Exploring the Impact of AANAPISI Grant-Funded Programs on Student Experiences and Outcomes: A Report on UNLV

Prepared by: Robert T. Teranishi and Cynthia M. Alcantar
October 2019
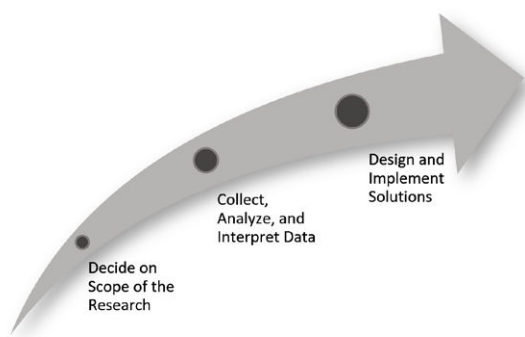
UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Recent U.S. Census data reveals a disproportionately high population of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in Nevada compared to the national average. While AAPIs make up five percent of the U.S. population, they comprise 9.6 percent of Nevada's population.[1] Moreover, AAPIs are now one of the fastest growing racial groups in the state, doubling in size over the past decade. Given these demographic trends, Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) Scholars partnered with University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and Nevada State College (NSC) in a collaborative project that responds to a need for research that can shed light on the demography of AAPI students in Nevada higher education, inform a deeper understanding of AAPI student experiences and outcomes, and produce recommendations that can inform campus services and programs. While the research is intended to inform programs and services at UNLV and NSC, it also generated findings that are relevant to the broader field of higher education. This report presents the findings from the research project at UNLV.

THE STUDY AT UNLV

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.[2] Thus, PAR was utilized in this project to pursue collective inquiry with campus partners through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to study institutional, programmatic, and student-level participation and outcomes, with the goal of providing data-driven decisions on campus and generating findings that can be shared with a broader set of constituents in and outside of the state. At the heart of the collaborative effort was a campus inquiry team consisting of administrators, faculty, practitioners, and students. Over a series of meetings, the research team worked with the campus inquiry team to decide on the focus and scope of the research, gain access to secondary data, gather primary data, and collectively interpret the findings to generate actionable recommendations.

Design and
Implement
Solutions

Collect,
Analyze, and
Interpret Data

Decide on
Scope of the
Research

The UNLV campus inquiry team decided to focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences and outcomes of students enrolled in programs funded by two federal grants they received as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI). The specific research questions that were the focus of the project were as follows:

1. Who are the students participating in the AANAPISI programs and how does it shed light on the demography of AAPI students at UNLV?

2. How do student participants talk about the perceived effect of the program on their educational trajectory?

3. In what ways, if at all, does the program help them enhance their educational experience, in addition to establishing their plans after college?

The focus on how AANAPISI programs can inform a deeper understanding of AAPI students at UNLV, provides useful insight for institution, as well as the broader field of higher education because of a need for more research on the impact of federally

funded programs generally and AANAPISI programs specifically.[3]

Federal AANAPISI Program:

The federal AANAPISI program, authorized by the College Cost Reduction and Access Act in 2007 and the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008, is structured as a competitive grant process for institutions with at least a 10 percent enrollment of AAPI students, a minimum threshold of low-income students, and lower than average educational and general expenditures per student (similar to Hispanic Serving Institutions).[4] Currently, three of the seven public colleges and universities in Nevada are designated as AANAPISIs. UNLV is the only higher education institution in the state of Nevada that has received the federal AANAPISI funding.

There were two primary sources of data for this study. First, data were provided by the Office of Decision Support and included cross-sectional and longitudinal institutional data on students participating in the AANAPISI programs and for UNLV students generally. The variables included information on student demographics, academic standing and performance, persistence, and degree attainment. Quantitative data was supplemented by individual interviews with students participating in the AANAPISI program (n = 20) and individual interviews with practitioners (program staff, advisors, and faculty; n = 6). Interview protocols focused on the experiences and outcomes of

AAPI students at UNLV generally and program participants specifically. We also conducted on-campus observations and gathered and analyzed supplemental campus and program material to inform the analysis and recommendations of this report.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: The Demography of AANAPISI Program Participants

The AANAPISI programs served a critical mass of AAPI undergraduate students at UNLV; thus, the demography of the students participating in the AANAPISI program provided useful insight into the demography and lived experiences of low-income AAPI students at UNLV generally. The data revealed the extent to which the AANAPISI

program participants were more likely to be Pell grant recipients and the first in their families to attend college compared to the general UNLV undergraduate population (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Selected Student Characteristics for AANAPISI Regular, AANAPISI STEM, and UNLV Undergraduates (Non-Participants), 2017-18
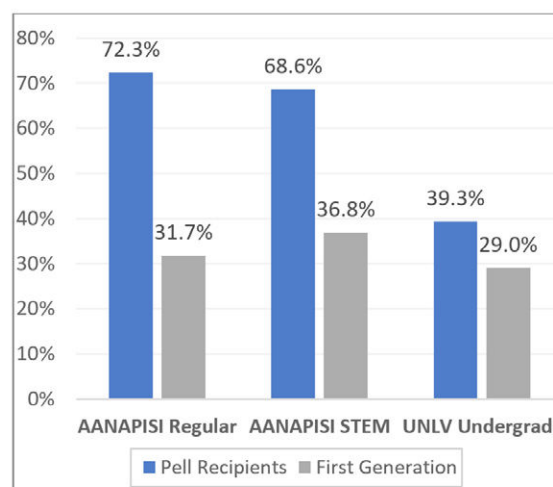
AANAPISI Regular: *N*=216
AANAPISI STEM: *N*=225
UNLV Undergrads (Non-Participants): *N*=25,282

While research has shown a number of ways that these factors create challenges for access to and persistence in higher education,[5] interviews with students helped to provide greater insight. A third-year student majoring in Nutrition Science described her experience as the first in her family to attend college: "There was sometimes a lack of parent support. It wasn't their fault; they didn't know. They couldn't really help me much because they didn't have an education themselves." A fourth-year student majoring

in Biological Sciences and Psychology we interviewed spoke to the issue of food insecurity by saying, "Literally, you eat a big breakfast and you stretch that until the end of the day. That's living frugally." Additionally, a high concentration of the student participants in the qualitative research were working, living at home, and providing support for their families. A fifth-year student majoring in Kinesiology spoke the importance of providing support for family in the AAPI community. She said, "Our [family's] whole mentality is that we're a team. We work for the family and stuff."

> "I'm glad Pacific Islanders are being recognized as people need[ing] extra help [through the AANAPISI program]... because many times, it kind of goes unnoticed... We have our own culture and ways of talking and doing things."
>
> - (First-year, Political Science)

Finding 2: The Role of the AANAPISI Program

In addition to understanding the demography of the students participating in the AANAPISI program, we were also interested in understanding the extent to which the programs were helping students succeed academically. Results revealed the programs were broadening students' horizons, exposing them to more resources and services on campus, and expanding academic goals and expectations.

Students were benefiting from tangible resources, like the book lending program, access to scholarships, tutoring, and early course registration. However, students also spoke highly of advising, mentoring, and other useful guidance and support they received through the programs. A fourth-year student majoring in Biological Sciences and Psychology said of his experience, "They were a good foundation to go out and use other resources. I would have never gone to the student wellness center had it not been for [the AANAPISI program]." A fifth-year student majoring in Kinesiology also said, "I think the thing that resonates with me the most is that I get to talk to [advisors] one-on-one... I feel like this program is a little more intimate, because I feel like she knows me."
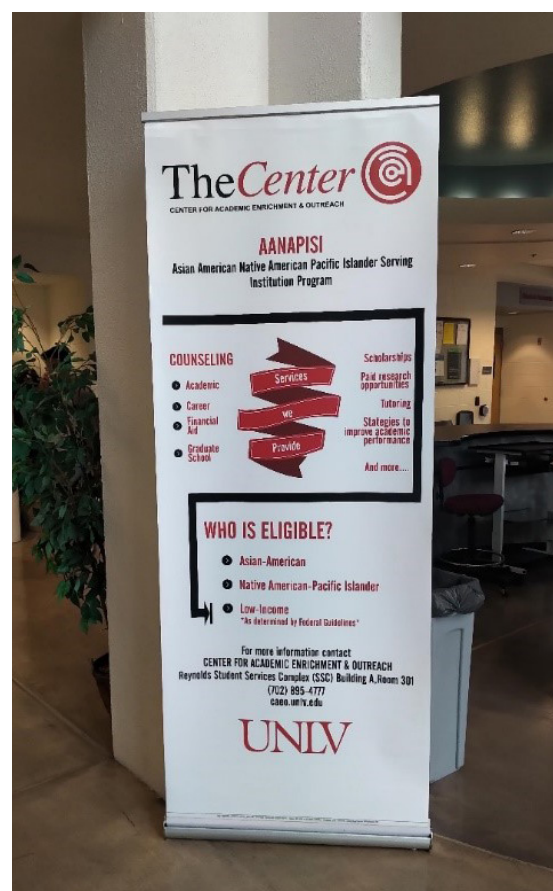
Some students also benefited from engagement in an AANAPISI-funded undergraduate research program, which paired them with a faculty advisor. A third-year student majoring in Nutrition Science spoke to her experience with the AANAPISI research program. She said, "It was research and everything else, the great things that come through, the knowledge you gain, the relationships you build as well." Students were able to build relationships with faculty, solidify plans to pursue graduate studies, and in some cases present and/or publish their research.

Finding 3: Student Outcomes of Program Participants

Results revealed encouraging findings about the academic outcomes of AANAPISI program participants. Despite having similar ACT scores, SAT scores, and High School GPA, AANAPISI program participants exhibited better academic outcomes than the general UNLV student population (see Figure 2). There is additional analysis underway utilizing Propensity Score Matching (PSM) to gain a more accurate comparison between the academic performance of program participants and the general UNLV student population.

In our longitudinal analysis, we found that AANAPISI program participants had higher term and cumulative GPAs and better retention rates one and three years after entry (Figure 3). The difference in the first-year retention rates was greater than the third-year retention rates for program participants compared to UNLV undergraduate students generally, indicating

Figure 2. Cumulative GPA for AANAPISI Regular, AANAPISI STEM, and UNLV Undergraduate Students, 2017-18
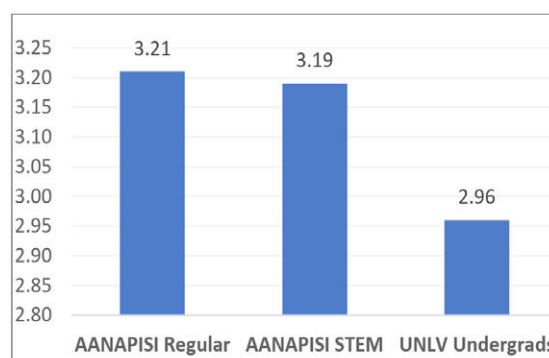
a possible long-term effect on student outcomes. Additional analysis using PSM is also being conducted to confirm this finding.

Figure 3. One-Year and Three-Year Retention Rates for AANAPISI Regular, AANAPISI STEM, and UNLV Undergraduate Students
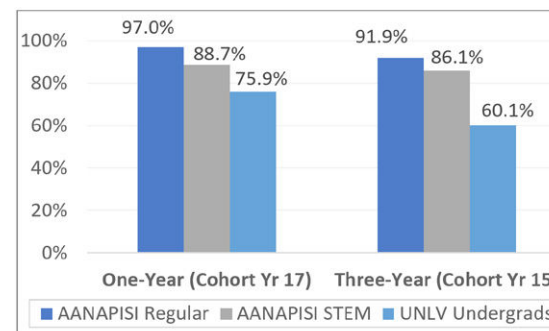
Students spoke to the ways in which the program helped them with their academic trajectory. A third-year student majoring in Health Care Administration connected the program to her academic performance by stating, "Being in the program, I went to the tutoring sessions and my GPA went up. So, that helped me a lot. And I was less stressed because I [got] to learn in one-on-one and face-to-face [sessions]." A fourth-year student majoring in Biological Sciences and

Psychology captured the impact of the program on his academic performance and plans after college:

"I mean, it definitely pushed me farther than I wanted to go. When I first got here, it was the bare minimum that I was shooting for... They were like, 'No, you should get this.' Then I ended up with a second degree and a minor with all these honors... [Also,] because of AANAPISI funding me, I [get] to go to Arizona now to present my research findings... and I became a published author. So, I feel that they have played a tremendous role during my time here."

AREAS FOR POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENT

The campus inquiry team met to discuss the findings and develop recommendations based on these results. Below are the recommendations that emerged from that meeting, along with action plans that are being pursued:

• Students described how support from the programs seemed more applicable to newer students. There will be efforts made to **differentiate services for students** at different stages of their academic programs.

• Students discussed a desire for more focus on the AAPI experience. Efforts are underway to establish **programming that helps to get at the unique challenges** faced by AAPI students (e.g., pressure of model minority myth, parental expectations, self-esteem, and self-perception).

• Students talked about wanting more opportunities to connect with other program participants. Efforts will be made to **connect program participants with each other**, which will be beneficial to expanding social networks and addressing challenges associated with a lack of campus engagement.

• Students described a need for more mentorship from other AAPIs in positions of leadership or who have similar prior experiences. There will be efforts to **connect AAPI students to students, alumni, and other resources** to help students explore opportunities during and after college.

"I think it was just nice to have an Asian resource on campus because I know as far as minorities go, there's not a lot of us... I think it would be nice just to have people from the same culture or people that look like us kind of just tell us about their experiences."

- (Fifth-year, Human Services and Urban Studies)

ENDNOTES

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

[2] R. T. Teranishi, M. Martin, L. Bordoloi Pazich, C. M. Alcantar, & T. K. Nguyen, *Measuring the Impact of MSI-Funded Programs on Student Success: Findings from the Evaluation of AANAPISIs* (New York, NY: CARE Project, 2014).

[3] N. Harmon, *The Role of Minority-Serving Institutions in National College Completion Goals* (Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012); R. T. Teranishi, M. Martin, L. Bordoloi Pazich, C. M. Alcantar, & T.-L.-K. Nguyen, *Partnership for Equity in Education through Research (PEER)* (New York, NY: CARE Project, 2013).

[4] R. T. Teranishi, *Federal Higher Education Policy Priorities and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community* (New York, NY: CARE Project, 2010).

[5] R. T. Teranishi, M. Martin, L. Bordoloi Pazich, C. M. Alcantar, B. M. D. Nguyen, E. R. Curammeng, M. H. Nguyen, & J. Chan, *The Impact of Scholarships for Asian American and Pacific Islander Community College Students: Preliminary Findings from an Experimental Design Study* (Los Angeles, CA: CARE Project, 2015).