

Author: Ami Patel

Title: Caught in the Middle: Indian American youth and their dating preferences

Course: AAS346 Section A(Asian American Youth) Fall 2007 -- Soo Ah Kwon

About the Author: I am a senior at the University of Illinois, where I am majoring in Economics and Political Science. I am a second generation Indian American, and have some personal input into the topic of dating. I am a member of Indian Student Association, although I am not that involved, but do attend some events. I did not grow up with many Indian American youth around me, and as such have always felt "less Indian" than other Indian American youth. When I came to this University, I was aware of its large Indian American population. I did not want to associate with them at first, because I thought I would be judged. But I have come to meet many of them, and know them as individually different. I still have many non-Indian friends, but definitely seem to consider myself more in touch with my Indian ethnicity than prior to college.

Keywords: Indian American, dating, relationships, immigrants, Indian Student Association

Abstract: Through interviews and observations on campus, I explored the dating habits and preferences of Indian American students. The amount of time a person's family has been in this country and their own assimilation level would affect their views on this topic. Interviews showed that not only does the time factor matter but the reason for the move to this country plays a part. Families that choose to come here for opportunity and long-term stay have a more liberal and Western way of thinking. The Indian Student Association holds events that help Indian students feel more connected with their ethnicity and hence allows for dating within their own race.

Question: Ami Patel

AAS 346- Asian American Youth

EUI Assignment #2

September 9, 2007

Early Question

I think it would be interesting to explore the current dating habits of Asian Americans, particularly Indian Americans. As possible immigrants and second generation, the community can have vast different experiences and ideas about dating. I would be interesting in finding out if the length of their stay in this country or the length of their parents stay here has any influence over the approach to dating. Also, it would involve all University of Illinois students. I am curious if being college students, away from parents, would do anything to influence their approaches. The idea came to me as I was reading about the dating habits of Japanese Americans in the 1930s or so. The reading showed that higher-class immigrant in urban areas tended to date while the rural community stayed close to the traditional ways.

Question: Do time of stay in USA and socioeconomic factors influence the approach to dating? What are common ideas among Asian American students, particular Indian American students, about dating rituals and processes?

Question

September 19, 2007

Do time of stay in USA and family assimilation influence Asian American approach to dating? What are common ideas among Asian American students, particular Indian American students, about dating habits and preferences?

Question (Revised)

September 24, 2007

Do time of stay in USA and family assimilation influence Asian American approach to dating on this campus? What are common ideas among Asian American students, particular Indian American students in Indian Student Association, about dating habits and preferences? Are the events held by Indian Student Association more likely to encourage same race dating?

Plan: Initial Plan

September 24, 2007

I think a good project idea to explore my question would be to interview some of the Indian Student Association members. I would like to get some students who are more involved (i.e, Executive Board members) and some less involved general members and see if there is any correlation among their dating preferences. I know they have movie nights, ice cream socials, dances, date auctions, and other events that might encourage more same race dating and I am curious if that plays a part into people's dating preferences.

I would also like to interview some "hard" science majors (i.e. MCB or Chemistry) and compare them to views held by social science majors to see if there are any differences among the two groups of Asian students.

I think a random survey of Asian students would do well to show some preferences of dating among students. I would stand in front of Grainger handing them out and see if the results show anything substantial.

After collecting all this data, I would see if any of the observed characteristics apply to dating preferences of Asian students. Also, the interviews would involve finding out what generation they are and seeing if that plays a role in their dating habits. I would be able to see if indeed what generation they are, how assimilated their family is and attending events/ classes with Asians (or people of your own race) sculptures your view on dating.

Data (observation): Ami Patel

AAS 346

Observations

September 19, 2007

I have noticed that Asians American college students on this campus tend to stay within the Asian community for dating purposes. Some of them may date other ethnicities but still classified as Asians. In conversations with people, I noticed that Asians usually change their dating behavior in or during college. I feel that the reasoning could be due to the idea that as they get older, they will want to think about marriage and possible family relations. If their family is more traditional, it might not

work out so well to date outside the ethnicity. I noticed that as college students in general get more serious about dating and possible future in marriage, it becomes clear to them what they thought they wanted is changing.

Personally, I came from a suburb of Chicago with little Asian influence. As such, I did not see myself with any Asian American boyfriends. After being on this campus for 3 years now, I definitely feel more of a connection with being Indian (Asian) American. My dating behavior changed due to the fact that I felt more comfortable with Asian Americans. I think that when the University influences a student to embrace their ethnicity and culture more, they might date more people who see things the way they do.

Also, I have noticed that people naturally date depending on who they are exposed to the most. Looking at statistics, if you look to see how Asian Americans are much more representative in science majors as opposed to social studies majors, it makes sense for Asian American students to be dating more of their own race. It is these people that they are exposed to the most. The minority of Asian Americans in social science majors leads to decreased interactions among them and decreased likelihood of dating.

Another part of my original question dealt with socioeconomic background of the Asian American students and if that played any effect into their dating behavior. I have yet to see any examples of that on our campus. I do not really know a variety of people with varying economic status to see any possible patterns. I am considering revising this part of the question.

I feel that depending on whether Asian Americans are first generation, 1.5 generation, second generation, or so on has much to do with their dating preferences. As a recent immigrant, a student would be much more apprehensive about dating someone outside of their race. There would be the obvious language, culture and future outlook obstacle. But that is not to say that it is impossible. I am a second generation Asian American and in a relationship with a 1.5 generation Asian American. The families are different as far as assimilation and culture goes. As a part of a later generation, I see that some families are less assimilated into the main stream. With that in mind, it would be difficult for children to date whomever knowing that their family might not be wholly accepting of their choice.

Currently, you still have Indian families who go back to India to get their children married when the age is right. If a child knows his/her family to be this way, they might not want to participate in dating at all, or

especially outside of their race. The reactions of children of Asian Americans to their different family traditions and rules on dating vary within each person. While some might not want to date at all knowing their family would disapprove, others might do the exact opposite.

Observations

October 10, 2007

For my observation, I went to the RSO (Registered Student Organization) Complex upstairs in the Illini Union. I observed the interactions among the students involved with the student organization, Indian Student Association (ISA). As far as dating preferences, it was hard to observe this idea at this point. I wanted to first observe the social interactions among the Indian students so I could better understand their dating preferences when I interview them.

Upon my arrival, I noticed several things about the students. First, the students interacted with only other Indian students. I did not see any of them greeting students of another race. This idea of separation might definitely play a part in their dating behaviors. Also, I saw few points of physical contact among the Indian students. There was not much hugging or hand-shaking. I wonder if their desire for personal space has to do more with their assimilation into American culture or personal preference.

Another observation I had was that English was spoken throughout much of their conversation. After reading the “‘FOB’ and ‘Whitewashed’:
Identity and Internalized racism among Second Generation Asian

Americans” chapter for class, I wondered if Indian Americans ever choose to use their home language with their friends. I did not observe it at this point, but I think maybe it was has to do with the various languages and dialects that Indian families use. This would make it difficult to communicate with friends at school. I got a feeling that most of these students were 1.5 or second generation immigrants. Their clothes, conversations, physical behavior, and interactions showed little similarities to what some would consider being a ‘FOB’. The clothes were usually name brands, such as Hollister, Guess or others. The conversations were more similar to other student groups in the RSO at the time. Their physical behavior and interaction showed more signs of separation whether it was from each other or from the students of other races.

I will be using these observations as a connecting point as I get started with my interviews of Indian students of various majors and connections to ISA.

Data (interview): October 24, 2007

Interview #1

I interviewed a senior University of Illinois Indian-American student. Through various questions of his family, school involvement, and preferences, I discovered this 1.5 generation Indian-American youth prefers intra-racial dating. Surya is not involved with any racial or cultural organizations on campus and does not hang out much with many other

Indian Americans, but his beliefs still hold strong to the cultural ties he left in India when he came here as a young boy. His parents came to the US from India 12 years ago, when he was 7 years old, because his father's job required him to move. This initial migration due to work could possibly play a large part in his lack of assimilation to the American view of dating. "Dating is not good because it may or may not hinder the future." His quote here references to the concept of dating among the Indian culture that wants youth to not date and let their parents choose their spouse for them. Going along with that, Surya does not feel comfortable showing public displays of affection with friends or significant others, "especially when I suspect Indian people are around."

Before college, he said he had dated to try the experience of it out, but it was not serious. He was involved in relationships with white, middle-class females. After he came to college, he dated an Indian female and his views changed. He took dating a lot more serious, and began to not agree with interracial dating. This change in his dating preferences spurred his "coming out" story. Instead of joining organizations or hanging out with a lot of other Indian-Americans, his views on dating and cultural aspects changed. His constant trips back to India with his family pushed his views further into the un-assimilated view.

I knew this student personally and as such, he did comment at the end that he was not completely comfortable sharing all his views with me. I am his

girlfriend and he did not want these issues to come in between us. I definitely should have taken this into account before conducting the interview, but I felt his experiences and ideas were such a good asset to this research project.

Interview #2

November 8, 2007

In my interview of an Indian American senior at this University with an agricultural finance major, I noticed the effects the Indian culture has upon dating preferences. Kira's family moved here 26 years and she is a second generation immigrant. Her family came for reasons of job and opportunity. While her family was the product of the post-1965 immigration wave, the reason was not due to further schooling of the parents. I had predicted that second generation Indian Americans would be more likely to steer away from the traditional expectations of the Indian culture. In this case, I was wrong. Kira is aware of the ways the Indian culture influences the dating arena. She finds it hard to date outside of her race because of the pressure she feels from family and relatives.

She says "It is even harder to find someone that speaks the same language as us and is the same type of Indian." The reason I choose to specify Indian Americans for my research was because of this notion. Indian families not only stipulate that their children date within their own

race, but within smaller realms of the same language, region of family orientation in India, and sometimes even the same caste of Hinduism. This has been the traditional way of thinking for some time now. As more and more families move to the United States, the probability to actually find and connect with another Indian American youth of the same background (family language, religion, and caste) is quite small. But as Kira points out, student associations, such as Indian Student Association make it a viable option. Without these types of student organizations, Indian Americans would not get the opportunity to interact much. Kira says that there are not many Indian American students in her major, so it is hard for her to meet students through that medium. While my hypothesis of the assimilation affecting Kira's views on dating was misleading, her major did affect her participation in Indian-oriented student organizations.

Interview #3

November 10, 2007

I interviewed yet another senior at University of Illinois. While this might skew the results (since it is not necessarily randomization), I thought that seniors would be much more likely to have evaluated their life and thoughts regarding dating and possible marriage than underclassmen.

Meena is an actuarial science major and takes many technical classes. She is in Indian Student Association but does not attend many of

the events or the meetings. Her dating preferences seem to be based more on the personality of the person rather than their race. She is aware of her parents wanting her to marry an Indian, but she knows they will understand if she ends up doing otherwise. She is a second generation immigrant; her family moved here over 30 years ago to seek better opportunities. Her family's more relaxed pressure allows her to be able to make the choice that some might not get. Meena claims "I have really changed a lot since coming into college. In a positive way, I think. I know more of who I am and I think being exposed to different types of people definitely helped that." Her "coming out" story was turned into a deeper connection of her identity, but it did not constitute having to associate with more Indian students. She does not put expectations onto what her future holds, and as such, she is not limiting her possible dating partners to be only Indian. Being a second generation immigrant, with a fair amount of assimilation, she does not necessarily follow the traditional Indian path. Her family frequently travels to India, and has built a house there recently. Also, she speaks Gujarati, but uses mainly with her grandparents. As with many second-generation Indian Americans, her parents usually talk to her in Gujarati and she responds in English.

Analysis: Analysis

31 October 2007

College can be a memorable experience for most students. For Asian Americans, in particular Indian Americans, it brings them closer to their ethnic identity. As cited in Maira's article, "The college context offers many second-generation Indian Americans the opportunity to become a part of an Indian American peer group on campus and...exposure to a specifically Indian American youth popular culture." (107) On the University of Illinois campus, there are many Indian American-specific peer groups, the largest one being the Indian Student Association. On this campus, Asian Americans make up about 11% of the student body, according to data collected in 2006. (AACC 1)

Researching the topic of dating preferences among Indian American students at this campus, I came across some very interesting points. The generational aspect of the student plays an impact on their view of dating, whether it is interracial or not. A first or 1.5 generational student coming from a more traditional family will want to promote dating within the race. The amount of time the student or their family has spent in this country with the mainstream culture affects the attitude they have upon dating preferences. I feel that it is as Matsumoto described it: a "tough spot" (97). These students are caught in between the traditional ways of our parents' culture and the new, liberal ways of the culture in which we live in.

As in Matsumoto's study of Nisei daughters, Indian American

students on this campus are “challenging the practice of arranged marriages in favor of ‘love marriage’” (94). Through observations and discussions with the Indian Student Association and members of the general Indian American student body, I got the impression that some students are willing to stand up for what they believe in. As with the Japanese immigrants of the WWII era, Indian American youth are trying to find their own identity. As in earlier times, these actions might seem rebellious from the parents’ point of view but the youth feel it is necessary sometimes.

“A common phenomenon in immigrant families involves the role reversal between immigrant parents and their children whereby the children must help their parents navigate the new society,” comments Stacey Lee from her research on Hmong Students in the education system. (62) While some Indian American youth are trying to leave their culture behind to embrace the new environment and assimilate into this country, other students show their obedience to their parents and culture by respecting the rules and wishes of their parents, by not dating or dating within their race.

Maira in her other article of the New York Indian American subculture comments on aspects of corruption seen in American culture and the purity in the Indian culture. I suspect this might play a big role in the dating habits of Indian Americans. If their parents believe that American culture corrupts and ruins the purity of their children, the youth would be less likely to engage in such risky behavior as dating outside their

own race. Another idea that Maira brings up is about Indian women's role and how that plays into sexuality or dating behaviors. I was intrigued because I think it is true that many youth consider an Indian woman who engages in sexual activity as "un-Indian" or "contaminated by Western culture". I would like to explore this topic more with the students on this campus, but that might be difficult in the short time span we have because these issues require trust from the people answering them.

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Research Proposal:

November 17, 2007

Raised in the Indian culture, I thought it would be interesting to explore the current dating habits of Indian American students. As possible second generation immigrants, the community can have vast different experiences and ideas about dating. I would be interested in finding out if the length of their stay in this country or the length of their parents stay here has any influence over the approach to dating. Being college students

at University of Illinois, away from their parents, might influence their approaches to this topic. The idea came to me as I was reading about the dating habits of Japanese Americans in the 1930s. The article by Valerie J. Matsumoto showed that higher-class immigrants in urban areas tended to date while the rural community stayed close to the traditional ways. I wonder if similar patterns exist for the Indian American youth of current times.

Do time of stay in USA and family assimilation influence Indian American approaches to dating on this campus? What are common ideas among Indian American students, particular those in Indian Student Association, about dating habits and preferences? Are the events held by Indian Student Association more likely to encourage same race dating?

The EUI projects of previous students proved vital to the ideas and thoughts of my hypotheses. First of all, the project titled “The Other Stories We Carry” relates to the dating issues as it explores how current college life is similar and dissimilar to the literature. In doing so, the author learned that “while it is very common for the parents of my generation to not have [at] all experienced ‘campus life’, when *we* start having children, this will shift and we may have more to share with them. ‘College is more about the experience...What you’ll remember is the people and the times you’ve had,’ said Shannon.” The exploration of the variances of the past and current themes in college plays a part into my own research because these same issues are apparent in the Indian American students on this campus. The students I have interviewed had parents who went to a university, but not in this country. Most of the students in Indian Student Association are 1.5 or second generation, and do not have parents who participated in the ‘college life’. Many parents do not know the social scene on American university campuses which allows Indian American students to be able to date outside of their race if they choose, but some out of pure obligation do not.

Another relation to a previous EUI project comes from the “Cultural Mapping of Dorms.” This paper discusses how FAR/PAR house more minorities, while the Six-Pack has more white students. The author researches the possible reasoning for these variances. It is an apparent fact through this project that there is indeed segregation among the students, whether it is by coincidence or another systematic reason. Being the case, it makes sense that as students come to this campus and live in dorms, they would be exposed to students that match their race. As students are surrounded mainly by their own race, they become friends with those people, and possible dating relations may emerge. It is a far stretch from what the author’s main intent was for this project, but I see that the implications are there when connected with my own research. Indian American students, whether they were involved with Indian Student

Association or not, meet more Indian Americans as they came to this campus and then their ideas on dating changes.

Although it is not been implicitly stated in my interviews with Indian American students, I feel that some students do feel discriminated against by mainstream society. Indian Americans might want to date outside of their own race, but for some people it is not an option. As stated in "Muslim Students Experience of Discrimination," "Ignorance leads to a climate of hatred as well with some people, but it's more anonymous." After some time, Indian American students who face judgment based off their color or race will turn inward and want relations with their own race. Nowadays, it is not so much the hatred you saw in past days, rather it is behind closed doors and in the minds of people that disregard biracial dating as a way of life for themselves or others.

These projects have all added to different aspects of my own research about Indian American dating habits on this campus. Since there was not directly related project on the subject of dating for Indian American students, it is futile to say whether my research will show the same results as previously noted.

To explore my questions, I interviewed some of the Indian Student Association members. I choose students who are more involved and attend events and some less involved general members and saw if there were any correlations among their dating preferences. I know the organization holds movie nights, ice cream socials, dances, date auctions, and other events that might encourage more same race dating and I am curious if that plays a part into people's dating preferences. Also, I choose to interview some "hard" science majors (i.e. Molecular and Cellular Biology or Chemistry) and compared their views to those held by social science majors to see if there are any differences among the two groups of Indian students. I also observed the Indian Student Association and see if there are possibilities of dating among their involved students. After collecting all this data, I wanted to see if any of the observed characteristics apply to dating preferences of Indian American students. Also, the interviews involved finding out what generation they are and seeing if that played a role in their dating habits. I would be able to see if indeed what generation they are, how assimilated their family is and attending events/ classes with Indians (or people of your own race) sculptures your view on dating.

For Asian Americans, in particular Indian Americans, college brings them closer to their ethnic identity. As cited in Maira's article, "The college context offers many second-generation Indian Americans the opportunity to become a part of an Indian American peer group on campus and...exposure to a specifically Indian American youth popular culture."

(107) On the University of Illinois campus, there are many Indian American-specific peer groups, the largest one being the Indian Student Association (ISA). On this campus, Asian Americans make up about 11% of the student body, according to data collected in 2006. (AACC 1) Other Indian American organizations focus on things such as religion and even traditional dance, which are less pan-Indian than ISA.

Researching the topic of dating preferences among Indian American students at this campus, I came across some very interesting points. The generational aspect of the student plays an impact on their view of dating, whether it is interracial or not. A first or 1.5 generational student coming from a more traditional family will want to promote dating within the race. The amount of time the student or their family has spent in this country with the mainstream culture affects the attitude they have upon dating preferences. I feel that it is as Matsumoto described it: a “tough spot” (97). These students are caught in between the traditional ways of our parents’ culture and the new, liberal ways of the culture in which we live in.

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because I think it is true that many youth consider an Indian woman who engages in sexual activity as “un-Indian” or “contaminated by Western culture”. I would have liked to explore this topic more with the students on this campus, but found it to be difficult in the short time span we have because these issues require trust from the people answering them.

Throughout this semester, I have learned much of the dating habits of some Indian American students. It is true that for many of them, college did change a lot of what they previously thought. While there is no general trend to apply to all Indian American students on this campus, I think that the family assimilation and generational status of the person does affect their particular dating habits. If the student thinks that their family would understand the idea of them dating, or dating outside their race, I think the student is more likely to get involved with it. It is a constant struggle that Indian American youth have to battle with, as seen in movies, books, and such. The balance between the traditional and the new, of letting your parents choose your life partner and the Western philosophy of independence and choice, is something apparent in all Indian American youth.

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EUI Links: Ami Patel

AAS 346- Asian American Youth

EUI Links- Assignment #1

September 9, 2007

Exploring EUI archives

I choose to analyze an interview with an Asian American student at University of Illinois for the research project titled “Korean Grocery Stores Influence on Korean American Identity.”

(<http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/bitstream/2142/1008/19/interview%20with%20Orachel.pdf>)

The project is mainly about how Korean Grocery stores on the campus area reflect a certain identity for Koreans and whether they influence Korean identity. The topic initially interested me because it was a unique idea. I had never really thought about grocery stores affecting identity, but as I thought about it some more I realized it definitely could have an influence. The interview proved to be beneficial to the project because “Rachel” was a Korean-American adoptee. Her experience with the grocery stores on this campus and back home (in the suburbs) really helped start the research for the project.

She said that she does not go to the grocery stores here because of her inability to speak Korean. Also, she does not feel comfortable since the other customers and store owners can spot out that she does not fit in. This helped the main research question in that it showed that the Korean stores on this campus are aiming at a certain identifiable Korean population. They want people that feel as if they have strong ties to their Korean identity. Rachel is Korean but was adopted by a White family, so her relation to the identity of Korean is different than most. She says that she definitely feels more comfortable going to Korean grocery stores at home because there is no expectation of speaking Korean or awkwardness due to the fact that she is an adoptee.

The researcher did do other interviews with non-Koreans and store owners, but this one interested me the most due to the unique position and identity of the interviewee. The researcher goes on to show that the Korean stores

do in fact “serve both as a means of reconnecting and reaffirming Korean ethnic identity among Korean Americans and as a means of separating and denying Korean identity for those whose ties to Korea may not be as strong.”

EUI Links

6 November 2007

My research project is mainly concerned with dating preferences of Indian American students on this campus. I purpose that the length of stay, including generational status and assimilation of the youth, and past experiences have shaped Indian American youth’s dating preferences. EUI has projects by other students from previous years which relate to the topic at hand.

First of all, the project titled “The Other Stories We Carry” relates to the dating issues as it explores how current college life is similar and dissimilar to the literature. In doing so, the author learned that “while it is very common for the parents of my generation to not have [at] all experienced ‘campus life’, when *we* start having children, this will shift and we may have more to share with them. ‘College is more about the experience...What you’ll remember is the people and the times you’ve had,’ said Shannon.” The exploration of the variances of the past and current themes in college plays a part into my own research because these same issues are apparent in the Indian American students on this campus. The students I have interviewed had parents who went to a university, but

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(November 6, 2007)

Reflect: Reflect

December 3, 2007

This was the first time I have done extensive research on any topic through ethnographic methods. Also, it was my first time working with EUI. All this being the case, I really did enjoy it and learned a lot from it. Although observing organizations and open spaces can feel uncomfortable at times, it is a valuable source of information for research topics. I got the opportunity to interview students for my project and each person had their own story and history. I enjoyed pulling all the different stories together to come to an overriding theme and analysis. The course did a great job at guiding me through the whole process, explaining the requirements, information and everything. The compliance with IRB did get messy and difficult for some of the other students, but for my project it was fairly easy since I was working with only students. While conducting interviews, it is difficult to write as fast as someone talks and you do not want them to have to repeat it. If I were to do this again, I would want to use some type of recording device. I would have appreciated if the class provided students with such a device so we would not have to go out and spend our own money on it. Other than that, the project went smoothly. I liked having the online moodle base, because I could see other students' work and my own. It was

a lot easier to see what my question or analysis said from the website, rather than searching through my own files. Overall, the project was a great idea for this class. It was a good way for us to incorporate the ideas and literature we learn about in class to a topic we are genuinely interested in.

Recommendations:

After this semester long research project, I feel that I learned much about the Indian student population on this campus. I was not able to find the percent of Indian students on this campus, but I know it is one of the larger Asian demographics. Being a larger minority, the University does not consider Asians, including Indians, as a minority. I know the University has a special section of freshmen orientation for the minority students. Since Asians are not part of this group, I think it is important and necessary to allow for some gathering of either pan-Asian or specific ethnicities of incoming freshmen. This would make them feel more connected with their own race, whether they came from a community that allowed them to do so or not. As college plays a big part in many students' "coming out" into their ethnicity, it is important for the University to understand this process and facilitate it any way they can. It is most crucial during the first year of college to be exposed to ethnic groups and ideas, so that it shapes their further interest in the remaining years. My recommendation to the University is to have a conference or orientation specifically for Asian, or specific ethnic, students to allow for a more diversely connected group of students. As the mission of the University

states: “We at Illinois serve the state, the nation, and the world by creating knowledge, preparing students for lives of impact, and addressing critical societal needs through the transfer and application of knowledge”, allowing for more diversity will better prepare students to exchange ideas and knowledge with people from around the world.

1) University of Illinois- Overview. "Our Mission". November 19, 2007. <http://uiuc.edu/overview/>