people think because we started out here in all of the assistance that we've done, especially from our contributions as being part of the military fighting in the wars. As a United States soldier that's very near and dear to me because both my father and my oldest brother, my Kuia, both are combat war veterans, and they served tours my father in the Navy and my brother in the Army.

And aside from our participation and contribution to the military of the United States, is our contributions to the farmworkers struggles and all of the things that we've done with the Mexican community. Right. So because there was nothing that I could see that identified closely to me, I actually gravitated towards the black community.

I gravitated towards the Mexican community. Those are the people that I felt more interconnected to because I felt as an oppressed person of color, that I could relate to what they're saying. So I gravitated towards hip hop music, gangster rap, R&B, and all of those things spoke to me very loudly, and I could see why I was so captivated by that type of music and overall the culture of hip hop, because it was basically the music and the culture of the people. Right. And that's why I gravitated towards it. Thank you.

So thank you. So let me ask you a few follow up questions. Given your role in human resources, you clearly see the importance of hiring and hiring the right people not. On for the organization. But because we're education institutions, the importance of hiring for our students.

So how do you see the importance of diversifying faculty and staff, and what advice do you have for our listeners about how we can do that in a way that, you know, brings more people on the campuses that students like and can better relate to?

Yes. Thank you, Chancellor, for the question. It's been a challenge for many, many years, right? Mm hmm. Diversifying employment in general, but specifically in the classroom in higher ed and even in the K-12. Right. Right. So the thing that makes it so critically important is that we all know the data and the research shows that any diverse faculty member, if we have more diverse faculty, all students will complete better and achieve better and learn better. And it's because of those unique perspectives that come in that are not just one dimensional, right? You see different walks of life.

You see different cultural aspects. You see various elements of lived experience that are then shared more so in an intimate classroom setting than you would outside of that. So I think diversifying the faculty is really the key overall.

And I would say, you know, Chancellor, as you mentioned, like, how can we really do it? I know that's always the question as we know as a system that all of us have the energy to really understand that it values students.

But everybody struggles with, okay, so does it actually work? Where do we start? Where do we even begin? And I have to say, you know, through my research of all of the community college districts in our state, there are several districts that are doing amazing things related to faculty hiring of diversity.

And one of the things that people don't know is if you do have and I know many of our district partners do have a faculty diversity internship program. Right. What they don't realize is that after just one or two years, Chancellor, only you can make an incremental change right away. Mm hmm. A lot of people have that misnomer or that misconception that this is going to take 10 to 15 years to move the needle, right? Yes, I agree that there to move the needle immensely, you're going to have to take some time.

However, I've seen through the research, Chancellor, that if you start a faculty diversity internship program and run it for two years. Mm hmm. And let's just say you have 25 members who are part of that. 30% to 40% of those individuals will be hired. Mm hmm. Because that is a measurable outcome that we already see in many of the community college districts that have those programs. Some programs just started literally two years ago, and some programs have been around for ten years. And each and every single one of those has between the 30 to 40% increase in diversity faculty for their district.

One program in particular that I found actually 50% of those folks were hired in the California community college system. Wow. So if we think about the amazing untapped resource and people don't have the awareness yet of how effective these programs are, if we continue to push and provide resource and to provide infrastructure and guidance to how to do that, we could move the needle greatly in a short period of time.

Well, those are important observations and great advice. So thank you, Dr. Ramon, as Ms. going out to let me turn back to you. You've obviously been a student in our system hanging out there in the Los Rios district at Sacramento City College.

You highlighted a lot about the great things that you celebrate in your culture. But I'm sure you and many of your peers have faced a number of challenges over recent years as students and particularly as students in the AAPI community.

And you've also my understanding, you've also been a student peer mentor in Sacramento City College, so you're hearing from students. How difficult has the last several years been to the AAPI community, particularly with the COVID 19 impacts on AAPI students? And if you can describe a little bit about the challenges and obstacles that you faced during that period.

Well, Chancellor, that is a question that has been actually quite loaded, and that was a question that I even remember trying to answer myself, not just working as a peer mentor on campus, but also as a student, and also with what the Triple C was doing with our anti-racism plan of action for students in chapter two, where it focused on our AAPI population. So these last three years have not been easy. I won't sugarcoat that. I won't beat around the bush. Right. I wish I could. Tell you how many times when someone had brought up a hate crime against the community that I identify so heavily with and have come to be proud of over the last few years because it's not an easy journey. Also identifying as an API student, it's

heartbreaking. It's hard. I remember crying when I heard about the Filipino getting attacked in New York at the subway train where he got slashed across the face.

I remember hearing one very near and dear in Sacramento where I live, being very close to my heart as well. And then I remember hearing about the Georgia shootings at that spot. I can't express to you how hard that is. And mental health, particularly within the API community for any Asian or Pacific Islander identifying individual, is a taboo topic in this community that you just don't talk about it, right? Growing up as Filipina, when I had a multitude of personal life events that were back to back to back of each other. Following from the time I started high school up until my first year of college, which was August of 2019, I wish someone hadn't told me saying, You'll get over it soon. Like, put a Band-Aid over it. You're okay. Go do your thing. You're fine. I wasn't. I clearly was not because I was crying myself to sleep every single night. I remember one instance where I was setting up for an event, and out of nowhere I had a panic attack. And I passed out in the middle of the quad and I had to get medical services for that to real me off of campus. And that was also around the height of Finals two, and this is when I was on campus in fall of 2019, before the whole world shut down and closed down.

I also remember a slew of anti-Asian hate comments that I was getting right. The height of them that I got was while I was actually running my campaign for student trustee. And I remember being scared to say something about it because as a female who is AAPI, you don't say these things.

You don't talk about these things. You stay quiet. We have been known, unfortunately, under this horrible stereotype where you are expected to sit there, be quiet, not say anything, and not make a ruckus about that. As a student myself, I made it known that I was not afraid to call it out as it is and say that there were things going on wrong. I remember an instance where a professor was just simply telling me that my experiences as an API was not the same as anybody else. And I remember getting in a heated argument about it that I started crying in the middle of the argument because I was so angry, saying, Don't diminish my experiences as a peer mentor. Students didn't know about the resources that were offered to them. I remember making calls to students asking them, Oh, would you like to make an appointment with our API counselor who was specifically hired just to talk on issues that are API students we're not just handling but seeing in real time.

Right. When I hopped on a phone with these students, these students were not our traditional students, us so per se. And when I say traditional, these are students that you would think coming straight out of high school within that 1820 something demographic.

The people I was on the phone with were older students, students that didn't speak English as a first language that had trouble navigating through our complex system. I will also say from my own experience, and I'll age myself for purposes here, I'm 21 and I remember being in a similar boat, but not having the factors that were against the students that were coming

in during the pandemic. Right. You've got that aspect of mental health, a physical health aspect. I remember being on a two hour long phone conversation with a student who I could just call just to ask if they wanted a counseling appointment.

They were telling me over the phone that they didn't have resources to be supported and the mental health aspect also in the physical aspect as well, meaning like they couldn't go on campus or anything and that they were also feeling an overwhelming sense of loneliness that just absolutely broke my heart and shattered it to pieces because I know what that's like when you go and tell another individual, a lot of the times you get shut down and diminished and asked, Oh, don't talk about these things. Don't talk about these things with me, because this is not something in our culture that we talk about.

In fact, if you talk about it, you look like an outcast. You get shunned about it. And even though more and more we're starting a conversation around it, as well as working in our efforts towards diversity, equity, inclusion, which aren't new concepts, there's still this impact felt by students that are AAPI, that are still feeling left out, that are still feeling lonely, that are still being looked at as outcasts. A lot of the times in the pandemic, I would hear stories of students that would infuriate me, like no incredible end about being blamed. For the pandemic.

These are all comments that are not unheard. Not uncommon because I would hear them myself. I also remember hearing students struggling to be sane at this time, and I. I know what that's like. I've had a multitude of mental breakdowns and had it not been for our mental health resources, which are done online, which are great. They saved me in some aspects. And not only that, having a line of support that aren't just related to mental health or whatnot, having a mentor or having someone as an open line of communication that you could talk to freely about these things.

These aren't things I can easily talk about with my family. I did an interview a while back talking about how what the impact of the George Floyd murder, the API related shootings. These things were not things I could easily talk about with my family, because there's also a generational gap, too, that we see among our API students. So between my dad and I, there is a 20 year gap when he went to college, totally different time versus me going into college. Now I tell him all about the diversity, equity, inclusion work that we're doing among our campuses.

I also tell him about, Oh, the world is changing to really help and benefit our students, especially students of color, where we don't see them historically represented very well. And if you look at the data, as Dr. Ramones mentioned on the faculty side of things, you also look at on the student side of things. And my experience I'm seeing that we don't have very many students that are API identifying or other groups as well. We can't negate them, but the

numbers have been fluctuating nonstop for communities of color. So when we do this work around diversity, equity, inclusion, we do not just focus on our API students.

We also need to look at other populations where they're hurting as well, because everyone's hurting somehow, someday. And it's not just because of the pandemic even beforehand. There are some things that were brought over into the pandemic that we needed to take off of, like our curriculum.

How are we structuring our curriculum to ensure that students are feeling heard? The whole discussion about ethnic studies, I remember that being a big deal too, and I remember some students cheering, but also being upset about it too, because the way I saw ethnic studies serves as an opportunity to see yourself as represented in the curriculum, and then also an opportunity for people of color to stand up and take space in places that we have historically not been able to. So on the students, I do think from a student perspective, our curriculum has changed a lot, but also that needs to be reflective.

And who's teaching the curriculum to which I hope we see more and more of, and maybe Dr. Ramones will go more in depth about. And we touched a little bit about it earlier on under the scope of being a peer mentor.

I hope that those students who are coming to our center because our center represented a multitude of students, that they're coming in and taking those resources as they come because there are students who felt that way too. Our team lead was API identifying she's Hmong and I got to work very closely with her in addressing how we can better serve our students. We thought of multiple things to get them engaged with, but also interact with a community that has historically been very separated and siloed because you don't see very many spaces where all of us can come together as APIs as one and communicate these struggles that we have with each other.

I got to communicate with these students about their struggles of, oh, public speaking, oh, I don't know which classes to speak or Oh, my mental health is absolutely terrible at this time and as a safe space. So I hope that with these experiences they aren't experiences you just hear once and then pretend to never hear again and just say, okay, let's do something to just cover the general basis of it. But things that we can do for our API students and not just them that can relate to other groups as well, because our struggles are intersectional, they're tied somehow, someday, even if you identify differently, if you're API versus someone who's Hispanic, sometimes the intergenerational also overlap comes into play with the intersectionality of these felt issues. So those are the things that I've just seen. I can't speak for everyone, but I hope that whoever's listening can resonate with these things and also have the courage to be vulnerable and speak up as well. Because I can't do it alone. I know I'm not the only one. I hope there's someone out there too that is willing to stand up and speak up saying Hi I'm API as well and I face these things that she's talking about.

She is not alone and she's also not crazy for speaking up and talking about that. In fact, that is a brave thing to do. So I'll pass it back over to you, Chancellor.

All right. Well, that is a brave thing to do. So, Dr. Ramones let me turn back to you. You've heard Jenn describe some of the challenges that she has faced and has witnessed other students facing. You belong to several professional organizations that do a lot of professional organizations ACRA and ACRO. How can we as administrators. Better inform ourselves to support students like Jenn and to recognize, identify and react to the challenges that our students are facing because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Thank you, Chancellor. I read a very sobering statistic that Asian-Americans between the ages of 15 and 24, the leading cause of their death, is suicide. And so when Jenn spoke about the mental health aspect and the wellness aspect, I couldn't help but think about our students in our system that are struggling immensely, maybe silent or maybe indirectly crying out for help. But an administrator or a staff person or a faculty maybe not recognizing they're asking for help, or maybe they're not doing it directly or as locally as other people. And I feel that it is our obligation and duty chancellor as administrators to take the lead, right, to lead our faculty, to lead our classified, to lead everyone in our communities. To say that Asian-Americans who are struggling mentally, who are struggling in many other forms that people don't recognize needs to be addressed, needs to be at the forefront as well. And it doesn't take away from our efforts for the black community or the Latin community.

It doesn't have to. But so many times, Chancellor, it feels like we are all trying to get a piece of one small slice of the pie. Exactly. And if we only have one small slice of the pie, that's how easy it is for communities of color to pit against each other and argue about, hey, we need to do our community first and then you can do your second. And really, all of those conversations and debates, if you think about it, are unnecessary. If we say, no, our system needs the pie and our system is the students of color and the students who are marginalized and underrepresented. And because we are the pie, there's more to go around. Let's not pit each other right against other communities and argue over one small slice. So that's something system wide that we need to really impact at the local level.

As you asked, Chancellor, is what can we do for this community? One is many good things are happening in some of the districts that do have a lot of AAPI students and they're having these affinity groups, the membership for students, they're having safe spaces where they can talk about AAPI hate and AAPI mental illness and those types of things. We need more of that and we need more resources put to that. Overall, I think if we recognize that Asian Americans are struggling. Although if you look at the data points of success, you'll see if we look at those data, it's misleading. It's saying that Asian-Americans are the most successful in terms of education completion. It's saying that Asian-Americans are the most prosperous in terms of wealth generation, in terms of jobs and the earning potential that we have. And

you'll see some of those data points that suggest that Asian-Americans are more successful than even white Americans.

And when you look at that data and not unpeel and unpack the data, disaggregated data to certain communities, you will see and fall under the notion, the misguided notion that. Asian Americans do not need help. Right. And so when you look at that data point that I brought up. 15 to 24. Those are our students. Right? Right. Of course, we have other students of other ages, but those are our students. And we cannot let that be the situation for our community college students who are in the AAPI community. That is completely unacceptable. And we have the power and privilege within our position nowadays and with the resources that we have and the influence that we have as executives to address the issue.

Right. No, I couldn't agree with you more. Thank for that, Dr. Ramones. I also have with us Hildegarde Aguinaldo often referred to as Hildy, or at least that's the way I like to refer to her. Hildy has served on the California Community Colleges Board of Governors since February 2018 and has been a driving force behind our system diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility focus. While she served on the statewide workgroup that is leading many positive changes for our students in our colleges, and we'll get into some of those changes a little bit later. She serves as assistant general counsel for DaVita Inc, and previously Aguinaldo served as an associate general counsel at United Health Care and as an associate in the Health Care Litigation Practice Group of Louis BRISEBOIS Beskar and Smith, LLP. Healthy Practice benefited from understanding of health care systems that she gained, earning a master's of public health at the University of California, Los Angeles, and her service as a hospital board member held.

It's great to have you with us. Welcome to the podcast. Thank you very much, Chancellor. It's great to be here. All right. So, Hildy, you are a member of the Asian American Pacific Islander community and we are celebrating this month, AAPI Heritage Month.

And we're talking about all the great things that the AAPI community has given done for this great country. So you as a Pacific Islander yourself of Pacific Islander heritage. What makes you proudest of your heritage and how do you celebrate your heritage?

Thank you for the question. When I think of things in my community or people in my community that I want to celebrate and elevate immediately, my mind goes to a close group of friends that I have and the Asian Pacific American Women Lawyers Association. It's a diverse bunch, but simultaneously we have so many commonalities. We come from different ethnic diasporas within the API community, and we're joined together by the fact that we're all attorneys. But perhaps the most significant thing about this group is that we are all advocates, we are all serving the community and not necessarily doing so with a lot of fanfare. And there are people all throughout the community that are doing the same thing, serving the community, serving the people, doing the right thing without necessarily seeking

the public eye. And I think folks like that deserve all the celebration in the world. And celebrating everything with them is is frankly very fulfilling for me. As far as how do I celebrate these moments? It's every day and there's so much to celebrate as I raise my biracial, bicultural son. There's so many things to do with him.

But at the same time, celebrating things with my immigrant parents is totally different now that I have an eye and awareness to the issues that they may not have had the courage to confront head on. So right. Everything is a reason to celebrate.

I'm just so very much filled with gratitude to be in such a loving and familial community. Well, we certainly celebrate your contributions to the California community colleges. And let's talk a little bit about those contributions at the recent Board of Governors meeting.

The work that you've been focus on was front and center. The Board of Governors passed some Title five regulations that focus on campus climate diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility and focused attention, and made changes to the way that we think about employee evaluations in faculty tenure.

In light of what we know about diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility, you had a lot to do with that serving on the task force to develop recommendations on behalf of the Board of Governors. How do you feel about the action that the Board of Governors took yesterday, and what do you see as the road forward for the California community colleges when it comes to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility? I'm very proud to be a part of a board that takes courageous action. And part of the significance of what happened yesterday was. A willingness by the board to be disruptive and persistent. I think it's commonly understood, especially now that we have a good grasp of the issues and the vocabulary to be able to express. Our feelings in this space that we need to be disruptive, that we can't implement patchwork solutions. And Title five Changes like this are instrumental in making sure that we are carrying out the full breadth of the interventions that are needed in order to make change. The Chancellor's Office the system as a whole is interested in changing hearts and minds, as well as making policy changes that will be long lasting. This is where the rubber hits the road and it takes the involvement of the entire system and all the stakeholders to make it happen. The Board of Governors Action yesterday was just the first domino in that. So I'm very glad and very proud that happened.

We're very proud as well here at the chancellor's office. And we could not have gotten to this point without your leadership. So we very much appreciate that and thank you for continuing to push the system from your seat on the board of Governors.

Now, in talking to our other guests, we've heard a lot, particularly from our student. She made a point of reminding us how much hate she witnessed against Asian, American and Pacific Islanders during the first few months of the COVID 19 pandemic.

She's seen a lot of challenges that her and her peers have faced working through this pandemic, the challenges she's facing, the economy. You as a member of the Board of Governors, as an attorney yourself, what have you witnessed the challenges to the AAPI community, particularly with the rise of hate against AAPI community?

And what message do you have for students about persevering through these challenges? And how can we as a system better protect our students? Well, first, I think that the students do an integral and important job in humanizing the issue to make sure that all of us are aware of the experiences that the students are experiencing on the ground. I think that in and of itself is very powerful. So not to jump to your last question, but making sure that the students have a voice and a forum for expressing what exactly is happening to them is so important.

And I'm glad that the student was on the podcast. Mm hmm. As far as hate that I've observed. I'd say that the most instructive and moving experiences have been incidents involving my parents and my parents generation. There were many microaggressions that happened to them that they pushed aside because they felt that it was part of the cost of wanting to be, quote, American. Right. So when we sit down and have those conversations about how it's not okay, it's not okay to be treated like this, and it's okay to stand up and advocate for yourself and those around you.

They feel very uncomfortable with those conversations, and it's become a political issue. It is not something that the generation wants to acknowledge as part of their empowerment, because even the term empowerment seems a little bit scary and different. So making sure that we are opening that avenue to communication, making sure that we are understanding the needs and hate and experiences of the different generations, I think brings a lot more clarity as to what we could do in the future against the students.

Just need to share and they need to be a part of governing boards and bodies that allow them to have a voice. Right. There isn't really a great representation of APIs on governing boards in general. I believe I'm the only one along the California Community College's board, despite the fact that we are one of the largest historically excluded groups in California. So I love to see not only more representation on governing boards, but to see more activity on the students part and more support in terms of peer support groups. I'd love to see the students get more engaged and API student caucus is something I've always dreamed of witnessing and to the extent I can support that and the students involvement in representative activities would be so wonderful to see. Well, Jane, our student here, it's just been such an amazing inspiration to all of us. It's great to hear her story and how much her leadership has helped her peers and students who are AAPI.

So, Hildy, let me ask you this. Is there a question that you want to make sure you answer in this podcast that you want to make sure get across? What would that be? I think it's important to address the disaggregation of data.

And the importance of disaggregating the data is because we have a focus towards accuracy. Mm hmm. If the interest is truly accuracy, you want to get as granular as possible so that you can tailor the interventions. And if everyone is lumped in as a whole, you don't have that careful eye towards what each student group needs. Well, I think that's a perfect example of why we need members of the Board of Governors, members of every governing board to have a perspective grounded in their own experience. And so, given the mythology out there, this muddle stereotype out there about Asians in higher education, why do you feel it's so important that we really dig into the data and desegregate it because the focus is on accuracy? I think if you truly want to get to the heart of the problem, you need to be able to cut the data in a way that's instructive and meaningful to future interventions.

And you can't do that if you are looking at a panacea. Mm hmm. I want to go back to the question about anti-Asian hate, because it makes me think of the piece by Arlene Geronimo about weathering and the emotional and physical impact that experiencing this hate has on your ability not only to succeed, but your physical well-being and your mental health. And I don't think that we realize that every time somebody experiences a negative event, like I hate incidents, that it affects that individual and it affects the community. And the fact that that burden compounds is so disappointing.

And I think that we have to do better for each other and with each other to make sure that we are recognizing and calling out this weathering component as part of our daily experiences and part of the advocacy that we have to do for the AAPI community.

That's absolutely right. I think, you know, as we look at the data, we see individuals from all backgrounds within this Asian-American, Pacific Islander community all having a variety of challenges, struggles. And so we couldn't agree with you more.

Disaggregating the data, putting a focus on communities, putting a focus on individuals as they experience the California community colleges is so important. We're going to be wrapping up with one more question. And given everything that we've just talked about, some of the opportunities to improve student success in our system, the challenges that our students face, that's in this on a very positive note. So let me turn to you, Dr. Ramos, and then I will bring in our student trustee and have the final word. What would you like our listeners to know about your community? What should we be celebrating in the AAPI community and specifically in your community?

Yes. Thank you, Chancellor. There's so much to celebrate. There's so much gratitude to be felt. And honestly, there's just so much love that the Asian-American community has given

blood, sweat and tears to this country. And another stereotype that other than the model minority myth, that basically is what we discussed earlier about how Asians are the ones to be the model for every other community and minority out there. It's very dangerous to subscribe to those types of things. But the other stereotype that comes up is the perpetual foreigner where Asian-Americans are not American. And I think because of the love and the blood, sweat and tears that we put into this country, we are as American as anyone else because we love this country so much. And because we love this country, we don't hesitate to call out all of these things that need to be changed for the better. So I am extremely proud of Asian-Americans overall and Pacific Islanders.

I'm proud of the Filipino Americans who fought for this country to defend this country, who contributed to the Farm Workers Union and the movement there, who partnered with Cesar Chavez. So Larry Itliong, Filipino American, partnered with Cesar Chavez. And that's when the movement happened is when the partnership happened and that's where it got traction. So I will say in closing that when we unify, when we unify groups of other people and our identities are shared and celebrated collectively, then we can do amazing things.

We can change systemic oppression and racism that occurs in our system. And because I know so many people like yourself, Jennifer Oakley and Jen, as a trustee that have the energy and desire. And we hold positions of influence.

We could change the California community college system to make sure everyone has that sense of belonging and can lead with love to give to other people.

Absolutely.

Thank you. Absolutely.

No, those are great words. And I certainly am very privileged to celebrate a Filipino-American on my board in Hildy Aguinaldo, who's done a tremendous job for us in the California community colleges as well, in her own right. So I'm going to give you the final word.

The student of the California community colleges and is a board member of AAPI community and and somebody who's been an activist for students. What should we be celebrating this month for AAPI community and for your community specifically?

Chancellor Oakley, I don't think there is just one thing we should be celebrating. We should be celebrating everything that this community has put its all into. Again, as Dr. Ramones said, blood, sweat and tears that we've put into this community.

I would say and I remember saying this to other students when I initially made the run for the executive vice president of the SSCC C. I don't have one singular accomplishment because I share these accomplishments with all of you.

And that's the same thing I say for this month particularly. Don't just celebrate one thing because you should be celebrating everything. Celebrate your brothers, your sisters, and everybody else that is in this community. Gather because we can't do it as just one singular individual.

I've said it about our community college system and that being a community of its own that I'm proud to identify with. But you cannot have community unless there is unity. And that unity starts with the way you are interacting with individuals.

It's the way you are bringing others into the fold. I remember talking with someone not too long ago about why I used to hate being called one of the first female AAPI out there, people type thing. And it came to a realization why I hated it so much is because there were other people that other people had and they were able to look to them. But for me now, even though I'm the first, I hope I'm not the last. And I hope that's one thing that our students, when they look at it in this community, that they are not the last ones here, in fact, celebrate the windows of our community, but also grieve the losses. I know I've done that throughout this year alone, seeing how much our community has grieved, but we don't forget what we've lost. We continually build off of that. My ancestors gave me a platform for a reason, and I'm proud to continually advocate on their behalf. So I celebrate the fact that I have a flat nose. I celebrate that I have a brown skin. I celebrate that I'm four foot ten and a half, despite that being a running joke within my fellow colleagues as well.

I celebrate everything there is about me as a Filipino, but I also celebrate the things of my fellow API's as well. I celebrate the culture of dance and how it's utilized as a performing arts lover. I celebrate the food because who doesn't love food?

I celebrate the language and the beauty of it all. There are so many things to celebrate. There isn't just one to celebrate when you can celebrate them all together. And this month isn't the only place to do that. You celebrate it in every single opportunity you can. And for anyone that's listening, I hope you do exactly that. You honor your ancestors the way that I've had the opportunity to you celebrate your culture, the way that I have had the opportunity to.

You take them as they come celebrate them every single day of the year, 365 days 24 seven. Because it shouldn't just be in this month. Sure, we have a month dedicated to it, but every day you should be celebrating your culture.

I try to integrate it more now than ever into the clothing that I wear, the food that I eat, the people in communicating with, and so many other things because there aren't very many of us. And if there's going to be people like me, I want to make it known.

I always had this fear that with being a Filipina and with being the first in so many things, I'd be the last. I hope that is it. And whoever's listening to this podcast can get excited as I am to be a part of such a beautiful system.

I look at this system not just within my API family, but also the California community college system itself. This is an extension of my kapamilya and that means family in the dialog. And I'm glad to have been a part of a family of so many diverse backgrounds that are also going to stand behind me and be behind my corner and celebrate with me during not just this month, but all the times I get the opportunity, but also stand with me in times of grief and tragedy. I remember seeing a press release about what was it, the George Floyd murders.

I also remember seeing press releases about what happened in the AAPI community within the last few years. And Chancellor Oakley, I do thank you and your team for that. And as well as the work that I've seen in Dr. Ramones district, which I've the opportunity through as my role of the Vice President of Regional Affairs for the SS Triple C. These are things that I feel so much more seen in with my culture and with this month alone, and I hope you continue in doing so. So when I celebrate this month, I'm celebrating because of what my community has done, what it's gone through, whether it's all pretty or ugly. I'm celebrating it to embrace it all. And I hope that again, whoever is listening can do exactly that because it is API Heritage Month and this is a time to be proud.

Not just this month, but every other month after that and every other opportunity that there can celebrate these traditions. They come to us for a reason. They're traditions for a reason. And generationally, they hope that they carry on. And as I said earlier, there's so much intersectionality this month has so much to give and so much to celebrate. Be excited because I do as well. It's also just an excuse for me to eat as much Filipino as I can without without getting judged for it. But again, I celebrate each and every one of my fellow API, brothers and sisters and non-binary identifying individuals. Because this month is about us and I'm so glad that I get to be here taking that space with them and standing alongside them because there's so much we have and I'm proud to have been a part of contributing to what a beautiful group of people we are. And I hope that there's going to be someone who comes in after me that is just as excited, just as passionate, and is just as happy to be a part of this beautiful, wonderful, amazing, talented and smart community that we get to be a part of while dismantling all these other things, like the model minority myth, a foreigner myth. We can do it and we're doing it together. I just know I can't do it alone, so please stand by me as I'm standing with you. So again, Chancellor Oakley, I'll say it in my native tongue because I don't get the opportunity to do so. But maraming salamat for for allowing me to be a part of

the kapamilya you've built within this system and sent to you that the Ramones thank you for allowing me to be a part of your community as well.

I can't thank you both enough because from the bottom of my heart it means so much to students not just like me, but similar to me that have this background and have so much love and compassion. In fact, I say all the time to everybody but mahogany that 3000 meaning I love you in my language, but also I say it because I love what we do in this community, in this culture. And I hope that this continues on with whoever comes in after me and far beyond that. So, again, thank you so much. But having said that, I'm a boy and I hope whoever is listening is just as inspired as I am.

Well.

That's great. And we hope the same because the inspiration that you bring to the table lifts us all. So thank you, Jen, for those thoughts and those words. Thank you, Dr. Ramones as well. A big thank you to my board member, Hildy Aguinaldo. This has been a terrific conversation highlighting Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders as we celebrate AAPI Heritage Month here in the California community colleges. So once again, I want to thank my guests. Board member Hildegard Aguinaldo, associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources, Dr. Eric Ramones and student trustee of the Los Rios Community College District, Jenn Galinato.

Thank you all for being with me. And let's continue to push forward.

Thank you for joining me. This has been another episode of the California Community College's Chancellor's Office podcast. Thank you all for joining us and listening to this conversation.

Take care. And we'll be back with you soon.

Be sure to join us for the next California Community College's podcast. This has been a California Community College's presentation.