



Understanding the College Retention & Success of AAPI and Latinx Students Pursuing Nursing Degrees at a Minority Serving Institution: A Report on Nevada State College

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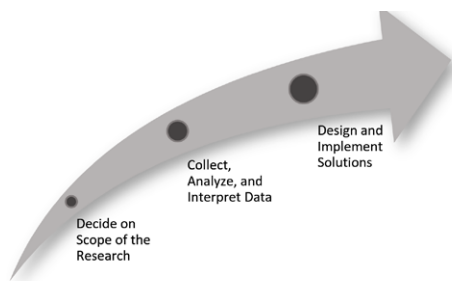


PROJECT BACKGROUND

Recent U.S. Census data reveals a disproportionately high population of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) and Latinx individuals in Nevada compared to the national average. While AAPIs and Latinx make up five percent of the nation's population, they comprise over 38.5% of Nevada's population.¹ Moreover, AAPIs and Latinx are now the fastest growing racial groups in the state, doubling in size over the past decade. Much of the population growth is located in the greater Las Vegas metropolitan area comprised of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Paradise, and Henderson. In fact, the Las Vegas metropolitan area is home to more than 70% of Nevada's population making it a critical site to examine the educational trends and outcomes of AAPI and Latinx groups.² Given these demographic trends, Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) Scholars partnered with Nevada State College (NSC) and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) in a collaborative research project that sheds light on the demography of AAPI and Latinx students in Nevada's higher education system, provides a deeper understanding of AAPI and Latinx student experiences and outcomes, and produces recommendations that can inform campus services and programs. While the collaborative research project is intended to inform programs and services at NSC and UNLV, it also generated findings that can inform the broader field of higher education. This report presents the findings from the research project at NSC.

THE STUDY AT NSC

The research project was guided by collaborative research with campus partners utilizing a participatory action research (PAR) approach, which is a research method that emphasizes direct and collaborative participation and action between the researcher and the target population.³ Thus, PAR was utilized in this project to pursue collective inquiry with campus partners through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to study institutional, programmatic, and student-level participation and outcomes, with the goal of providing data-driven decisions on campus and generating findings that can be shared with a broader set of constituents in and outside of the state of Nevada. At the heart of the collaborative effort was a campus inquiry team at each campus. At NSC the inquiry team consisted of faculty, and representatives from the Office of the Provost, Institutional Research, and Diversity Office. Over a series of meetings, the research team worked with the campus inquiry teams to decide on the focus and scope of the research, gain access to data and aid in facilitating additional data collection, and help with interpreting the data and making actionable recommendations to the institution.



The research project at NSC focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences and outcomes of AAPI and Latinx students enrolled in pre-nursing and nursing bachelorette programs. The enrollment patterns of AAPI and Latinx students in the nursing program was of particular concern for NSC given their high enrollment of these populations in pre-nursing, but only a few transition into the bachelors in nursing program given the limited number of available spots in the program. For instance the summer and fall 2019 admission cycles

had low acceptance rates of 57.1% and 57.7%, respectively, for the bachelors of science in nursing (BSN) program. More specifically, in the summer of 2019, 48 of 84 and in the fall of 2019, 96 of 166 eligible applicants were admitted into the BSN program. That means that while many students are enrolling at NSC with the intent to earn a BSN, the reality is very few students will be able to transition from the pre-nursing program to the BSN because of the high competition caused by the limited number of available spots in the program. Thus, NSC was interested in understanding: a) the demography and educational experiences of pre-nursing and nursing students and b) what was happening to the students who were not admitted to the BSN program. The specific research questions that were the focus of the project are as follows:

1. What is the demography of students in the pre-nursing program? How does the student composition of pre-nursing students compare to other students enrolled at NSC and the surrounding community?

2. What are the most important factors that influence the career choices of AAPI and Latinx students enrolled in the pre-nursing program at NSC?

3. What are the enrollment patterns and educational outcomes of pre-nursing students? For students who leave pre-nursing, what are the alternative educational trajectories and outcomes?

4. What are the most important factors that influence AAPI and Latinx students' decision to continue or not continue their enrollment in a nursing program at NSC?

There were two primary sources of data for this study. First, data provided by the Office of Institutional Research included cross-sectional and longitudinal institutional data on students enrolled in pre-nursing and nursing across four cohort years (2015-16 to 2018-19). The variables included information on student demographics, academic standing and performance, retention, and degree attainment. The quantitative data was supplemented by individual interviews with AAPI and Latinx students enrolled in pre-nursing and bachelors of science in nursing tracks ($n = 30$) and individual interviews with practitioners (program staff, advisors, faculty; $n = 13$).

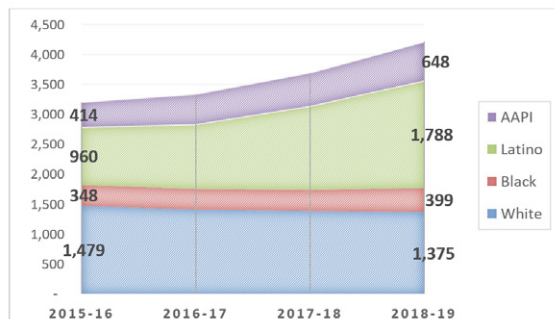


FINDINGS

Finding 1: The Demography of Students at Nevada State College

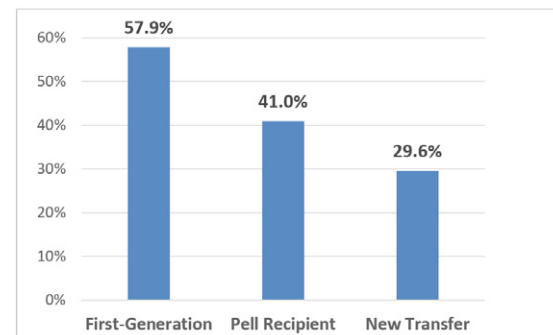
Nevada State College serves a critical mass of racial/ethnic minority and low-income first-generation college students, especially Latinx and AAPI students. In fact, in 2018-2019, over half of all students were Latinx (57.5%) and AAPI (15.4%) and these numbers keep growing. Figure 1 demonstrates that while the total enrollment at NSC increased by 39% from 2015-16 to 2018-19, there was a particularly pronounced increase among Latinx (86%) and AAPI (57%) students.

Figure 1. Total Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2015-16 to 2018-19



The data also reveals the extent to which a large concentration of students at NSC are low-income students and the first in their families to attend college. Figure 2 demonstrates that over half of NSC students are the first in their families to attend college (58%), and nearly half are receiving financial aid (41%). Additionally, nearly one-third (30%) of NSC students are transfer students (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Proportional Representation of First- Generation Students, Pell Recipients, and New Transfers, 2018-19



While research has shown a number of ways these factors create challenges for access to and persistence in higher education,⁴ interviews with pre-nursing and nursing students provide insight into how these factors present challenges for NSC students. The majority of the student participants in the qualitative research were working, living at home, and providing support for their families. An Asian American pre-nursing student, Debbie Aquino (pseudonym used for all participants) shared the challenges associated with working while attending college: "So, usually I work grave yard. So, it's like 8:00pm to 4:00am." This student described going to school after her grave yard shift or sleeping in before going to school which made learning in class and studying a challenge. There were also a number of students who had dependents. Mei Cruz, an Asian American student stated, "I have one daughter. I am a single mom. I've actually been divorced since 2010. So I've been raising

my daughter by myself. She is 16 now. [...] Trying to get her ready to graduate out of high school and then herself just beginning her college career as well.”

Furthermore, students were asked about whether they felt NSC was responsive to their needs as AAPI or Latinx. While the majority of the participants expressed favorable views of NSC, the staff, faculty, and their peers, a few also discussed ways in which their needs were not being met. For instance, Jenifer Nguyen (AAPI) expressed feeling a lack of understanding and services addressing the needs of AAPI students on campus. She stated, “I feel like we’re [(referring to AAPIs)] not very important kind of deal [at NSC], we’re just there. So there’s nothing they’re concerned about, but there’s nothing that they are ... that stands out. [...] So no one really is just like, ‘Hey, you’re Asian. Do you need something kind of this?’ And [NSC] won’t worry about us understanding anything. [...] Because... there’s nothing that needs to be met. [...] I feel like that’s how it is because [NSC] don’t really question it.” Others shared they would like to see programs geared toward AAPI students, like an AAPI affinity student club on campus.



For AAPI and Latinx English language learners, learning the material in English posed additional challenges. Le Tien, an AAPI student stated, “My first language is Vietnamese [...] It is a barrier. I have to make a lot of research, and read a lot, use a lot of dictionary, so able to understand what the teacher she inferred to us in the knowledge. [...] Usually I just do it in my own, go home and read.” (quote presented verbatim).

Finding 2: Factors that Influence Enrollment in Pre-Nursing

In addition to understanding the demography of AAPI and Latinx students at NSC, we were interested in the factors that influence their enrollment in pre-nursing at NSC. Many students described family as being a big influence for pursuing nursing as a career, especially for AAPI students. For example, Jenifer Nguyen (AAPI) stated, “It was just something I grew up with. My dad always wanted me to be a doctor. My grandfather wanted me to be a pharmacy technician. So it was just something like the medical field that I was already in and me being in high school with the nursing assisting kind of thing, that’s my only knowledge of what I wanted to do. I didn’t have any other career path I wanted to do.”

Additionally, students discussed being influenced to pursue a nursing degree by their high school academic experiences. Many NSC students were exposed to early tracking into health service careers through local career and technical high

schools in Las Vegas. Rosa Carranza (Latina) shared, “Ever since I was little I knew I wanted to be in the medical professions, and I applied to that high school because they had [a certified nursing assistant program...] So, I got put into sports medicine. [...] We were exposed to anywhere from like ankle taping to all those classes, like human anatomy classes and human disease classes. [...] We would go on field trips to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas [...] to talk to actual doctors and students.”

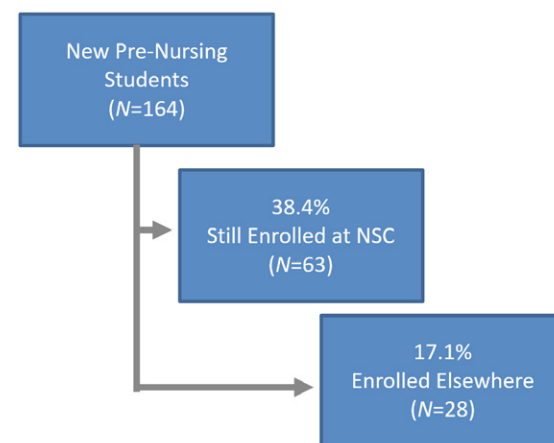
Many students also emphasized a passion for helping others. Ashley Chang (AAPI) stated, “When I was little, I always wanted to be - not a doctor because that’s just too much work, medical school is just, I can’t do that - but I always wanted to be a nurse when I was younger because I liked medical. Anything to help people.” However, as exemplified in Ashley’s statement, while many students expressed a passion for science or medicine a large number of those students conveyed a dislike for math and science.

Finding 3: Retention of Pre-Nursing Students

One of NSC’s interests in this study was examining the persistence rates of pre-nursing AAPI and Latinx students. Through institutional data we examined the retention of a cohort of pre-nursing AAPI and Latinx students after three years (Figure 3). For the cohort of new pre-nursing students who started in 2015-16, 38.4% were still enrolled at NSC after three-years. There were also

17.1% of the students in this cohort who were now enrolled at a different institution. The status of the remainder of the students in this cohort ($n = 73$) is unknown. The next section examines the academic trajectory of AAPI and Latinx students post pre-nursing.

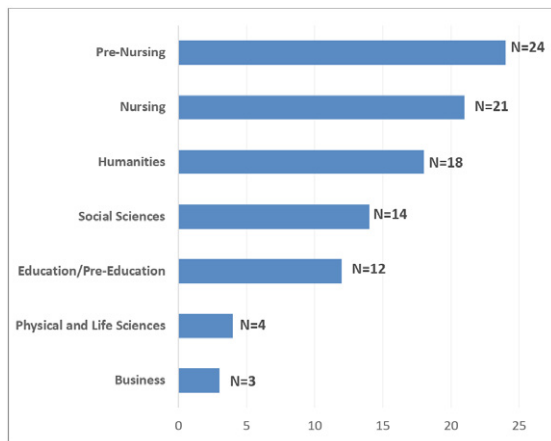
Figure 3. Academic Trajectory for the 2015-16 Cohort of Pre-Nursing Students After Three Years



Finding 4: The Academic Trajectory of Pre-Nursing Students

Aside from examining student retention, NSC was interested to know if pre-nursing AAPI and Latinx students remained in nursing. Three years after starting NSC as pre-nursing, 40.7% of the cohort that were still enrolled at NSC remained in pre-nursing ($n = 24$; Figure 4). The largest number of students who were no longer in pre-nursing were now enrolled in the nursing program ($n = 21$). Additionally, the cumulative GPA for students who entered nursing within three years was 3.59, while the average high school GPA for the cohort was 2.94.

Figure 4. Academic Program of Students Three Years After Starting Pre-Nursing, 2014-15



Note: Numbers (and not percentages) are presented because students can have more than one major. We used the 2014-15 cohort for this analysis because in 2018, pre-nursing was placed in Integrated Studies, which is under Humanities, causing duplication.

Given the high enrollment of pre-nursing AAPI and Latinx students, and low number of those persisting to nursing degrees, the interviewers asked student participants if they had alternative plans if they did not get admitted into the nursing program; in other words, students were asked if they had a Plan B. The majority of the students became visibly anxious at the thought of not being admitted. Alexandra Vargas (Latina) stated, “[My] main goal is to be in nursing, so I don’t wanna start thinking of Plan B even though I know I should. But I don’t know if I’d be as passionate about psychology as I am for nursing. That’s why I don’t know if that would be my Plan B. But I’ve heard, I got an email saying, because Nevada State nursing is so competitive - that if we don’t end up passing nursing - they’re gonna do something where we can be in the health care department.” The few students who had considered an alternative plan did not sway from

their goals to pursue a bachelors in nursing, but instead considered alternative colleges. Wendy Tellez (Latina) shared, “If I don’t get into the nursing school here, I would apply at Roseman [(a local highly expensive private college focused on healthcare fields)]. If I don’t get into Roseman, I would most like go into phlebotomy. It’s a course that you take and I would become a phlebotomist.”

The findings presented in this report are worthy of attention and pivotal to address the postsecondary retention and success of AAPI and Latinx students at NSC, the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), and the State of Nevada as whole. Not only do these findings speak to the challenges faced by AAPI and Latinx students, but also difficulties faced by students pursuing nursing degrees—a career that is significant to the public health of the state. Thus it is critical to address these issues affecting these populations and to do so through cross-collaborative institutional and system-wide efforts. Below are some areas of potential improvement that will be addressed by NSC.

AREAS FOR POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENT

The campus inquiry team met to discuss the findings and develop recommendations to address the retention and success of AAPI and Latinx pre-nursing students based on these results. Below are the recommendations that emerged from that meeting, along with action plans that are being pursued:

- The need to address the retention and success of AAPI and Latinx pre-nursing students at NSC was directly aligned with NSC's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. Since the meeting, a unit has been tasked with leading and coordinating efforts to address the needs of pre-nursing students at NSC.
- Pre-nursing students described their desire to engage more with nursing faculty and current nursing students. Pre-nursing students expressed wanting to learn more about the admissions and academic expectations and experiences as future nursing students. NSC's advising, student orientation, and nursing departments are working together to develop more opportunities for students to meet nursing faculty and students through panels, guest speakers, and mixers.
- Students discussed a desire to learn more about alternative careers in healthcare. Students expressed a desire for experiential learning opportunities such as volunteer and internship opportunities. These opportunities would also help pre-nursing students identify alternative

healthcare-related majors and careers besides nursing. There will be efforts to expose students to alternative health care related careers through new student orientations, advising, early career counseling, and programming, including the possibility of more degree options, and panels of non-nursing faculty.

- Students talked about wanting more culturally responsive practices and services aimed at AAPIs and Latinx student groups in and out of the classroom. For example, learning more about AAPI and Latinx experiences in the classroom, having an AAPI student club, and more opportunities for community engagement. Efforts are underway to develop partnerships with community groups, such as the Asian Community Development Council (ACDC) in Nevada and APIA Scholars, which will be beneficial to expanding opportunities and services for AAPI students.
- Students described a need for more support services tailored to meet the demands of "non-traditional"⁵ college students, such as students working full-time and those with dependents. For instance, offering extended hours for food services, library business hours, and tutoring services. Also, increasing access to mental health services and more outreach and recruitment of men in nursing degrees. There will be efforts to expand support services and resources to help students thrive in college.

STUDENT VOICES FOR POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENT

“I know they have the centers where you can go talk to someone, but I think specifically someone who has gone through nursing or who knows about it. I think that would be more helpful than getting help from someone who’s just there to help you with, they can help you specifically for pre-nursing.”

– Alexandra Vargas (Latina)

“I know we have assigned [faculty] advisors, [...] if they could do like emails, like ‘hey, how are you doing?’ [...] because I have a faculty advisor, but we don’t talk or anything. It’s like she’s just there.”

– Cristina Reyes (Latina)



ENDNOTES

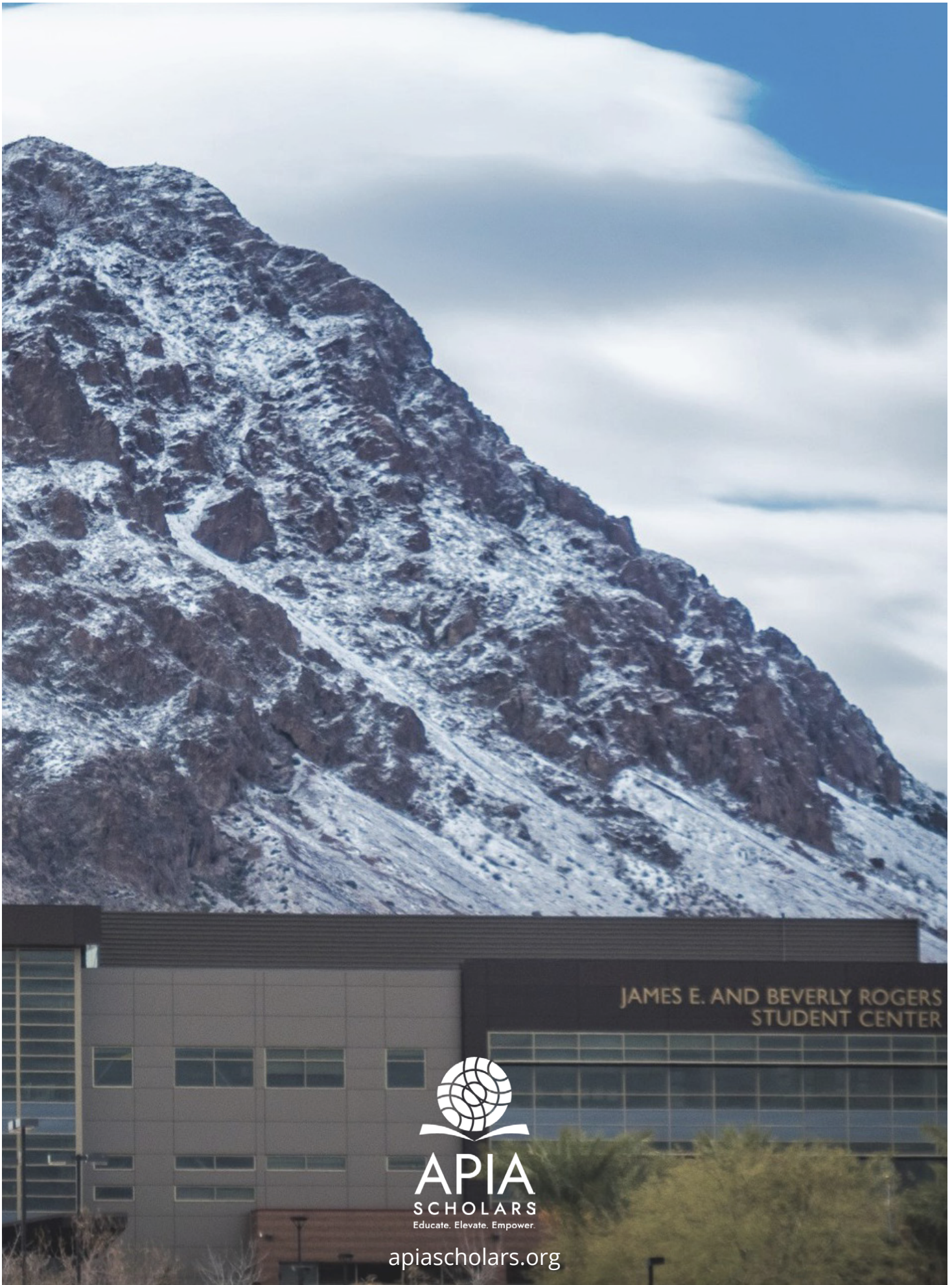
¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2018 Population Estimates (Washington, D.C.: Author, 2019).

² J. Hardcastle, *Nevada County Population Projections 2017 to 2036*. (Reno, NV: Nevada Department of Taxation, 2017). Retrieved from <https://tax.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/taxnv.gov/Content/TaxLibrary/2017-20-Year-Total-Population-Projections-Report.pdf>

³ R. Teranishi, M. Martin, L. Bordoloi Pazich, C. M. Alcantar, & T.-L.-K. Nguyen, *Measuring the Impact of MSI-Funded Programs on Student Success: Findings from the Evaluation of Asian American and Native American Pacific-Islander-Serving Institutions* (New York, NY: National Commission on AAPI Research in Education, 2014). Retrieved from http://care.gseis.ucla.edu/assets/2014_peer_report.pdf

⁴ M. M. Lohfink, & M. B. Paulsen, "Comparing the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation students," *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4) (2005): 409-428.; R. T. Teranishi, C. M. Alcantar, & B. M. D. Nguyen, "Race and class through the lens of the Asian American and Pacific Islander experience: Perspectives from community college students," *AAPI Nexus Journal*, 13(1 & 2) (2015): 72-90.; X. Wang, "Baccalaureate attainment and college persistence of community college transfer students at four-year institutions," *Research in Higher Education*, 50(6) (2009): 570-588.

⁵ "Non-traditional" is intentionally written with quotation marks because many of NSC's students have historically come from non-traditional college-going backgrounds.



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