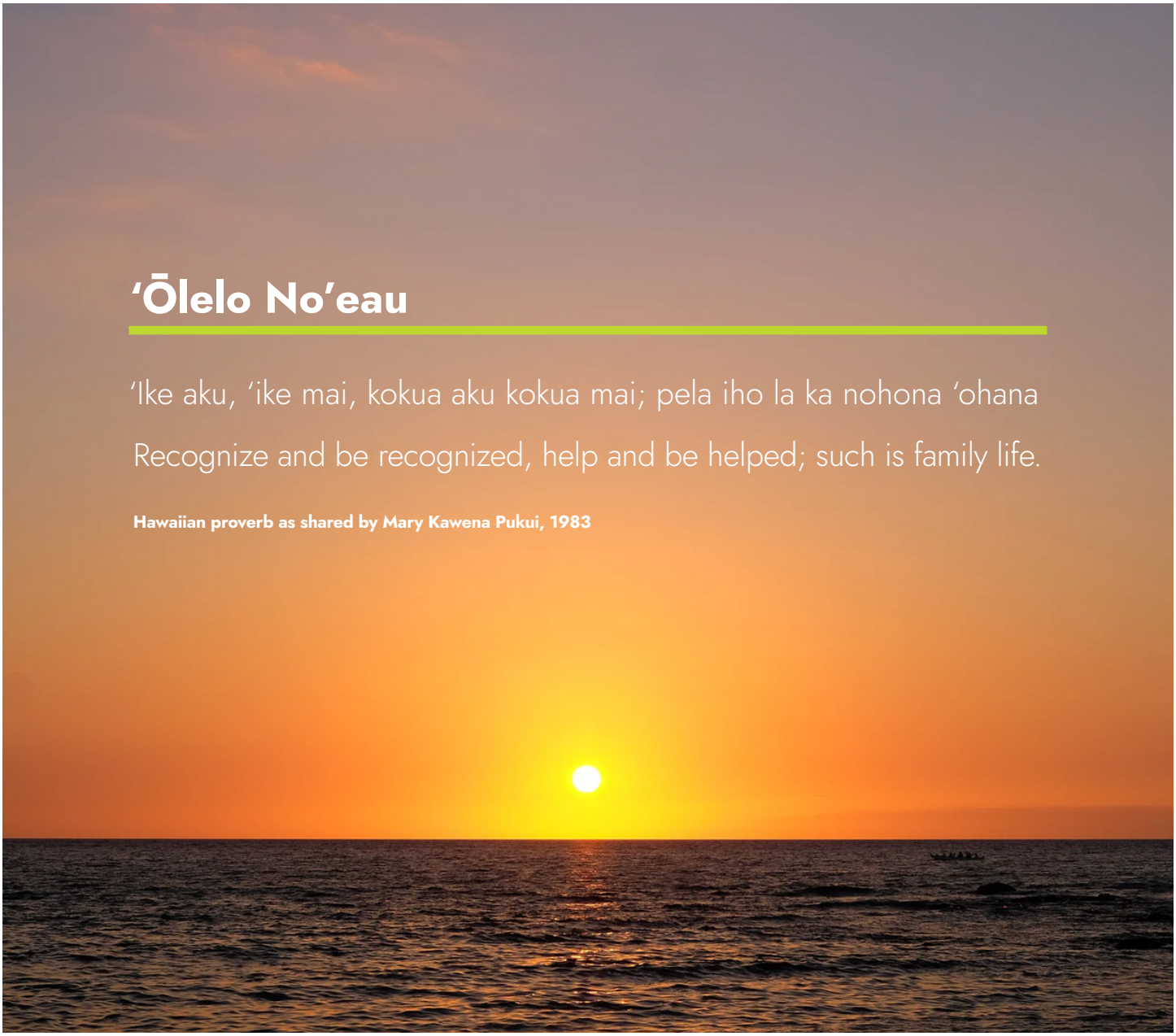
NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A RURAL PACIFIC LEARNING TOUR

APIA SCHOLARS



ʻŌlelo Noʻeau

ʻIke aku, ʻike mai, kokua aku kokua mai; pela iho la ka nohona ʻohana

Recognize and be recognized, help and be helped; such is family life.

Hawaiian proverb as shared by Mary Kawena Pukui, 1983

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amid a global pandemic that has fundamentally changed how higher education traditionally operates across the nation, it is critically important to understand how college campuses can continue to serve their students, with a special focus on the students who too often are overlooked and underserved.

For students from communities of color, low-income households and other populations that have been historically excluded from postsecondary opportunities, COVID-19 has exacerbated preexisting barriers to college access and success. Rural communities in particular, with sparse populations and long distances between students and educational facilities, have long experienced limited postsecondary opportunities due to limited emerging technology and services, that students in non-rural areas are now experiencing for the first time.

Institutions of higher education in the U.S. affiliated Pacific—where rural communities look across oceans rather than rolling hillsides—serve Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities at the confluence of these challenging factors. Now, as the coronavirus compels us to reimagine the relationship between proximity and student success, educators in the Pacific are well positioned to offer insight on how to navigate these unknown waters.

Yet our current understanding of how institutions in this region are able to serve marginalized student communities or even how NHPI students fare in postsecondary education is limited, due to national postsecondary data sources' inability to capture reliable information about students in the region. In order to learn more about these institutions and their capacity to serve NHPI students, APIA Scholars set out to conduct a Rural Pacific Learning Tour, a set of conversations with institutional stakeholders at nine of the eleven rural higher education institutions in the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands, that asked open-ended questions about student success and institutional capacities to improve student outcomes.

This report lays out the findings from these conversations, in combination with insights gleaned from focus groups of students who live in and/or attend college in the Pacific Islands, in order to shed light on how institutions, students and communities in the region have fared—both prior to the global pandemic as well as now.

Three major themes emerged from these conversations. First, although higher education institutions across the rural Pacific face challenges unique to their campus and community, institutions detected three common barriers to NHPI student success: college readiness, lack of financial resources, and work and family responsibilities. Second, despite these barriers, institutions are deliberately challenging the colonial legacy and resulting deficit framework that too often plagues students, institutions, and island communities; in some instances, deficit narratives are confronted outright, while in other instances colleges and universities seek to provide the sorts of holistic supports that create student success stories that will continue to shift the narrative. Finally, there was a keen interest from many campuses to better use data to gain insight into student trends, as well as leveraging this data to institutionalize systemic changes that would improve NHPI student success.

Based on findings from this study, APIA Scholars outlines recommendations for further research to collectively expand the body of knowledge on NHPI postsecondary access and success. Ultimately, in order to improve the capacity of rural institutions in the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands to support vulnerable student populations themselves, APIA Scholars is poised to initiate an NHPI Student Research Capacity-Building Initiative that would create a community of practice for institutional stakeholders to learn from one another in the region as they all work towards improving NHPI student success.

INTRODUCTION

Amid a global pandemic that has fundamentally changed how higher education traditionally operates across the nation, it is critically important to understand how college campuses can continue to serve their students, with a special focus on the students who too often are overlooked and underserved. For students from communities of color, low-income households and other populations that have been historically excluded from postsecondary opportunities, COVID-19 has exacerbated preexisting barriers to college access and success. At the same time, with sparse populations and long distances between students and educational facilities, rural campuses have historically grappled with questions that are now being posed in every college campus across the United States. Institutions of higher education in the U.S. affiliated Pacific—where rural communities look across oceans rather than rolling hillsides—serve Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities at the confluence of these factors. Now, as the coronavirus compels us to reimagine the relationship between proximity and student success, educators in the Pacific are well positioned to offer insight on how to navigate these unknown waters.

It is vitally important to understand the experiences of NHPI students in higher education access and success. Scholarship that focuses specifically on NHPI students is often critical of the relative invisibility of these students within the umbrella term Asian Pacific Islander (API).[1] In recent years, scholars have challenged this homogenous view by advocating for and using disaggregated data.[2] When national API data is disaggregated, significant disparities emerge in college participation and completion rates. For example, Teranishi et al. found that although the college participation rate for the total U.S. population is 54.9 percent, only 47.0 percent of the NHPI population have attended college. This disparity is even more concerning when NHPI data is further disaggregated by ethnic subgroup, with large proportions of adults never enrolling in postsecondary education, including Samoans (57.9%), Tongans (56.8%), Native Hawaiians (53.0%), and Guamanians or Chamorros (49.3%).[3]

Lower participation rates occur along the entire postsecondary pipeline, with declining NHPI enrollment in not-for-profit two- and four-year institutions and concerning rates of attrition for those who do enroll. There is a particularly high rate of students who begin college and leave without a degree among Samoans (58.1%), Tongans (54.0%), Native Hawaiians (50.0%), and Guamanians or Chamorros (47.0%). As a result of low levels of college participation and a high rate of students starting college and leaving without a degree, overall educational attainment rates have been relatively low for NHPI students, with Native Hawaiians (20.5%), Guamanians or Chamorros (18.6%), Samoans (13.4%), and Tongans (12.3%) receiving four-year degrees at rates well below the national average (29.1%).[4]

While Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students attend college both in the Pacific and on the U.S. continent, there are a handful of colleges that make up a critical mass of NHPI enrollment. The top five institutions in terms of total NHPI enrollment are located in the U.S. affiliated Pacific: College of Micronesia-FSM (Public Two-Year), University of Guam (Public Four-Year), Guam Community College (Public Two-Year), American Sāmoa Community College (Public Four-Year), and the College of the Marshall Islands (Public Two-Year). These five postsecondary institutions in the Pacific Islands enroll one-in-five NHPI students nationally.[5] As federally designated Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), these institutions are part of a cohort of schools that serve and award a large proportion of associate's and bachelor's degrees to NHPI students. AANAPISIs enroll 14.1% of all undergraduates nationally but 38.1% of NHPI students and conferred 42.6 and 27.1 percent of associate and bachelor's degrees, respectively, to NHPI students in 2016.[6] Additionally, the colleges and universities that comprise the University of Hawai'i system are eligible for and have participated extensively in the federal Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (ANNHSIs) program, with all ten campuses represented among the 44 grant awards between 2008 and 2014.[7] These trends are significant for understanding NHPIs in higher education broadly, though national data sources do not include figures from the U.S. territories and freely associated states that comprise much of the U.S. affiliated Pacific.[8] For this reason, it is important to understand the history and context of higher education in the region.

There are more than 20 ethnic groups recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau in the NHPI community.[9] Polynesians include individuals who identify as Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Tahitian, Tongan, and Tokelauan. Micronesians include individuals who identify as Guamanian or Chamorro, Mariana Islander, Saipanese, Palauan, Carolinian, Kosraean, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, Yapese, Marshallese, and I-Kiribati. Melanesians include individuals who identify as Fijian, Papua New Guinean, Solomon Islander, and Ni-Vanuatu.

Higher Education in the U.S. Affiliated Pacific

> The U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands fall into three broad geopolitical classifications: U.S. territories, freely associated states, and the state of Hawai'i.[10] The territories are comprised on American Sāmoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Guam. The freely associated states are the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau.

Across the U.S. affiliated Pacific there are sixteen public two- and four- year colleges and universities. In Hawai'i, there are ten institutions, including the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, University of Hawai'i West O'ahu, and the University of Hawai'i Community College (UHCC) system comprised of Hawai'i Community College, Honolulu Community College, Kapi'olani Community College, Kaua'i Community College, Leeward Community College, the University of Hawai'i Maui College, and Windward Community College. These colleges and universities have high racial and ethnic diversity with NHPI students comprising a sizable minority of the overall student population.

Within the UHCC system, NHPIs were 30% of the student population in Fall 2019. At UH Manoa, UH Hilo, and UH West O'ahu, these figures were 16.8%, 37.6%, and 31% respectively.[11] In the U.S. territories and freely associated states, NHPIs comprise larger proportions of the student population. In 2019, NHPI enrollment was 46% at the University of Guam and 50% at Guam Community College. In this same period, PI enroll-

Table 1: NHPI Enrollment at Pacific AANAPISIs

Institution	Student Population	NHPI Students by Percent
University of Hawai'i Community Colleges*	28,066	30%
Hawai'i Community College	2,615	46%
Honolulu Community College	3,510	28%
Kapi'olani Community College	6,488	19%
Kaua'i Community College	1,373	31%
Leeward Community College	6,568	30%
University of Hawai'i, Maui College	2,992	33%
Windward Community College	2,520	44%
University of Hawai'i, Mānoa*	17,490	17%
University of Hawai'i, Hilo*	3,372	38%
University of Hawai'i, West O'ahu*	3,049	31%
University of Guam**	3,653	46%
Guam Community College***	2,732	50%
Northern Marianas College****	1,253	43%
American Sāmoa Community College***	1,370	89%
College of Micronesia-FSM***	2,683	100%
College of Marshall Islands***	1,399	100%
Palau Community College***	621	98%

*Source: University of Hawai'i Institutional Research & Analysis Office, Enrollment Table 5, Student Selected Characteristics, Fall 2019, All Ethnicities, All Majors. Accessed November 16, 2020

**Source: University of Guam 2019-2020 Fact Book. Accessed November 17, 2020

***Source: Pacific Postsecondary Education Council. Report to Accrediting Commission of Community & Junior Colleges, July–December 2019. Accessed November 16, 2020

****Source: Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics. Access November 19, 2020

ment rates were 43% at Northern Marianas College and 89% at American Sāmoa Community College. In the freely associated states, NHPIs comprised the majority of students: College of Micronesia-FSM (100%), College of the Marshall Islands (100%), and Palau Community College (98%).[12]

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander experiences in higher education are indelibly marked by U.S. involvement in the Pacific region, both as relates to specific geopolitical statuses vis-a-vis the United States and an affective sense of belonging within college communities. The varying classifications between Hawai'i, U.S. territories, and freely associated states are a legacy of U.S. militarization across the Pacific and have lasting impacts on migration patterns and a host of legal statuses that vary by island and archipelago. For example, statehood affords Hawai'i full citizenship benefits, as is the case for Guam and CNMI. This is in contrast to American Sāmoa in which, though also a U.S. territory, residents are considered to be U.S. nationals. Through the Compacts of Free Association, citizens of Palau, FSM, and the Marshall Islands are able to travel and live in the U.S. for educational and employment purposes without visas.[13]

In the context of higher education, these differences matter. A student's legal status determines their ability to access financial aid, health care, and employment.[14] For example, due to Hawai'i's status as a state, students born in the islands are eligible for all assistance available to U.S. citizens, including federal Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and Work Study. Through the Compacts of Free Association, students from Palau also gain access to these forms of federal assistance. In contrast, citizens of FSM and the Marshall Islands are only eligible for federal Pell Grants as stipulated in those nations' compacts with the United States.[15] This geopolitical context in regard to the different relationships each Pacific island has with the U.S. shape the pathways and opportunities of NHPI students in higher education and require consideration.

The legacy of U.S. involvement in the Pacific region also impacts NHPI students' sense of belonging in institutions of higher education. In Hawai'i, Native Hawaiian students bear the burden of over 100 years of U.S. colonialism and an imposed foreign educational system, with starkly lower 4- and 6-year graduation rates at 9 and 40 percent, respectively, compared with 19 and 44 percent for their peers.[16] Federal ANNH programs address these gaps and Malone et al. found that beneficiaries of federal ANNH programs within the University of Hawai'i system cited a higher sense of belonging, identify formation, educational agency, and kuleana (sense of responsibility) over their non-beneficiary peers.[17] For Pacific Islander families and students, the ability to migrate from the U.S. territories and COFA states to Hawai'i and the continental U.S. does indeed open educational opportunities. However, Uehara, Chugen, and Staley Raatior found that Pacific Islander students at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo experienced a sense of conflict between higher education and their cultural beliefs and practices.[18] Indeed, NHPI students' persistence to degree completion is influenced by a sense of belonging on campus and the challenges associated with trying to find a balance in their identity at home and educational settings, where values are often conflicting with one another.[19]

Rurality and Rural Higher Education

The U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands are unconventionally rural to the extent that dominant perceptions of rurality[20] do not often include the oceans, atolls, and islands for which the Pacific is commonly known. The U.S. Census Bureau "defines rural as what is not urban—that is, after defining individual urban areas, rural is what is left."[21] This report challenges dominant perceptions with a multifaceted conceptualization of rurality.[22] In this approach U.S. Census definitions are an important starting point because urban areas are designated as such through a constellation of factors that include population threshold, density per square mile, land use, and distance. Specifically, urbanized areas meet a population threshold of at least 50,000 and population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile. Urban clusters meet this population density criteria but have a lower total population of between 2,500 and 50,000 people.[23] However, data for the entire U.S. affiliated Pacific is

not uniformly produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. Specifically, due to differing geopolitical statuses vis-à-vis the U.S., U.S. Census data is available for states and territories but not the freely associated states. Thus, data for the freely associated states were derived not from census figures but from the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

Most notably, many of the counties, county equivalents, and freely associated states fall below population thresholds for urban designation and few meet both the population threshold and density requirements for urban areas. Honolulu county is the notable exception and is a helpful example for understanding the ways rurality is understood throughout the U.S. affiliated Pacific. Rather than designating an island as rural or urban, islands are often understood in relation to population centers within the archipelago. Honolulu county, located on the island of O'ahu, is the major population center of Hawai'i. It is the only county with large tracts of land

Table 2: Population and Population Density for Hawai'i, U.S. Territories, and COFA States

Area	Population	Land Area in Square Miles	Population Density
State of Hawai'i*			
Hawai'i	1,360,301	6,422.63	211.80
Hawai'i County	185,079	4,028.42	45.90
Honolulu County	953,207	600.74	1,586.70
Kaua'i County	67,091	619.96	108.20
Maui County	154,924	1,173.51	132.00
U.S. Territories**			
American Sāmoa	55,519	76.46	726.16
Eastern District	23,030	25.69	896.41
Manu'a District	1,143	25.69	51.29
Rose Island	0	0.03	0.00
Swains Island	17	0.94	18.10
Western District	31,329	27.51	1,138.98
Guam	159,358	209.80	759.56
Guam Municipality	159,358	209.80	759.56
Northern Mariana Islands, Commonwealth of	53,883	182.33	295.53
Northern Mariana Islands Municipality	0	61.79	0.00
Rota Municipality	2,527	32.86	76.91
Saipan Municipality	48,220	45.89	1,050.78
Tinian Municipality	3,136	41.79	75.04
Compacts of Free Association States***			
Marshall Islands	71,917	69.88	1,029.15
Micronesia, Federated States of	102,436	271.04	377.94
Palau, Republic of	21,685	177.22	122.36

*Source: State of Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, 2019 State of Hawai'i Databook, Table 01.10
**Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Recent Population Trends for the U.S. Island Areas: 2000 to 2010
***Source: Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook, accessed October 12, 2020

designated as urban areas and host to six of the ten public higher education institutions in the islands. Students living on other islands—often described as "outer islands"—have far fewer, if any, options on their home island. This pattern of limited higher educational options is replicated throughout the U.S. affiliated Pacific where population distribution tends to follow a similar pattern of higher density tracts with lower density areas on the same or outlying islands and atolls.

Another facet to understanding rurality in the U.S. affiliated Pacific is through an exploration of NHPI educational trajectories that resonate with their continental peers. Existing research details the ways that proximity of rural communities to urban centers is implicated in access to emerging technology and services and, ultimately, results in less access and opportunities for rural students.[24] This begins in K-12 systems where education budgets, enrollment sizes, and limited access to academically rigorous courses adversely impact rural students.[25] NHPIs in the U.S. affiliated Pacific also exhibit similar enrollment trends as their peers in other rural regions. Students from rural areas experience lower college enrollment,[26] have similar family backgrounds, including being the first in their family to attend college and coming from a low-income background,[27] and are more likely to attend nonselective colleges.[28] If they transfer, students from rural communities will transfer to smaller rural colleges.[29] Research also highlighted rural students' difficulty in adjusting to the increased size of large public four-year institutions.[30] Furthermore, students from rural communities experience challenges in adapting to more racially and culturally diverse settings.[31] Regarding degree attainment, rural students have lower percentages of degree completion compared to urban peers.[32]

A third facet to understanding rurality in the U.S. affiliated Pacific is that rural upbringings also provide benefits that may be influential for students pursuing higher education. That is, although students from rural communities face a host of challenges, they find benefits in having grown up in smaller communities that are often tight-knit.[33] Rural students have shared their immense sense of gratitude towards family members, teachers, coaches, counselors, and peers that have shaped their educational pathways.[34] In addition to individuals, rural students emphasized the significant role of local businesses, colleges, and civic and faith-based organizations in supporting rural students in their pursuit of higher education.[35]

Rurality in the Pacific is both similar and different from the U.S. continent. A key difference is that definitions of urban and rural are continent-based, focusing on population in relationship to land. In the Pacific, archipelagos and atolls—and their populations—are understood in relationship to the ocean that connects island communities with each other. Rurality appears out of sync with Pacific experiences. However, even in light of this distinction, the U.S. Census delineation of urban and rural areas remains an important starting point because most islands do not meet both the population threshold and density factors that are important for defining an urban area. When population factors are read alongside the experiences of NHPI students in local educational systems, the concept of rurality in higher education names the way that low population thresholds and densities interface with issues of equitable access and success. Examining the U.S. affiliated Pacific will thus expand and deepen current understandings of rurality in higher education.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to share findings from the APIA Scholars digital Rural Pacific Learning Tour and establish an agenda for an NHPI Student Research Capacity-Building Initiative. In presenting these findings, we build on prior research by providing a portrait of the colleges and universities that serve rural NHPI students pursuing higher education across the U.S. affiliated Pacific. With the intent to host open-ended conversations, we designed questions to shed light on NHPI student experiences, as well as how institutions collect and use data to improve outcomes for NHPI students:

1. How do institutions define student success? What barriers do NHPI students encounter in pursuit of educational success?

2. How are institutions currently addressing identified barriers to NHPI student success? What are the ongoing institutional challenges to achieving NHPI student success?

3. How do institutions currently gather, analyze, and strategically use data? What would improving that process look like at an institutional level?

These questions framed the broad parameters of the Rural Pacific Learning Tour in which our stated interest was in listening to, conversing with, and learning firsthand from institutions that serve NHPI students in the U.S. affiliated Pacific.

DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

Of the sixteen public two- and four- year higher education institutions in the U.S. affiliated Pacific, eleven are situated in rural areas that align with our multifaceted framework for understanding rurality. In Hawai'i, these institutions are the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, the University of Hawai'i Maui College, Hawai'i Community College, and Kaua'i Community College. In the U.S. territories, these institutions are the University of Guam, Guam Community College, the Northern Marianas College, and American Sāmoa Community College. In the freely associated states, these institutions are the College of Micronesia-FSM, College of the Marshall Islands, and Palau Community College.

Beginning in May 2020, outreach for the APIA Scholars Rural Pacific Learning Tour was conducted to faculty, staff, and administrative leaders of these institutions with particular emphasis on rural colleges and universities. After initial campus connections were established, a snowball method was employed to increase the focus group size, with persons involved in student affairs, institutional research, senior-level institutional leadership, directors of AANAPISI (Asian American- Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution) and ANNHSI (Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institution) programs, and faculty or staff involved in planning distance learning programs. A snowball method was also employed to increase the number of college campuses participating in the study. Each session was framed as an open discussion with our key research questions provided as a prompt for participants to begin sharing insights on student experiences and institutional capacities at their campus. Learning Tour sessions were conducted from June to September 2020.

Nine of the eleven rural higher education institutions in the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands are represented in this study and two were unable to coordinate a time among stakeholders to meaningfully participate. Four of the five urban institutions were also engaged as a frame of reference, though the findings in this report focus on rural institutions only. All institutional responses have been anonymized. Data for this project relied primarily on focus group interviews conducted digitally with stakeholders of rural institutions of higher education in the U.S. affiliated Pacific, with individual interviews or written responses provided as additional options for respondents unable to attend focus group sessions. All institutional responses have been anonymized.

We also include in this report findings from focus groups with students who live and/or attended college in the Pacific Islands. In total, we conducted seven focus groups with over 20 students who attended six postsecondary institutions in the Pacific Islands. These students were recruited through their affiliation with APIA Scholars. In an effort to center Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander voices and their unique experiences from the islands, we asked about students about their college experience and how COVID-19 impacted their educational trajectory. The interviews provided important context and insight into findings from focus groups comprised of institutional stakeholders, specifically to corroborate the key challenges and opportunities along the lines of student access in higher education. Like institutional respondents, student responses have been anonymized though at times institutional affiliations are noted.

> The professors have a lot of business connections outside. If the student is really interested in, you know, getting into the workforce or getting a job in the business or financial industry after school, if they just reach out to the professors, then they definitely help them get a job. It's kind of how I think I started working right after graduation. I already had a few job offers to start working right after graduation, so it definitely helps–reaching out to the professors and things like that. —Recent graduate, University of Guam

FINDINGS

Colleges and universities across the U.S. affiliated Pacific are both like and unlike their continental peers. This was the case before school closures began due to COVID-19 and continued to be the case as institutions sought to address the large and looming questions of college access and student success in a changed world. For this reason, we preface our findings with an overview of the community contexts in which participating institutions work to provide higher education opportunities to rural NHPI students, including the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19. We then shift to emergent themes that were common across all participating institutions, beginning with an identification of common barriers rural NHPI students encounter in their educational journeys. We then identify holistic supports currently in place to improve rural NHPI student outcomes in higher education. We close by turning attention to institutional research and capacity-building, focusing both on current practices and institutional aspirations in collecting, analyzing, and leveraging data to initiate changes in policies and practices that will improve outcomes for rural Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students.

1. Community Contexts

A common theme across rural institutions in the U.S. affiliated Pacific was resilience and gratitude. From Typhoon Yutu that hit the Northern Mariana Islands in 2018 to the present global pandemic—and everything in between—students, faculty, staff, and administrators demonstrated a faith in the strength of their community and the role of their institutions in meeting the vital needs of their people. At the same time, respondents spoke candidly about the ways that local economies and institutional contexts challenged their efforts to serve their island communities.

Local Economies: The strength and future of local economies was a significant issue for each institution involved in the learning tour. At the front end of the college pipeline, administrators were concerned that many in their communities were opting out of a college education with limited employment prospects in the local economy. One senior administrator expressed frustration that in some communities multiple generations of the same family have relied on federal and local forms of living assistance. Without changes to federal policies, she reasoned, there would be no motivation to change the status quo. Another college also noted that recent high school graduates would often opt out of a college education after seeing the immediate benefits their friends gained through employment in the retail sector.

In contrast to the concern among college leaders, students who did enroll in Pacific Island colleges and universities saw the benefit of their educational experiences. Recent graduates of the University of Guam, for example, appreciated the local employment connections made through their faculty advisers:

The professors have a lot of business connections outside. If the student is really interested in, you know, getting into the workforce or getting a job in the business or financial industry after school, if they just reach out to the professors, then they definitely help them get a job. It's kind of how I think I started working right after graduation. I already had a few job offers to start working right after graduation, so it definitely helps–reaching out to the professors and things like that.

The professors and advisors are just like guiding us, and we really have to work on our own path…The professors or the advisors helping you get jobs, they really do that. I still get emails about job opportunities.

Significantly these students, from different departments within the same school, were able to point toward their college experience as important for preparing and securing stable and worthwhile employment after completing their undergraduate education.

For the most ambitious students, education abroad is alluring and the resulting brain drain also has consequences for local economies. A recent graduate from the University of Guam explained his ambitions:

I just graduated and I'm planning also to go off island to get a doctorate's degree. One thing that I might see myself is outweighing whether to come back to the island or not…I'm curious how, I think there's this term called brain drain and how

> They send out vast emails a lot saying, "Here's this. You can come in this Zoom meeting, and we'll help mentor you," or something along the lines of that. There's a lot where they just post up flyers, where they give you some neat tips on how to cook and what to do. Because there's a lot of Chamorro delicacies, you know, and they just put it all out there … I cannot be more grateful for their support system. —Student, Northern Marianas College

when people look whether it's much more beneficial to go back to Guam and teach as a professor once they get their doctorate's, I'm not sure if it's very enticing for people to come back although there is sentiment to give back to your island…And so throughout my years in [University of Guam], some people do come back. They give presentations, but they're stationed out there. They're in Texas, Pennsylvania, Washington…a lot are in California.

Brain drain from the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands is a consistent challenge to local economies with impacts far beyond the higher education sector. Understood in regional and national terms, one administrator explained that it often begins with educational migration from the western Pacific to Guam, from Guam to Hawai'i, and from Hawai'i to the continental United States. As seen in the above student perspective, students with ambitions to further advance their education are not always certain from the outset that their efforts will be adequately rewarded in a return migration after completing their studies.

Institutions in Context: The historic and continuing presence of the United States in the Pacific was observable in the ways higher education institutions balanced community needs with larger U.S. and global trends. In Hawai'i, one senior administrator cited U.S. colonialism and oppression as barriers for Native Hawaiians in that educational system. As an example, the respondent noted hundreds of responses against a recently proposed change to the University of Hawai'i vision statement that currently designates the system as a Hawaiian Place of Learning. The specificity of this designation supports the production of Hawaiian knowledge within academia, establishes undergraduate course requirements, and provides for the support of Native Hawaiian students as a historically underrepresented group within the system.[36] In this context, apprehension reflects a fear that such changes would alienate Native Hawaiian students who are already struggling to navigate contentious issues that have embattled the system for years.

In contrast, many college administrators indicated challenges emerging from U.S. affiliation without expressly referencing colonialism. Colleges in the freely associated states, for example, expressed a need to balance the maintenance of indigenous languages with accreditation requirements for English language proficiency. Proximity to eastern Asia also created a context in which one college was grappling with how to prepare students to transfer abroad when host languages and cultures varied in influence between the United States and China. Another common challenge that was noted by colleges in the western Pacific were high turnover rates of faculty and staff that impacted student learning. In this instance, newly arrived faculty and staff are often underprepared to navigate Pacific Island cultures and demand that students align with norms of instruction that are unfamiliar in the islands. Additionally, faculty and staff who are not from the islands often struggle with adjusting to island life and return to the U.S. continent after a few years, resulting in severed mentoring relationships that are considered by faculty and staff as critically important for Pacific Islander student success.

2. COVID Impacts

The global pandemic had profound impact across the Pacific, with both challenges and opportunities for all institutions. The move to distance education was more difficult for some schools than others, with campuses faring better if local infrastructure and online platforms were in place prior to the pandemic. Three themes emerged: connectivity and enrollment, student services and completion, and transforming institutional practices.

Connectivity and Enrollment: Unlike urban centers, the infrastructure necessary to move online is not generally accessible to all students. The challenges are not simply access to a computer or cell phone; rather, students live in areas which are not serviced by internet providers. When campuses closed and students returned to their home islands, limited local infrastructure imposed an enormous barrier to accessing digital classwork. Connectivity had implications for summer enrollment that was reduced in one instance by 30% from last year. However, challenges due to connectivity were not universal. On an island with generally robust internet infrastructure, the campus reported disparities between students with internet access and those who lived in zones without service.

> [Students are] already discouraged, and I feel that they even need encouragement to ask for help. I don't know the reason why there might be stigma in asking for help, especially when they need it, but students don't go to the tutor lab unless they're really failing. … [I think] this will increase given that now students don't have that push compared to in-class courses. Now it's online, and some of these discouraged students will just be told, 'Here's a link where you can find videos' or 'Here's a link for the tutoring.'—Teaching assistant, University of Guam

From an administrative perspective, two campuses in the western Pacific noted a comparatively smooth transition to online learning. The first benefitted from already high rates of connection since students and families sought and had access to internet service for recreation purposes. The second has over a decade experience in distance education partnerships with other colleges that has continued to improve with advances in digital technologies.

Across the Pacific, those students with reliable internet access expressed gratitude for continued support from faculty and staff. One student attending the Northern Marianas College was thankful to remain connected with his campus:

They send out vast emails a lot saying, "Here's this. You can come in this Zoom meeting, and we'll help mentor you," or something along the lines of that. There's a lot where they just post up flyers, where they give you some neat tips on how to cook and what to do. Because there's a lot of Chamorro delicacies, you know, and they just put it all out there … I cannot be more grateful for their support system.

The task of remaining connected with students has been tremendous and, though grateful, some students are struggling with the shift online. One student who recently transferred from Guam Community College to another institution, shared a sense of sadness and loss:

I am a people person, I love being in the classroom … I love learning that way … [and] I feel like learning online for me is going to be, I mean, doing online classes for me is going to be hard because I just love being in the classroom and engaging.

Like these two respondents, students nationwide are experiencing a range of emotions as they navigate higher education during a global pandemic. One thing shared between these two students, however, is reliable internet access that is not a given for their peers. The challenge facing colleges across the rural Pacific is how to address disparities arising from uneven access to internet infrastructure within and across islands.

Student Services and Completion: The rapid shift online placed many students at risk for falling behind and dropping out before the close of the semester. The move online represented a culture shift away from in-person student services that had been developed to be highly accessible to students while on campus. One campus found that it took students time to realize that services such as tutoring and counseling were still available in online formats. For staff, making students aware of continuing support required extensive outreach and phone calls to connect with students.

Another campus is focusing their outreach on students who are still working to complete their spring coursework and are on the border between continued enrollment and dropping out. This concern was shared by students. For example, in thinking about the impact of COVID-19 on his campus, a teaching assistant from the University of Guam identified likely barriers to completion that may be exacerbated due to virtual learning:

[Students are] already discouraged, and I feel that they even need encouragement to ask for help. I don't know the reason why there might be stigma in asking for help, especially when

> We're always posting [youth mental health activities] up on our NMC emails. We're always posting up scholarships and everything …We try to make it much more supportive as much as possible because we know the struggle. —Student, Northern Marianas College

they need it, but students don't go to the tutor lab unless they're really failing. … [I think] this will increase given that now students don't have that push compared to in-class courses. Now it's online, and some of these discouraged students will just be told, 'Here's a link where you can find videos' or 'Here's a link for the tutoring.'

The potential impacts of COVID-19 on completion weighed on students, staff, faculty, and administrators. However, islands in the Pacific also have experience with campus closures due to unforeseen circumstances and the pandemic was sometimes seen as yet another obstacle to be overcome. Another student at the Northern Marianas College recalled the disruptions caused by Typhoon Yutu and the valuable lessons in resilience learned throughout her community:

We're always posting [youth mental health activities] up on our NMC emails. We're always posting up scholarships and everything …We try to make it much more supportive as much as possible because we know the struggle. Not all universities would know how, because of the events that happened here. Yes, COVID has happened to us, but we also had a typhoon. And to go back to normalcy again, "It's like wow, we're gonna go back and jump. But now we're more experienced, we can do this."

Though devastating, the typhoon was an exercise in resilience that this student felt prepared her college to continue providing students the support needed to advance toward degree. The resilience of Pacific communities was echoed by faculty, staff, and leadership at institutions across the Pacific.

Transforming Institutional Practices: All campuses found that COVID-19 challenged institutional capacities and accelerated changes that were already on the horizon. The most common area of accelerated change was in distance education, though the ways campuses experienced this change varied widely based on location and the degree to which each successfully incorporated components of distance education prior to school closures. Hardest hit were campuses with large numbers of students returning to home islands with little internet connectivity. Since limited internet infrastructure was a barrier to digital learning prior to the pandemic, programs at these campuses emphasized in-person learning to make college education accessible to their student population. The shift to distance education was consequently a fraught and complicated process.

In contrast, the institution whose students generally had access to reliable internet at home found that existing systems eased the transition to distance education. Three years ago, this campus adopted an online teaching platform to meet student needs, such as limited resources to print materials or jobs that necessitated asynchronous learning. One student attending this college felt well-prepared for the shift online:

There was one teacher in particular who incorporated an online learning platform … We had to submit assignments through there, never to him. So, in a sense, it was kind of a hybrid class …We were exposed to a lot more online-based, distance learning, taking—you know what? That's right!

For this student, the transition was eased by experience interacting with instructors in a digital learning space. In hindsight, campus respondents noted that faculty, staff, and students had the benefit of learning to maximize this platform over the course of years and reported that approximately 85% of courses were utilizing the platform in some way when the campus had to close in March 2020.

Other institutions faced challenges in distance education due to the technical nature of their programs. Community colleges, for example, found that career and technical education courses, such as auto mechanics, could not fully transition to online formats even with generally reliable internet infrastructure. Going forward, these colleges are striving to find a balance that transitions general education courses online and maximizes space on campus for specialized programs and students with limited internet connectivity at home.

COVID-19 also accelerated changes that were already transforming both individual campuses and higher education systems in the Pacific. Drastically reduced budgets as a consequence of the economic impact of COVID-19, for example, has accelerated creative problem-solving that reduces programmatic redundancy across campus systems while continuing to fully serve rural students that are spread across island archipelagoes. This system and others were also refocusing on skill development for recently unemployed, a process that amplified the urgency with which campuses were

> It was a really big help. Back home at my family's, I stay with my aunt and uncle and none of them work. I was really happy to get the scholarship because it could help pay for my college, finance and tuition and also at the dorms. It was really helpful. —Student, College of Micronesia

working with community stakeholders to ensure programs serve as career pathways for students.

3. Rural NHPI Student Completion Barriers

Although higher education institutions across the rural Pacific face challenges unique to their campus and community, there was striking similarity in the experiences of NHPI students. There were three common barriers: college readiness, lack of financial resources, and work and family responsibilities.

College Readiness: The degree of college readiness of incoming students is an ongoing concern, with campuses investing considerable resources to address achievement gaps linked with developmental English and math courses. One college shared that approximately 75% of incoming students are placed in developmental English and/or math courses. In an effort to address achievement gaps, some campuses have successfully partnered with the local public schools to improve college readiness in math. One campus, for example, is engaged in a nearly decade-long initiative to improve college readiness and last year began working with area high schools to develop a transitional math course to prepare students for entry level college math. Another campus has an accelerated program that successfully provides students at or above grade level with the support of three faculty members and tutors.

The achievement gap is an ongoing concern across the United States, though in the rural Pacific the challenge of college readiness in English overlaps with the dilemma colleges face in balancing native languages with federal requirements for English proficiency. The United States has a long history of imposing English in the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands and today federal accreditation requirements place similar imperatives on colleges, especially those in the freely associated states. In these countries, English is more commonplace on the most developed island while native languages remain the dominant language throughout most of the archipelago. One college administrator cited English requirements as a challenge to be weighed against the imperative to maintain native languages. An administrator at another campus shared that their college leverages locals with high capacity to learn English and trains them to work with students in their home villages to improve college readiness in English.

Lack of Financial Resources: Insufficient financial resources were a common barrier to persistence and completion, noted by institutions and students alike. Among the colleges, lower completion rates were closely tied to developmental courses in English and Math. With limited financial resources, many students rely heavily on federal PELL grants to fund their college education and, as one college shared, the need to take developmental coursework spends down this critical resource without advancing the student to completion.

Many students are the first in their families to attend college and often families are unable to provide financial assistance. An undergraduate at the College of Micronesia poignantly shared what a scholarship with APIA Scholars meant to her educational journey:

It was a really big help. Back home at my family's, I stay with my aunt and uncle and none of them work. I was really happy to get the scholarship because it could help pay for my college, finance and tuition and also at the dorms. It was really helpful.

The compacts of free association, which vary across the freely associated states, provide a complicating factor for students from those countries. One campus in Hawai'i, for example, was challenged to serve students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands who are not presently

> My first semester I struggled a lot with trying to find ways to pay for school, but also trying to find a job on campus or outside campus. The biggest challenge is if I work off campus, I'm gonna have to get a car because the public transportation system here isn't very reliable. —Transfer student from American Sāmoa attending the University of Hawai'i at Hilo

eligible for Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants and federal work-study funds do to the current compacts. These students face layered financial barriers that rarely meet the entirety of student financial need and they benefit greatly from campus-based and outside scholarships.

Work and Family Responsibilities: Across many of the colleges, respondents noted work and family responsibilities that often served as a barrier to completion for many of their students. One transfer student from American Sāmoa attending the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, shared the dilemma she faced searching for employment to alleviate the expense of her college education:

My first semester I struggled a lot with trying to find ways to pay for school, but also trying to find a job on campus or outside campus. The biggest challenge is if I work off campus, I'm gonna have to get a car because the public transportation system here isn't very reliable. I was trying to weigh the pros and cons of having a job off campus because it's harder to get a job on campus. They're looking for a more experienced person. I ended up having to sign up for loans because financial aid didn't cover a lot.

Another student at this campus was able to find employment, though she struggled to juggle the requirements of her scholarship with her financial need. She ultimately ended up failing those courses.

For students who are also parents, this type of financial burden is compounded. For example, one two-year college reported that one third of students are parents who must manage coursework alongside parenting and familial obligations to their extended kin. For these low-income and first-generation students, strain within the family is common as families may not fully understand the demands of college coursework. In instances when communal life is perceived as at odds with higher education, the participants indicated that students often choose to attend family and village events over coming to class. Another college noted that many students are employed full time and require not only late afternoon and evening classes, but also access to daycare providers with extended hours. Similarly, in this community there are no elder care facilities and the need to care for elderly parents presents as a significant barrier for many students.

4. Existing Student Supports

Across the rural Pacific, higher education institutions grapple with a colonial legacy that frames students, institutions, and island communities as inadequate. In some instances, deficit narratives are confronted outright, while in other instances colleges and universities seek to provide the sorts of holistic supports that create student success stories that will continue to shift the narrative.

Addressing Deficit Narratives: Many colleges—especially community colleges but not exclusively—emphasized that post-secondary employment was a measure of institutional success. This was frequently mentioned not in the context of strategic plans, but in the context of those programs that faculty, staff, and administrators identified as or hoped would be the most successful at meeting student educational goals. Reflecting on efforts to foster student success at his campus, one program coordinator highlighted the importance of shifting the deficit narrative in relation to NHPI students:

> Transformation can be viewed in various aspects of students' lives such as raising standards of living through greater and more advanced career and employment opportunities as well as in developing skills, deepening knowledge and ways of knowing, and appreciating and understanding one's own culture and other cultures and worldviews. —College program coordinator

These are institutional matters that focus on the institutions and structures to change to help students reach their educational goals, rather than focusing on student deficits that are sometimes attributed to a lack of success. Institutional change is where I think the focus should be. Rather than focus on students being ready for college (which is important, but often the narrative emphasizes that), I think it's equally if not more important for colleges to be student ready.

For this respondent, being student ready entailed ensuring that staff were able to support students in far-ranging ways, including the financial, emotional, academic, and physical wellness of NHPI students. This sentiment was shared across

programs in which there was a common commitment to working with students to address the myriad barriers that they may encounter in their higher education journey.

At the same time, colleges are also grappling with longstanding deficit narratives which frame their institutions as inferior to educational opportunities abroad. Off-island degrees are perceived as more prestigious, with degrees from the U.S. continent accepted as the gold standard. One business student at a four-year college detailed this perception:

There's a lot of people who probably got through the program without actually learning the material. I found that the varying degrees of knowledge, like people were able to still pass, and they kind of like diluted the–I don't want to say prestige of the business school–but people were just able to pass without even learning the material. I kind of get that from when I was applying at jobs, right? When people see [my degree] compared to maybe an off-island degree, the bias would be towards the person with the off-island degree not because the student per se, but I'm guessing like the stigma around–this is just talking about the business school–sometimes the level of students that they produce or level of graduates they produce isn't the highest.

As seen in this candid reflection, colleges across the rural Pacific are tasked with creating employment pathways for their students while contending with deeply rooted perceptions that local institutions are inferior to those abroad. In this context, becoming "student ready" involves providing holistic supports that will get students to graduation and employment, as well as provide success stories that can reshape deficit narratives about institutions of higher education in the islands.

Holistic Supports: Providing holistic supports to Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students entails understanding the Pacific community broadly, as well as the specific histories that differentiate island communities from each other. Colleges across the Pacific expressed similar efforts to improve advising processes to address challenges present before and sometimes accelerated by the rapid shift to online learning after COVID closures began in March 2020. On one campus with limited community connectivity, early surveying of student technology needs occurred alongside newly instituted intrusive advising practices learned last year at a professional development conference. For another college with reliable connectivity for most of its students, improving student services during COVID entailed linking their early alert student monitoring system with their digital learning platform to enable faculty, students, and counselors to communicate more effectively.

In Hawai'i, one program coordinator at a college that hosts

> It's basically just a program for first-generation students. So, I got into that straight after high school. And from there, they really helped me a lot with my college experience, especially like they offer tutoring, mentoring, all these workshops and field trips, and they even offer grants.—TRiO programming participant

students from across the Pacific region took time to explain that while retention, persistence, and graduation are quantitative markers of student success, a complimentary perspective is that student success "is viewed as providing educational opportunities and experiences that transform students' lives." Speaking specifically of migrants from the freely associated states, the respondent continued:

Transformation can be viewed in various aspects of students' lives such as raising standards of living through greater and more advanced career and employment opportunities as well as in developing skills, deepening knowledge and ways of knowing, and appreciating and understanding one's own culture and other cultures and worldviews. In Pacific societies, it should be noted that this is not just limited to individual students' lives: when an individual student is successful, the immediate and extended family, village, island, and nation are all successful. An individual student's success is a success for the larger group. So, we see student success as a success for the larger communities as well.

This campus offers a range of supports for Pacific Islander students, including dedicated financial assistance to at-risk students, cultural programming, and assistance to students navigating the complexities of migration within the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands. Significantly, these supports are meaningful because they are offered with an understanding of the student in relation to their larger community.

Similar to the Hawai'i campus, colleges throughout the Pacific work to provide holistic support to students navigating complex challenges that might otherwise impede completion. A two-year college in the western Pacific found success in a pilot internship program with a local employer. On the one hand, the college provided an extensive support system that addressed the holistic needs of students, including houselessness, transportation, food insecurity, and balancing family obligations. On the other, the college partnered with the employer to guarantee employment for each student who successfully completed the internship program. With daily support from a dedicated administrator and their peers, the entire cohort succeeded and went on to employment with the local partner.

Students noticed and were grateful for such extensive support. One student who participated in TRiO programming at a community college anticipated continuing to benefit from such programs at her new school:

It's basically just a program for first-generation students. So, I got into that straight after high school. And from there, they really helped me a lot with my college experience, especially like they offer tutoring, mentoring, all these workshops and field trips, and they even offer grants. And they're the ones who… taught me also how to write my scholarship essays. I feel like if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have got as many scholarships as I have within my years here.

Another student benefitted from a medical cohort program where students are required to be enrolled in the same classes as well as share living quarters:

That's also one thing I like because it's a set group of people and you get to know them more and then you're free to do whatever you want around them because you get close to them … We do everything together we take the same classes; we live in the same rooms in the dorms.

From extensive wrap-around services to intrusive advising, administrators and students alike perceived these programs as

successful because they met a wide array of student needs to increase the chances of success.

On a basic level, holistic supports for NHPI students address an array of socioeconomic barriers that adversely impact the academic, physical, and emotional wellness of students as they navigate higher education. On a deeper level, holistic supports for NHPI students require addressing the specific challenges that distinguish island communities from each other. As seen in the Hawai'i campus described above, migrant Pacific Islander students have needs that differ from

Native Hawaiian students attending the same campuses. Educational migration patterns occur regionally within the western Pacific, between the western Pacific and Hawai'i, and between the western Pacific/Hawai'i and the continental United States. One administrator anecdotally linked educational migration to perceptions of the superiority of off-island institutions. She explained that within the western Pacific campuses in Guam were preferred, that the four-year colleges in Hawai'i were perceived as more reputable, and that college campuses on the continental United States held the most prestige. This pattern alongside family migrations related to the compacts of free association mean that Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i, for example, have vastly different experiences and needs than the indigenous student population.

Conversely, as indigenous to the Hawaiian Islands, Native Hawaiian students have a complex and often challenging relationship with the higher educational institutions that serve them. One senior college administrator pointed toward the years-long struggle over building the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Mauna Kea as an indicator of ongoing settler colonialism that adversely impacts Native Hawaiian students. For context, Mauna Kea is the tallest mountain in the world from base to summit and is scared to Native Hawaiians as wao akua, or realm of the gods and goddesses. It also provides pristine conditions for astronomical observation and thirteen observatories currently sit atop the summit. The University of Hawai'i has authorized the building of the TMT on the northern plateau of Mauna Kea, over the objections of thousands of Native Hawaiians and their allies. This respondent explained that many Native Hawaiian students on her campus felt stuck in the middle of a controversy that has divided the community and replicated bitter antagonisms that are playing out in U.S. politics. As these events continue to unfold, the degree to which Native Hawaiian students feel that their holistic needs are being met by local institutions of higher education will likely remain intertwined with the struggle over Mauna Kea.

5. Institutional Capacity to Improve NHPI Student Success

There was a keen interest from many campuses to use data to gain insight into student trends, and most campuses anticipated the capacity to pull together a cross-campus inquiry team to do so. Interest in collecting and analyzing data was expressed in three ways: effective use of existing data, tracking former students, and understanding completion. Alongside improved ability to collect and analyze NHPI student data, campuses also expressed a desire to leverage data in ways that create lasting and systemic change. Institutions of higher education—from individual campuses to entire systems—are consistently challenged to effectively leverage data to inform practices and policies, as well as to institutionalize such changes.

Effective Use of Existing Data: Many institutions collected large amounts of data, were engaged in initiatives that leverage data to inform practice, and/or were awaiting new data on recently developed student support programs. A common area of interest was how to effectively use existing data, with three noteworthy examples. First, there was interest in looking at existing longitudinal primary and secondary educational data and tracking data in new and creative ways. A second campus indicated high quality program-level data but a challenge in scaling that data to systemic institutional change. Third, a system with multiple campuses indicated a need for staff training to identify data trends that can inform practice. A fourth campus that was part of a larger system,

shared how all levels of the system engaged in collecting and reviewing data on an annual basis, though one respondent suggested that the system was "data rich and analysis poor," meaning that although the system collects extensive amounts of data effective analysis was limited due to capacity and institutional priorities.

Tracking Former Students: The desire to learn what former students are doing was commonly expressed alongside limited abilities to collect and track related data. The types of data included post-graduation employment rates, degree completion after transfer, and employment rates for students who left without a certificate or degree. Campuses noted existing efforts, such as use of the National Student Clearinghouse and alumni surveys, that provide a starting point but not as robust a picture as desired, including the National Student Clearinghouse, annual employment surveys, and alumni surveys. One campus, for example, is in the midst of a study on alumni employment and career pathways after graduation. Another campus was a little further on and found that with only approximately 1/3 of graduating classes answering the annual employment survey it was hard to get a full picture on a key measure of institutional success.

Understanding Completion: Related to the desire to track former students was the goal of better understanding the drivers of student completion alongside barriers for those who do not persist to certificate or degree. One administrator put it plainly, "If they are spending all this time in school, why not just complete?" In this conversation, the administrator understood that although some barriers cannot be controlled, for there are ways that analyzing data can inform the direction and scope of wrap-around services that can reduce barriers to completion. This sentiment was echoed by many institutions. One such institution shared a desire to expand their ability to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in the area of student services, with the intent to better advocate for specific programs and resources for the most vulnerable students.

Institutional Readiness: Two campuses spoke specifically about leveraging data to drive changes in institutional policies and practices. The first was involved in a multi-year project that leverages data to create systemic change, with a focus on the transition from local high schools to the college. The first broad changes were initiated in 2019 as a result of years-long partnerships with multiple stakeholders. The second remarks were made by a senior administrator of a community college who noted that implementing change was a complex process that included institutional readiness and student involvement. Such comments reflect a desire for a cautious approach that builds stakeholder consensus as part of the process of analyzing data to affect systemic change.

Institutionalizing Change: Campuses also expressed questions around institutionalizing any changes that come about through the Rural NHPI Initiative. For example, one campus collects a wealth of data but the person who manages the data is a faculty member who does not work year-round. Another campus has a tool in place but an unfilled vacancy at the director level and lack of time for training make the tool relatively useless. A third campus that was previously awarded a large grant to better serve Pacific Islander students was not able to institutionalize the center that was created as part of the grant. These examples point toward continued challenges of institutionalizing systemic change, from unreliable plans of succession to insufficient campus support for programming.

Need for Community of Practitioners: A common gap amongst all colleges was limited collaboration and learning from rural Pacific counterparts. Due to the historically complex geopolitical relationships between the Pacific Islands, as well as between each locale and the United States, it was unusual for professionals to engage with their Pacific peers. This was certainly the case for student success practitioners who do not currently have a means to connect and exchange ideas with each other. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, this also appeared to be the case for high level administrators who typically connect through the Pacific Postsecondary Education Council. These

administrators appeared to be working feverishly to manage their individual campuses and systems and not regularly convening as had previously been the case.

CONCLUSION

Across the rural Pacific, administrators, faculty, staff, and students generously shared glimpses into student life on their campuses. There were challenges for NHPI students that preceded the global pandemic and barriers that worsened as COVID impacted island communities. But there was also resilience and a shared commitment to making postsecondary education accessible and relevant to all. Common trends among institutional goals and objectives in the region were illuminated when our inquiries about measures used to define and evaluate institutional success were read against participating institutions' strategic plans. There was alignment on three aims in particular: Improving Student Success, Developing Workforce Partnerships, and Increasing Institutional Innovation and Efficiency.

In our conversations, student success was generally discussed in terms of persistence and completion rates. Complementary to these findings, institutional strategic plans identified additional institutional responsibilities to improve support services that would ultimately not only help students on the path to completion, but would also reflect interim measures of institutional capacity to deliver student success, such as student satisfaction. Institutional plans also consistently included advancing workforce development and partnerships as a key objective to help translate student completion into meaningful employment placements that also met local industry needs.

And, finally, plans consistently sketched institutional commitments to improving operational systems, primarily by leveraging technology for data collection and instructional delivery, but also by investing in professional development for both faculty and staff.

There was also an eagerness to develop stronger research capacities to ensure institutional policies and practices were data-informed. Such eagerness points toward a key area of improvement for many of the participating institutions. Indeed, developing data-driven tactics would enable institutions to more effectively pursue the goals and objectives outlined in institutional strategic plans. For example, **identifying** student populations like student parents or working students who disproportionately face common persistence barriers like affordability or inflexible scheduling, and then **targeting** supports directly at those students to improve their outcomes.

Finally, discussions with institutional teams revealed common struggles that students from certain sub-populations experience—for instance, students from outlying islands, migrant families, households with limited English proficiencies, and other barriers. One surprising omission from many institutional strategic plans was an equity framework that is frequently utilized by institutions in the continental United States to question systems, policies, and practices that have historically underserved vulnerable student populations. An area for future inquiry is the degree and ways in which this equity framework resonates with institutional cultures as distinct as those found across the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings from this study, APIA Scholars is poised to initiate an NHPI Student Research Capacity-Building Initiative. Recommendations from this study include both research and institutional capacity-building measures that will collectively expand the body of knowledge on NHPI postsecondary success and improve the capacity of rural institutions in the U.S. affiliated Pacific Islands to support vulnerable student populations.

There is still much to be learned about NHPI student experiences in the rural Pacific. Two areas are recommended for future research:

- An examination of the demography of NHPI students in public colleges and universities in the Pacific region to understand their postsecondary access and success; and

- An exploration of NHPI student perceptions in terms of how, and to what extent, colleges support them in postsecondary access, persistence, and academic success.

This research agenda is critical for informing best practices to support first-generation, low-income NHPI students.

Capacity-building recommendations flow from this research agenda, with three key recommendations:

- Create interactive learning opportunities for institutions to identify, collect, analyze, and leverage data to improve NHPI student access and success;

- Provide tools for institutions to develop sustainable action plans that pursue systems change through institutional, state, and federal policy levers that enable student success; and

- Promote applied collaborative research by connecting with a local and/or regional stakeholders and build relationships that support NHPI postsecondary success.

Lastly, these research and capacity-building recommendations offer an opportunity to think critically about how and to what extent continent-based equity frameworks are engaged in social, cultural, and geopolitical contexts that vary greatly both from the continent and each other. Attention to the differences in engagement will provide a critical perspective at the intersections of equity, racial and ethnic difference, and place and rurality.

We opened with an ʻōlelo noʻeau shared nearly forty years ago by Mary Kawena Pukui: ʻIke aku, ʻike mai, kokua aku kokua mai; pela iho la ka nohona ʻohana. This Hawaiian proverb reflects a commitment to each other—to recognize to be recognized, to help to be helped. As we sought to understand the experiences of NHPI students in the rural Pacific, we gratefully accepted the insights of those whose daily work is to serve these students who are historically underserved. From this generosity, APIA Scholars is pleased to share this report to recognize the tremendous pride these institutions take in their campuses and communities. Despite the many barriers discussed—from stretched resources to deficit mindsets—those who contributed to this project care deeply about the success of their students. Through their work we are pleased to offer this report as an important thread in national conversations on NHPI and rural student success.

ENDNOTES

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