

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE RAPID RATE  
OF COLLEGE ATTAINMENT OF THE HMONG

A Project

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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

by

Mai Vue

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Division of Social Work

Abstract  
of  
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The research project examined the contributing factors to the rapid rate of college attainment of the Hmong by exploring factors that influenced college attainment. Purposive sampling, convenience sampling, non-proportional sampling, and snowballing was used to recruit 97 research participants. The exploratory design was used to identify specific factors and comprised of quantitative questions to gather the participant's demographics and college attainment influences. Study findings proposed six factors that contributed to the rapid rate of college attainment in the Hmong community: self-determination, influences from parents and siblings, wanting a better quality of life for children, wanting to be equally competitive in the wage and labor market, past poor living conditions, and cost of living. This study will empower researchers to better understand the reasons Hmong students strive for higher education.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Serge Lee, Ph.D., M.S.W.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## **Chapter 1**

### **THE PROBLEM**

There has been a rapid rate of Hmong attaining higher education in the United States. The doubling of college attainment rates since the year 2000 indicated that more Hmong individuals are pursuing and obtaining a post-secondary education (Lee, 2015). This phenomenon has not been captured in any data discussing the contributing factors that would indicate this result. The Hmong's lack of formal education and lack of written history and documentations further alludes to the phenomenon of the rapid growth of Hmong college graduates. The rapid rate of Hmong college attainment indicates that there are other variables needing to be examined in order to pinpoint what has been contributing to this phenomenon.

The rapid rate of college attainment in the Hmong community has been the most prominent since their immigration to the United States in the 1970s. According to Xiong (2012), the number of Hmong college graduates have doubled since the early 2000s. Individuals obtaining a higher education brings forth better life outcomes and more opportunities for themselves and the society. A college education has both an immediate value, in terms of better job opportunities, higher pay, and social mobility, and also brings forth a long-term value for both the individual and the society (Gee, Hawk, & Norton, 2015). Gee et. al (2015) also argued further that a major influence of obtaining a college degree was associated with extensive economic outcomes for the individuals.

Although many researches have been conducted for groups of people all over the world and within the United States regarding to the pursuit of higher education, there lacks research on the Hmong college education, especially the contributing factors to how it doubled in college graduates since the early 2000s. The rapid rate of college attainment in the Hmong community in the United States was a phenomenon in that the Hmong have only been in the United States for a little over 40 years. The Hmong migration from Laos and Thailand to the United States was celebrated in the year 2015 through the Hmongstory 40 exhibit and served as a momentum to appreciate the perseverance of the Hmong people (Hmongstory 40, 2017). Therefore, the examination of Hmong college education is crucial to understand how Hmong college graduates have been able to overcome educational barriers, as well as what are the contributing factors that led to the rapid rate of college attainment.

### **Background of the Problem**

There are numerous reasons why individuals seek out to attain higher education. Like previously discussed, attaining higher education has monetary benefits and decreases the likelihood for unemployment. Individuals who earned at least a bachelor's degree (B.A.) can expect to have greater median earnings and a lower rate of unemployment rate across the duration of their life (Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2005; Garg, Kauppi, Lewko, & Urajnik, 2002; Ross & Reskin, 1992). According to Baum, Ma, and Payea (2013), the median annual income for individuals attaining a bachelor's degree was \$21,000 higher than the median annual income of those acquiring only a high school diploma.

Attaining higher education has proven to have overall benefits for those who have chosen to pursue it. It has been shown to promote the overall well-being of the individual who have attained the higher education. According to Blossfeld et. al (2005) and Garg et. al (1992), post-secondary educational attainment is also positively associated with the beginnings of adulthood, and included career success and earnings, good physical health, and emotional well-being. This positive perception of college attainment contributes to the foundation for why individuals pursue higher education.

Historically, the history of education has been primarily reserved for those who were elite and wealthy (Leonhardt, 2014). Education was not distributed equally until much later on. Education was not equally accessible to all individuals until it became a commodity as well. Murchison and Pejovich (2012) argued that during the last century in the United States, higher education was inaccessible to all until it was perceived as a product. After being viewed as a product, education became a service that could benefit the economy in multiple ways, through both the scholars and the educational institutions. Education spiked in the second half of the century in the United States when abundant numbers of scholars appeared in the academic world (Murchison & Pejovich, 2012).

However, the trace of Hmong education is not as readily available. A barrier to collecting data on Hmong education, specifically Hmong college education includes the Hmong people's lack of formal education, as well as no formal recollection of Hmong history and artifacts. The Hmong were agrarian societies that consisted of clans that formed the Hmong people (M. Lee, 2015). Vang and Vang (2017) included that the

Hmong history was often found to be interwoven into other ethnic histories, such as those from China. They also stated that the way Hmong people collected their history was often through oral interpretations and narrative stories (Vang and Vang, 2017). The Hmong written language did not exist until much later on (Teranishi, 2007), however, even with a written language, little Hmong literature and documentations existed to capture the Hmong history, especially anything relating to education. Hmong recollection of history and education transpired when the Hmong immigrated to the United States and many prominent Hmong figures emerged in the academia world, leading the rest of future Hmong generations into academics and research. Research about the Hmong people is growing due to the increased number of Hmong in academia and their interests to study the Hmong people.

Among the prominent Hmong figures in academia includes Dr. Serge Lee, who was the first Hmong candidate to receive a doctorate in Social Work and is now the Graduate Program Director at California State University. Among Dr. Lee are other prominent Hmong college-educated individuals such as Mayor Steve Ly and Senator Mee Moua. Mayor Steve Ly was elected Elk Grove's Mayor in 2016 and graduated from University of California, Davis (Luery, 2016). Mee Moua served as one of Minnesota's Senator for three terms and is now the Vice-President for the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) (US Census Bureau Public Information Office, 2002). These three prominent figures in the Hmong community are examples of how college attainment is highly sought out by the following generations of Hmong.

When examining the positively viewed reasons for why individuals attain higher education, it is also important to dissect the reasons of how individuals are able to successfully attain their higher education. It is crucial to look at the positive outcomes of attaining post-secondary education and how it contributes to the many factors that supports individuals as they continue to pursue higher education. Examining how individuals are attaining higher education will also allow for us to better understand the contributing factors in the Hmong community. This thesis project will aim to identify factors associated with the rapid rate of college attainment in the Hmong community.

### **Study Purpose**

The research study aims to discover and examine contributing factors to the rapid rate of college attainment of the Hmong. The purpose of this study is to provide content and identify concrete influences as to why and how there is a rapid growth rate of college attainment in the Hmong community. The known research about Hmong education is very limited, however it is growing, and this research will offer further information to future researchers to examine variables of Hmong education. By identify the contributing factors to the rapid growth rate, it will also allow better evidence for future generations to compare their college experiences and attainment to this research project.

*Theoretical Framework.* The Social Construction Theory (Andrew, 2012) is useful in examining the contributing factors that leads to the rapid rate of college attainment of the Hmong in the United States. According to Andrew (2012), Social Construction Theory focuses on understanding the world of lived experiences from the

perspectives of those who live it and the process in how the experiences were created, sustained, and modified. Berger and Luckman (1991) argued that the idea of the Social Construction Theory included that an individual's reality is socially defined and that it refers to the subjective experience of the every day life, and how the world is understood. The Social Construction Theory is best suited for this research study because the experiences of the research participants will be examined to identify the contributing variables to the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong people.

### **Social Work Justification**

There has been limited research on how the Hmong increased their rate of attaining college education. The Hmong has immigrated to the United States since the 1970s and the studies have previously examined other Hmong education that included but is not limited to the following: the increased of college attainment (Lee, 2015), Hmong students in higher education and academic support programs (2011), Hmong attainment changes and challenges (2012), academic characteristics of first time freshmen Hmong college students (2013), and factors affecting students to obtain a 4-year graduation rate (Vang and Vang, 2017). Also, the Hmong's research on education have been lumped in with other East Asian cultures, which further demised the fact that the Hmong can overcome and persevere their historical barrier of immigration and generate the rapid rate of college attainment. By providing content to the Hmong's own experiences when attaining higher education, it will provide a platform to further help the Hmong people to understand their educational history and experiences.



## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to understand the factors associated with the rapid increasing rates of college attainment by the Hmong Americans, the Literature Review discussed global factors that makes it difficult for students to attain a higher education degree. As a part of the difficulty factors, the reviewed of the literature include reasons why college education is important. It then focused on the US educational influences for US college students, as well as Asian American students and the stereotypes of the Model Minority Myth and how it impacts Hmong college students. The last section of the Literature Review discussed the different factors that have been previously researched regarding Hmong students' rapid rate of college attainment.

#### **FACTORS FOR COLLEGE ATTAINMENT GLOBALLY**

Many factors were examined to understand the difficulties that students across the globe faced when attaining their postsecondary degrees. Among those challenges, privatization and cost-sharing access, as well as cultural and learning styles, especially in developing countries, were factors that contributed to college attainment. Other factors, such as parent's educational level and positive economic returns after college attainment were also examined.

Attaining a post secondary education degree is now more important than ever. The enrollment rates into a tertiary level education increased worldwide by 63% from 92.5 million in 1999 to 150.5 million in 2007 (Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011). Sanyal and Johnstone stated that during the same period, developing countries saw a dramatic

increase of 92%, from 47.5 million to 91.3 million. Developed countries saw an increased of 22%, from 36.4 million to 44.4 million. The highest increased in postsecondary enrollment was from East Asia and the Pacific, with a 102% rate and increasing from 22.9 million to 46.3 million. In regions, such as North America and Europe, where enrollments were high to begin with, there was still an increase of 21%, from 28.2 million to 34 million (UNESCO, 2010). The enrollment rates into postsecondary education is crucial when examining factors that associates to degree attainment.

### **Economic Decline Increases Privatization and Cost-sharing**

The worldwide economic crisis in 2008 aggravated the capacity for how countries provided financial support and resources for students attaining higher education, thus increasing the need for privatization and cost-sharing (Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011). Research from Sanyal and Johnstone showed that funding for higher education influenced how universities supported their school and growing population of students. Financial changes in the universities included an increase for privatization and cost-sharing. They stated that with privatization of universities in both the non-profit and for-profit, there was an increasement in cross-border higher education recruitment. Increased in cross-border higher education within the past two decades indicated in increased rate of students studying abroad, as well as an influx of students from other countries to study in other nations, especially in developed nations where English was taught (Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011).

With cost-sharing, students and parents are tasked with paying high tuition rates. This means that students and parents have to financially invest in the student's higher education. While the enrollment rate into postsecondary education is high, access to higher education is financially problematic for many who cannot afford to do so. Many students have to financially support themselves by attaining a job during their postsecondary education. The increase of students working while in school, regardless of their academic level, such as their Bachelor, Master, or Ph.D., is the result of cost-sharing and has been shown to be true for students in Romania (Rosca, Paunescu, & Pârvan, 2010). According to Rosca et. al. (2010), Romanian students worked while simultaneously attending their postsecondary education as a mean to sustain themselves financially. The access to higher education completion for Romanians becomes harder as financial burdens increased.

### **Higher Education Leads to Better Jobs and Pay**

Accessing higher education in some countries was not possible unless cross-border education was provided. The demand for cross-border higher education was prominent in China, India, and other Asian countries, as well as North African regions and the Middle East (Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011). The increase of cross-border higher education is possible due to branch campuses, where international universities opened "branches" of their school in other countries. In many Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, international universities have exported higher education through the form of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Salah, Alves, & Guerreiro, 2014).

This has shown to be a factor into why students from the MENA countries have shown interest in this kind of reform for higher education because it resulted in the students being more equipped to find better jobs using the specific skills that they attained through the cross-border education system. The World Bank reported that this type of reform on MENA's education system positively affected areas such as Jordan, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia. On the other, the reform on MENA's educational system poses a barrier to students attaining postsecondary education because higher education is limited and resources for higher education is limited and MENA still relied largely on importing higher education to other areas, such as Arabia (Salah et al., 2014).

Attaining higher education for better careers have also been shown to be prominent in other countries. According to Tavares and Ferreira (2012), 41.3% of Portuguese students reported that they wanted to attain a higher education to better prepare for an attractive career (Tavares & Ferreira, 2012).

Also, economic returns to higher education is another example of why students pursue higher education. Hu and Hibel (2014) found that students in China also benefitted economically from a college education. Tavares and Ferreira (2012) also stated that 8.4% of Portuguese students indicated wanting to attain a higher education due to wanting a high-paying job.

### **Culture and Learning styles affects Higher Education Attainment**

Another factor examined are the cultural and learning styles of the professors in universities, especially international universities that exported professors to other countries for higher education. Professors from those universities were typically where

English was spoken and taught, which included to the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011).

In the research by Lemke-Westcott and Johnson (2013), the Kolb assessment was conducted on Canadian faculty from Canada teaching at the Canadian University of Calgary in Qatar (UCQ). The results indicated that the Canadian faculties had a learning style that included abstract conceptualizing (or thinking), and referred to theories, lectures, critical awareness and logical processing. In contrast, the UCQ students, who came from a Middle-Eastern background and educational system, had a different learning style that consisted of actively experimenting (or doing), and rather than learning from lectures and critical thinking, preferred a more hands-on experience. The students also valued a stimulated and collaborative environment with their peers in the classroom (Lemke-Westcott & Johnson, 2013). Collaboration was also found to be true to students in the MENA countries where they preferred remote laboratories that allowed for them to collaborate with other students (Salah et al., 2014).

Although access to higher education in the MENA countries and other developing countries, such as Qatar, is increasing, other cultural barriers, such as different learning styles, was still an issue. This barrier can be a factor in students attaining higher education in their country.

### **Parental Educational Influences**

Parent's level of education was studied to determine its effects on higher education attainment. Parents completing a college degree have shown to have a positive impact on students attaining higher education in East European countries while

parents' high school completion was a positive association of students completing their college degrees (Chykina, Chung, & Bodovski, 2016). Chykina et. al also found that the attainment of a college degree by at least one parent was found to be associated with the student's higher levels of expectations to finish college across all five Eastern European countries that includes Hungary, Lithuania, The Russian Federation, Romania, and Slovenia. In China, students whose father and mother completed high school were 1.52 and 1.99 more times likely to complete a higher education degree (Hu & Hibel, 2014). This supported the evidence that parental level of education beyond high school completion positively influenced students to pursue higher education.

### **Gender Differences and Higher Education Attainment**

There is a global trend of more women pursuing higher education than men. In the 1960s, men accounted for over 60 percent of the bachelor's degrees awarded, however, in 2004, nearly 60 percent of bachelor's degree were awarded to women (Klevan, Weinberg, & Middleton, 2016). Also, the value of education changed and extended opportunities in college which allowed more women to access and afford college along men (Kallison & Cohen, 2010). The trend of more women attaining higher education was consistent in Eastern European as well. Among the five Eastern European countries that were mentioned previously, females were more likely to finish college than males (Chykina et al., 2016). This accounted for the phenomenon change in which women were now more prominent in attaining higher education.

## **COLLEGE ATTAINMENT IN THE UNITED STATES**

### **U.S. Educational Reform**

Academia in the first half of the century was nonexistent in the United States and higher education was not even valued as a commodity (Murchison & Pejovich, 2012). However, Murchison and Pejovich (2012) also argued that latter in the half of the century, United States scholars were outperforming the rest of the world in terms of academia, while gaining achievements in prestigious areas, such as the Nobel Prize, noteworthy publications, and scientific discoveries.

Kallison and Cohen (2010) argued that the aftermath of World War II led to the educational reform in the United States as policies and programs were implemented to fund for higher education, and increasing accessibility, affordability, and participation. Due to the educational reform, higher education was valued as a moral need for the public and an individual necessity. Funding for public colleges and universities increased as a result and led to the creation of additional financial aid (Kallison & Cohen, 2010).

The funding for higher education came in the form of federal programs, such as the Morrill Acts, the GI Bill, and the National Defense Education Act (Kallison & Cohen, 2010). Financial aid for students pursuing higher education was also provided through the New Deal programs, which created employment opportunities for students to be hired on as research assistants while in school (Galambos, 2009). Another financial improvement for students attaining higher education were grants and loans. Need-based and merit based grants were also created, as well as loan programs for students (Kallison & Cohen, 2010). Kallison and Cohen (2010) stated that although the

educational reform in the United States to support students attaining higher education have drastically benefitted academia, continued support for higher education is slowly deteriorating among taxpayers, the government, and public institutions.

### **Economic Decline and its Effects on Higher Education**

Many factors played a role in why support for higher education is slowly decreasing. A big contributing factor is the economy. During the Great Depression, many colleges and universities reduced their financial assistant, the same assistant supporting students through college (Galambos, 2009). Galambos reported that students are the population to be hit the hardest during economic crisis. This was seen again during the economic crisis in 2008, where the United States had to balance their budgets while facing the declining tax revenues, as a way to solve financial supports for higher education (Sanyal & Johnstone, 2011). Priority in funding for higher education was pushed further back, as primary and secondary education, healthcare, and the criminal justice system were favored more for the public funding (Kallison & Cohen, 2010).

In 2006, the State Higher Education Executives Officers stated that the state and local support for higher education per each student had hit an unsurpassed record in 25 years in the 2004-2005 fiscal year (Kallison & Cohen, 2010). This was due to the funding pattern for public institutions that typically follow a recession, which is not proficient enough to support higher educational funding in universities and restore it to its pre-recession levels. Inflation, combined with increased enrollments in the universities, also contributed to this issue. Also in 2006, the College Board reported that tuition and fees at a public four-year college or university reached a high of 35%, even



after the inflation in 2001-2002 and 2006-2007. This increase of tuition fees has been the greatest increments since 1976 to present day (Kallison & Cohen, 2010).

Economic decline affected how students financed their tuition fees while attaining higher education since funding had been decreased. Galambos (2009) reported that some students were able to continue with their higher education only after securing employment and sacrificing other necessities, such as food. Paying for tuition fees were prioritized over food as a means to continue attaining higher education.

Kallison and Cohen (2010) also stated that inflation brought on by economic decline has also affected the low-income Americans. In 2006, the Advisor Committee on Student Financial Assistant reported that financial barriers in attaining higher education that were faced from low- and moderate- income families was also seen with families from the middle- and high- income (Kallison & Cohen, 2010). For students that did not meet the requirements for financial aid, the U.S Census Bureau reported that they will have to pay a fee of 24% of their median family income (Thao & Dang, 2017).

Other student populations, such as women, minorities, and those who were economically disadvantaged, were also the first to suffer from this financial downfall (Galambos, 2009). Students from low-income economic statuses also had a higher dropout rate from college than other student populations (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2007).

Similarly, like the students discussed earlier from Romania, students in the United States have sought similar scenarios when financing for college. Thao and Dang (2017) reported that college students also worked, on average of 10 to 15 hours per

week while in school as a way to continue the pursuit of higher education. The amount of hours dedicated to work can also negatively impact the students' grades and their ability to complete their higher education within the four-year time frame. A financial barrier also impacted the rate of higher education completion. Students from minority groups often have parents with little or no educational background, as well as are from low-socioeconomic statuses. Thus, those students cannot rely on their parents for financial support, which prevented them from attaining a higher education within four years (Thao & Dang, 2017).

### **Gender Differences and Higher Education Attainment in the U.S**

The gender differences in women obtaining higher education degrees is consistent with what we discussed earlier in the global aspect. Even when income is compared, females from low-income socioeconomic statuses are still 25% more likely to receive their bachelor's degree than males from the same socioeconomic backgrounds (Klevan et al., 2016). Klevan et al. (2016) discussed that the increased of women achieving for a higher education degree is due to financial independence. However, it comes at the cost of delaying marriages, having fewer children, and having fewer eligible males (Klevan et al., 2016).

## **DECIPHERING HMONG AMERICANS' EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **Asian Americans and the Model Minority Myth**

In order to fully understand the factors of how the Asian race, specifically Hmong Americans, attained higher education in the United States, it is important to

recognize the different terms used for each group. Palmer and Maramba (2015) found that the Asian race has over 50 different ethnic groups that varied in characteristics, language, national origins, immigration patterns, and socioeconomic statuses. The terms for Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Asians are not interchangeable, and each term have been politically and socially constructed in terms of race and ethnicity (Poon et al., 2016). Lee (2013) found that the term “Asian” or “Asian American” was vastly used in the United States to describe individuals from Asia. Also, the terms “Asian” or “Asian American” did not allow room to distinguish the many different Asian ethnicities and instead, combined all of the Asian ethnicities into one. Asian ethnicities from areas such as East Asia included China, Japan, and Korea while Asian ethnicities from areas of Southeast Asia included Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippine Islands, and Vietnam. Lastly, Asian ethnicities from areas of Indian included Indian and Pakistan (F. M. Lee, 2013).

Asian Americans and Pacific Islander (AAPI) were finally recognized in the American public educational system in 1954 by the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Song, 2016). In 2002, the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE), examined the different retention rates of students of different ethnic background among first and second year students in college. The retention rates were as followed: White students had a rate of 80.3%, African Americans students had a rate of 74.6%, Latino students had a rate of 75.7%, American Indian students had a rate of 67.2%, and Asian students had a rate of 86.9%, which accounted for the highest retention rate among the different racial groups (Seidman, 2005). Also, Asian

Americans attaining their bachelor's degree or higher was the highest group in doing so, with Asian Americans at 40% compared to 30% with whites, 19% with African Americans, 19% with Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islander (NHPIS), 17% with American Indians and Alaskans Natives (AIAN), and 13% with Latinos” (Ramakrishnan and Ahmad, 2014).

In 2000, among other ethnic origins, Asian Americans accounted for 43.2% within the ethnic groups in higher education attainment (Teranishi, 2007). According to Song (2016), there were approximately 1.5 million Asian American students who pursued a higher education at a two- or four- year college. When capturing college retention data for Asian Americans, data was often focused on East Asian groups, primarily Chinese, Japanese, and South Koreans because they have resided the longest in the United States (Thao & Dang, 2017). East Asians have emigrated to the United States since the 1840s to live the “American Dream” which explained their long existence in the United States (M. Lee, 2015). However, the Southeast Asians’ immigration patterns were much more different compared to their East Asian counterparts. Southeast Asians, such as the Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Mien, and the Hmong population, did not arrive in the United States until the 1970s, and came as political refugees of war (Thao & Dang, 2017). When deciphering the Asian groups by ethnicities, Southeast Asians, specifically Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians have fewer than 15% in higher education attainment while Asian Indians had 72% and East Asians, specifically Chinese, had 53% of higher education attainment (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014).

Southeast Asians have been considered the newest Asian population to immigrate to the United States, therefore, their historical background deemed them different from other Asian Americans (Vang & Vang, 2017). Xiong (2012) included that when East Asians immigrated to the United States, they were from the poor, working class; however, Southeast Asians were refugees of political war and were poor, less educated, and were from agrarian societies.

Without regarding the fact that Asian Americans consisted of many ethnic groups, the Model Minority Myth insinuated that all Asians are alike, which meant that Southeast Asian groups were similar to their other Asian counterparts, such as the East Asian groups. The Model Minority Myth has been socially constructed to describe Asian Americans as a population that naturally accelerated into academic achievements, thus, creating a successful life for themselves (Song, 2016).

Palmer and Maramba (2015) also proclaimed that all Asian Americans do not follow the Model Minority Myth and that it actually created barriers for Southeast Asians when accessing higher education, as well as the needed support for education. The Model Minority Myth has created stereotypes within the Asian American community and made it harder to distinguish the challenges that Southeast Asian students faced. The stereotypes have caused unfair comparisons among the many different Asian ethnicities within the Asian American communities because the stereotypes grouped all of the different Asian cultures together. These types of unfair comparisons caused Southeast Asian Americans to be dismissed as its own ethnic minority group who have been faced with different challenges compared to the

perceived challenges that East Asian Americans were faced with in Model Minority Myth (Palmer & Maramba, 2015).

It is equally important to understand that the Hmong population falls within the Southeast Asian groups, therefore the Model Minority Myth cannot be used to explain the circumstances of the Hmong community. Kwan (2015) have found that many families in the Hmong community in the United States have lower socioeconomic backgrounds and depended on social welfare. Within the Southeast Asian group, the Hmong community was faced with the highest poverty rate at 64%, while Cambodians faced a poverty rate of 43%, and Laotians faced a poverty rate of 35% (Teranishi, 2007).

### **Hmong Representation in Higher Education**

Vang and Vang (2017) stated that the Hmong group, along with Cambodians, Mien, and Laotian ethnicities, were ranked as the lowest when attaining higher education. Vietnamese was actually ranked as the highest of all the Southeast Asian groups and accounted for 26.3% who obtained a higher education of a bachelor's degree (Vang & Vang, 2017). Hmong accounted for 14% of a bachelor degree attainment, which was lower than the national average (Krupnick, 2015), while Laotian accounted for 12.1% and Cambodians accounted for 14.5% of college attainment (Vang & Vang, 2017).

However, Xiong (2012) argued that from 2001 to 2010, the amount of Hmong college undergraduates, graduates, and professional students have doubled. The United States Census data from 1990 to 2010 and the 2010 American Community Survey

indicated that of the 260,073 Hmong individuals residing in the United States, 14.5% were the age 25 years or older and have at least a bachelor's degree in 2010, compared to the 4.9% in 1990 and the 7.4% in 2000 (M. Lee, 2015). The American Community Survey also indicated that there was a gender difference in college attainment and reported that Hmong females aged 25 years and older accounted for 20.4% while Hmong males accounted for 18.6% (Vang & Vang, 2017).

## **BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE HMONG COMMUNITY**

### **Financial Hardship**

From earlier research, poverty rates in the Hmong community in the United States were very high. This issue affected financial support for students as their annual family household income was less than \$24,000 (F. M. Lee, 2013). Poverty level was highly affected by unemployment rates in the Hmong community as well. When compared to the national average, the rate of unemployment was high in the Hmong community, and the per capita income in the Hmong household was significantly lower (Chiang, Fisher, and Collins, 2015). According to Vang and Vang (2017), the poverty rate for the Hmong people have decreased over the decades, however, the Hmong people are still struggling more than most other racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

Through the research conducted by Xiong and Lee (2011), one of the obstacles that Hmong students faced when attaining higher education was the lack of financial assistance. From Xiong and Lee's (2011) research out of CSU Fresno, out of the 28

Hmong students, who participated in an Academic Support Program (ASP), and the 27 Hmong students, who were not involved in an ASP, 70% reported that the lack of money was a direct obstacle in attaining higher education. The sample size also identified that lack of financial support has jeopardized the continuation of their higher education career, as they wavered between the decision to finish their higher education or withdraw completely (Xiong and Lee, 2011).

### **Cultural Expectations and Stress**

Cultural barriers that clashed with the acculturation into the American culture has been shown to have created challenges for Hmong students. McCoy, Supple, and Wang (2010) conducted a qualitative study on five students that examined the acculturative stress experienced when adjusting to a new lifestyle in the United States. Students from the qualitative study of reported that acculturative stresses experienced stemmed from parental expectations which clashed with their acculturation into the American culture. Xiong and Lee (2011) also agreed that Hmong students experienced similar distresses and often resorted to self-blaming as a result.

Vang and Vang (2017) stated that cultural expectations in the Hmong community also differed by gender, where Hmong females were more heavily pressured to carry out cultural practices. Hmong females have reported that cultural roles and gender differences were stressors towards academic achievements (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Students attaining higher education were still expected to carry out cultural duties even when they have academic work to complete (Xiong & Lam, 2013). McCoy



et. al (2010) also included that female participants reported experiencing greater pressure to fulfill gender roles and values in their culture.

### **Parent's Education and Limited Parental support**

Similarly, to the global research that previously discussed parental level of education and its effect on students attaining higher education, parent's educational influences were examined to understand the barriers brought forth when Hmong students pursue higher education. Like previously mentioned, the history of formal education within the Hmong community is very limited and nonexistent for many years prior to the Hmong immigrating to the United States. Many Hmong students who pursued higher education were first generation college students who came from a low socioeconomic background, where their parents had no formal education and college degrees (Vang and Vang, 2017). Although Hmong parents have shown to have greatly encouraged their children to pursue higher education, their lack in the skills and knowledge of formal education posed as a barrier to directly support their children in attaining the formal college degree (Xiong and Lee, 2011). As a result, Hmong parents relied on words of encouragements and the school system to help their children stay focus in school and attain higher education (Vang and Vang, 2017). Although direct support from Hmong parents was limited, many students have reported that achieving in higher education was a way to show appreciation towards their parents (Xiong & Lam, 2013).

### **Academic Barriers**

Challenges that Hmong students faced within the school system itself were barriers when attaining higher education. Academic barriers that students dealt with included lack of counseling support. The lack of counseling support for Hmong students to support overall academic achievements in higher education were reported to as a barrier that was not exercised to its full potential (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Paired with being first generation college students, Hmong students were faced with the challenges of succeeding at higher education career by themselves once admitted into college (Vang and Vang, 2017). Xiong and Lam (2013), reported that from their research, participants missed out on key academic support programs that would have helped them lessen their academic challenges while attaining their higher education. The participants also reported that lack of awareness of such academic programs resulted in preventing the students from not accessing the academic support originally (Xiong & Lam, 2013). This lack of awareness also effected the student's future goals and the pursuit for a chance at a professional degree. The significance of this effect is seen in one of the participants in Xiong and Lam's research, where the student reflected on not having guidance when determining degree requirements and completion, which delayed the student from applying to graduate school by one year.

### **SUMMARY**

As rates of enrollment into higher education are increasing around the world, other challenges arise for students when attaining higher education. With the economic failure in 2008, universities and colleges resorted to other measures to support their students, such privatization and cost-sharing fees. Universities and colleges also

resorted to cross-border education and branch colleges to gain revenues to support their university. Also, with the implementation of the cross-border education, many students found it to help them establish a better career path due to attaining the necessary skills learnt from the programs. However, with all of these new high ways to support universities and colleges, students were also impacted as it does not benefit them. Privatization and cost-sharing created challenges for students to attain higher education since they cannot financially support themselves. With the economic failure, funding for higher education decreased which effected students directly. Students relied on sharing the cost of tuition with their parents or relied on working to support themselves while attaining their higher education. This was also examined in the Hmong community as well. The Hmong people do not fall into the Model Minority Myth, which is significant when understanding the barriers that they faced with when attaining higher education. Hmong students also faced financial hardships since they were often from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. They also lacked direct educational support from their parents, who lacked a formal education. As a result, the Hmong students relied on the school system as their means of support in education. However, it was founded that the school system did not provide adequate guidance for students as well and which resulted in Hmong students' delayed educational path to attain higher education. These barriers are important to note as we study the rapid growth rate of college attainment in the Hmong community.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter explains the procedures used to identify the key factors in contributing to the rapid college attainment rate of Hmong. The chapter layout begins with the study objective and the selected study design to identify the factors associated with the rapid college attainment rate in the Hmong community. The first part of the chapter discussed the sampling design and the efforts put forth for this research, and instruments utilized for data collection. The author, along with two other peers, Shau Xiong and Lisa Thor, from the same Master of Social Work (MSW) cohort, were recruited to help collect the data, along with Dr. Serge Lee's directions. The research team consisted of Dr. Lee, who was the principal investigator for the research study, myself, and the other two students from the MSW program, who were the co-principal investigators for the research.

#### **Study Objectives**

The research objective is to identify key factors that contributed to the rapid rate of college attainment of Hmong Americans. The key factors identified from this research study will offer an explanation and perspective on how Hmong students are graduating at a rapid rate.

#### **Study Design**

The exploratory research designed was used to identify the research aims. The exploratory design was selected as the best choice due to the very few data that existed for this topic in regard to the Hmong community. According to Rubbin and Babbie

(2015), the exploratory design is best used to research an issue with little or no existing data in regard to the topic of origin. Although there has been previous research on Hmong students' experiences in higher education, as well as the delayed in degree attainment among Hmong college students within a four-year time frame, there are very few data identifying factors that positively contributed to the rapid rate of college attainment in the Hmong community overall. The quantitative approaches were utilized for the recruitment of research subjects and data collection procedures.

### **Sampling Procedures**

This research study utilized four sampling methods to collect data from the research participants: purposive sampling, convenience sampling, non-proportional sampling, and snowballing. Purposive sampling was best fitted with the research aims as the research teams wanted to recruit research subjects that were knowledgeable about educational background of Hmong Americans. Convenience sampling was used from the co-principal investigators as each investigator asked upon their friends, families, and members of the Hmong community to participate in the research project. Non-proportional sampling occurred after the first rounds of data collection when the co-principal investigators were informed by Dr. Lee that more male participants were needed for the research project. The co-principal investigators used non-proportional sampling to collect data from the Hmong male population, and specifically sought out Hmong male participants. Snowballing occurred when co-principal investigators sought out people to participate in the research project, whom may fit the criteria of the research project.

The research subjects are Hmong individuals who were between the ages of 21 and 55 and not receiving any mental health treatment. This included individuals who were currently in college, have graduated from college, or identified as a Hmong individual within the required age limits. The subjects were recruited throughout the United States. More specifically, the participants represented Hmong from the following states: California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Texas.

Prior to administering the questionnaire, the research team met on April 20, 2017 to discuss the research topic and the sampling population for the research study. The team discussed strategic ways of reaching 20-35 participants per co-principal investigators, with a goal of at least 50 research participants.

After the Application for the Protection of Human Subjects was reviewed and approved by California State University's Human Subjects Protection Committee, the research team immediately began their data collection. Data collection started in June 2017 and completed in September 2017. The participants were recruited through family, friends, social media outlets, and word of mouth. The author recruited 71 participants for the research study. Co-Principal investigator Xiong recruited 40 and co-principal investigator Thor recruited 30 for the research project with a total of 141. Out of the 141 research participants, only 97 surveys were included in the research study. Out of the total participants recruited for the research study, 21 Hmong males were personally emailed to participate in the study. All of the 21 Hmong males have graduated from college. Out of the 21 males that were personally emailed, 14 emailed back with their

interests in the study and was forwarded with the survey. Out of the completed 97 participants, 27 were collected through Qualtrics.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The data collected was completed by the co-principal investigators including myself, Shau Xiong and Lisa Thor. In order to be eligible to serve as both Research Assistants and co-Principle Investigators, each one of the co-principal investigators must obtain the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certificates. The CITI certificates must be completed before Dr. Lee could submit the research proposal to the university's Research Affairs for review and approval. While the three co-principal investigators were completing their CITI training, on May 5, 2017, Dr. Lee sent out the draft of the survey to be reviewed by the co-principal investigators and on June 4, 2017, the research team finalized the research instrument. Being viewed as talented researchers, Dr. Lee recruited the three co-principal investigators as his Research Assistants. Dr. Lee too was interested in the same research areas that the three co-principal investigators were expressing to him.

The methods of data collection included the use of word of mouth, Facebook, emails, and survey monkey via Qualtrics. Through word of mouth, the research team spoke with selected peers and family members about participation in the research study. Through Facebook, an event page was created on June 8, 2017 to recruit potential participants for the research and 298 Hmong prospective participants were invited to the research study. The Facebook event was also shared on the undersign's Facebook wall. The undersign created a generic email and emailed the interested participants with the

informed consents and the survey instrument. The undersign also informed the participants to email the completed surveys directly to Dr. Lee. Once the undersign emailed the interested participants, the undersign would comment on her personal Facebook with a “Thank you!” to the interested participant’s Facebook post.

On June 12, 2017, the same Facebook event page was shared again on the undersigns’ personal Facebook wall. The undersign also shared the Facebook event page with the following groups: Hmong Student Union at UC Davis, UC Davis Hmong Student Union Alumni, Hmong Student Associations of CA, Hmong Nerds, and HmonginHealth UC Davis. The undersign posted on her personal Facebook page again on the following occasions to recruit for more participants: June 21, 2017, June 27, 2017, June 29, 2017. From the Facebook posts, 298 were invited to the event page and 96 participants responded back with interests in participating in the research project.

On August 9, 2017, co-principal investigator Thor also created a Facebook post to obtain research participants for the research study through Qualtrics. The Facebook post generated 7 likes, 15 shares, and 5 comments from research participants who had completed the survey and had also shared the post on their personal Facebook profiles.

On July 10, 2017, the research team was informed by Dr. Lee of the low number of Hmong male college graduate participants in the research study, as well as an aim to reach a goal of at least 30 Hmong female college graduates to participate in the research study. The co-principal investigators personally reached out to Hmong males who have graduated with a college degree to participate in the research study. On July 10, 2017, the undersign personally Facebook messaged 21 Hmong males who have already



obtained their college degree to participant in the research study. Out of the 21 participants, only 14 responded back and were emailed the informed consent and survey. The other seven participants never responded back to the researcher. The last attempt to recruit for more participants for the research study was on July 28, 2017 through the undersigns' Facebook post. Co-principal investigator Xiong was further able to reach 3 Hmong male participants and co-principal investigator Thor was also able to reach 1 known male participants. Per Xiong and Thor's data collection, the number of Hmong males outreached to was ambiguous due to the use of Facebook via Qualtrics. The co-principal investigators are unsure of how many Hmong males participated in the research project through the Qualtrics platform. The co-principal investigators were not able to confirm the exact number of males that were considered for the research project, however, the data results will later indicate the actual number of males who participated.

The participants through Qualtrics was reached through the contact of Dr. Judy Vang, a lecturer at California State University of Chico. Professor Vang was introduced to co-principal Xiong through a mutual peer in the MSW Program and was contacted to help distribute the surveys to her students via email and Qualtrics. The informed consents were distributed through emails and the students took their surveys through the Qualtrics website, and this data size included 27 students.

Three participants in the research project also emailed their completed surveys back to the co-principal investigator, which had to be forwarded to Dr. Lee.

Once the data was collected, Dr. Lee entered the raw data into the statistic software Statistical Package for the Social Science (SSPS). Dr. Lee entered in 77 of the completed surveys that was emailed to him and co-principal investigator Xiong entered the other 27 completed surveys from Qualtrics into SSPS. Co-principal investigator Xiong completed entering the results into SSPS in two hours. The completed data set was finalized in September 2017.

### **Instrumentation and Human Subjects Protection**

The data was collected using the survey method to identify the factors that contributed to the rapid college attainment rate in the Hmong community. On May 5, 2017, Dr. Lee sent out the draft Application for the Protection of Human Subjects to California State University, Sacramento's Committee for the co-PIs for review and approval. On May 12, 2017, the three co-PI reviewed and approved of the draft application. Dr. Lee then submitted the entire Human Subjects Protection protocol to the university's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects via Research Affairs. Few days later on May 15, 2017, Dr. Lee received the following statement via email from the university IRB Committee "the Sacramento State Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposal titled *Factors associated with the rapid college attainment of Hmong Americans*. Your project received an Exempt review and this approval will expire on May 14, 2018. Our application was approved with the approval number IRB-16-17-295.

As stated above, the university IRB reviewed and approved all of our questions which consisted of 26 questions that generated 68 variables. Questions 1-11 identified

demographics of the sampling population, questions 12-16 identified college attainment and experiences, question 18 identified possible reasons for why college attainment in the Hmong community has increased in the past years, and questions 19-26 were only for those who have attained a college degree and identified the experiences and reasons for college attainment.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

After the commencement of the data collection, a copy of the SSPS data file was provided to the researchers to analyze. A total of 97 Hmong individuals participated in the study, 72 identified as female and 23 identified as males. Sixty percent of the participants were college graduates only, while 28.4 percent were high school graduates and 11.6 percent were post college graduates. The data results will be used to identify the contributing factors to the rapid rate of college attainment in the Hmong community. For this research Project, the undersign will analyze and discuss the following main variables in regards to its effect on the rapid college attainment of the Hmong community: the history of long-term welfare dependency of Hmong during resettlement period, the poor living conditions of the Hmong, wanting to be equally competitive in wages and in the labor market in the U.S., the encouragements of family and friends, the influences by parents, brothers, and sister, wanting a better future for their children in the future, self-determination, and simply wanting a college degree. Other variable will further be analyzed regarding the self-confidence levels of those who have graduated from college, the likelihood the subjects will encourage family

members to pursue higher education, and the participant's willingness to serve as a role model to their own family and to those not planning on attending college.

## Chapter 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND STUDY FINDINGS

This chapter examines the key factors that resulted in contributing to the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong people. The research study employed a quantitative method to determine which factors were prominent in the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong. The first section introduces the demographics of the research participants, the next section discusses on explaining the data, and the last section summarizes the overall study findings.

#### Demographics

The study had a total of 97 participants in the research who met the requirements to participate in the survey. Table 1 displays the participants' self-identification. Of the 97 participants, 75.8 % (n=72) identified themselves as female, 24.2% (n=23) as male, and two participants declined to disclosed their gender.

**Table 1**  
*Gender of the Research Subject*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	72	74.2	75.8	75.8
	Male	23	23.7	24.2	100.0
	Total	95	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		97	100.0		

Table 2 displays educational background of the respondents. Overall, 27 (28.4%) participants indicated being a high school graduate, 57 (60.0%) being a college

graduate, 11 (11.6%) being a post college graduate, and two participants did not indicate their highest level of education. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents were college graduates.

**Table 2**  
*Highest Level of Education of Research Subject*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High school graduate	27	27.8	28.4	28.4
	College graduate	57	58.8	60.0	88.4
	Post college graduate	11	11.3	11.6	100.0
	Total	95	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.1		
Total		97	100.0		

One of the key variables interested by the researcher was country of birth of the respondents. When inquired about their country of birth, 26.9% (n=25) were born in Laos/Thailand, 72.0% (n=67) were born in the USA, 1.1% (n=1) did not indicate their country of birth. It appears that most of the research subjects were born in the United States.

**Table 3**  
*Country of Birth of the Research Subject*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Laos/Thailand	25	25.8	26.9	26.9
	USA	67	69.1	72.0	98.9
	Other country	1	1.0	1.1	100.0
	Total	93	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	4.1		
Total		97	100.0		

As is common in the literature for new immigrants and refugees to the United States, one's educational success tends to correlate with his/her degrees of acculturation and assimilation. Table 4 shows the results of acculturation and assimilation for the participants that were born outside the US. The instrument used for this question is based on a scale from 1 to 5. In the scale, 1 was used to indicate "not acculturated at all" to 5 "fully acculturated into mainstream American society." The mean score for level of acculturation was 4.18 (SD=.664) and assimilation was 4.30 (SD=.703). The results indicate that the majority of the participants who answered these two question were highly acculturated and assimilated.

**Table 4**  
*Level of Acculturation and Assimilation into mainstream American Society*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Acculturation	4.18	.664
Assimilation	4.30	.703

Table 5 displays that participant's English-speaking capability. Out of the 97 participants, 35.5 % (n=33) indicated their English-speaking capability as excellent, another 35.5 % (n=33) indicated as above average, 26.9 % (n=25) indicated as average, and 2.2 % (n=2) indicated as below average for English-speaking capability. There were also four research responses whom did not indicate their rate of English-speaking capability. The results suggested that the majority of the participants indicated their English-speaking capability as above average and excellent for.

**Table 5**  
*The Research Subject's self-rated English speaking capability*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below average	2	2.1	2.2	2.2
	Average	25	25.8	26.9	29.0
	Above average	33	34.0	35.5	64.5
	Excellent	33	34.0	35.5	100.0
	Total	93	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	4.1		
Total		97	100.0		

Table 6 illustrates the Hmong-speaking capability of the participants. Overall, 6.5 % (n=6) indicated their Hmong-speaking capability as excellent, 25.8 % (n=24) indicated as above average, 46.2 % (n=43) indicated as average, and 21.5% (n=20) indicated as below average in Hmong-speaking capability. The results suggest that the majority of the participants rated their Hmong-speaking capability as average.

**Table 6**  
*The Research Subject's self-rated Hmong speaking capability*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below average	20	20.6	21.5	21.5
	Average	43	44.3	46.2	67.7
	Above average	24	24.7	25.8	93.5
	Excellent	6	6.2	6.5	100.0
	Total	93	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	4.1		
Total		97	100.0		



Table 7 focuses on the English writing skills of the participants. Out of the 97 participants, 2 (2.2 %) participants rated their English skills as below average, 36 (38.7%) rated as average, 36 (38.7%) rated as above average and 19 (20.4%) rated as excellent for their English-writing skills. The results suggest that the majority of the participants rated their English writing skills as either average or above average.

**Table 7**  
*The Research Subject's self-rated English writing skills*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below average	2	2.1	2.2	2.2
	Average	36	37.1	38.7	40.9
	Above average	36	37.1	38.7	79.6
	Excellent	19	19.6	20.4	100.0
	Total	93	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	4.1		
Total		97	100.0		

Table 8 displays the racial and ethnicities of the participants. When inquired about their racial and ethnicities, 81.5% (n=75) indicated as Hmong Americans, 9.8% (n=9) as Hmong only, 5.4% (n=5) as Asian mixed American and 3.3% (n=3) as Mixed. From the results, the Hmong American identity was highly represented in the data.

**Table 8**  
*How the Research Subject Self-Identify*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hmong only	9	9.3	9.8	9.8
	Hmong American only	75	77.3	81.5	91.3
	Asian mixed American	5	5.2	5.4	96.7
	Mixed (everyone)	3	3.1	3.3	100.0
	Total	92	94.8	100.0	
Missing	System	5	5.2		
Total		97	100.0		

Table 9 displays the ethnic origins of the friends and peers that the participants most often socialized with at school and work. Overall, 1 (1.1%) participant indicated having only American peers, 13 (14.0%) indicated having only Asian friends, 17 (18.3%) indicated having Asian and Americans friends and 62 (66.7%) indicated having a mixture of everyone as friends. The results suggest that the majority of the participants had a mixture of friends with everyone.

**Table 9**  
*The Ethnic origin of friends and peers the subject most often socialized with at school and work*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Asian only	13	13.4	14.0	14.0
	American only	1	1.0	1.1	15.1
	Asian mixed American	17	17.5	18.3	33.3
	Mixed (everyone)	62	63.9	66.7	100.0
	Total	93	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	4.1		
Total		97	100.0		

### **Specific Findings**

This section focuses on the key factors that were examined to determine the contributing factors to the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong. The participants' college experience and their perceptions about the Hmong people, history and culture were also examined in order to compare them to the key factors.

Table 10 displays the college experience of the participants who attended college. The tool used for this question is based on a scale from 1 to 5. In the scale, 1 was used to indicate "not applicable to me at all" to 5 "strongly applicable to me." Four variables were examined for the college experience of the participants: belief that Americans do not understand the individual, easier to communicate the individual's feelings to the Asian students more than American students, belief that Hmong students understand the individual better than American students, and the individual having both American and Asian friends in college.

The mean score for the participants' college experience in feeling that Americans do not understand them was 2.61 (SD=1.394). The mean score for the participants' college experience in feeling that it was easier to communicate their feelings to Asian students more so than American students was 2.79 (SD=1.381). The mean score for the participants in feeling that Hmong students understand them better than American students was 3.05 (SD=1.498). Lastly, the mean score for the participants having both American and Asian friends in college was 4.03 (SD=1.402). The table suggests that the majority of the participants had friends who were both American and Asian students while in college.

**Table 10***College Experience*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
1. Americans do not understand the individual	2.61	1.394
2. Easier to communicate the individual's feelings to the Asian students more than American students	2.79	1.381
3. Hmong students understand the individual better than American students	3.05	1.498
4. Have both American and Asian Friends	4.03	1.402

The participants were inquired about their Hmong experience. Table 11 illustrates four variables that were examined for the Hmong experience: the Hmong culture remaining a strong part of the participant, the participant consulting in Hmong elders, the individual believing that the Hmong people and the culture is still very important to the individual, and the individual liking Hmong food, listening to music and attending Hmong art shows. The instrument use for this question is based on a scale of 1 to 5. In the scale, 1 was used to indicate “not applicable to me at all” to 5 “strongly applicable to me.”

The mean score for the Hmong culture remaining a strong part of the participant was 3.56 (SD=1.089). The mean score in the participant consulting with Hmong elders

was 2.45 (SD=1.327). The mean score for the participants feeling that the Hmong people and culture is still very important to them was 3.97 (SD=1.134). Lastly, the mean score for liking Hmong food, listening to Hmong music and attending Hmong art shows was 4.05 (SD=1.197). Table 11 indicated that majority of the participants feel that the Hmong people and the culture is still very important to them, as well as are still embracing Hmong food, music and art.

**Table 11**

*Hmong Experience*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
1. The Hmong culture remaining a strong part of the individual	3.56	1.089
2. Consult with Hmong elders	2.45	1.327
3. Feel that Hmong people and culture is still very important	3.97	1.134
4. Like Hmong food, listen to Hmong music, and attend Hmong art shows	4.05	1.197

Table 12 reflects the nine key variables out of the 18 variables inquired that were examined by the researcher to determine if they contributed to the rapid growth rate of college attainment of the Hmong. The question utilized a scaling instrument of 1

to 5. In the scale, 1 represented “not related to college attainment of Hmong at all” to 5 “significantly contributed to college attainment of Hmong.”

The researcher chose a mean score of 4 or greater ( $M > 4$ ) as the base line to determine if the variables contributed to the rapid college attainment of the Hmong. The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due to a history of put downs by Americans during the resettlement periods was 3.15 ( $SD=1.510$ ). The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due to the history of long-term welfare dependency of the Hmong during the resettlement period was 3.56 ( $SD=1.471$ ). The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due to the poor living conditions of the self or family in the past years was 4.29 ( $SD=1.237$ ). The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due wanting to be equally competitive in both the wages and labor market in the United States was 4.31 ( $SD=1.092$ ).

The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due encouragements by the Hmong community was 3.36 ( $SD=1.383$ ). The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due the cost of living in the United States was 4.02 ( $SD=1.280$ ). The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due influences by parents, brothers, and sisters was 4.54 ( $SD=0.755$ ). The mean score for the key variable that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due wanting a better quality of life for their children was 4.34 ( $SD=1.117$ ). Lastly, the mean score for the key variable

that the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong was due self-determination was 4.55 (SD=0.848).

The results indicated that self – determination scored as the most influential factor in contributing to the growth rate of the college attainment rate of the Hmong. Influences from parents, brothers, and sisters scored as the second highest factor in contributing to the rapid rate of college attainment, and wanting a better quality of life for their children scored the third highest. The history of put downs by Americans during the resettlement periods scored the lowest in contributing to the college attainment of the Hmong.

**Table 12*****Key Variables for college attainment of Hmong***

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
1. Due to history of put downs by Americans during resettlement periods	3.15	1.510
2. Due to history of long-term welfare dependency of Hmong during resettlement period	3.56	1.471
3. Due to the poor living conditions of the self or family in the past years	4.29	1.237
4. Want to be equally competitive in both wages and labor market in the U.S.	4.31	1.092
5. Encouragements by Hmong community	3.36	1.383
6. Cost of living in the United States	4.02	1.280
7. Influences by parents, brothers, and sisters	4.54	0.755
8. Want better quality of life for children	4.34	1.117
9. Self – determination	4.55	0.848

Table 13 displays the self-confidence of the participants after attaining a college degree. Overall, 15.2 % (n=10) of the participants indicated that their confidence remained the same, 24.2 % (n=16) indicated that their confidence somewhat increased,



33.3 % (n=17) indicated that their confidence increased, and 25.8 % (n=17) stated that their confidence significantly increased. From the data, an overall increase in confidence was highly associated after college attainment.

**Table 13**

*By possessing a college degree, how the subject feels about himself/herself*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Confidence remains the same	10	10.3	15.2	15.2
	Confidence somewhat increases	16	16.5	24.2	39.4
	Confidence increases	22	22.7	33.3	72.7
	Confidence significantly increases	17	17.5	25.8	98.5
	5	1	1.0	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	68.0	100.0	
Missing	System	31	32.0		
Total		97	100.0		

Table 14 focuses on the likelihood that the participants will encourage family members to attain a college education. The participants indicated that 1 (1.6%) individual will strongly discourage the family members to attain college, 16 (25.4%) participants will encourage the family members, 11 (17.5%) participants will strongly encourage the family members, and 35 (55.6%) participants definitely will encourage the family members to attain a college education. The results indicate that at more than half of the participants will definitely influence a family member to attain a college education.

**Table 14*****Likelihood the subject will encourage family members to go to college***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly discourage them	1	1.0	1.6	1.6
	Encourage them	16	16.5	25.4	27.0
	Strongly encourage them	11	11.3	17.5	44.4
	Definitely will encourage them	35	36.1	55.6	100.0
	Total	63	64.9	100.0	
Missing	System	34	35.1		
Total		97	100.0		

Table 15 represents the participants' willingness to serve as a role model for other Hmong individuals that do not plan to attend college. The data suggests that 84.8% (n=56) of the participants indicated that they will serve as a role model while 7.6% (n=5) stated that they will not serve as a role model for other Hmong individuals to pursue higher education. Also, 7.6% (n=5) participants declined to indicate if they will serve as a role model. The subjects' willingness to serve as a role model in the Hmong community is highly represented in the data.

**Table 15*****Subjects' willingness to serve as a role model for other Hmong individuals that do not plan to attend college***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, I will	56	57.7	84.8	84.8
	No, I will not	5	5.2	7.6	92.4
	Decline	5	5.2	7.6	100.0
	Total	66	68.0	100.0	
Missing	System	31	32.0		
Total		97	100.0		

## Summary

In summary, six of the nine factors that were examined in Table 15 were found to have contributed to the rapid college attainment of the Hmong: poor living conditions, wanting to be equally competitive in the wage and labor market in the United States, cost of living in the United States, influences by family members, better quality of life for children, and self-determination. The majority of the participants responded that were college graduates, 57 (60.0%) being a college graduate and 11 (11.6%) being a post college graduate, which highlights even further the impact of the previous six factors.

The results in Table 3 indicated that the 72.0% (n=67) of the participants were born in the United States, however, impoverished living conditions of the participants were found to contribute to the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong. This result in Table 12 suggests that the parents of those born in the United States were affected by the American's mistreatment during the resettlement period of the Hmong while the aftermath of the resettlement of poor living conditions affected the participants' generation, which is why it is a contributing factor in our research.

Also, the results showed that many of the participants were highly acculturated or assimilated, the level of acculturation was 4.18 (SD=.664) and the level of assimilation was 4.30 (SD=.703) which further highlights the key factors of the participants wanting to be equally competitive in the wage and labor market in the United States. The factor of self – determination scored the highest in our research

project, with a mean score of 4.55 (SD=0.848), which can suggest that it is influenced by the participants being highly acculturated and assimilated.

When examining the college experience of the research participants, only one variable was found significant. The results in Table 10 indicated that the college experience of the participants included having friends who were American and Asian peers. When examining the Hmong experience of the participants, the results in Table 11 indicated that the Hmong culture was still very important to them, which also influenced them to stay connected to the Hmong food, music and arts. Although the participants scored high in embracing the Hmong culture, the factor of participants receiving encouragements by the Hmong community was not found to be significant in contributing to the rapid college attainment rate.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the purpose, methodology and findings of the thesis project in examining the contributing factors to the rapid attainment college rate of the Hmong. Within the past decade, the Hmong students have rapidly increase their attainment and pursuit of higher education given the time frame of the Hmong's existence within the United States. This is a phenomenon given that the Hmong came to the United States as a preliterate group from 1975 to the middle of 1990s. Studies have shown that the achievement of a college education has many benefits such as better job opportunities, higher competitive wages, and social mobility (Gee et al., 2015). Given this context and the Hmong's historical context since the mid-1970s, this project aims to find out the reasons for the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong. Also, there are limited research on the exact contributions to why Hmong students have attained college education. This project examined Hmong culture influences and the American culture influences to understand its impacts of the rapid growth of college attainment in the Hmong. Another key factor examined was the level of acculturation and assimilation of the participants. Key themes emerged from the research project that indicated that self-determination, influences by family members, wanting a better quality of life for children, past poor living conditions, wanting to be equally competitive in the wage and labor market, and the cost of living in the United States highly influence the participants to attain a higher education.

### **Summary of Study**

To reiterate, the purpose of this research project was to examine and understand the contributing factors to the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong. Historically, the Hmong have been lumped together with other Asians, specifically, East Asians, and the Model Minority Myth took precedent in believing that the Hmong had similar patterns of opportunities and influences as those of Asian descendants. However, the Hmong lacked a formal education and so few became literate after the 1950s (Duffy, 2007), and does not fall into the Model Minority Myth theory. Also, with limited data on the Hmong's educational history, this project was created to provide more context in understand the Hmong community and its educational influences.

The Project examines the factors that may have contributed to the rapid growth rate of college attainment of the Hmong within the United States. The Project included 97 participants from California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Texas, and North Carolina. The majority of the participants were females. The participants have also shown to have highly assimilated and acculturated to the American culture.

Through the Social Construction Theory, the researchers were able to examine how the lived experiences of the participants contributed to the factors of attaining higher education and understand which factors were the most influential in the rapid growth of the college attainment of the Hmong. Also, the Social Construction Theory looked at the participants individual reality and how it factored into the participants' influences to attain a college education. Consequently, exploring the contributing factors of the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong can help inform professionals

and the Hmong community at large on the direct educational and life experiences of Hmong college graduates.

Influences to the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong includes: self-determination, influences by family members, wanting a better quality of life for the children, wanting to be equally competitive in the wage and labor market, past poor living conditions, and the cost of living in the United States. These factors contributed to the participants pursuit of higher education and attainment.

***Self-Determination.*** According to the research findings, self-determination was the highest factor influencing the participants to attain a college education. The participants' own motivation proved to be the most prominent in influencing college attainment. This is not surprising since the findings indicated that the participants have highly assimilated and acculturated, and self-determination can be seen as an American value of individualism.

***Influences from Parents and Siblings.*** The findings indicated that influences from parents, brothers and sisters came in as the second influence to attain a college education. The influence of the family is also a very collectivist value of the Hmong, which can be the reasons why influences of the family proved highly influential in this research study. Although the research indicated that the participants have highly assimilated and acculturated, the finding results of this factor was not surprising to the researchers since the Hmong culture was also indicated to remain as a huge influence to the participants in the research.

***Wanting a Better Quality of Life for Children.*** Based on the research, the influences of wanting a better quality of life for the children was the third highest factor in college attainment. This factor is a surprising influence for the researchers due to limited research indicating that this factor existed in other educational influences. This factor is a unique factor to the Hmong's educational experience.

***Equally Competitive in Wage and Labor Markets.*** Another contributing factor to the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong includes wanting to be equally competitive in wages and the labor markets. This research finding agrees with other research findings that attaining higher education sustains a higher pay and more job opportunities.

***Past Poor Living Conditions.*** The research findings indicated that influences of the past living conditions of the self or family in the past years contributed to the college attainment rate of the Hmong. This factor also coincides with previous research that suggest that attaining college educations brings forth better living conditions for the individual.

***Cost of Living.*** According to the research, the cost of living in the United States was another factor in influencing the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong. This factor is unique in that it explores that the cost of living influences of the United States and its effects in the Hmong educational experience.

The research findings of the mentioned contributing factors in influencing the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong is the ground work in understanding the Hmong educational experience. Using the Social Construction Theory, the researchers



will explain how this data can be used to influence further research and assistance to future generations of Hmong students pursuing higher education, as well as serve as an example for other Southeast Asian cultures.

### **Implications for Social Work**

This Master's Project and other studies on Hmong Americans showed a slowly but steadily pattern of college attainment resulted in a better understanding about college experiences of the Hmong within the United States. The findings of this research project indicate that some of the factors influencing the rapid college attainment rate of the Hmong supported previous research on college attainment and benefits in general. This is not surprising since the findings of this research project indicated that the participants have highly assimilated and acculturated into the American society.

Using the Social Construction Theory, the findings suggest that the participants' educational influences and experiences were socially constructed by their life experiences while growing up in the United States, as they were assimilating and acculturating from their Hmong culture and values to the American culture and values. With these findings, future research can use this data to build even further educational experiments on the genders of Hmong college students and second-generation Hmong students.

This data can also be used by social workers in the school settings to better understand the Hmong individual. Other social work implications include how social workers can use the data to advocate for more programs and services to cater to the

specific needs of the Hmong students in attaining higher education, as well as understanding how the factors from the research findings affect the individual's life experiences and actions. This will create for a better learning environment for the Hmong students.

### **Study Limitations**

Although this research project was carefully prepared for, there were still limitations. Below are the limitations for the research project.

1. A limitation for this research project was not having the survey on a survey website platform so that more participants can reach it without having to email the researchers back in order to participate.
2. There were some terms in the survey that could have benefitted with a definition so that the research participants don't have to guess at their answers. The research can benefit with clear definitions to specific terms that the researchers were trying to collect instead of leaving it up to the participants to interpret.
3. Sampling a broad population within the Hmong community, those who were college graduates and those who were not, caused for the survey to include both types of questionnaires that was confusing on the survey.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this research project built the foundation for the influences of higher education attainment in the Hmong community, there are still recommendations for future research. Below are some proposals for future research.

1. Have two separate samples of Hmong participants, those who have graduated from college and those who have not graduated, in order to see what is factual and what is perceived.
2. Research and data collection should utilize a website platform in order to reach more recipients.
3. Future research should focus solely on the Hmong male population and their influences in attaining higher education.
4. Future research should focus solely on the Hmong female population and their influences in attaining higher education.
5. Future research can look at the qualitative research on why the results of this research have contributed to the participants pursuit of higher education.
6. Future research can look at the educational influences of Hmong second-generation college graduates.

## **Conclusion**

This research project was conducted due the researchers' interest in understanding what factors are contributing to the rapid college rate within the Hmong community, especially since there is limited research on the growth of the Hmong community in education. The purpose of the study is to provide specific factors and influences on the rapid college rate of the Hmong. The researcher used the Social Construction Theory as the theoretical framework for examining the research project and variables in contributing to the rapid growth rate of college attainment in the

Hmong community. Reflecting upon the data, the researchers found that poor living conditions, wanting to be equally competitive in wage and the labor market in the United States, cost of living, influences by immediate family members, wanting better quality of life for children, and self-determination highly contributed to the participants' college attainment. Future research should examine further factors that contributed to the rapid college attainment rate within the Hmong community, however focus on Hmong male recipients and contrast with this data to see if the results differed or are similar since the majority of our sample were Hmong females.

## Appendix A

### Informed Consent

#### **INFORMED CONSENT**

##### **Factors Associated with Rapid College Attainment of Hmong Questionnaire**

You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve examining cultural traditions (new and old) and social behavior that have influenced the significant college attainment of Hmong Americans in the past ten years. My name is Dr. Serge Lee, and I am a professor at California State University, Sacramento, Division of Social Work. This survey may have been administered by a student research assistant.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to give 15-20 minutes of your time to answer a series of questions about reasons you believe contributed to college attainment of Hmong in past ten years. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and anonymous. You can withdraw participation at anytime or skip those questions that you do not like or do not apply to you.

There are some possible risks involved for participants, but these are not anticipated to be any greater than those risks you encounter in daily life. There are some benefits to this research, particularly that your participation will provide invaluable information about the factors that contributed to college success of Hmong.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. To withdraw your participation, please simply return the survey to the researchers. No question will be asked. Also, there is no incentive for your participation in the study.

The anonymous data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at (916) 278-6943, or email to me at [leesc@csus.edu](mailto:leesc@csus.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email [irb@csus.edu](mailto:irb@csus.edu).

Your participation and completion of this survey indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time

without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

## Appendix B

## QUESTIONNAIRE

**Factors Associated with Rapid College Attainment of Hmong Questionnaire**

You must be between the ages of 21 and 55 and not receiving any mental health treatment to participate in this research study. Please try to answer the questions to the best of your ability. There is no right or wrong answer. Participation in this research project is strictly voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or does not apply to you. You may stop or withdraw participation at any time. **DO NOT put your name anywhere in the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.**

1. Please circle your gender.
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Other
  
2. Please circle your highest level of education.
  - a. Less than high school graduate
  - b. High school graduate
  - c. College graduate
  - d. Post college graduate
  
3. Are you a 4-year or higher college graduate?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Decline
  
4. Please circle your place of birth. If not born in Laos/Thailand, skip Question #5 and 6.
  - a. Laos/Thailand
  - b. USA
  - c. In other country
  
5. If born in Laos or Thailand, on a scale from 1 (not acculturated at all) to 5 (fully acculturated), please rate your overall level of acculturation into mainstream American society.

1      2      3      4      5

6. If born in Laos or Thailand, on a scale from 1 (not assimilated at all) to 5 (fully assimilated), please rate your overall level of assimilation into mainstream American society.

1      2      3      4      5

7. Either native born or foreign born, how would you rate your English speaking capability?

1. Below average
2. Average
3. Above average
4. Excellent

8. Either native born or foreign born, how would you rate your Hmong speaking capability? 1. Below average

2. Average
3. Above average
4. Excellent

9. Either native born or foreign born, how would you rate your English writing skills?

1. Below average
2. Average
3. Above average
4. Excellent

10. Living in the US, how do you identify yourself?

- a. Hmong only
- b. Hmong American
- c. American
- d. Decline

11. What was the ethnic origin of the friends and peers you socialized most often with either at school or work?

- a. Asian only
- b. American only
- c. Asian mixed American
- d. Mixed (Everyone)
- e. Decline



12. **Skip Question #12 thru 16 if you are not currently attending or had attended a community college, or a four year college or university.** While attending classes, I feel most comfortable if my professors are Hmong or other Asians.
- Mostly not true about me
  - Not true about me
  - True about me
  - Mostly true about me
13. While taking classes, on a scale from 1 (not committed at all) to 5 (fully committed), my level of commitment to my learning is at:
- 1      2      3      4      5
14. While taking classes, on a scale from 1 (not value it at all) to 5 (highly value), how much you believe in higher education values?
- 1      2      3      4      5
15. Please rate yourself on how well you fit with the concept of “individualism”.
- Not fit them at all
  - Somewhat fit them
  - Fit them
  - Fit them a great deal
16. This question is in regard to your experience as a college student. Please place a number 1 (not applicable to me at all) to 5 (strongly applicable to me) on the following statements:
- \_\_\_ I feel that American students understand me better than Hmong students do
- \_\_\_ I find it easier to communicate my feelings to American students than Asian students
- \_\_\_ I feel that Asian students treated me as an equal more so than American students do
- \_\_\_ In college, I have both American and Asian friends
- \_\_\_ In college, I often feel that Asian students and American students do not understand me
- \_\_\_ Sometimes I feel that Americans do not understand me
- \_\_\_ I feel that Hmong students understand me better than American students
- \_\_\_ I have crying spell as American students and Hmong students do not understand me

- \_\_\_ I feel that American students treated me as an equal or more so than Asian students do
- \_\_\_ I sometimes feel that other students are better than me

17. This question is in regard to the perceptions you have for yourself in comparison to the perceptions you have about the Hmong people as well as the history and culture of Hmong. Please place a number 1 (not applicable to me at all) to 5 (strongly applicable to me) on the following statements:

- \_\_\_ The Hmong culture remains a strong part of me
- \_\_\_ I commit strongly to the Hmong's traditional culture of valuing and respecting one another
- \_\_\_ I sometimes consult Hmong elders for things I don't understand
- \_\_\_ I see that intra-racism still happening within our Hmong people
- \_\_\_ I feel that I am an American now; therefore, the Hmong people and our cultural traditions are no longer important to me
- \_\_\_ I feel that the Hmong people as well as our culture is still very important to me
- \_\_\_ I often attend events organized by the Hmong community
- \_\_\_ I don't like events organized by the Hmong community
- \_\_\_ I don't like Hmong food, listen to Hmong music, and attend Hmong arts show
- \_\_\_ I like Hmong food, listen to Hmong music, and attend Hmong arts show
- \_\_\_ I feel that the Hmong culture is not a part of me

The next several statements are possible reasons college attainment of Hmong has significantly increased in past years. **Whether you have had attended college or not, please read each of the statement and rate either yourself or your perceptions about the Hmong Americans.** We are seeking how your rate each of the statement. Put a number in front of the statement.

18. On a number **1 (not related to college attainment of Hmong at all) to 5 (significantly contributed to college attainment of Hmong)**, please rate how you perceived as reasons for the significant increase of college attain of Hmong in past years.

- \_\_\_ Due to history of racial discrimination encountered by the Hmong while living in Laos
- \_\_\_ Due to history of put down by Americans during the resettlement period
- \_\_\_ Due to history of long-term welfare dependency of Hmong during resettlement period
- \_\_\_ Due to the poor living conditions of the self or family in past years
- \_\_\_ Want to be equally competitive in both wages and labor market in the US
- \_\_\_ Want to become some special person in the Hmong as well as American

- community
- \_\_\_\_\_ Because of encouragements by the Hmong community
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because of encouragements by family and friends
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because of the cost of living in the United States
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because of college promotions by Hmong social media such as Facebook, TV and radio
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because of the influences by parents, brothers, and sisters
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because of the availability of financial aid grants, university grants, free/reduce tuition, and scholarships
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Either single or married, because of your children and their future (want them to live a better quality of life)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because of self-determination
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because of the American society as a whole
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because Hmong students are equally intelligence as students of other racial group
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Simply want a college degree
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Want to have the prestige of a college graduate and having a higher social status

**If you did not graduate from a 2-year community college or a 4-year or higher college, please STOP here. Do not continue to the next several questions.**

19. By possessing a college degree, how is your self-confidence?
  - a. My self-confidence remains the same as when I wasn't in college
  - b. My self-confidence has somewhat increase
  - c. My self-confidence has increase
  - d. My self-confidence has significantly increase
  
20. By possessing a college degree, how likely that you will encourage your family members such as brothers and sisters to go to college?
  - a. I will strongly discourage them
  - b. I will discourage them
  - c. I will encourage them
  - d. I will strongly encourage them
  - e. I will definitely encourage them
  
21. While in college, what is/are the biggest difficulty for you as a student? (**Check all that apply**)
  - a. Family, relationship
  - b. Financial burdens
  - c. Behavioral such as Health and mental health
  - d. Lack of academic preparation, repeating courses

- e. Language barriers such as speaking and writing
  - f. Lack of campus resources such as peer counseling
  - g. Others
22. This question only applicable to a 2-year college graduate. How many years did it take you to complete your program of study? \_\_\_\_\_/years.
23. This question only applicable to a 4-year or higher college graduate. How many years did it take you to complete your Bachelor's degree?  
\_\_\_\_\_/years
24. Overall, after possessing a college degree (Associate, Bachelor or higher), how do you consider your intelligence?
- a. I believe that my intelligence remains the same
  - b. I believe that my intelligence has somewhat increased
  - c. I believe that my intelligence has increased
  - d. I believe that my intelligence has significantly increased
25. Overall, after possessing a college degree (Associate or Bachelor), how do you rate your personality?
- a. Nothing changed on me
  - b. My personality has somewhat changed
  - c. My personality has changed
  - d. My personality has changed a great deal
26. Overall, being a college graduate, would you be willing to serve as a role model for other Hmong individuals that do not plan to attend college?
- a. Yes, I will
  - b. No, I will not
  - c. Decline

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix C

## HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

**To:** Serge Lee  
Social Work Division  
**IRB protocol number:** IRB-16-17-295

**RE:** Initial Review

On May 15, 2017, the Sacramento State Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposal titled *Factors associated with the rapid college attainment of Hmong Americans*. Your project received an Exempt review and this approval will expire on May 14, 2018.

**Making changes to your approved protocol:**

No changes may be made to your study without first receiving IRB modification approval. Log into Cayuse IRB, select this study, and add a new submission type. This submission type will be a modification and will look similar to your initial submission process.

**Reporting Adverse Events:**

Adverse reactions include, but are not limited to, bodily harm, psychological trauma, and the release of potentially damaging personal information. If any unanticipated adverse reaction should occur while conducting your research, please login to Cayuse, select this study, and add a new submission type. This submission type will be an adverse event and will look similar to your initial submission process.

**Accessing Cayuse IRB:**

<https://csus.cayuse424.com/rs/irb>

Should you need further information about the protection of human subjects, please consult our [Human Subjects Website](#) or contact the Research Integrity and Compliance Officer, Leah Vargas, at 916-278-5674 or [leah.vargas@csus.edu](mailto:leah.vargas@csus.edu).

Thank you and best wishes for continued success,

Leah Vargas  
Research Integrity and Compliance Officer  
Sacramento State Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
FWA00003873

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