

Message from the Editors

From Trauma to Cautious Optimism: AANAPISIs Leading the Way

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We begin 2022 both mindful and hopeful. The COVID-19 pandemic, the heightened racial and social inequality, the rise of anti-Asian hate, as well as the disrupted 2020 Census and the contentious 2020 presidential election, together created an environment of disorder. The world, our nation, and our institutions of higher education were turned upside down these last two years. Amid the chaos and calamity, it is more important than ever to remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: “Commit yourself to the noble struggle for human rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country and a finer world to live in.”

This special issue of *AAPI Nexus* was conceived after a series of virtual community forums attended by directors, staff, and faculty from Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) from around the country. In previous years AANAPISI directors, staff, and researchers met at the annual Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) conference to partake in camaraderie, discuss challenges, and share best practices. The APAHE conference was canceled in April 2020, and this left a void for AANAPISIs that had to address the needs of large numbers of historically underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students and marginalized AAPI faculty and staff during a time of great social and institutional calamity. Another impetus for this special edition was the publication of a new book, *Transformative Practices for Minority Student Success: Accomplishments of Asian American and Native*

American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (2020), the first to focus wholly on AANAPISIs. This book offered a corrective to the misconceptions about AAPI students. The book highlighted the student services, leadership programs, innovative pedagogies, community engagement models, and cross-campus collaborations.

This volume highlights how AANAPISI campuses were thoroughly tested in the midst of social and institutional upheaval these past two years, and the challenges that continue. There are many important stories to tell, and valuable lessons learned. Most articles are collaborative efforts, which speaks volumes of the bonding that emerges during times of crisis. In many cases faculty, staff, and students at AANAPISIs rose out to strengthen collaboration and connection to overcome previous institutional marginalization and isolation.

Theme 1 introduces AANAPISI policy, institutional opportunities, and challenges. Nguyen et al. provide an overview of federal funding for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Their analysis clearly shows the federal formula used for both programmatic and institutional levels of funding is significantly less for AANAPISIs relative to other MSIs. This chronic underfunding of AANAPISIs was also apparent when examining the distribution of COVID-19-related relief to colleges and universities. The authors' critique with solid evidence of the unfair funding system is an issue actively raised by AANAPISI advocates to Congress with the hope that changes are forthcoming. The article by Venturanza, Lee, and Masulit shows examples of the work done at two very different public AANAPISI institutions in California, one a community college (Coastline Community College) and the other a four-year comprehensive university (California State University, Sacramento). What binds the two programs together is the fact they were focused on serving as critical sites in cultivating AAPI students' civic engagement toward social justice agendas. In particular, both campuses understood that their AANAPISI programs should not only provide student services but also be an academic enterprise integrating research, scholarship, and personal reflections influenced consciously by an Ethnic Studies framework. The article by Espinoza and Watson is centered at a Research 1 institution outside of California (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) that is *both* a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) as well as an AANAPISI. This article is significant because it focuses on students in the Minority-Serving Institution Student Council (MSISC) leading the way to change the institutional culture by advocating for

the imperative to promote success for minoritized students and to become a truly *servicing* MSI.

Theme 2: Supporting and Organizing Students at AANAPISIs during Multiple Pandemics highlights important and inspiring examples of work by students during a time of national and institutional crisis. Huynh and co-authors describe the VOICE project (Visualizing Our Identities and Cultures for Empowerment) at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). Student researchers used photovoice, or “ethical photography for social change,” methodology to document the experiences of AAPIs during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach of community participatory action research and community-centered archival creation serves as a model for other AANAPISIs that embrace the mission of “service” as well as “empowerment” and “care” for marginalized communities. The Cuenza-Uvas and Toso-Lafaele Gogue article discusses how student affairs professionals at Mt. San Antonio College utilized their cultural values and employed creative strategies to demonstrate an ethic of care and responsibility for the student community amidst COVID-19 and the increased attention on violence toward Asian Americans. Liu from the Hunter College AANAPISI Project (HCAP) offers four strategies in their pandemic programming that address mental health, anti-Asian racism, and anti-Blackness. Particular attention is given to the challenges in launching and continuing these efforts, as well as recommendations for engaging Asian American students. San Francisco State University students Francisco, Dela Cruz, and Phuong, with faculty mentors Jeung and Yoo, assess student involvement with two campus-community projects: the Auntie Sewing Squad and Stop AAPI Hate’s Youth Campaign. The findings show both projects created a space where students could incorporate their Ethnic Studies courses with the communities they served. In the face of uncertainty, fear, and exhaustion, these two community service projects became examples of responding with resilience, healing in community, leading with care, and embodying solidarity.

Theme 3: AANAPISIs Changing Institutions is at the heart of the ultimate purpose of AANAPISI-funded projects. Not only should AANAPISI programs help the most underrepresented and underserved AAPI students but should also be collaborators with others to raise AAPI issues and concerns that should be seen as central to both the campus and the surrounding community. The high visibility and partnerships are what lead to the institutionalization of AANAPISI

programs. Chandara and colleagues from the Asian Pacific American Resource Center at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, highlight (1) their work toward addressing anti-Asian racism and anti-Blackness on our campus and local community, (2) building community and solidarity across racial-ethnic communities, (3) participating with student groups as partners to challenge inequality, and (4) engaging as a “critical collaborator” with other campus units to advance the institution’s goals toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. These efforts significantly advanced an understanding of the role of AANAPISIs in activism at the local level that is critical for institutional change. Similarly, Daus-Magbual and Loi-On from San Francisco State’s Asian American & Pacific Islander Student Services examine the legacy of Ethnic Studies and Community Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) to inform their approach in addressing COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and anti-Asian violence. Ethnic Studies emerged from Black and Third World students organizing alongside faculty, white students, and community members to address higher education. The authors demonstrate how CRP and praxis can be conducted collaboratively across the silos of higher education. Lee and Nguyen from DeAnza College presents a framework for a practice of Asian Americanist advocacy. Their heuristic framework introduces four questions to help practitioners determine the direction of their advocacy, focusing on approaches to self-organizing, analyses of racial relationality, and engagements with institutional power. The case study highlights tensions around the legibility of Asian Americans in campus discourse, the politicization of Asian American employees, and the efficacy of Asian Americanist advocacy. Finally, Fong and Hung from California State University, Sacramento, focus on how AAPI students, staff, and faculty stepped up to the call for engagement and organizing on campus. Having the Full Circle Project (FCP), the AANAPISI program on campus was the genesis for the rise of social action. FCP was first funded in 2011 and was consciously rooted in Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies as a transformative project with the intention of changing the campus culture and raising the visibility of AAPIs in the campus community and throughout the region.

We trust this volume will serve as a valuable inspiration to all institutions of higher education, but especially to other funded and eligible AANAPISI campuses. We have lived through a generational social epoch, and the traumas of the past two years will remain in our hearts and minds forever. Nonetheless, these stories of resilience must

not be lost, and important lessons learned must continue to be told and shared. This message began with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr., and we end with two more quotes that are especially relevant for this special volume.

“Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.”

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

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