



NATIVE HAWAIIANS & PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Collection of
Campus Research to Inform
Student Success

MARCH 2023

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

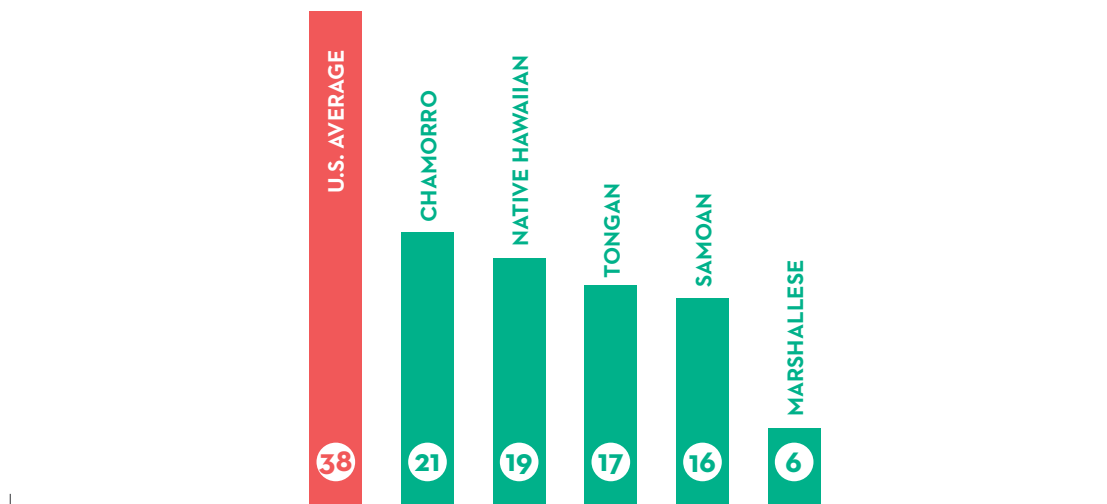
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) students represent a diversity of backgrounds, including wide variations in histories, cultures, languages, and religions. They often bring to their educational experiences a number of assets, including the ability to speak more than one language, a deep commitment to their families and communities, and a desire to maintain rich cultural heritages. **The NHPI community is one of the most overlooked groups in higher education**, despite their unique lived experiences.

One of the most significant barriers to including NHPI students in broader discussions about equity and inclusion in higher education is a **lack of research** that can provide insight into their educational trajectory and their unique needs and challenges. **This exclusionary practice is a significant disservice and injustice for NHPI students.** Consider that only 19% of NHPI adults age 25 or older hold a college degree, which is a rate identical to Hispanics and lower than African Americans.¹ Certain ethnic subgroups experience even lower rates of college attainment, including 17% for Tongans, 16% for Samoans, and 6% for Marshallese (See Figure 1). In addition to low educational attainment rates, NHPI students experience high college attrition rates. For example, 50% of Native Hawaiians, 54% of Tongans, 58% of Samoans, and 47% of Guamanians or Chamorros who attend college leave without a degree, demonstrating a need for programming that supports NHPI student retention.²

For NHPIs who spent their formative years in Hawai'i and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands, there are even greater attainment challenges compared to their counterparts in the continental U.S.³ **Limited educational opportunities create a context in which many resident NHPIs are forced to leave their homelands for the U.S. continent.** Due to the lack of resources for those who choose to study in their home islands and the difficulties of cultural assimilation for those who move off island for college, these students must overcome a multitude of barriers to succeed.

While we know that many factors influence a student's preparedness for college, we also know that **financial barriers influence NHPI students' decisions and ability to attend college.** During the 2007 to 2011 recession, the number of unemployed Pacific Islanders (PIs) increased by 123%, a rate higher than any other racial group. As of 2016, one in five PIs in the U.S. lived in poverty.⁴ However, among PI students who have pursued postsecondary studies, only 67% receive federal aid compared to 85% of African American students and 80% of Hispanic students.⁵ Further factors may also be impeding the ability of students to access financial aid. For example, about 30% of PIs do not have broadband internet at home⁶ and 12% of PIs are limited English proficient.⁷

FIGURE 1 BACHELOR'S DEGREE ATTAINMENT RATE BY PERCENT FOR NHPI SUB-GROUPS COMPARED TO U.S. AVERAGE



Source: 2020 ACS Five-Year PUMS, U.S. Census Bureau

Prior Research on NHPIs in Higher Education

In December 2019, with the generous support of the Kresge Foundation, APIA Scholars and a team of researchers at UCLA released [Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education: A Call to Action](#). Moreover, in 2020, APIA Scholars and the UCLA research team published a second report [Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education: A Rural Pacific Learning Tour](#) with support from the Ascendium Education Group. These two reports revealed the following significant areas of research that should be pursued to better understand NHPI students:

› **The Educational Trajectory of NHPI Students**

There is a need to understand the reasons why NHPI student enrollment trends exist for particular higher education sectors (e.g., community colleges where enrollment has declined at a particularly high rate, private for-profit institutions where enrollment has increased).

› **The Role of Institutions that Serve High Concentrations of NHPI Students**

Given the disproportionately high concentration of NHPI enrollment and degree conferrals at particular institutions, including Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), practices and services for NHPI students (e.g., as incubators for best practices, their ability to leverage status and funding to bring attention to NHPI students) should be explored at these institutions as well as at Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions.

› **The Need for More Research in the Pacific Region**

There is a need for a close look at the key institutions in the Pacific region with high concentrations of NHPI enrollment that are anchor sites for cross-enrollment, transferring, and other formal connections for other institutions in the region with attention to research, policy, and the development of campus services.

› **Being More Student-Centered**

There is a particular need for understanding how institutional practices can address three common barriers to NHPI student success: (1) college readiness, (2) lack of financial resources, and (3) work and family responsibilities.

› **A Focus on Data Disaggregation**

A need for further disaggregation of data exists to look at gender differences in higher education enrollment, degree attainment, and the overall educational trajectory of NHPI students.

› **The Use of Data and Inquiry**

There is a need to explore how to improve the use of data in order to gain insight into student trends in addition to leveraging this data to institutionalize systemic changes that would improve NHPI student success at campuses in the Pacific.

This report builds on the findings in our prior study and shares lessons learned from a collaborative project between APIA Scholars, Professor Robert Teranishi, a research team at UCLA, and a group of eight postsecondary institutions that serve high concentrations of NHPI students. The findings paint a portrait of the relevance of NHPI students to key issues in higher education and how the colleges that were involved in this project are using research to address these challenges.

Purpose of the Study

Recognizing that institutions that serve high concentrations of NHPI students are important sites for learning and innovation related to NHPI student success, this report shares findings from a collaborative research initiative that had three primary goals.

- › The project was designed to build the capacity of institutions to better serve their students through the use of data and inquiry to inform their institutional practices and policies.
- › We aimed to put these institutions in conversation with each other to promote learning and an exchange of ideas, perspectives, and information on best practices.
- › We wanted to see what the research across these institutions could tell us about NHPI students and the institutions that serve them.

Research Design and Our Campus Partners

This collaborative research project involved eight campuses that were chosen based on the NHPI student population they served, their geographic location, existing services focused on NHPI students, and the ability of the institution and leadership to provide support for the project (see Appendix A for recruitment process). The research process was facilitated through co-investigative research that involved at each site campus inquiry teams, which were composed of administrators, institutional research, and/or student services staff across the campus. The inquiry teams, in collaboration with researchers from UCLA, engaged in a process of inquiry that involved key institutional stakeholders in the generation of research questions, data collection and analysis, and recommendation formulation to remove barriers (see Appendix A for methodology).

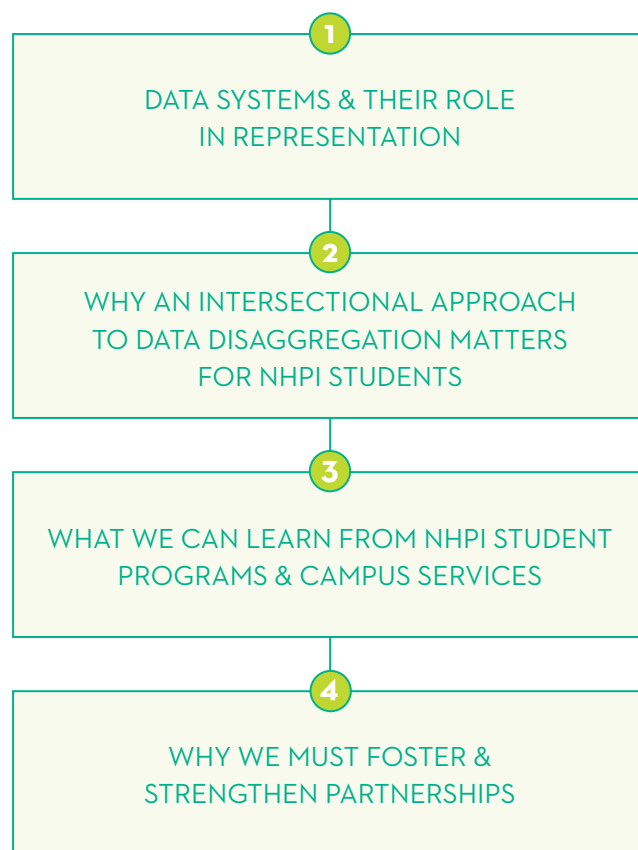
- To examine the demography of NHPI students in postsecondary institutions and understand their access to and success in higher education;
- To explore NHPI student perceptions in terms of how, and to what extent, colleges support them in college access, persistence, and academic success; and
- To use findings from this study to inform existing “best practices” in college access, persistence, and academic success, specifically in supporting first-generation, low-income NHPI college students.

Four sections representing key overarching themes that emerged from this project



The desired outcome of this research process was for campuses to leverage their findings to establish interventions and strategies that would be informed by data and inquiry. More specifically, each campus developed a communication and/or dissemination plan that included developing tools to share their research and disseminate their findings to key internal and external stakeholders who can influence and support recommendations to increase NHPI student outcomes on their campuses. Additionally, the findings that were generated from each campus team helped to contribute a robust body of evidence on the role and function of institutions in the support of NHPI students.

This report is divided into four sections that represent key overarching themes that emerged from this project. We discuss each of these themes using findings from our campus partners, discuss how the campuses are using the findings to inform practice and policy, and demonstrate the relevance of these findings to key issues in the broader field of U.S. higher education. We conclude with recommendations for best practices related to how campuses can leverage inquiry and data in addition to policy recommendations to better understand, serve, and improve outcomes for NHPI students.



KEY THEMES

1

DATA SYSTEMS & THEIR ROLE
IN REPRESENTATION

CAMPUS PARTNERS

HAWAI'I COMMUNITY COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

DATA SYSTEMS & THEIR ROLE IN REPRESENTATION

While data is an essential component to informing higher education policy and practice, data systems and procedures for access to and use of data are often not adequate for maximizing the potential of data-informed decisions. It is important for colleges and universities to examine their data practices within the context of their institutional priorities and the extent to which their data systems and practices are meeting their needs. For example, there are many instances where colleges are collecting an abundance of data, but this data is not accessible to people who need to use it to make decisions.⁸ This is a key

barrier to maximizing the potential for data to be used as a tool for addressing issues of equity and social justice for marginalized and vulnerable groups.⁹

In this section, we discuss how two campuses—Hawai'i Community College (HCC) and University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)—engaged in a process of inquiry to better understand the extent to which their data systems and practices were able to capture the demography of NHPI students and their unique needs and challenges.



Photo: Hawai'i Community College

HAWAI'I COMMUNITY COLLEGE



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

Hawai'i Community College (HCC) focused their effort on exploring how research can be used to identify more effective ways of **classifying and targeting services to Pacific Islander English Learner (PI EL) students**. This research emerged out of a need for improvements to the placement process for EL programs and services, where they found that English Learner (EL) students are performing better with access to and use of these services.



RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

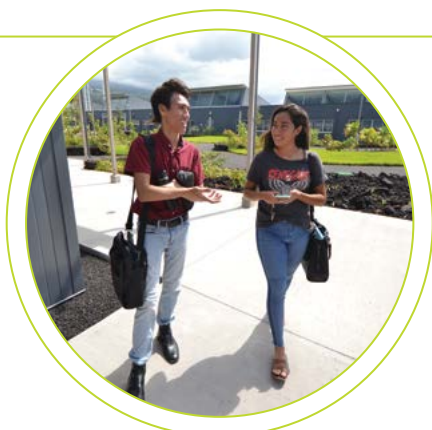
The inquiry team adopted a mixed-methods approach, which included institutional data, a survey, and focus groups. Findings revealed useful insights into their PI EL student population and how the institution can better serve this diverse student population.

- HCC has a diverse PI EL student population, which includes Micronesians, Samoans, and students from other Pacific Islander backgrounds.
- PI EL students were more likely to be enrolled as part-time students instead of as full-time students. **PI EL student enrollment experienced a precipitous decline year-after-year**, which was greater than the decline in the total enrollment of PI students in the broader University of Hawai'i (UH) system.
- While the course completion rates of PI EL students were better than PI students who were not classified as EL, the number and proportional representation of PI students classified as EL students were declining.
- The campus inquiry team found that a shift to **multiple measures for EL placement** was an important factor that made it **more difficult to identify and provide services to EL students**. More research is needed to determine how to improve this process.



RESEARCH GOAL

HCC's research focused on **understanding how the campus was identifying students** for targeted support, how EL students described their access to and use of services, and if there were particular programs and services that had effective approaches to serving EL students that could inform other institutional services.





RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

HCC has developed a strategic communication plan to help raise awareness about the need to provide better services for EL students on campus. They will be pursuing the following:

- Writing a report and creating presentation material.
- Pursuing targeted messaging and discussions with administrators, staff, and faculty.
- Targeting an external audience, including other community colleges in the UH system because of the extent to which these institutions share the same students as they move between institutions.
- Presenting their work with the Hawai'i Student Success Institute, which includes faculty and administrators throughout the UH system.



“Students feel a sense of belonging when they connect with others in meaningful ways.”

–HCC Staff

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

University of Nevada, Las Vegas has been engaged in several efforts to promote **better practices related to collecting and reporting disaggregated data** on Asian American and Pacific Islander students. For example, the push for data disaggregation had come from a Minority-Serving Institution Student Council (MSISC) initiative entitled, “Count Us In: Ethnicity Data Disaggregation,” which advocated for the university’s adoption of the collection of ethnic subgroup options beyond the minimum categories required by The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).¹⁰

The aim had been, at minimum, to add expanded subgroup categories to the undergraduate and graduate admissions application forms. Around the same time and separate from the MSISC, data disaggregation for AAPIs was made part of the UNLV AANAPISI program (under UNLV Center for Academic Enrichment and Outreach).



RESEARCH GOAL

The UNLV campus inquiry team engaged in a research project to inform their effort to **pursue data disaggregation** at UNLV, with a particular focus on the relevance of this goal to NHPI students.



RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

UNLV utilized institutional data to inform their study of NHPI student enrollment. Their findings reveal useful insight toward their goal of pursuing disaggregated data at UNLV as well as how this is relevant to a broader national audience:

- During their process of exploring UNLV’s data practices related to NHPI students, they found that **IPEDS classification of race and/or ethnicity**—a federal reporting standard for all colleges and universities—**concealed the enrollment and representation of NHPI students at UNLV**.
- While IPEDS was showing a total NHPI enrollment at UNLV as 240 students in 2021, the actual NHPI enrollment, when disaggregated, was 1,653 total students (see Table 1); **IPEDS was only reflecting 14% of the actual NHPI enrollment**.
- They found that NHPI students are more likely than any other group to check more than one race and were being counted as “two or more races” as opposed to NHPI alone.
- They also found that NHPI students marked “Hispanic or Latinx” as seen in Table 1 (283 in 2017, 284 in 2018, 290 in 2019, 272 in 2020, and 290 in 2021); if you check Hispanic and any other race, students are counted as Hispanic.



NATIVE HAWAIIANS & PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY
OF NEVADA,
LAS VEGAS

TABLE 1
UNLV IPEDS REPORTING FOR NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER
STUDENTS ACROSS ACADEMIC LEVELS, 2017–2021

FALL ENROLLMENT ^a										
	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hispanic or Latinx	283	18.2%	284	17.7%	290	17.2%	272	16.3%	290	17.5%
International	2	0.8%	4	0.3%	5	0.3%	4	0.2%	6	0.4%
NHPI (IPEDS^b Reporting)	258	16.6%	240	14.9%	265	15.8%	250	14.9%	240	14.5%
Two or More Races	1014	65.1%	1078	67.1%	1122	66.7%	1147	68.6%	1117	67.6%
Total	1557	100%	1606	100%	1682	100%	1673	100%	1653	100%

Note: Adapted from “Oceania in the Desert: A QuantCrit Analysis of the (Under)counting of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Students and an AANAPISI-HSI,” by K. J. C. Espinoza, B. E. Rincón, J. Harbin, and K. Ethelbah. [Manuscript in preparation].

^aThis table includes students across all academic levels (undergraduate, graduate, professional students). ^bIPEDS Reporting column refers to the categories and enrollment counts of students identifying as NHPIs.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- **Advocate for expanded subgroup classifications** in order to provide more insight into the heterogeneity of the NHPI student population at UNLV. The findings were presented to and endorsed by the Executive Vice President and Provost, the UNLV Office of Decision Support, undergraduate admissions, and Graduate College.
- Show a national audience that **how we collect and report data matters and can be highly consequential** for how we think about representation. And it can affect some groups—in this case, NHPI students—more than others.
- **Pay more attention to data practices** and the ways in which they can disproportionately impact an accurate rendering of the NHPI student population. An undercount and the inability of institutions to be able to identify students and student groups are also critical because campuses need the ability to target support and provide services for NHPI students. The undercount of NHPI students potentially also has implications for eligibility for federal grants, which are often based on the proportional representation of NHPI students relative to their total enrollment. The undercount of NHPI students at the institutional level also has implications for an accurate representation of NHPI student enrollment at a state or national level.

KEY THEMES

2

WHY AN INTERSECTIONAL
APPROACH TO DATA DISAGGREGATION
MATTERS FOR NHPI STUDENTS

CAMPUS PARTNERS

COLLEGE OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS
KAUA'I COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WHY AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO DATA DISAGGREGATION MATTERS FOR NHPI STUDENTS

While U.S. involvement in the Pacific began in the mid- to late-1800s, very little data, to date, exists on Pacific Islanders in the U.S. This is due in part to the fact that only in 1997 did the U.S. Office of Management and Budget mandate the use of separate data for Pacific Islanders. Additionally, there is a lack of consistency in when and how the U.S.-affiliated islands were included and accounted for in national data sets. In “Pacific Islanders: A Misclassified People,” Kawika Riley, founder of the Pacific Islander Access Project, notes that Pacific Islanders are often at risk of being excluded from national conversations on education.¹¹ Consequently, the PI community continues to be left out of education access initiatives that serve underrepresented minority groups, not to mention college-to-career resources and networks widely available to other high-need communities of color. A key barrier related to data on the NHPI community has not only been how much data is available but the lack of data that can capture the diversity within the population. Aggregated data conceal variations in income, education backgrounds, immigration histories, and language backgrounds within the NHPI community.¹² Consider that the NHPI racial category consists of nearly 20 different ethnicities reported in the 2020 Census (see chart below).

In addition to the need for disaggregated data, we must also consider the framework and orientation campuses have to utilize data. For example, in addition to being an NHPI student, students also have needs associated with gender and social class backgrounds, including family responsibilities and the need to provide financial support at home. Therefore, the use of disaggregated data can also be further refined through the use of intersectionality as a lens that helps to understand how different dimensions of one’s identity (i.e., ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status) experience marginalization uniquely and distinctly.¹³ To that end, an intersectional approach using disaggregated data provides a valuable framework for understanding the varied experiences of NHPI students with a range of unique needs and challenges.

Two of our campus partners—College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) and Kaua’i Community College (KauCC)—engaged in a process of inquiry that not only sheds light on the importance of focused research on NHPI students, but also the role of an intersectional approach to disaggregated data for supporting NHPI students.

NHPI ETHNICITIES REPORTED IN THE 2020 CENSUS

Native Hawaiian	Guamanian or	Kosraen	I-Kiribati
Samoan	Chamorro	Pohnpeian	Fijian
Tahitian	Mariana Islander	Chuukese	Papua New Guinean
Tongan	Saipanese	Yapese	Solomon Islander
Tokelauan	Palauan	Marshallese	Ni-Vanuatu

COLLEGE OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) pursued a study that focused on the importance of gender analysis for PI students to illuminate the **unique needs and challenges of their female students**. This decision was based on a recent study of 482 Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) public high school students who enrolled at the College of the Marshall Islands. The study found that **male students were more likely to persist to a second-year degree and earn all of their attempted credits than female students**. These gaps in first-year success contributed to more male students overall completing their courses and degrees.



RESEARCH GOAL

In this research, there was an aim to improve retention outcomes for first-year NHPI students at CMI by targeting the identified gender gap in order to **raise success rates for young women** at CMI. This research also sought to inform the intervention of target services for female first-year students.



RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

CMI used a mixed-methods approach, which included analysis of institutional data and interviews with students. Their study revealed a number of important findings:

- There was a historical trend where female students were exhibiting lower persistence, course completion, and degree completion despite a higher enrollment rate.
- Female students indicated **family responsibilities as a big factor in their education**, which included balancing their education with taking care of kids, caring for extended family, and addressing health needs.
- Female students were confronted with the **need to prioritize family over education**, and they were willing to take time off from school to support their families.





RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

- Female students also expressed a different idea about educational persistence, which did not align with the institution's definition of persistence. Specifically, female students described persistence as eventually finishing and earning a degree, but not necessarily without interruption.
- CMI also studied the differences between continuing and non-continuing female students, and they found that **non-continuing female students were more likely to have children** than continuing female students (50% vs. 25%).
- Continuing female students indicated a higher level of perceived support from family.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- The study resulted in a number of recommendations CMI will be addressing.
- Have campus-wide discussions about ways to **bring family into more consideration to help support female students.**
 - Explore ways to create an environment for students to communicate with faculty about their personal needs.
 - Identify ways to communicate with students about the benefits of finishing sooner rather than later in regard to persistence and finding ways to accommodate students' unique needs and challenges.



“For [College of the Marshall Islands] to provide equitable access in line with our mission, we need to address the specific needs our women students bring with them...and we have to provide culturally appropriate spaces for students to discuss their needs.”

–Elizabeth Switaj, Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs

KAUA'I COMMUNITY COLLEGE



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

Kaua'i Community College (KauCC) **focused their research on part-time students**, which is a large and growing sector of their enrollment. While much of their courses and services were historically oriented toward full-time students, over the past six years the student population has shifted to become 75% part-time enrollment. This is consistent with scholarship that demonstrates a decline in participation rates for NHPI students in postsecondary institutions.¹⁴ COVID-19 also introduced a significant shift to largely online instruction that has impacted and will continue to impact barriers to enrollment and student persistence rates for the NHPI student population.¹⁵ Additionally, given the rural context of Kaua'i, the strength of local economies remains a significant issue tied to student outcomes.¹⁶



RESEARCH GOAL

The research guiding this campus inquiry team focused on **barriers to student enrollment, credit accumulation, degree completion, transfer for part-time students**, and how the college can mitigate barriers leading to NHPI part-time status in order to increase students' degree completion.



RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

KauCC utilized a mixed-methods approach, which included institutional data and interviews. Their study had a number of insightful findings about their part-time student population:

- **Family and work obligations were the most frequent barriers** to full-time attendance, and these obligations were not optional for these students.
- Several part-time students also indicated that they **held more than one job** and the challenges associated with their financial situation.
- There were part-time students who indicated a preference for part-time status because of a **lack of academic self-confidence** and the desire to focus on only one or two classes at a time, rather than feeling overwhelmed with three or more classes in a semester.
- Analysis of part-time status revealed that while three-quarters of KauCC students are part-time, they were largely **part-time by choice** and the campus does not expect this trend to change in the near future.





RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- › Taking steps to shift their approach from a focus on the “traditional” full-time student as the norm, and instead **focus on the unique needs of the part-time students** that are a large and growing concentration of their enrollment.
- › Exploring ways to be more accommodating to part-time students through structural changes to course offerings and scheduling.
- › Committing more intentionality in their course offerings and scheduling.
- › Developing **guided pathways** that are more accommodating for part-time students.
- › Offering **flexible schedules** to meet students’ diverse needs.
- › Exploring the use of new modalities that include **synchronous and asynchronous and flexibility** in ways students can take a class (e.g., in-person and virtually).



Kaua’i Community College is taking steps to shift their approach away from the “traditional” full-time student as the norm, and instead **focus on the unique needs of the part-time students**, which are a large and growing concentration of their enrollment.

KEY THEMES

3

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM
NHPI STUDENT PROGRAMS
& CAMPUS SERVICES

CAMPUS PARTNERS

MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE
COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM NHPI STUDENT PROGRAMS & CAMPUS SERVICES

There is a lot that we can learn from programs that target services for particular student groups. These programs are often designed with a specific student population in mind and provide specific services to expand opportunities and reduce institutional barriers. In some cases, these programs are the result of and benefit from external funding, such as the Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) program, which is a federal designation that offers competitive grants to support institutions that serve high concentrations of low-income Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students.

There are two institutions we partnered with—Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) and College of San Mateo (CSM)—which have institutional programs that are designed with the unique needs and challenges of NHPI students in mind. Mt. SAC has received funding as an AANAPISI to support this program while CSM has an interest in using their funding to pursue an AANAPISI grant in the future. In both cases, these institutions have valuable lessons learned from their student programs that shed light on NHPI students in higher education and ways institutions can better support their academic success.



MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC), located in Southern California, is a community college that started their Arise Program in 2011 with support from a five-year, \$2 million AANAPISI grant.

Their goal was to target services and support which were grounded in inclusion and engagement for low-income AAPI students. These targeted services and supports included activities, events, workshops, field trips, tutoring, and other support services.

There was also a particular emphasis on NHPI students on campus and the need to raise visibility for their unique needs and challenges, so the research they pursued with us had an explicit goal of using the findings to expand awareness about the program to the broader campus community.



RESEARCH GOAL

The research guiding this campus inquiry team focused on **learning more about the Arise Program** and its implications for the broader campus community.



RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

Mt. SAC used a mixed methods approach, which included institutional data, program-level student data, and interviews. Research findings revealed useful insight about the Arise Program:

- NHPI students were facing a number of unique needs and challenges, including the **tension between their commitment to their academic work and balancing their family** responsibilities.
- For some NHPI students, attending college created a feeling of being **disconnected from their families**, which was a particularly salient issue for NHPI female students who had a significant amount of family responsibilities.
- A high concentration of NHPI students were from out of state, and they were experiencing family separation because of migration.
- The research revealed the importance of recognizing the situational context of NHPI students, especially as it related to **work responsibilities and the need to provide income** for their families.





RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

- Compared to the broader student population, NHPI Arise participants were more academically motivated and had more awareness about resources; the program increased self-confidence and a greater sense of belonging on campus.
- Arise is creating opportunities around engaging diversity through activities and spaces that are designed to promote engagement between NHPI students and students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. These efforts are important because engagement around diversity has been found to be correlated with a greater sense of belonging, higher levels of satisfaction, and better academic outcomes.¹⁷
- Arise is creating a space on campus for students to feel connected to the campus community. As one participant noted in an interview, “The Arise Program is like my school family.”



RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The campus inquiry team is using their findings to:

- Inform efforts to further engage members of their NHPI community: students, administrators, faculty, and those in the local community.
- Share their research with the NHPI community at the Pasifika Family Education Day, an event where NHPI students bring their families to campus to learn about the resources the Arise Program offers and how families can support their students as they navigate higher education.
- Enable Mt. SAC’s campus inquiry team to present the findings to the Executive Management, including the President’s Cabinet and Student Services management.
- Enable Mt. SAC to share their findings not only with members of the campus community, but nationally at conferences, including Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- Continue this momentum, particularly by examining how students deal with COVID-19 while transitioning back to campus.

“Through Arise I not only grew as a Pacific Islander student, but I was able to really find my passion for higher education. I found a community and support system that I’m still able to lean on now even though I’ve transferred.”

—Arise Program Alumni, Arizona State University

COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

College of San Mateo (CSM) is a community college located in Northern California. They created the **CSM MANA¹ program** in 2015 in response to the need for targeted services and support for NHPI students on campus. The program includes a cohort-based learning community that assists students with their transition into college while promoting greater persistence among their participants.

The program provides support and guidance to assist participants with their academic pathways, including degree attainment and transfer success. The program also **provides a Critical Pacific Studies & Oceania Certificate, a specialized curriculum, and wrap-around support services.**



RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

CSM used a mixed-methods approach, which included institutional data, program-level student data, and interviews. Findings revealed useful insight about the MANA Program:

- MANA students have many **intersecting identities** that can impact their experiences as college students, including being more likely than the overall student population to be the **first in their families to attend college** (52.4% vs. 47.2%) and entering college with more basic skills needs related to Math and English (48.7% vs. 35.2%).
- NHPI students were facing a number of other **unique challenges related to family responsibilities, work,** and challenges associated with **adjusting to higher education.** The program targeted these barriers through a number of interventions, which were found to have contributed to the success of NHPI program participants.
- A common theme in their qualitative analysis was the **importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy** taught by NHPI faculty members and the emphasis on developing students' academic identity relative to their ethnic identity.



RESEARCH GOAL

The campus inquiry team at CSM pursued a study that would highlight the ways in which their targeted support for NHPI students can build awareness about the unique needs and challenges NHPI students were facing on campus and how the MANA Program was contributing to NHPI student success.

¹ According to CSM, the name of the program is derived from the word “mana,” which is rooted in the Pacific as a belief of supernatural power. It is a force that may be ascribed to persons, spirits, or inanimate objects. The motto of the MANA program is, “We Are Ocean.” The motto refers to the fact that we are all connected through the ocean, which is integral to Pacific Studies.



RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

- Students described their experiences with the program as “welcoming” and a “comfortable environment” and that it created a sense of “family community” in the college.
- In an analysis of fall-to-spring persistence among a cohort of NHPI program participants prior to the COVID pandemic, they found that **MANA students had an 87.9% persistence rate** compared to 74.1% campus wide.
- For Pacific Islanders, MANA participants also did much better than non-MANA participants (84.4% compared to 68.7%).



RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The research that CSM engaged in produced findings that offer important insight for the program staff as well as the broader campus administration.

The research yielded important insight into the unique needs and challenges of NHPI students on campuses as well as how the program engaged in activities and built a community that resulted in positive academic outcomes for NHPI students. These insights can be used to:

- Inform the work CSM does with NHPI students as well as for programs at other institutions that seek to provide targeted support for NHPI students.



“I enjoyed the whole semester. Really since we had started school, this was the only class I wanted to go to. Even if it was through a screen, the class was the real deal. Fi and Wes (MANA Staff), you guys were really welcoming and made that comfortable environment not only for me but for everyone.”

—CSM student

KEY THEMES

4

WHY WE MUST FOSTER &
STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

CAMPUS PARTNERS

UNIVERSITY OF GUAM

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

WHY WE MUST FOSTER & STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

Another important theme that this research project established is the need to foster and strengthen partnerships across the campus, as well as with the local community, to better support NHPI students in their pursuit of success in higher education. In the broader field of higher education research, studies have found that working collaboratively with different departments and offices can improve the undergraduate student experience.¹⁸ Schroeder (1999) found that by bridging efforts and initiatives between student affairs (e.g., cultural centers, student involvement offices) and academic affairs (e.g., academic departments), colleges and universities can achieve various outcomes such as “improving academic achievement, retention, and educational attainment; fostering civic engagement through service learning; designing learning communities; creating undergraduate research opportunities; broadening community outreach efforts; and, developing diverse, inclusive communities that value understanding, acceptance and respect for human differences.”¹⁹

As reflected in the makeup of the different Campus Inquiry Teams, members from across the campus came together to conduct research projects aimed at better understanding their NHPI student population and developing meaningful initiatives that addressed their needs and experiences.

In addition to developing and sustaining partnerships across the campus, forming meaningful connections with individuals,

groups, and organizations external to the institution is also critical to the success of NHPI students. For example, fostering and strengthening relationships with organizations, such as local museums,²⁰ can provide students with service-learning opportunities to “gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.”²¹

Partnerships with local colleges in the region can also facilitate better support for NHPI students as well. One noteworthy partnership is that between two-year institutions and four-year institutions. Strengthening these connections between two-year and four-year institutions can involve establishing clearer articulation agreements.²² Additionally, it would allow for more tailored advising and a seamless transition for students as they transfer from one institution to another.²³ By partnering with local organizations and institutions in the region, postsecondary institutions can work to better serve their NHPI students through a variety of opportunities.

Our campus partners at the University of Guam (UOG) and the University of Washington (UW) conducted research projects aimed at fostering and strengthening partnerships with external partners. Their studies highlight the importance of these relationships and how they can be leveraged to advance the success of NHPI students.



Photo: University of Guam

UNIVERSITY OF GUAM



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

The University of Guam (UOG) focused their research efforts on **understanding their transfer students' experiences** as well as **strengthening their transfer pathways** with neighboring institutions. Although UOG has made strides in supporting its students through various services and programs, there remain disparities in student enrollment and success between first-time, full-time students and transfers.

In 2020, UOG's student enrollment was 3,449.²⁴ However, on average, only 140 new transfer students had enrolled over the past four years. In addition, retention and graduation rates between these two groups differed. While the retention rate for first-time, full-time students

was at 75%, transfer student retention only reached 73%. Moreover, six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time cohorts was about 38% compared to 30% for transfer cohorts. These statistics are in alignment with trends discussed in higher education literature, specifically around the experiences of transfer students navigating four-year institutions.²⁵

As Townsend and Wilson (2006) note, institutions often focus their programs and services on first-time, full-time students; consequently, transfer students are often an afterthought, which results in decreased retention and graduation rates compared to their first-time, full-time counterparts.



RESEARCH GOAL

The campus inquiry team at UOG sought to understand how transfer students were navigating the institution and the ways they could **facilitate easier transfer from institutions in the region**, such as College of the Marshall Islands, College of Micronesia-FSM, Guam Community College, Northern Marianas College, and Palau Community College.





RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

The campus inquiry team utilized data from student surveys, focus group interviews, regional campus meetings, and document analysis. UOG's research team identified three main themes. Findings revealed useful insight into transfer students and a number of ways they could improve their transition:

- Over a period of 11 years (cohorts 2010–2020), the average fall-to-fall retention rate for full-time transfer students was 69%, whereas the retention rate for full-time freshmen was 74%. On the other hand, the six-year graduation rate for full-time transfer students was 39% compared to the full-time freshmen graduation rate of 36%.
- Transfer students who persisted through three semesters were more likely to graduate than first-time, full-time students.
- During individual listening sessions with different regional campuses, all of the institutions expressed an interest in reestablishing the University Transfer Advising Specialist program to facilitate a smoother transition between regional campuses and UOG.
- There is a need to **establish points of contact and advocates for transfer students**, especially those who understand how to ensure students feel supported, welcomed, and understood on campus. For example, the UOG residence halls have made intentional efforts to diversify their residence assistants and engage dorm residents for governance and administering policies and procedures.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The findings from UOG's research study have prompted administrators, faculty, and staff to develop and implement solutions to **support transfer students** on campus as well as **strengthen their partnerships with neighboring institutions**.

- First, UOG will be reinstating the **UOG Transfer Advising Specialist program** at each regional campus. The specialist will work with students at the regional campus and support those who are interested in transferring to UOG.
- In addition to a Transfer Advising Specialist, UOG intends on establishing a **Transfer Student Advocate program**. Differing from the specialist, the advocate will be housed on UOG's campus and serve as the primary point of contact for incoming and current transfer students. Moreover, this individual will have the authority to function as a liaison on behalf of specific students in offices across campus.
- Lastly, UOG intends on **expanding their peer mentoring** efforts to offer transfer students a familiar program similar to their community college institution and provide them opportunities to build relationships with other members of the campus community.



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON



BACKGROUND & FOCUS OF RESEARCH

The University of Washington (UW) campus inquiry team focused their research on UW NHPI students who were engaged in an established partnership with the Burke Museum (Burke). The opportunities at the Burke that NHPI students engaged with have provided educational support and a sense of belonging for them in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field and the broader university community.

This is noteworthy because the current literature about historically racialized and minoritized students in STEM demonstrates the systemic barriers (e.g., absence of culturally relevant mentors and peers, cultural barriers, racial microaggressions, isolation, lack of sense of

belonging) they face in academic spaces.²⁶

UW's research provides a unique contribution to the current literature by describing the ways in which PI students are thriving in STEM through their research in collaboration with the Burke. More specifically, UW's research team explored the ways in which research opportunities at the Burke provided support for NHPI students, with specific attention to engaging with Oceanic research methods in STEM and connecting knowledge in relation to their family and culture. UW's research aimed to train students to see through research their culture as a source of knowledge and strength.



RESEARCH GOAL

The campus inquiry team at UW explored the extent to which an **understanding of one's culture from an asset-based framework** could then facilitate the expansion of students' research interests in STEM.





RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS

UW's research team collected and analyzed multiple forms of data from interviews, observations, surveys, Talanoa,^{2, 27} and evaluations. Their findings revealed useful insight into the **power of UW's relationship with the Burke to promote success** among NHPI students:

- Research opportunities at the Burke for and by NHPI students had a positive impact on their sense of belonging to the academic community.
- While museums can be argued to be deeply colonial spaces,²⁸ the ways NHPI students engaged with research at the Burke made them feel welcomed, respected, and appreciative of leadership opportunities on campus.
- The partnership between UW and the Burke revealed that the designated research space created for **NHPI students increased their academic self-concept to thrive** in their academic discipline and the broader campus community.
- NHPI students took a strong interest in continuing interdisciplinary, group learning research that centered on Oceania at UW.
- Findings showed what possible institutional changes can look like in practice for NHPI students; for example, institutionalizing mentorship groups like Research Family, which played a significant role in the NHPI students' personal and academic development.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

From UW's research, we gain insight as to how research and knowledge need to be relevant for NHPI students.

- Active, hands-on, and community-based approaches to NHPI students' learning best reflected participants' Oceanic values and learning styles, which further facilitated their deep engagement with the research and investment in their learning within the broader STEM field.
- When students, especially those in STEM disciplines, have an opportunity to learn, understand, and produce knowledge about their culture, they become more invested and highly engaged in contributing to the academic campus community.
- Additionally, students from the campus inquiry team acted as co-researchers in the inquiry process and gained professional development by cultivating their research skills.
- UW's research team is collaborating with UW's College of Arts and Sciences to create social media pieces related to the research conducted by Pacific Islander students at the Burke.
- Due to the work that the campus inquiry team at UW has done this past year, they are using their findings to apply for grants that would provide students with funding to continue participating in research activities that uplift their culture.

² Talanoa is a cultural practice, as well as a research method that Pacific Islander scholars employ to center Pacific Islander ways of knowing and being. It can be understood as a formal or informal conversation and exchange of ideas or thinking.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report demonstrates that there is a lot we can learn from a focus on NHPI students and the institutions that serve them. The research these campuses engaged in provides important insights into the unique needs and challenges of NHPI students, especially as it relates to family obligations, students' sense of belonging and their connection to their culture and community, and the barriers associated with normative practices that render them overlooked and underserved. Findings from this project also reveal the extent to which the capacity of institutions to better serve their students is dependent, in part, on their ability to use

data and inquiry to inform their institutional practices and policies. In addition to the institution-level insight gained, we were also able to see what the research across these institutions could tell us about NHPI students and the institutions that serve them. Namely, we are able to gain valuable insight into the ways in which data systems have implications for the representation of NHPI students, the importance of intersectional approaches to data disaggregation for NHPI students, the important role of NHPI student programs and campus services, and why we must foster and strengthen partnerships on and off campus.

Key Themes in the Research and Implications for Practice and Policy

1

We Need to Improve the Ability of Data Systems and Practices

- › **Aggregated data is a key barrier** to maximizing the potential for data to be used as a tool for addressing issues of equity and social justice for NHPI students.
- › **Disaggregated data can reveal much-needed insight** to not only understand the needs of NHPI students as well as how an institution can target resources to address them.
- › **More discussions between campuses about data practices are needed** to find out if they are similar or different across institutions and if it reveals a larger systemic problem associated with suppressing the representation of particular student groups.
- › There is a need for a particular **focus on the collection and use of disaggregated data** and its relevance to institutional programs and services as well as broader equity issues related to policy priorities for the NHPI community.

2

Intersectional Approaches to Disaggregated Data Matters for NHPI Students

- › Disaggregated data creates the ability to **focus on specific sub-groups**, which is critical to a focused analysis of NHPI students.
- › **An intersectional approach to NHPI students** takes into account the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, language, class, and other aspects of students' identities. These approaches are critical for addressing the unique needs and challenges they face related to college access, persistence, and degree attainment.
- › There is a need for more support to help **institutionalize and sustain best practices** associated with institutional research. We need to better understand barriers to utilizing data and inquiry and provide resources and support to overcome these challenges.

3

We Can Learn from NHPI Programs and Services

- › NHPI student **programs and services exist that require further assessment and evaluation** to better inform the efficacy of these efforts, determine where there is a need for a greater investment, and identify ways that they may be replicable at other institutions or for other student populations.
- › Participatory action research (PAR) is an effective approach to inform best practices through the **involvement of a range of key constituents** involved in programmatic efforts.



4

Partnerships and Collaboration are Critical to Support NHPI students

- › **Forming meaningful connections with individuals, groups, and organizations external to the institution** is critical to NHPI student success. This could involve connections from one institution or another or partnerships between an institutions and a local organization.
- › These connections are critical for providing the **resources, capacity, and support** that addresses the unique needs and challenges facing NHPI students.
- › **A sustained and deep connection with institutions** will further solidify the knowledge base that is needed to create strong partnerships, improve institutional best practices, and contribute to advocacy efforts that address the unique needs and challenges of the NHPI community.

5

The Role of Action-Oriented Research

- › Powerful insight can be gained through a **collaborative, action-oriented research** effort and learning and exchange are key ingredients to creating sustainable practices related to the use of data and inquiry to inform practice and policy. This will create opportunities for campuses to learn in the community and build on each other's strengths and insights.



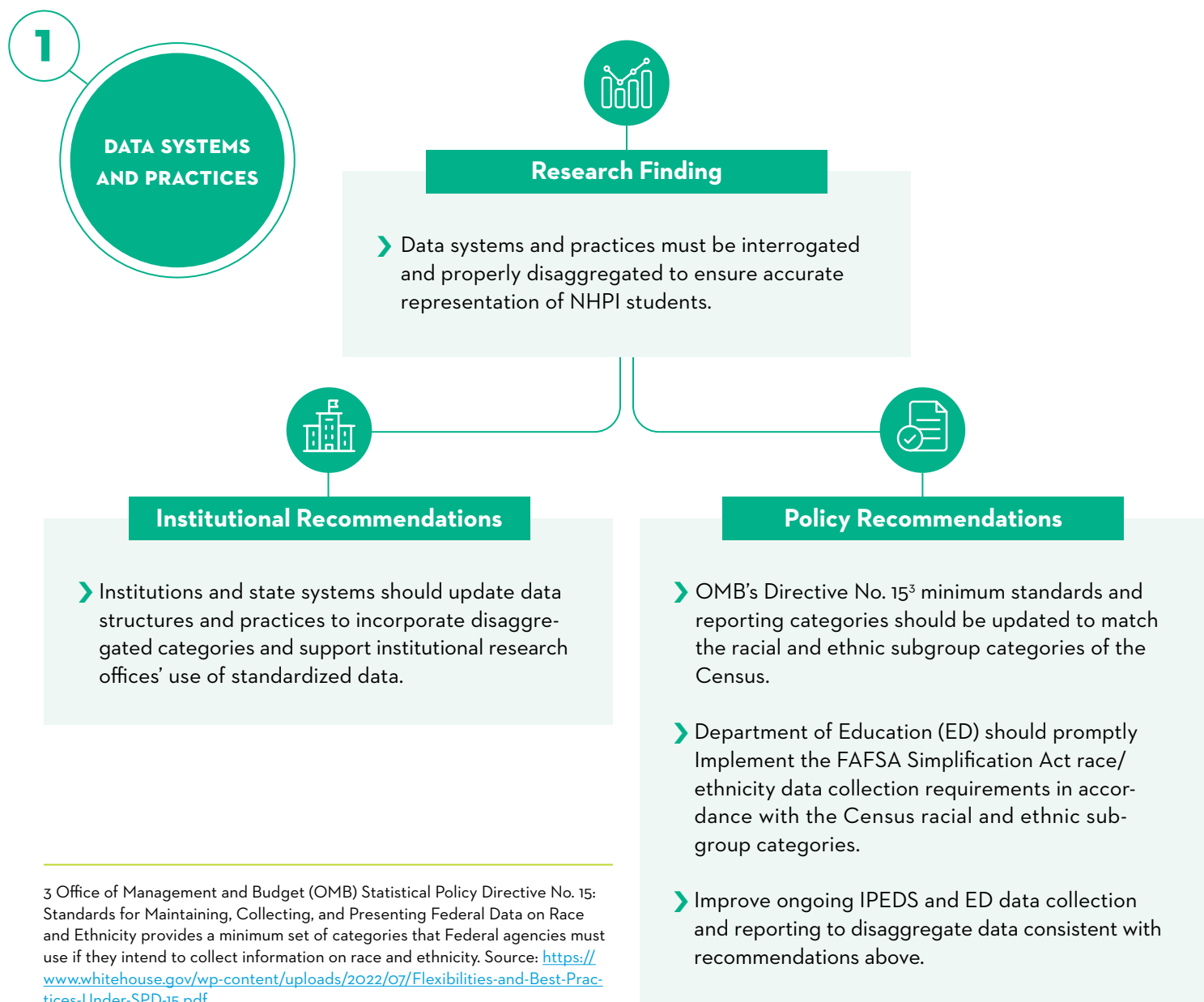
Photo: Mt. San Antonio College

Recommendations

These action-oriented research findings also inform federal policy recommendations that would better enable government agencies to both understand and address NHPI student access and success. Following are the different ways in which certain government regulatory and statutory

changes would not only improve the data systems that tell us about NHPI student needs, barriers, and the strategies that impact their success, but also direct an increase in federal funding that would be made available to institutions to better serve these students.

[Data Systems & Practices](#) | [Intersectional Approaches](#) | [Student Programs & Services](#) | [Partnerships](#) | [Action-Oriented Research](#)



Recommendations (Continued)

Data Systems & Practices | Intersectional Approaches | Student Programs & Services | Partnerships | Action-Oriented Research

2

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES



Research Finding

- › Intersectional approaches to disaggregated data are critical to understand NHPI students' holistic experiences.



Institutional Recommendations

- › Institutions should consider how lived experience (e.g., family caregiving responsibilities, part-time enrollment) intersects with NHPI students' educational journeys when providing financial, academic, mental health, and other critical supports to students.



Policy Recommendations

- › Increase awareness (and frequency) of technical assistance offerings to help institutions in applying for [US Department of Education Grants](#) programs that focus on closing postsecondary equity gaps for underserved students.



Photo: College of the Marshall Islands

Recommendations (Continued)

Data Systems & Practices | Intersectional Approaches | Student Programs & Services | Partnerships | Action-Oriented Research

3

STUDENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



Research Finding

- › Student programs and services that support NHPI students should be evaluated to determine what positively impacts student success and how successful practices can be replicated and scaled.



Institutional Recommendations

- › Institutions should participate in learning communities that share information about how to implement effective student supports and systems.



Policy Recommendations

- › Create a repository of student support strategies that have demonstrated positive outcomes for NHPI students.



Photo: College of the Marshall Islands

Recommendations (Continued)

Data Systems & Practices | Intersectional Approaches | Student Programs & Services | Partnerships | Action-Oriented Research

4

PARTNERSHIPS



Research Finding

- › Partnerships across campus and with the community are important to better support NHPI students.



Institutional Recommendations

- › Institutions should encourage cross-department collaboration and build partnerships with community stakeholders.



Policy Recommendations

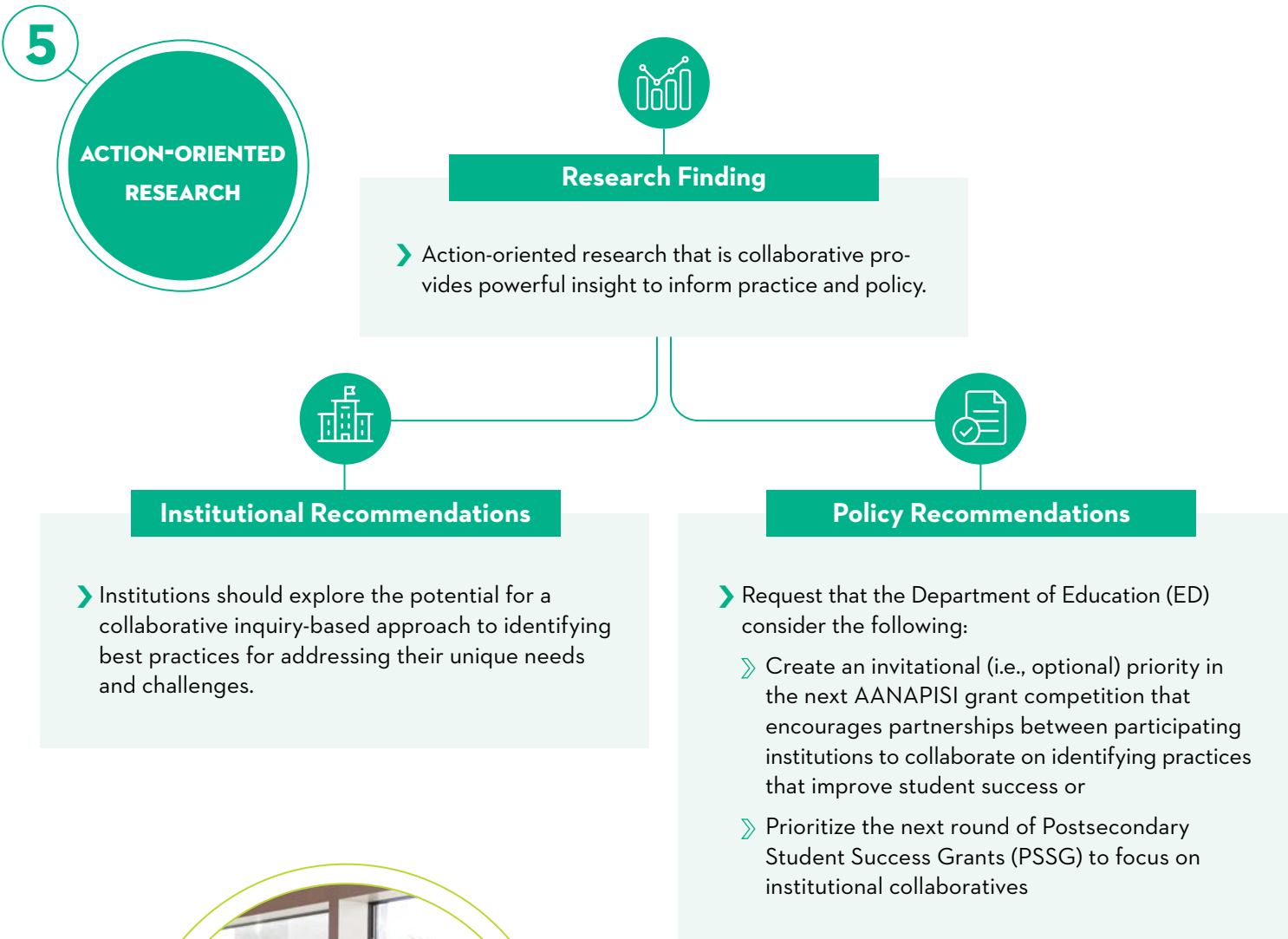
- › Increase AANAPISI funding so that more Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) are eligible for more funding that can support community partnerships that focus on NHPI student success from college to career.



Photo: College of the Marshall Islands

Recommendations (Continued)

Data Systems & Practices | Intersectional Approaches | Student Programs & Services | Partnerships | Action-Oriented Research



APPENDIX A: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research was guided by collaborative research with campus partners using participatory action research (PAR), which is an analytical and methodological approach that emphasizes direct and collaborative participation and action between the researcher and the target population. It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it following reflection through a cyclical and incremental process. Perhaps most importantly, based on the current literature, ethical considerations that focus on the needs of NHPI communities, PAR preserves their cultural values and histories, and interweaves reciprocity, a central premise to our research approach – not solely as a concept but as a practice. Thus, we utilize PAR recognizing the importance of community as a unit of identity. For example, one important cultural value among communities within the Pacific region is the centrality of voice and storytelling. PAR allows for flexibility so that participants are not simply answering questions, which is often the case in traditional research with rigid and structured interviews. Rather, PAR enables the research process to include engagement with the questions through ways that are most meaningful to participants while honoring cultural values and practices, such as engagement, reciprocity, and inclusiveness. The balance of power and agency is also crucial, especially for communities that have been historically marginalized, displaced, and dispossessed.

PAR is also an effective tool for institutional and organizational change. As a methodological approach, it helps to focus research on the strengths and resources within an organizational setting and approach inquiry from an asset-based framework and ecological perspective. Additionally, we believe PAR was the right approach from an organizational standpoint given the importance of integrating knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners, and the potential for promoting a co-learning and empowering process that attends to different organizational dynamics existing in higher education. It was also useful for identifying ways to disseminate findings and knowledge to key constituents in order to promote institutional change.

The specific parameters for the scope of the research were focused on institutional, programmatic, and student-level participation and outcomes, with the goal of providing data-driven decisions on campus and generating findings

that could be shared with a broader set of constituents in and outside of the state. Through a collaborative inquiry process, we engaged in formative and summative assessment and evaluation with the goal of leveraging findings to inform innovative and sustainable interventions while establishing a larger body of evidence on the role and function of institutions in the support of NHPI students.

Institutional Partners

Eight institutional partners participated in this project. Campus partners were selected through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process, which asked applicants to provide a brief description of their institution and how it will benefit from engagement in this collaborative research project. Interested campuses submitted a project narrative that described a particular challenge they were facing in serving NHPI students and how involvement in this project could help them address it. Additionally, the RFP included questions about an institution's ability to create an inquiry team of 6 to 10 people who could engage with the research team over the course of the project and a discussion about the ways the institution would share findings from the project with their campus community and other relevant stakeholders.

From the applications that were submitted, we selected eight institutional partners. Four campuses were located in Hawai'i and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands and another set of four campuses were located in the continental U.S.

Campus-Level Engagement: Campus Inquiry Teams

At the heart of our collaborative research effort with postsecondary institutions in the Pacific Islands was the establishment of an engagement with 8 campus inquiry teams over 18 months. Our campus inquiry teams were inclusive of 6 to 10 members at each campus. The members represented different campus units, including admissions and outreach, academic and student affairs, faculty, and counselors. These members were identified in collaboration with campus leadership.

Over a series of meetings, we engaged each campus inquiry team with our research team, comprised of a principal investigator (PI; Robert Teranishi) and the UCLA research team. This research team worked with the campus inquiry teams to determine the focus and scope of the research,

gain access to secondary data, gather primary data, and collectively interpret the findings to generate actionable recommendations. Our goal was to pursue evidence-based innovation through a collaborative research process with the campus inquiry teams. Thus, the specific research focus was partially defined in collaboration with the participating campus inquiry teams.

The data collection was determined by: 1) the focus of inquiry that was informed by our first meeting with each campus inquiry team, and 2) the availability of existing secondary data at the campuses. Once data sources were identified, the research team provided technical support for the campus inquiry teams to conduct analysis and helped with summarizing findings for discussions within the campus inquiry teams. These findings were discussed within the campus inquiry teams in order to generate formative and summative assessment and evaluation, leverage findings to inform innovative and sustainable modified interventions,

and establish a larger body of evidence on the role and function of institutions in the support of NHPI students.

Regional Engagement: Learning Community of Practice

Another core activity was to support partnerships and mentorship between campuses through ongoing campus-level and systemwide learning processes. The Learning Community of Practice (LCoP) engaged our campus teams as a community of learners in order to gain exposure to the efforts of peer institutions as well as knowledge and resources that exist in the broader field. Specifically, we engaged the LCoP in facilitated discussions between peer institutions to help them share what they have learned through their individual research activities, assist each other with potential solutions, build collaboration across higher education practitioners in the region, and amplify the innovative approaches and experiences of particular institutions.



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