

### **Addressing Low Rates of Higher Education among Hmong Youths of Sacramento**

In higher education, Southeast Asians experience a significant achievement gap and are underrepresented in American Universities (AAPI Data, 2017). These ethnic groups carry traumatic experiences regarding the Vietnam War, the Secret War, the Khmer Rouge, and the Pathet Lao. During the 1970s, these groups were displaced and resettled as refugees in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia (Chen, 2009). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), Southeast Asian Americans demonstrate lower rates of educational attainment than the overall Asian rate (67%) and the general population. Contributing factors to these disparities include poverty, language barriers, and a lack of access to higher education resources. A significant portion of Southeast Asian students are first-generation college attendees, who often lack access to knowledge about post-secondary education due to their parents' limited experience with higher education. According to Tian (2024), "Hmong Americans (17%) were among the Asian origin groups with the highest poverty rates in 2022." This high poverty rate is closely correlated with educational attainment, as 46% of Hmong Americans possess a high school diploma or less. Research on the educational attainment of the Hmong population in the U.S. reveals that 46% of Hmong students have a high school degree or less, 31% have some college, 17% have a bachelor's degree, and 6% have a postgraduate degree. This campaign aims to address the low rates of higher education attainment among Hmong Youth in the Greater Sacramento area.

In the University of California's report of UC Student disaggregated race and ethnicity, there are currently 559 Hmong students enrolled in the University of California schools (UOC, 2025). There are a total of 130,539 Asian students enrolled in UC schools, yet Hmong students make up 0.004 percent. What accounts for the disconnect between high school completion and

college attendance among Hmong youths? In a Sacramento State report from a study of 2,400 Southeast Asian students, 45% stated that a lack of information about college, application fees, and the application process were significant barriers they faced when applying to college (CSUS, 2022). These challenges impact their ability to pursue higher education. To address the achievement gap, we need to support Hmong high school students in transitioning to higher education by providing their parents with the knowledge and resources to assist in college planning. The initiative, “For Hmong Parents,” will offer college readiness workshops and community events designed to empower parents. This program aims to integrate lessons into existing organizations, creating a supportive environment for Hmong families.

This campaign focuses on three primary goals. First, increase college enrollment rates among Hmong High school graduates in Sacramento by 10% within 2 years of campaign implementation. Second, increase awareness of the benefits of higher education and alleviate the college application process for Hmong families. Lastly, promote greater Hmong parental involvement in Youths' higher education planning through programs, workshops, and bilingual support groups.

The primary audience for this campaign is: Low-income Hmong parents in the Greater Sacramento Region. Many of these parents lack prior experiences in higher educational spaces and are unaware of how to apply for college and the strategies needed to thrive in such institutions. Research indicates that Hmong parents believe their role is limited to providing basic needs such as cooking, cleaning, and dropping off at school, as they lack the formal education to help with their children's school work (Her & Gloria, 2022). The lack of knowledge is not intentional but can inadvertently discourage Hmong students during the challenging college application process. According to Her & Gloria (2022), Hmong parents are more

involved during their child's primary and middle school years, in comparison with high school and college. The reduction of support derives from Hmong parents' belief that they are limited in their role as "they were no longer able to assist their child with the complexity of the educational process and felt disconnected from the process of higher education" (Her & Gloria, 2016). This campaign aims to empower Hmong parents so they can empower their children throughout college. By targeting a midstream audience, we can have a larger influence on their child's decision to pursue higher education. Furthermore, our stakeholder, Dana Topousis, mentioned that targeting parents can create a larger impact on youth as they are more impressionable and swayed by their parents' influence.

One major theoretical framework guiding this campaign is the Theory of Planned Behavior, which states that behaviors are shaped by attitudes, social norms, and perceived control. The campaign will target Hmong Parents' attitudes regarding higher education and the college application process as costly, unnecessary, or difficult to understand. Many Hmong parents tend to believe that their role is to support their child in other means such as providing food and housing rather than academic support (Her & Gloria, 2016). However, Hmong parents' efforts play a critical role in motivating their children to succeed in college (Her & Gloria, 2022).

To enhance parental involvement, our campaign will provide resources to equip Hmong Parents with the skills necessary to effectively support their children during the higher education process. Our program workshops will emphasize the significant impact of parental influence on a youth's academic success. This initiative aims to foster a supportive environment for Hmong Parents to develop the skills to actively support their youth in higher education. Additionally, this campaign seeks to support both parents and Youth throughout the college experience, while

eliminating the embarrassment or shame parents may feel due to their lack of familiarity with higher education systems.

Another theory that will be utilized is Community Mobilization. Community Mobilization Theory highlights that social change begins when communities take collective action. This theory involves community leaders and community members to change behavior from the bottom up to resolve issues. The Hmong culture has a collective mindset with shared values, beliefs, and cultural norms. According to Tatman (2004), Hmong culture cherishes and highly values the Hmong family and clan system. Additionally, the “value placed by the Hmong on family and sense of community can be defined as the most important dynamic within their culture,” (Tatman, 2004). Therefore, establishing the connection of supporting Hmong youth to the betterment of the community motivates parents to engage with the program as a way to contribute to the greater good. The program will place a strong emphasis on instilling community pride and encouraging active involvement, which will cultivate a sense of urgency and responsibility toward the success of future generations.

The central focuses of all key messages revolve around community based actions. The first key message is, “When the community leads, our children succeed.” This message states that through community involvement and initiative, the children will also reap the benefits and become successful. The next message is, “College is a goal shared by both Youth and Parents,” which elaborates how college is a collaborative effort for families. The main key message is, “We support you, so you can support your child through every step of college.” This statement aims to build mutual trust and highlights the program’s value to be a reliable support system for Hmong parents. The campaign is dedicated to equipping Hmong parents with essential skills and strengthening their understanding of higher education to better assist their children during the

college journey. Additionally, a statement to supplement this main key message is “Peb txhawb koj,” which means “We support you” in Hmong. This campaign will consist of Hmong translated materials, messages, and workshops that will be translated for Hmong speakers.

The strategies from this campaign are based on the principles of Community Mobilization. By utilizing Hmong community leaders such as elders, educators, faith leaders, and alumni as campaign ambassadors, the campaign will deliver messages to ensure community-driven support. Tactics that support this strategy involve outreaching and recruiting Hmong Community leaders in the Greater Sacramento area. The campaign will develop a facilitator handbook that informs how to lead the program and workshop lessons. Each campaign ambassador will serve as an opinion leader and emphasize the importance of participation from Hmong parents.

Another strategy that the campaign will conduct is organizing and facilitating biweekly, free, bilingual workshops for parents that emphasize college readiness within community hubs. The campaign focuses on creating a program that can easily be implemented in Hmong community centers such as churches and non-profit organizations. For workshop content, the campaign will collaborate with Hmong educators, counselors, and college alumni to create workshops about key topics related to college preparation. These workshops will be curated and personable lessons to share with Hmong parents, such as applying for financial aid, application questions, and skill sets to thrive in higher education. This program will ensure bilingual content to ensure that Hmong parents will be able to learn the new concepts without language barriers. In addition, to promote program participation, advertising will be shown on Hmong radios, posters on community bulletin boards, and door-to-door outreach in Hmong-populated neighborhoods.

This campaign will launch on August 1st, 2025, and will last till August 1st, 2030. The timeline is strategically aligned with the academic calendar that begins in August and ends in June. A midpoint evaluation will take place on August 1, 2027 to assess if the campaign met its goal of increasing college enrollment rates by 10%. Before the campaign begins, there will be a preliminary survey for designated Hmong parents of Juniors and Seniors in high school. This quantitative survey will ask questions regarding familiarity with the college application process, financial aid, and other topics concerning higher education planning on a 1-5 scale. This survey will measure self-reported knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of Hmong parents. At the end of each school year, the same parents will complete a post survey of the same questions to indicate the growth of their knowledge. In addition, for each workshop held during the campaign, parents will fill out pre- and post-workshop surveys to assess their learning progression. Since the overall goal is to address the low rates of higher education attainment in Hmong youth, the college application and enrollment rates of Hmong students will be analyzed from selected colleges of UC Davis, Sacramento State, and Sacramento City College. Lastly, focus group interviews with parents and students will be conducted annually throughout the duration of the campaign. Each workshop will include feedback forms, allowing for the collection of critiques and suggestions to enhance the program. Focus group interviews are essential when attempting to solve an issue in a given community to allow for authentic feedback from the community. In my team's interview with Dana Topousis, she emphasized the importance of focus groups and keeping the key audiences in every step of the problem solving process. Success in this campaign will be reflected in an increased self-efficacy among Hmong Parents in their ability to help out their child during the college planning process. We anticipate that survey scores will average between 4 and 5 on the provided scale by the end of each academic year. Additionally, we aim to

achieve the targeted 10% increase in enrollment rates within a two-year timeframe, as well as a 20% rise in the number of college applications submitted by Hmong youth from each designated high school in Sacramento.

Overall, addressing the low rates of higher education attainment in Hmong Youth in the Greater Sacramento area is an important issue to discuss. Addressing the inequalities can reduce poverty rates, increase accessibility to higher education for minorities, and advocate for Southeast Asian students to achieve higher education. By offering support and information to Hmong parents about planning for their children's higher education, we can promote a more accessible educational system to ensure all individuals have a fair opportunity to thrive and excel in higher education.

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AI Disclosure: I used Chat GPT to help me generate ideas for goals for my campaign.