

Study says whites exclusive

James Leong

For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Ask any of Leong Suik Loon's friends and they'll tell you she's a bundle of joy and fun to be around. Better known as Su, a University student from Singapore, she has friends from New Zealand, Australia and the United States.

Birthday parties, going to the movies and dinners with friends were all part of her weekend activities when she first arrived on campus. But it wasn't long before she was greeted with a rude awakening.

Leong spent a lot of her time with six American girls who were living on the same floor as her. "We got along pretty well at first but I later sensed my existence didn't matter to them," she said. "I felt like another face on the floor."

Leong said she was left out on group outings and received snide remarks from one of her friends about her Asian culture. When an American family invited Leong to an Easter dinner, one of her friends commented that she hated Chinese food and couldn't understand how the Chinese could eat like that.

"They weren't interested about my culture," Leong says. "If it has nothing to do with them, they don't want to know about it. I don't see much of them these days, anyway."

A survey conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan, involving more than 6,000 students of all races at campuses across the country, found that minority students frequently interacted with students of other races and ethnic groups — and did so much more regularly than white students associated with minorities.

The study debunks the idea that minorities socialize only among themselves.

Although no surveys or research have been conducted to find out if this is the case at the University, Leong and many other students and teaching staff believe the school fits the pattern.

"I'm not surprised at all by the findings of the study," says Ken Kempner, professor of higher international education at the University. "The minorities are at a deficit because the white majority controls the means of production on this campus. The whites are the administrators and professors, and for minorities to be upwardly mobile, they have to come into contact with the

whites who own everything."

The number of minority and white students might explain the apparent racial segregation on the campus. There are 12,171 white students, 2,021 minority students and 1,613 international students enrolled at the University. Although the University has seen an increase in minority and international students over the last few years — up by 19 percent between fall 1991 and fall 1994 — white students still prefer to mingle with their white friends.

Kempner explains that white students tend not to mix with international students because international students eventually return to their home country. White students want long-term relationships where they can date and make business contacts with other white friends.

Ginny Stark, an international student adviser, said that cross-cultural interaction is a priority on this campus.

"Because we are living in a smaller world, in terms of communication, there is a greater need for people to get along with one another," she said. "In terms of being in an academic environment, going cross-cultural is all part of learning. There's value in internalization."

Stark believes that international students are enthusiastic about meeting friends of other cultures and races because they are studying in a foreign country.

"Although in reality, students tend to be more comfortable with their own culture, it is the international students, especially those living in the residential halls, that put in the effort to make friends from different backgrounds," Stark says.

Sasha MacDougall, a fine arts major who is half-Japanese and half-American, said she goes out with people outside her race and culture because they have so much to offer.

"I befriended a Chinese-Russian girl who told me how she was brought up. Because I have some Russian blood, the friendship was a valuable experience for me. I learned about Russian culture and it got me going back to my roots."

MacDougall believes that by mixing with people of other races and backgrounds, people can avoid stereotyping.

Turn to RACE, Page 8

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