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Pacific Islanders Lagging Behind in Higher Educational Attainment

In an economy that increasingly requires a college education to be successful in the labor market, Pacific Islanders have fallen behind and current admissions patterns will perpetuate this problem, according to an analysis conducted by the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, the UC Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Initiative, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center.

The analysis uses data released November 14, 2006 from the 2005 American Community Survey, iterated by race, Hispanic origin, ancestry and age released today by the U.S. Census Bureau, along with previously released data.

Major Findings include:

- Among those 25 years and older, single-race Pacific Islanders are only about half as likely as non-Hispanic whites to have at least a bachelor's degree (15% versus 30%). The gap is even wider when compared to Asians (49% with a bachelor's or more advanced degree).
- Pacific Islander levels of educational attainment (15%) are similar to African Americans, in which 17% have at least a bachelor's or more advanced degree.
- Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i have lower educational attainment than those in the other 49 states.
- Among Pacific Islanders, Samoans, Tongans, and Fijians have the lowest percentages with a college degree.
- Prospects for future educational attainment are bleak. Slightly less than a third (29%) of Pacific Islanders between the ages of 18 and 24 are enrolled in a college or university, a rate comparable to African Americans (29%). In contrast, the college enrollment figures are 39% for non-Hispanic whites and 57% for Asians.
- Public schools are failing to prepare Pacific Islander students for high school and college levels. The lack of culturally-appropriate programs and a hostile educational environment contribute to social alienation and a high dropout rate among Pacific Islander youths.

Graphs of the researcher's analysis are available on the center's Web site, www.aasc.ucla.edu.

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