



BRIEF #1  
FEBRUARY  
2023

# AANAPISI Spotlight Series

## BUNKER HILL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A MODEL OF STUDENT SUCCESS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



Written by Rikka J. Venturanza and Florie Mendiola



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We express our gratitude to Bunker Hill Community College's staff, faculty, and administrators for their collaborative efforts composing this brief. We continue to be inspired by your dedication and commitment to serving all ELL students. To Althea Li, we thank you for sharing your remarkable educational journey and we are excited to see you continue your unique path towards success.







## UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

English Language Learners (ELL)<sup>1</sup>, one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States (U.S.), embark on an elaborate journey as college students. While immersed in a new environment learning English as a second language, they often navigate a host of unfamiliar experiences that can directly impact their decision to stay or leave college.<sup>2</sup>

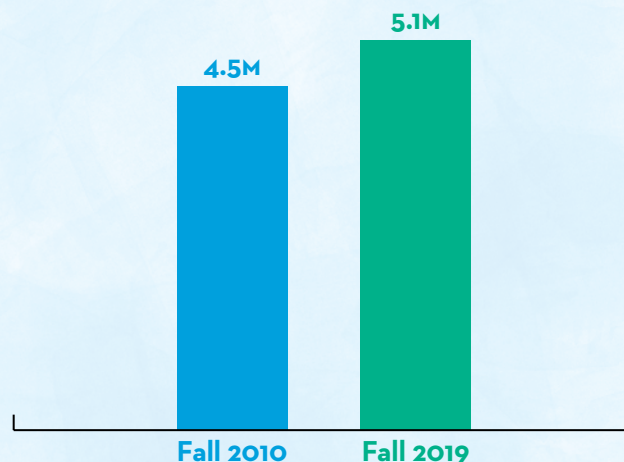
For ELL students from Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander (AA&PI)<sup>3</sup> backgrounds, the college experience can be increasingly challenging. In addition to disparate mischaracterizations as high achieving students or

students who lack necessary academic skills, limited proficiency in English serves as an added major barrier to their academic success.

At some institutions, AA&PI ELL students are assumed to lack the potential to overcome academic challenges. However, these challenges are but a reflection of the prevailing historical inequities in U.S. colleges and universities.<sup>4</sup> Contending with these challenges are Asian American and Native American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) like Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC).

**To illustrate the remarkable efforts transpiring at AANAPISIs, this brief focuses on Althea Li's story, an undergraduate student who benefited from BHCC's institutional commitment and readiness<sup>5</sup> to serve AA&PI ELL college students.**

### NUMBER OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE U.S. WHO WERE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



English Language Learners are one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States.<sup>6</sup>



## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Similar to other ELL students from first-generation immigrant communities, Althea chose to enroll at a local community college, largely for economic reasons.<sup>7</sup> After living in the U.S. for three years, she matriculated into BHCC in spring of 2018. Like many other first-generation college students, Althea was tasked with navigating the U.S. higher education system and funding her own education. Fortunately, with BHCC's commitment and readiness to serve underrepresented AA&PI students, Althea thrived.

With access to the institution's newly reformed English as a Second Language (ESL) program—which operated on the basis of ELL students' assets instead of deficit-based mischaracterizations—Althea was supported by dedicated faculty and staff who understood her unique needs and leveraged the cultural and linguistic skills she already had prior to BHCC.

### Impact of the BHCC ESL Program

Successfully progressing through the ESL program, Althea enrolled in college-credit English courses, published two stories in BHCC's online literary magazine, and acquired scholarships that secured necessary financial aid funding towards her transfer institution.

Surrounded by a vibrant campus community of ELL students, participating in student success coaching, and utilizing language lab tutoring also contributed to Althea's academic success, motivating her to maintain a high GPA throughout her time at BHCC, and identifying psychology as her major before transferring to the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston).

As a current UMass Boston undergraduate student connected to the university's AANAPISI programs and services, Althea wears a badge of honor as a BHCC alumna, determined to pay it forward by empowering other ELL transfer students toward their success.



The program changed my life. Faculty and staff believed in my academic abilities and helped me build confidence in myself.  
I feel lucky to have been part of the program.

—Althea Li



## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In 2016, two years prior to Althea arriving at BHCC, the U.S. Department of Education awarded BHCC with an AANAPISI grant. The primary reason BHCC became an AANAPISI was in response to the needs of the college's AA&PI students being disproportionately first generation to college, low-income, and more likely to be placed into ESL courses.<sup>8</sup>

### Initial Program Challenges

Prior to the reform, students like Althea were enrolled in BHCC's ESL program which consisted of 36 pre-college credits that did not count towards degree completion and often took as long as four years to complete. Moreover, from fall 2011 to fall 2013, AA&PI ELL students were not completing the required courses of the ESL program with nearly 70% of AA&PI students dropping out of the program.

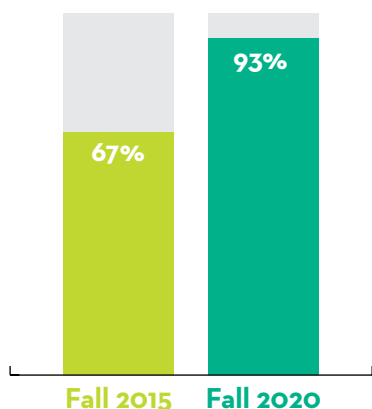
### Impact of Funding

Fortunately, the AANAPISI-funded comprehensive reform of the ESL Program paved the way for BHCC to build capacity toward increasing ELL student success. This involved strategically providing stipends to faculty while hiring a research data analyst, student success coaches, and language lab tutors to work collaboratively with UMass Boston and redesign curriculum while bridging support services for BHCC ELL students to transfer to a four-year university.

Notably, these efforts not only increased and expedited ELL students' successful completion of ESL and introductory English college-credit courses but also promoted progress towards transferring in a timely manner, thus decreasing students' financial burdens during their time at BHCC. The following figures further demonstrate these accomplishments in relation to AA&PI ELL and all ELL student success.<sup>9</sup>

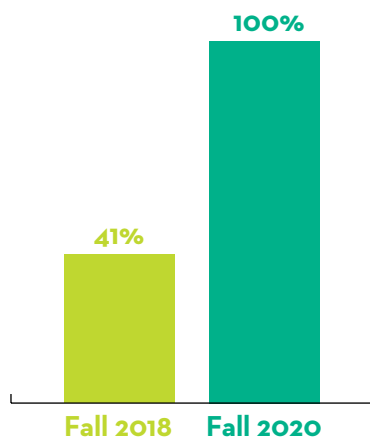
## BHCC AANAPISI PROGRAM MILESTONES

### Retention Rate (Fall-to-Fall)



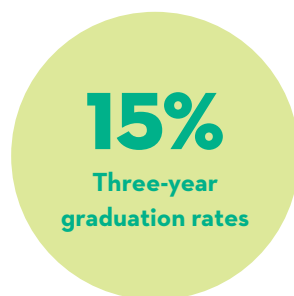
Pell-eligible AA&PI ELL students had the highest increases of retention rates from fall 2015 to fall 2020

### Rates of One-on-One Advising



By fall 2020 100% of ELL students were receiving ELL success coaching compared to 41% in fall 2018

### Three-year Graduation Rates: AA&PI and Pell-eligible Students



AAPI ELL students were consistently exceeding the grant goal (12%) at 15% three-year graduation rates





## INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT AND READINESS

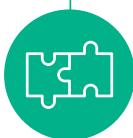
Through campuswide, faculty-driven, and data-informed efforts, BHCC's exemplary reforms offered students like Althea the following interventions:<sup>10</sup>

### ASSET-BASED APPROACH



Culturally relevant teaching methods, asset-based approaches, and learning community models were offered to increase ELL student success. This was accomplished by developing an integrated educational experience through academic courses, services, and tutoring with ELL students' cultural multilingual assets in mind.

### INTEGRATED CURRICULUM



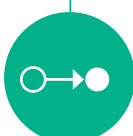
Writing, listening, and speaking skills were taught using an integrated skills curriculum, rather than in separate courses. This ensured students to earn college credit when they previously could not, reduced the total number of credits ELL students had to take, from 36 to 18, and shortened the progression into the college-level gateway English course from six to eight semesters to just three.

### TARGETED SUPPORT



Targeted success coaching promoted AA&PI ELL student success, as coaches provided culturally responsive advising and a space for students to discuss a variety of topics that included their academic goals, challenges, and specific needs.

### PATHWAY TO GRADUATION



As a result of the invaluable consultation and guidance of UMass Boston administrators, faculty, and staff, and the cohesive, innovative leadership of BHCC faculty and staff, the two campuses worked together to ensure the success of AA&PI ELL and all AAPI and Pell-eligible students by increasing their three-year graduation rate from 7% prior to the grant to an average of 15% under the grant.

## CONCLUSION

Given the significance of one-one coaching participation rates, and increased retention and graduation rates, BHCC's AANAPISI Program is a model of success in serving the unique needs of AA&PI students. BHCC's innovative approach and intentional use of targeted federal funding demonstrates how AANAPISIs serve as critical sites for supporting the success of underrepresented AA&PI student populations, especially

first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds. As AA&PIs continue to be one of the fastest growing communities in the U.S., dedicated federal funding is necessary to ensure that postsecondary institutions are equipped and empowered to serve this growing population so that students like Althea are given the resources and support to succeed.

## Endnotes

1 While the term “English Language Learners” is used in this brief, it is important to note the ongoing discrepancies of which term to refer to this student population. Notably, the term “multilingual learner” is ideal among advocates who emphasize the assets of these students who negotiate and understand the world through multiple languages and cultures. (see Mitchell, K. (2013). Race, difference, meritocracy, and English: Majoritarian stories in the education of secondary multilingual learners. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(3), 339–364.

2 Almon, C. (2015). College persistence and engagement in light of a mature English language learner (ELL) student’s voice. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(5), 461–472.

3 While terms vary “Asian American and Pacific Islanders” is used in this brief to align with BHCC’s AANAPISI Program’s terms used in their research and practice and to denote students who identify as Asian, Asian Americans, and/or Pacific Islanders. The “AA&PI” abbreviation is also used in this brief to establish a racial distinction between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders often categorized as one group (see Gogue, D. T. L., Poon, O. A., Maramba, D. C., & Kanagala, V. (2022). Inclusions and exclusions: racial categorizations and panethnicities in higher education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 35(1), 71–89

4 As cited by Teaching For Our Times (2022, para. 14). [www.teachingforourtimes.org/sharing-our-stories](http://www.teachingforourtimes.org/sharing-our-stories)

5 Gasman, M., & Conrad, C. F. (2013). Minority serving institutions: Educating all students.

6 “Includes students in kindergarten through grade 12 and ungraded students and students reported as being enrolled in grade 13...” (see National Center for Education Statistics (2022). <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf/english-learners>

7 Hartman, C., Callahan, R., & Yu, H. (2021). Optimizing Intent to Transfer: Engagement and Community College English Learners. *Research in Higher Education*, 62(6), 789–828.

8 The AAPI community is the fastest rising demographic group in the state of Massachusetts and across the United States (Museus, 2013; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2013; Watanabe & Lo, 2019). As cited by Teaching For Our Times (2022, para. 4). [www.teachingforourtimes.org/sharing-our-stories](http://www.teachingforourtimes.org/sharing-our-stories)

9 Data highlighted for this brief was collected by the BHCC’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness. [www.bhcc.edu/about/institutionaleffectiveness](http://www.bhcc.edu/about/institutionaleffectiveness)

10 See BHCC AANAPISI Program website [www.bhcc.edu/aanapisi](http://www.bhcc.edu/aanapisi)



To learn more about the impact of AANAPISIs,  
visit: [www.apiascholars.org/aanapisi](http://www.apiascholars.org/aanapisi)