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Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs): Serving and Advocating for the Educational Needs of Southeast Asian American Students

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Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs): Serving and Advocating for the Educational Needs of Southeast Asian American Students

Cover Page Footnote

I am indebted to those who work at AANAPISIs, and their Southeast Asian American students, who inspire me with their stories.



Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs): Serving and Advocating for the Educational Needs of Southeast Asian American Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to highlight how AANAPISI programs can intentionally design their programming to support Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students, and their responsibility in effectively advocating for them at the policy level. In this effort, this article will first provide a background and an overview of the AANAPISI landscape over the past decade. Then it will focus on one exemplary AANAPISI, providing examples of programmatic mechanisms and efforts used to serve SEAA students. This article concludes by providing recommendations and discussing the implications regarding the role of AANAPISIs in effectively serving and advocating for their SEAA students at the policy level.

Keywords: AANAPISI, Policy, Advocacy

Introduction

In 2007, the College Cost Reduction and Access Act was signed into law, creating the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) program. Since then, 35 institutions have received federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education to provide academic and co-curricular programming for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, staff, and faculty (Nguyen, 2019). Perhaps less understood is the intentional focus on the educational experiences and outcomes of Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students at AANAPISIs (Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018). Indeed, the rationale and policy arguments used to advance AANAPISI-based legislative efforts through Congress sought to dispel harmful myths by shedding light on the diversity of the AAPI community and the real educational needs of SEAA students (Park & Chang, 2009). Thus, the creation and inclusion of AANAPISIs among other Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, etc.) is significant for several



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reasons. First, AANAPISIs demonstrate the federal government's commitment to AAPIs and recognizes that they have educational needs (Park & Teranishi, 2008). Furthermore, it acknowledges the diversity and complexity within the AAPI community, rather than being viewed as a static "monolithic monotone" (Lee, 1996). Extending this argument further, the existence of AANAPISIs demonstrates the federal government's commitment to Southeast Asian Americans and their educational needs. However, policy makers still maintain a limited understanding of SEAs (CARE, 2013a), and possess a limited understanding of the potential for AANAPISIs to support the needs of SEAA students (Park & Chang, 2009; Pimentel & Horikoshi, 2016).

Given that one of the primary arguments used to ensure the passage of AANAPISI legislation focused on dispelling myths about AAPI students and to provide resources for these underserved students (i.e., Southeast Asian Americans), what is or should be the role of AANAPISI programs, with respect to SEAA students, at both the institutional and policy levels? Thus, the purpose of this article is to highlight how AANAPISI programs can intentionally design their programming to support SEAA students, and their responsibility in effectively advocating for them at the policy level. In this effort, this article will first provide a background and an overview of the AANAPISI landscape over the past decade. Then it will focus on one exemplary AANAPISI, providing examples of programmatic mechanisms and efforts used to serve SEAA students. This article concludes by providing recommendations and discussing the implications regarding the role of AANAPISIs in effectively serving and advocating for their SEAA students at the policy level.¹

Background on AANAPISIs

Housed and administered by the U.S. Department of Education, the AANAPISI program is a competitive grant that provides federal funding for eligible colleges and universities. Under Title III, Section 320 and 371 of the Higher Education Act (HEA), colleges and universities, excluding for-profit institutions, are able to apply for and receive the AANAPISI grant under two primary criteria: (a) if 10% of the undergraduate student enrollment identifies as Asian American and Native American and Pacific Islander, and (b) if the institution meets the Section 312(b) basic eligibility criteria of Title III and V programs. To meet the Section 312(b) basic eligibility requirements, the college or university must:

- be an institution of higher education (IHE), as defined in section 101 of the HEA;
- have lower than average educational and general (E&G) expenditures per full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate student compared to institutions that offer similar instruction;
- have a requisite enrollment of needy students;
- be legally authorized within its respective state to award bachelor's degrees; be a community college; or be the College of the Marshall Islands, the College of Micronesia/Federated States of Micronesia, or Palau Community College;
- be accredited or making progress toward accreditation by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association recognized by the Secretary of Education (the Secretary); and
- be located in one of the 50 states, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth

of the Northern Mariana Islands, or the freely associated states (Congressional Research Service, 2014, p. 2).

These requirements are often summarized as having an undergraduate student population that is at least 10% Asian American and Pacific Islander, and maintaining a significant proportion of students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Since 2007, approximately 190 institutions have been eligible to become funded AANAPISIs (Nguyen, 2019). This number has shifted over time, given that eligibility may fluctuate due to dynamic student enrollment patterns and institutional expenditures. Of those 190 colleges and universities, 35 have been awarded the AANAPISI grant and created AANAPISI programs on their campuses (Nguyen, 2019).

Analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) indicates that AANAPISIs educate a large proportion of all AAPI undergraduates throughout the country. Nearly 40% of eligible AANAPISIs maintain an AAPI student population over 20%. That figure increases to 57% for funded AANAPISIs. In Fall 2017, over one million AAPI undergraduates were enrolled at 2-year and 4-year institutions across the United States. Eligible and funded AANAPISIs, while comprising of only 4.4% of the over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States, enrolled 37.9% of all AAPI undergraduates, or 412,639 students, in the nation. In other words, over one-third of all current AAPI college students are attending one of the 190 AANAPISIs.

With regards to institutional type, public two-year eligible AANAPISIs enroll the majority of AAPI college students, compared to four-year institutions. However, over the past decade, the proportion of AAPI undergraduate enrollment at four-year eligible AANAPISIs has steadily risen. Additionally, eligible and funded AANAPISIs have played an increasingly critical role in conferring degrees for AAPI students. Of all associate's degrees that were conferred to AAPI college students across the country in 2013, 43.5% of those degrees were conferred at eligible or funded AANAPISIs. Today, that figure has increased to 47.5%. Similarly, in 2013, 28.8% of all baccalaureate degrees conferred for AAPIs were at eligible or funded four-year AANAPISIs. That figure has increased slightly to 29.4%, as of 2018. In other words, AANAPISIs are of crucial importance for AAPI college students, as they are enrolling and conferring degrees for large proportions of AAPIs throughout the United States.

However, given that the federal government does not collect or require reporting of disaggregated data from institutions, there is no precise mechanism to determine the percentage of SEAA students that AANAPISIs serve nationally. Nonetheless, researchers have begun to document how AANAPISIs are serving SEAA students at both two-year and four-year institutions (see CARE, 2013b; Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2014; Nguyen et al., 2018).

Southeast Asian Americans and AANAPISIs

The U.S. Department of Education (2016) states that federal funding for AANAPISIs can be used to create or support a large variety of new or existing academic and co-curricular programming, some of which includes:

- Increasing student retention and progression through college level courses by re-engineering student support services and supplemental instruction and providing enhanced faculty professional development;

- Development of a summer bridge program to bridge the gap between two-year and four-year colleges and universities;
- Strengthening assessment and integrating academic advising, academic support, and academic enrichment under a new center;
- Developing faculty development, including workshops in high-impact pedagogies, technology, and instructional methods for teaching under-prepared students;
- Developing an endowment fund to meet ongoing costs for maintenance and upgrades to technology;
- Development of smart classrooms and improvement and technological enhancements to classrooms

Given that this broad mandate does not explicitly dictate or suggest initiatives intended for SEAA students, several AANAPISIs, as previous noted, maintain an explicit focus on SEAA students. AANAPISIs are spread across the United States, but can be clustered in regions such as California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas, and Washington, and located near large concentrations of SEAA populations due to refugee resettlement policies and patterns (Kula & Paik, 2016; Nguyen 2019). One such AANAPISI program, Initiatives to Maximize Positive academic Achievement and Cultural Thriving focusing on Asian American and Pacific Islander students (IMPACT AAPI), is located at De Anza College. IMPACT AAPI maintains several distinct initiatives that are specifically geared towards enhancing the educational experiences of SEAA students. The following section will provide greater context and background on De Anza College, as well as detail four specific initiatives (i.e., academic programming, student support services, co-curricular activities, and professional development) for SEAA students, that are housed within the AANAPISI program.

Institutional Background

De Anza College is located in Santa Clara County, California. According to the U.S. Census Bureau,² nearly 750,000 Asian American and Pacific Islanders reside in Santa Clara County, comprising of approximately 40% of the county's entire population. Santa Clara County is also home to a large population of Southeast Asian Americans (i.e., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese), who make up a large percentage of the county's AAPI population, 20.7%. Indeed, one in five AAPIs who reside in Santa Clara County identify as Southeast Asian American.

In 2008, De Anza College was awarded AANAPISI funding, making it among the first cohort of institutions to receive the grant. De Anza markets itself as the premier community college in the region and state, with high transfer rates to selective and prestigious four-year universities on the West Coast, while also providing a robust vocational education program. De Anza College maintains a very large student enrollment, nearly 23,000 students, with 800 part-time and full-time faculty members. The college offers 63 different associate's degree programs and 97 certificate programs, and also has an Ethnic Studies program, where several Asian American Studies courses are offered. In Fall 2019, AAPI enrollment accounted for over 48% of the total campus population or 9,127 students. Ironically, even with a heavy emphasis on SEAA students through IMPACT AAPI, De Anza College, as a whole, does not publicly report disaggregated enrollment figures. Interestingly, De Anza College does collect disaggregated data from students during the admissions process, but only publicly releases AAPI data in three groups on its website: Asian

American (n = 7,723), Filipinx (n = 1,257) and Pacific Islander (n = 147). However, disaggregated data was used within the AANAPISI program to guide programmatic efforts.

Initiatives for Southeast Asian Americans

De Anza College's AANAPISI program was specifically designed with Southeast Asian American students in mind. Publicly available documents detail IMPACT AAPI's mission to serve Southeast Asian American students. This message permeates throughout the entire AANAPISI, and can be found in its physical spaces, course syllabi, and on the website, to name a few. Furthermore, this approach to serving Southeast Asian American students is embedded in the mindset of the faculty and staff who manage the AANAPISI's primary initiatives.

With respect to academic programming, IMPACT AAPI created several new courses that focused on the experiences of Southeast Asians in the United States. These classes were housed within the institution's Asian American Studies program, where readings examined Western colonization and the legacy of the wars in Southeast Asia, as well as contemporary issues for Southeast Asian American communities, both nationally and locally. Furthermore, these classes followed the tradition of Ethnic Studies and were taught through an interdisciplinary lens that interrogated dominant narratives through critical readings and class discussions about history, literature, public policy, and politics.

IMPACT AAPI's second component was their multi-pronged student services. Although De Anza already maintains highly robust counseling and student success programs, IMPACT AAPI worked to expand these services specifically for Southeast Asian American students. The student support services were operationalized through embedded counseling, where several AANAPISI staff worked in conjunction with faculty in the Asian American Studies courses to provide real-time counseling and student advising. These staff members, who identify as Southeast Asian American, also taught student success courses that provided SEAA students with culturally relevant academic and life skills, while delivering tutoring services and creating workshops focused on college transfer, applying to scholarships, and career planning.

Some of the AANAPISI program's co-curricular activities were housed at De Anza College's Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute (APALI). Founded prior to receiving the AANAPISI grant, APALI augments the academic work of IMPACT AAPI to provide civic engagement-based programming for students. APALI served as an incubator for AAPI community leaders and public officials within Santa Clara County to network and build community. For students, APALI provided direct opportunities to engage with these leaders through a series of formal and informal co-curricular events, including speaker panels, community visits and trips, internships, and volunteering, among many others. APALI specifically curated these events to ensure that Southeast Asian American leaders and communities were present and represented, in order for SEAA students to see themselves in public service, as elected officials, judges, directors of non-profit organizations, educators, artists, activist, and community organizers.

IMPACT AAPI's fourth initiative included campus-wide faculty and staff development as well as regional AANAPISI convenings. This programming offered several curriculum-based modules that were focused on underserved and underrepresented AAPI groups, including one module on SEAA students and another on the model minority myth. The modules and workshops were open to all faculty and staff at De Anza College, with the intention to educate the entire faculty and staff corps on the Southeast Asian American refugee experience and its implications on students' educational trajectories. In addition to large format trainings, the modules were also

available electronically for faculty and staff to learn about their SEAA students on their own time or remotely. External to De Anza College, IMPACT AAPI also hosted regional convenings with other AANAPISIs in order to share knowledge, resources, and best practices.

As discussed, De Anza College offers an opportunity to examine how institutions can build and direct their AANAPISI programs to develop and educate Southeast Asian American students in holistic ways. Beyond simply providing traditional academic resources or augmenting existing support services for students, IMPACT AAPI relies on several existing institutional mechanisms to create new programming designed intentionally to benefit their Southeast Asian American students. However, achieving these results is no easy task and requires multiple levels of engagement and a real commitment towards SEAA students, especially given the varied institutional and policy barriers that limit an AANAPISI program's ability to engage in this multi-pronged and interconnected approach.

Effectively Serving and Advocating for SEAA Students at the Policy Level

There is an institutional responsibility to serve and advocate for Southeast Asian American students at the institutional and policy levels. As noted by Park and Teranishi (2008), AANAPISIs were created for several important reasons. First, AANAPISIs are a *racial project* that “reposition how AAPIs are viewed by carving out a unique space for AAPIs in the American racial landscape” (Park & Teranishi, 2008, pp. 117–118). In other words, the creation of this MSI designation commits to a greater understanding that AAPIs are a highly diverse and distinct racialized minority group. In demonstrating this, and in order to show that AAPIs have unique academic needs, educational data on SEAAAs (and NHPIs) was used in policy arguments to sway Members of Congress to support AANAPISI legislation (Park & Chang, 2009). Second, and equally important, was that the creation of AANAPISIs works towards the disruption of harmful stereotypes about Asian American and Southeast Asian American students, while providing federal resources to address these issues (Park & Teranishi, 2008).

Given these intended outcomes, there is reasonable justification for AANAPISIs to not only serve, but also to advocate on behalf of SEAA students, ensuring that this federal program lives up to the standard in which it was created. Thus, based upon the institutional and ongoing work at De Anza College, this section extends the efforts of IMPACT AAPI and offers three areas where AANAPISIs can engage policy makers, in order to advance educational opportunities for SEAA students.

First, AANAPISI must disaggregate their data, and use these data points to lobby policy makers on the need to require all institutions to collect and disaggregate their data. Most institutions that maintain AANAPISI programs do not collect disaggregated data, and if they do, they often do not report out disaggregated AAPI data. Thus, it is incumbent upon AANAPISI programs to do this work. While collecting internal disaggregated data for reporting and accountability purposes (from academic, student services, co-curricular, and professional development), AANAPISI programs should merge their data with institutional-wide data datasets from institutional research units. Doing so would provide a more accurate and robust picture of the AAPI students who are served by the AANAPISI program.

Second, AANAPISIs should present this data to policy makers, in order to demonstrate the vast diversity that is unique to AAPI communities, as well as the positive benefits of their program for SEAA students. The mere existence of data on SEAA students may also provide an avenue to secure meetings with relevant policy makers at federal, state, and local jurisdictions. Since

AANAPISIs are a federal initiative, it is self-evident that engagement with federal legislators is necessary. However, given that higher education is primarily governed by the state (McGuiness, 2005), and in the case of California community colleges at the local level (Knoell, 1997), AANAPISIs should not limit themselves to just one tier of government. State and local policy makers must also be informed about the important work that AANAPISIs are engaged in, especially with respect to SEAA students. Additionally, this provides an opportunity for state and local policy makers to become champions of AANAPISI programs, and collaborate with AANAPISIs when advocating at the federal level.

Finally, AANAPISIs must coalesce in order to develop an advocacy organization that is similar to what already exists for their counterpart MSIs. Indeed, there are existing associations and organizations that are engaging in this work on behalf of AANAPISIs, yet none have emerged as the primary organization committed to this work. Although many of these associations and organizations may be the ideal vehicle for these efforts, leadership and governance must flow from the 35 funded AANAPISIs, in order to create an advocacy arm that can then be housed at one of the existing associations or organizations. Only then, will there be a sophisticated apparatus that can adequately advocate for the necessary resources that will ensure that AANAPISIs can live up to their historical mission of serving underrepresented and under-resourced AAPI students, especially those who identify as SEAA.

As AANAPISIs celebrate and surpass their 10-year anniversary, recommitting to their true purpose would greatly strengthen the ability of those who shape academic and co-curricular programming at these colleges and universities. This approach would also create the opportunity to advance new advocacy efforts that would inform the work of those charged with overseeing AANAPISIs at the federal, state, and local levels. Doing so will provide new tools for AANAPISIs to better serve and support the educational experiences and trajectories of Southeast Asian American students in higher education and beyond.

Notes

1. It is important to note that AANAPISIs, both as a policy and as an institutional program, were also created to serve Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) students. This cannot be understated. However, given the scope of this journal, this article will focus on the role of AANAPISIs in serving Southeast Asian American students.
2. 2013-2017, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

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