

# Alhambra High School: Adversity with Diversity

A student panel occurred on Friday, March 9 to address issues currently affecting our student body regarding diversity and school culture. During the panel, representatives of the student body expressed their honest opinions about the problems that exist on campus in an open discussion. The main points of discussion included questions about demographics, leadership, minimizing the achievement gap, respect and the goals of Alhambra High School. Panelists bravely voiced their concerns regarding stereotypes, the lack of motivation and sense of apathy that is prominent within our student body. However, Alhambra High extends beyond merely these issues, and has great potential to thrive in different areas of activites, academics, and culture.

*"Freshman Council had a lot of people running, depends on class-spirit and participation; Class of 2015 has a lot of interest in student government."*

- Annie Tran

*"Students won't put in the effort to participate because they fear getting shot down. They make excuses and pull themselves back from being leaders or joining clubs."*

- Karina Meza

*"One of my teachers said, 'You have to get good grades because everyone is depending on you. You're one of the smart Mexicans.'"*

- Daniel Castaneda

## Activities

If there's one thing that students at AHS should be proud about, it's the variety of activities available on campus. And yet, this is also one of the biggest sources of our shame. While we claim to have a club for everyone, participation in activities, leadership and events is not diverse, but half-hearted at best.

Last year's Spring Executive elections proved that there is a large gap in participation between AHS' two major ethnic groups, Asians and Latinos, and raised questions about why that is the status quo. The panelists pinpointed two major issues: the feeling of exclusivity in clubs and leadership, and the lack of effort on the part of many students themselves.

"The way our student government is run, students who network or are in a lot of clubs have an advantage. Other students feel like what they say doesn't matter," senior Daniel Ibarra said.

Because of the exclusive feel of student government and many clubs, students end up making excuses not to try and to avoid rejection. Even worse, many peers try to bring down students who are brave enough to take a risk and participate. However, many of the panelists agreed that this behavior, although understandable, is the fault of the students and should change.

Junior Paul Ngo added, "Students don't put in the effort to find out information, like when to run for Council or Executive. Some kids just want everything thrown at them."

Despite the deep-rooted problems in our school participation, there are ways to improve it. Our student panel advocated reading the Daily Bulletin, which many teachers skip—resulting in students not being informed about school events as well as not being able to promote school unity. Another solution brought up was teacher participation.

"It's really exciting to see a teacher participating, such as at Quad Friday events. It encourages students to participate as well," freshman Annie Tran said.

*"Teachers don't have the time to tutor [and often say] 'I'm so disappointed with you.' Some of the teachers here don't exactly respect each other and that's a bad example for kids."*

- Rita Zhou

*"Some teachers write students off when they fail [and just get the D]. The A-G requirements for college are not high, just the graduation rate."*

- Andrew Torres

*"[It's] hard to see the counselors; they should make an effort to call in students and encourage them to do better."*

- Chelsea Cardenas

*"[There are] really great teachers, especially senior teachers, who help with graduation and college. I wish teachers in other years were [more] like that, so students could feel that push."*

- Brian Chen

*"Stereotypes make students feel like they can't cross the boundary. A lot of Latinos think, 'I'm not expected to go to college' and don't feel that push—making it seem alright to underachieve."*

- Chelsea Cardenas

*"People feel suppressed and constantly accosted, [for example] not being able to go to the C and D buildings [for] club meetings."*

- Kathleen Juarez

*"You don't need to separate yourself from your demographic. It's society's fault for creating this perception. Society shouldn't do this. They should look at everyone individually."*

- Daniel Ibarra

*"Students should be open to suggestions [since] Exec. is not always sure what they want; Exec. is busy but improving the environment is on their agenda."*

- Paul Ngo

*"Whoever gets their name out will win. It is insulting to be categorized by the way [a person] looks."*

- Charissa Wood

## Academics

It's the issue that educators at AHS have been trying to solve for years: The achievement gap between Asians and Latinos. While we wonder whether the cause is attributed to culture, apathy or environment, the student panel provided suggestions based on their own experiences.

The panel spoke of the need to motivate students from the very beginning, not just honing in on them as graduation nears. The importance of knowing what our futures should be is the start of constructing a solid road map, which leads to a more meaningful high school academic experience.

Sound familiar? Well the future-planners of AVID are an important resource of our school, a resource that is not available to nearly enough students. The panel shared that making AVID more widely available to students would allow them to be more confident with their purpose much sooner in their high school career. Because AVID is only available to those who have free 0 period and 3rd period slots, really only a fraction of students can be sorted into the period.

Other resources that need to be flaunted and possibly made mandatory for more students who need it is our Crossroads tutoring program. Offering tutoring in both math and English, the after-school program allows for students to have a more personal learning experience with either a teacher or experienced student tutor. It is also important to have stronger teachers for all four years of a student's high school career. A teacher who does his or her job well is a teacher who is dedicating as much of his or her time as possible to create many successful citizens.

Another suggestion was to make meetings with our counselors more frequent. The counselors here at AHS work tirelessly and passionately, so it is without a doubt that they will want to see as many of their students become successful adults, and for that to happen, there needs to be a new system where students can meet with them more often and more easily. During these meetings, counselors check for whether the student is on track to graduate and whether they have plans after graduation. Having more frequent meetings is like having more frequent reminders of the path they have chosen.

## Culture

Our school "culture" has been analyzed to death this past year, especially with the WASC team evaluation. But for most of us, all we know is that it's flawed. Our panel brought up the main problems they saw in AHS' culture, including the tension between Asians and Latinos on campus and lack of school pride and spirit, as well as the strengths of which we can be proud.

"There is not division as much as there is a lot of tension. People join groups with people that they are comfortable with and can relate with the most. As a result, we have cultural divisions through all ethnicities," junior Daniel Castaneda said.

Ethnic identity is a pressing and very personal issue for many students at AHS because a majority of us are considered minorities in the larger world and face the stereotypes associated with our heritage. Therefore, it's no surprise that there is a conflict between claiming one's heritage and distinguishing one from societal stereotypes.

"Ethnicity shouldn't be the issue; I hate being labeled as 'that Mexican in AP classes,'" junior Chelsea Cardenas said.

A large part of culture is respect on campus. The panelists agreed that respect among peers is important, but so is respect among teachers because they set examples for students.

The fact of the matter is that many of us do not take pride in being a Moor. Though there are innumerable things of which to be proud, the negative always stands out more than the positive. There are people spitting off the second story and throwing trashcans from greater heights; these people clearly see no purpose in preserving our school because they reserve no pride in our grounds. It depends on individual interpretation on how a person sees the school and how to treat it, and thus, it depends on individual participation to proudly embrace our school as a school.