



HMoob American Studies Committee
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Wisconsin Center for
Education Research
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Five Factors Influencing the Academic Experiences and Career Trajectories of HMoob American Students at UW-Madison

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CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON
College-Workforce Transitions

Abstract

This qualitative study is a student-led Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) project, conducted in collaboration among professional researchers from the Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT) and student activists from the HMoob American Studies Committee (HMASC), to explore the college experiences of HMoob American students at UW-Madison.

Community Based Participatory Action Research

Student-led CBPAR engages the involvement of the student population of focus (in this case HMoob American college students) in all parts of the research, including the development of research questions, methods, data collection, analysis, and especially, in orienting the research to address problems in the community.

This approach of including the voices and contributions of the study's targeted community allows for the development of a more distinct understanding of the populations' lived experiences with the ultimate goal of creating a clearer foundation for social justice action.

Research Question: What are the sociocultural and institutional factors that influence the college and post-college transitional experiences of current and former HMoob American students at UW-Madison?

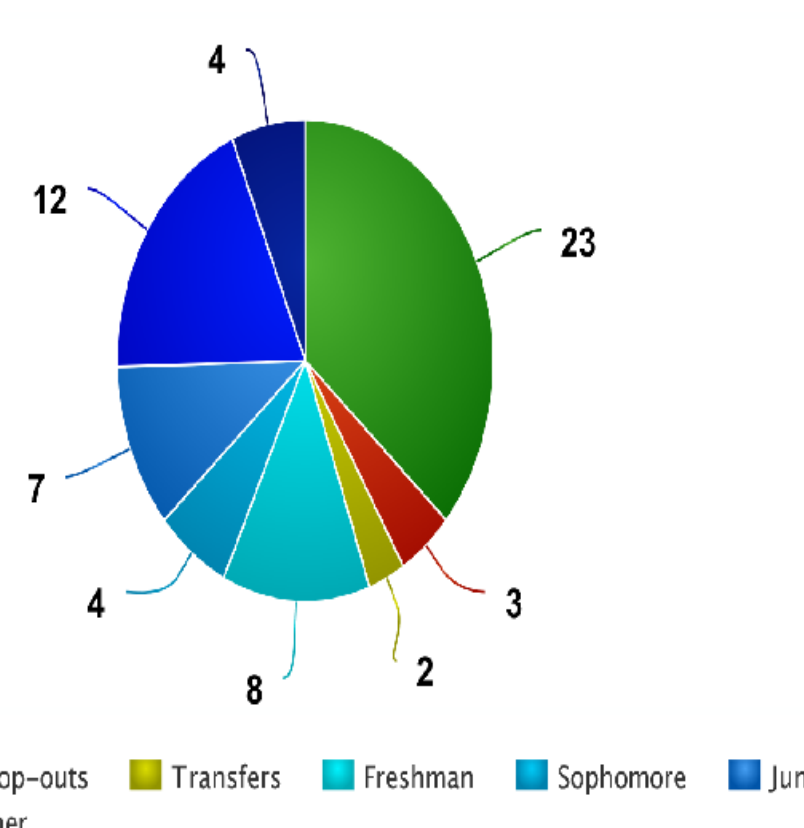
Conceptual Influences

This study draws on Asian Critical Race Theory, Critical Geography, Critical Whiteness Studies in Higher Education, and Leadership in Higher Education

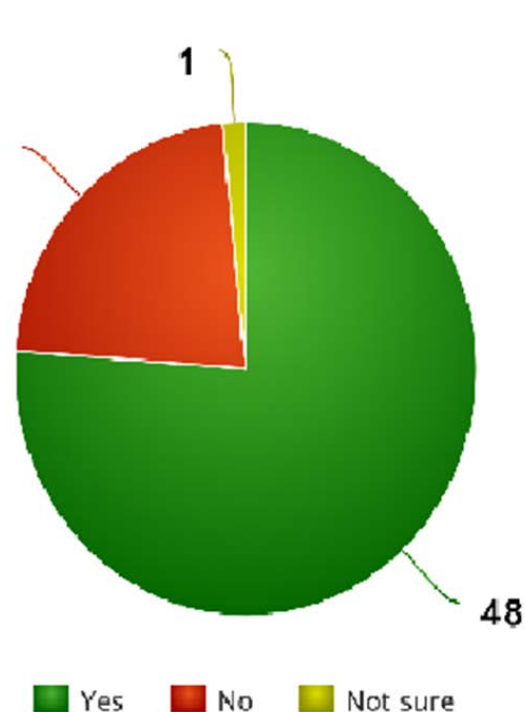
Methods and Data

- The team recruited and interviewed a sample of current and former HMoob American students (n = 63) about their education and career experiences. We also conducted 14 observations and participant observations on campus.
- Participants are majority first-generation college status and nearly all involved in college support programs, which reflects the background of the population of HMoob Americans on campus. Fifty-eight percent of the sample identified as female.
- The interviews were transcribed, and preliminary coding and analytical memoing were conducted for this analysis.

Academic Status of Participants



First Generation Status of Current Student Sample



Findings

We found five salient factors that influence the academic experiences and career trajectories of HMoob American undergraduate students at UW-Madison: Gatekeeping, Advising, Support Network, Cultural and Family Expectations, and Campus and Academic Cultures.

Gatekeeping

- Gatekeeping is the bureaucratic mechanism involved in applying for various programs and schools. Many Hmoob American students were redirected away from these programs based on this institutional vetting process.
- Rebecca, a current student, was accepted to the nursing program after her third try, which extended her time-to-degree from four to six years:

"I think for me not getting accepted the first time, I was really sad and it made me think like 'oh maybe I'm not meant to be a nurse.' And then I think my second time I just didn't put enough effort into it because...I lacked confidence in myself...But I think not getting accepted twice in a row actually opened my eyes."

Advising

- Academic advising was central to HMoob American undergraduate experiences. Some students described their relationship with their advisor as one of the factors that helped them persist toward their goals. Others described encounters with advisors as directing them away from their academic and career goals, or for influencing them to stop out of college.
- Austin, an Alumni, was "put into CALS" after he was not accepted into the Engineering College:

"I feel like I didn't know what kind of goals I should be setting. I think that's where my academic advisor failed to help me... [My advisor] just told me, "Yeah, there's a lot of jobs out there that you can apply for. Just look around." ... I got switched to a different advisor my last semester."

Support Networks

- Academic and support programs, student organizations, and co-ethnic peer groups often provided support and resources to enable students to persist through social and academic obstacles.
- Hli, an alumni, "found supportive environment at the PEOPLE Program:

"...throughout my entire undergrad, I leaned on the PEOPLE Program a lot...just going to see my advisor was the number one thing that kept me floating here...until this day, I still keep in touch with my advisor...I'm super grateful that he was just here and he's also Hmong."

Cultural and Family Expectations

- Cultural and family values, expectations, and messages communicated to students about education and careers seemed to influence student experiences and goals.
- Ellie, a current student, describes the difficulty in balancing gender expectations at home and at school for HMoob men and women.

"It's very interesting, because usually in Hmong culture, I feel like they want the women to stay home and to clean and stuff, but for my family, it was like no, like, you better -- you better be able to do both ... if I were a boy, I would just have to... go to school -- and be a hard worker, take care of my family, mow the lawn... Like you better be able to balance both without struggling, basically."

Campus and Academic Cultures

- Campus and academic cultures constituted by norms, expectations, and practices (such as disciplinary culture or the racialized, classed, or gendered norms of particular programs) influence students' experiences and goals.
- Jazmin, who stopped out, expressed how she felt attending a prestigious campus.

"... what scared me about coming to UW-Madison was I had these thoughts and I'm like, no, I can't do it...maybe I-- like I was just lucky...that was my like initial thought about UW-Madison, that it was...such a high standard for me that I felt like I just wouldn't achieve it."

Take Home Points

- In this poster, we document how these factors play a role in students' discipline and program choices, sense of belonging on campus, job market preparation, and general educational "success."
- We argue that our evidence problematizes individualized decision-making models of educational choice that ignore these important sociocultural and institutional factors which ultimately have significant consequences on students' fields of study and future life trajectories.