The Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) Grant is a five year federally funded award to develop and implement a comprehensive and culturally informed student support program. Focused grant activities are designed to enhance learning, engagement, retention and success of Pacific Islander students at UH Hilo. More specifically, the grant is aimed at facilitating the success of Pacific Islander students by providing opportunities to engage in “high impact” activities that support retention and graduation. In addition, grant objectives include conducting and disseminating research into best practices that facilitates the success of Pacific Islanders in higher education. Pacific Islander students as a sole unit of study within the higher education context allows for the extrication of specific information.

This Newsletter describes preliminary findings from a small-scale study of recent Pacific Islander graduates from the University of Hawaii at Hilo (UH Hilo). Recognizing that under-represented students are often marginalized on college campuses, the AANAPISI research objectives include an investigation into Pacific Islander students’ perceptions of their higher education experiences. The information gathered will be used to support the retention rate for Pacific Islander students attending UH Hilo and other institutions of higher education. One of the ways to collect consistent and regular information is by periodically disseminating surveys. During the Fall of 2012 recent UH Hilo Pacific Islander graduates received an invitation to participate in a survey for those who graduated in Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Summer 2012. There were a total of 45 graduates during those semesters who received survey invitations via email. Of the 45 graduates, 31 email addresses were viable. As a result, twelve graduates completed the survey. Through the email invitation, graduates accessed the consent form and survey online. We anticipate fielding the survey annually to increase the number of responses. However, the preliminary information collected during Fall 2012 offers a glimpse of the type of information we are gathering and its relevance to Pacific Islander students in higher education.

WHAT IS THE AANAPISI GRANT?

The purpose of this Research Newsletter is to provide an overview of the Fall 2012 Survey of Recent Graduates results. In this inaugural issue, we describe the AANAPISI grant program of research and share findings from a small scale study of recent UH Hilo Pacific Islander baccalaureate graduates.

Key Findings
Most graduates attended public high school
Majority considered their Pacific Islander language as their primary source of communication
Many graduates strongly identified with their respective Pacific Islander culture
Graduates reported positive experiences when they attended UH Hilo

The Survey of Recent Graduates consisted of four parts:
- Demographic Information
- Cultural Identity
- Cultural Congruity
- University Environment
While our response rate was only 30%, the information we received from this population has never been collected prior to this study. In particular, information related to cultural identity, cultural congruity and university environment offers a rare perspective about the experiences of Pacific Islander student graduates. The following charts and graphs show select demographics of graduates who chose to participate in the online survey.

**Ethnicity**

- Yapese: 42%
- Marshallese: 25%
- Palauan: 8%
- Pohnpeian: 17%
- Samoan: 8%

**Gender**

- Male: 75%
- Female: 25%

**What type of High School did you graduate from?**

- Public: 80%
- Private: 20%

**What do you consider to be your primary language (most comfortable speaking)?**

- Mainly Pacific Islander Language: 0%
- Mainly English: 20%
- Other Language if not Pacific Islander: 40%
- Equal Amount of English and another language: 60%

The AANAPISI research agenda includes opportunity to explore in-depth, current and former Pacific Islander UH Hilo students. Understanding their experiences and perceptions of UH Hilo will offer insights into this under-researched population. Previous studies of non-Pacific Islander college students show that students are more likely to remain in college when they highly identify with the university (Zea et al., 1997). Likewise, poor perceptions of the university are related to more non-persistence (dropout) decisions (Gloria, 1997). While there are few studies of ethnic minority higher education graduates, our study found that retrospectively, Pacific Islander graduates positively rated their experiences at UH Hilo.

Graduates retrospectively rated their experiences while attending UH Hilo. For each question graduates used the following rating options: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree.
This section measured how graduates thought about themselves in relation to their culture. Using a scale of 1 to 4: 1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=a lot, 4=entirely, graduates rated the extent to which they identified with their individual Pacific Islander cultures as well as their perceived relationships with other cultures.

Numerous studies in the field of higher education describe how culture may influence learning styles (Casey, 2001). While most studies recommended further research, scholars identified race and cultural identity as influencing Pacific Islander college students in academic achievement, mental wellness, interpersonal relationships and identity development (Choi, 2010). Other studies indicated that Pacific Islanders reported experiencing racism and discrimination (Choi, 2010). In a broader framework, studies related to how Pacific Islanders internalize variations of racialized images in order to understand how this impacts academic achievement and identity development is an area in need of further inquiry. The AANAPISI Research Team has charted a course to obtain information about the current context at UH Hilo, and the experiences of enrolled and recently graduate Pacific Islander students.

CULTURAL CONGRUITY (N=10)

As part of the larger AANAPISI research agenda, we are interested in how Pacific Islander students negotiate the boundaries of traditional culture while pursuing academic success. Often times, this process results in dissonance among Pacific Islander college students. Academic success by way of operating within the western construct of “individualistic” values promoted by mainstream American culture often is at the expense of “collectivistic” values characteristic of indigenous cultures (Leake & Black, 2005; Leake, Black, & Roberts, 2004).

We asked graduates to rate their perceived “fit” between their own values and the values of the university. For every question graduates used the following rating options: 
1 = strongly disagree 
2 = disagree 
3 = agree 
4 = strongly agree.

Overall, graduates perceived a positive fit between their own culture and that of the university.
For the purposes of this Research Brief, preliminary findings from the Survey of Recent Graduates address the following Research Questions:

- What are the ways that the cultural influences/backgrounds (assets/challenges) of PI students both align and conflict with the cultural norms of the institution?
- How can cultural values be incorporated into higher education policies, practices and pedagogy to promote academic success for PI students?
- To what extent does UH Hilo provide an environment that supports PI students in persisting and graduating? (Perceived comfort/ feeling of inclusion in the university setting).

**AANAPISI Research Goals:**

- Add to the knowledge base on the diversity of experiences in higher education among Pacific Islander students, a sub-population that has historically been unrecognized in educational research.
- Describe cultural and lifestyle characteristics of Pacific Islanders that impact the post-secondary educational transition process of youth who go to higher education.
- Support policy makers and leaders in making decisions that will enable Pacific Islander students to thrive in a post-secondary context.

**Summary and Implications**

The *Survey of Recent Graduates* had a low response rate of twelve students. While this sample size is quite small, the number of Pacific Islander students who graduated over the past two years (Fall 2011, 2012; Spring 2012, 2013; Summer 2012) averaged 14 per semester. Our results indicated that graduates who responded were mostly female; reported positive experiences while they attended UH Hilo; were proud to be of Pacific Islander heritage; and felt their cultural values matched that of the university’s. These positive findings may serve as contributing factors to their persistence and graduation. The findings from this initial study offer a partial understanding of the experiences of Pacific Islander students at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. Additional data collection of Pacific Islander UH Hilo graduates will take place over the next two years to further inform our study.

Graduates responded to a culminating question about their entire experience while attending UH Hilo using a four-point rating scale:

1 = Poor
2 = Fair
3 = Good
4 = Excellent

**Mean: 3.6 SD: .48**

**References**


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