

The role of Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions in reframing leadership education

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Abstract

Leadership education within postsecondary institutions has often failed to consider the ways in which Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) make sense of their leadership identity. This article explores the role that Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions have in fostering AAPI leaders through culturally relevant practices and services that recognize and embrace students' racial and ethnic backgrounds.

American higher education institutions across the nation serve as critical sites for students' leadership development (Astin & Astin, 2000). Although institutions have made efforts to operate under a leadership framework that recognizes multiculturalism (Bordas, 2012), leadership education continues to overlook the experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs; Balón, 2003; Kodama & Dugan, 2020). Furthermore, little is known about the extent to which educational institutions address leadership development for this specific community. There are, however, institutions such as Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) that are advancing this endeavour by incorporating a culturally responsive approach to leadership that recognizes AAPI identities and cultural assets.

The purpose of this article is to highlight how the AANAPISIs, a federal Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) designation established to increase and enhance the educational opportunities and experiences for AAPI students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), has reframed and addressed leadership education. First, we will provide an overview of AANAPISIs. Next, we will discuss critical issues pertaining to leadership education as it relates to AAPI students and discuss contemporary efforts that AANAPISIs have implemented to provide culturally responsive leadership education for AAPI students. Finally, we conclude the article by offering recommendations for policy and practice.

AN OVERVIEW OF AANAPISIS

The AANAPISI designation is one of the most recent classifications of MSIs. Administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), AANAPISIs (a) must have at least a 10% AAPI undergraduate population and (b) meet section 312(b) of the Higher Education Act's basic eligibility requirement of Title III and V programs (i.e., enroll a high proportion of low-income students and maintain low average educational and general expenditures; Nguyen et al., 2021). Since its inception in 2007, the AANAPISI designation has provided federal funding to 38 institutions (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), AANAPISIs were not initially established with AAPIs in mind. That is, AANAPISIs were founded as predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Due to changing demographic patterns and an increase in AAPI student enrollment, these institutions met federal eligibility requirements, and some have sought the AANAPISI grant (Espinosa et al., 2019). If awarded, these institutions typically develop AANAPISI campus programs to provide a host of academic, co-curricular, and research programming for AAPI students (Nguyen et al., 2021). Thus, these enrollment-based MSIs have a unique role in reframing certain institutional practices and services for specific student populations.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN LEADERSHIP EDUCATION FROM THE AAPI PERSPECTIVE

Postsecondary institutions' leadership education has historically underserved AAPI students. This failure to account for AAPI students is evidenced by foundational conceptualizations of leadership that determined this virtue as trait based and leader centric (Rost, 1993), which is a stark contrast to the ways many AAPIs conceptualize leadership as group oriented with an emphasis on common goals (Kim et al., 1999; Liang et al., 2002). This narrow framing is pervasive as most of the early student leadership development research has exclusively examined white students (Kodama & Dugan, 2013), while leadership education literature on AAPI students' experiences remain limited (Balón, 2003). Notably, during the 1980s and 1990s, higher education practices began to shift towards inclusive paradigms (Barnes, 2020), exploring alternative strategies to develop multicultural environments (Tierney, 1992). By the following decade, identity-based leadership frameworks emerged, suggesting students of color understood leadership concepts relationally based on their racial background that encompassed "experiences of racism, historical roots, language, biculturalism, socioeconomic status, cultural values, nonverbal communication, and assumptions about the world" (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 498).

Developing AAPI leadership programs in context to the historical and contemporary conditions of higher education have been contentious. Despite empirical evidence of the vast experiences and backgrounds from over 48 different ethnic groups (CARE, 2015), Asian American students and sometimes Pacific Islander students (Yi et al., 2020) continue to be overgeneralized through a model minority construct that deems them universally successful (Lee et al., 2009), while constraining efforts to develop programs specific to both communities (Mac et al., 2019). Moreover, Pacific Islander students' inclusion within the larger AAPI category often erases the fact that they are "underserved and possessing a socioeconomic status closer to Blacks or African Americans and Latinos than the general population" (EPIC & AAJC, 2014, p. 59). Consequently, this discriminatory culture remains present at institutions, fortifying a campus environment that alienates both Asian American and Pacific Islander students.

As institutions become more complex and diverse, leadership education programs have had to adopt interdisciplinary approaches that apply to various student populations (Owen, 2012). Contemporary notions of leadership are recognizing that each student can become a leader if given the opportunity (Eich, 2008) and if their specific developmental needs are integrated in the leadership program (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Accelerating this transformative direction are leadership models that incorporate the racialized experiences of students and how they understand leadership as well as consider students' intersecting social identities and the communities they aim to serve (Liang et al., 2002; Manzano et al., 2017). While traditional frameworks of leadership (i.e., positional leadership, individualism) remain pervasive as many institutions continue to teach in culturally neutral ways (Quaye & Harper, 2007), AANAPISIs are advancing equitable and inclusionary practices by centring the diverse learning experiences of underserved AAPI students.

AANAPISIs AND LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

AANAPISI serve as unique and ideal vehicles to offer critical approaches to leadership education and development for AAPI students. Research demonstrates that AANAPISIs achieve student-centred and community-oriented practices that impact both the campus and general student outcomes (Museus et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2018). Many of these practices result from collaborative approaches (Alcantar et al., 2019; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019), as AANAPISIs demonstrate cross-division and cross-campus efforts in rethinking and reexamining educational interventions that are better suited for AAPI students. Furthermore, AANAPISIs model best practices by continuously collecting data from their current AAPI student populations and use the data to redesign programs responsive to the diverse AAPI communities reflected on their campus (Venturanza & Nguyen, 2020). AANAPISI programs also incorporate holistic frameworks and approaches to help students explore and reflect about dominant racialized narratives while cultivating student agency (Nguyen, 2019). These innovative approaches strongly emphasize AAPI students' cultural assets to facilitate their learning, persistence, retention, and graduation (CARE, 2014).

AANAPISI leadership programs

AANAPISIs offer a variety of programs and services catered to developing AAPI students' leadership identity and skills. Most notably, AANAPISI programs with an investment and focus on leadership education provide AAPI students with various opportunities to engage in activities and discussions that demystify notions of traditional leadership; gain skills through experiential learning in areas that intersect with AAPI community issues; and collaborate with campus and community partners to expand students' leadership repertoire. Demonstrating these exemplary efforts is Hunter College, a public university in New York. The Hunter College AANAPISI Project (HCAP) offers two semester-long programs to develop their AAPI undergraduate students' leadership skills and identity. The HCAP Leaders Program provides students with leadership coaching, skills training, and mentorship. Students can also participate in trainings that focus on leadership skills, public speaking, facilitation, resource sharing, and Asian American community issues. Upon completing the summer training, students are positioned as peer leaders on campus to help other students navigate their collegiate experience. They are also given hands-on training by serving as co-leads to plan and facilitate campus and community events throughout their fall and spring semesters.

HCAP's other program, the Leadership Internship Program, places AAPI undergraduate students at an Asian American community-based organization. The program's key objective is to provide students with practical experiences in an environment they can explore, examine, and engage in activities connected to issues in public health, housing rights, immigrant rights, and gender equity. In connecting students with AAPI community-based organizations, students are able to develop a deeper understanding of the needs of the AAPI community while also practicing their own leadership skills in the field they are interested in. Providing 10 to 15 service hours a week, these internships offer a comprehensive experience for students to access individual coaching and evaluation, reflective learning opportunities, job application preparation, career exploration, and skill-building and professional development interventions.

Similar to the HCAP's advancements in developing AAPI student leadership, Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC), a public community college in California, works with AAPI students beginning in the summer and then throughout the academic year. Through the Arise Program, Mt. SAC's AANAPISI program, students interested in leadership education can participate in the Arise Student Leadership Retreat, which takes place each summer and is offered over 3 days. The goal of the leadership retreat is to provide AAPI students with the confidence and motivation to view themselves as leaders on campus and in their communities, and then engage in leadership activities during the academic year. Given the demographics of the region, Arise includes a focus on Pacific Islander students, which is a population that is often overlooked (Teranishi et al., 2019). The retreat takes a unique approach to leadership education. That is, they believe that students with little to no leadership experience benefit from participating in leadership education as a way to increase students' understanding of leadership through their racial and ethnic identity.

Additionally, the retreat serves as a bridge between AAPI students' two academic years, while also providing them with new leadership skill sets and perspectives. During the retreat, AAPI students engage in a series of culturally and ethnically specific workshops, peer mentor activities, team building experiences, and reflections among other activities. In doing so, they practice different leadership styles (e.g., community-based leadership, multicultural leadership), learn about different frameworks that ultimately guide these approaches (e.g., social change model, community cultural wealth), and engage in critical self-reflection and community-based discussions. Overall, the Arise Leadership Retreat aims to demystify how AAPI students see themselves as leaders and agents of change within their various communities.

Theoretical frameworks

To help students reframe leadership, these programs rely on various theoretical frameworks to guide their work. Leadership education must account for the ways that AAPI students understand leadership, which is often rooted in a community-oriented fashion. At both Hunter College and Mt. SAC, an important aspect and goal is to ensure pathways for AAPI students to engage in leadership education that recognizes and incorporates their diverse experiences. AANAPISI programs support students in their leadership development and consider the ways in which their cultural values—which may not always align with dominant perceptions of leadership—are still an integral part of their leadership development.

At Mt. SAC, the Arise Program staff members conduct workshops utilizing Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework to explore the ways in which students' cultural values, lessons, and traditions have cultivated their leadership skills. For example, AAPI

students recognize that their ability to speak more than one language, especially when their native language is not English, is an asset they possess within their repertoire of leadership skills. Through dialogue, students learn about their shared cultural anchors and engage in conversations that reframe leadership from an asset-based perspective. Similarly, Hunter College employs the community cultural wealth framework throughout their semester-long programming. As one-on-one coaching and mentorship is embedded in both of HCAP's leadership offerings, the emphasis on AAPI students' cultural wealth is discussed and connected to the student's existing leadership skills.

Given that AAPI students experience oppression similar to other marginalized communities (e.g., other students of color and first-generation college students; Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Museus, 2011), AAPI specific student development frameworks (Kodama et al., 2002) are also integrated in many AANAPISI leadership programs. Using race-based student development frameworks, students are guided on making connections to their racial and ethnic identity and its influence in shaping their collegiate experience and beyond. These frameworks also lead to a focus on servingness (Garcia et al., 2019; see also the HSI article in this issue), which involves institutional efforts that go beyond enrolling specific student populations and requires a holistic understanding of AAPI students. The use of these frameworks facilitates AAPI students' increased awareness of their racial and ethnic identity and its connection to their leadership potential, all within a supportive environment.

The impact of AANAPISIs' leadership education efforts

Leadership education and development at AANAPISIs is not simply directed at a position that a student may hold; instead, leadership is operationalized as a process. More specifically, leadership education at AANAPISIs empowers AAPI students to discover their leadership characteristics and provides an intentional space for students to examine their racial and ethnic identity and cultural values as a critical and necessary aspect of leadership. In doing so, leadership education focuses on accepting and demonstrating a collective responsibility for self and others in various relational contexts: as a student, as part of the workforce, and as part of an institution and a community. The consideration of these outcomes reframes what is traditionally expected and measured in leadership education to include the lived realities of AAPI students and how they engage in various spaces on campus and in their communities. Thus, including social change, activism, and racial justice as outcomes for leadership programs (Manzano et al., 2017) more accurately depicts the ongoing work of AANAPISIs. Given the multiple approaches that AAPI students have taken with respect to leadership, AANAPISIs can play a critical role in ensuring that leadership development for AAPI students moves beyond, quite simply, how institutions structure opportunities and experiences for engagement and participation.

Through AANAPISI programs, leadership is co-constructed with students to align more familiar concepts from students' homes and neighbourhoods, emphasizing how contextual their leadership identity is to their lived experiences. For example, understanding familial ties to immigration and displacement can help AAPI students understand the ways in which their families have demonstrated leadership in their pursuit of a better life for their family and community, even while continuing to overcome systems of oppression and exclusion within America (Canlas, 2020). Thus, AAPI students' racial and ethnic identities are foundational for all leadership programming. As these students engage with intentionally designed leadership education, they not only transform into leaders, but remain a part

of the AANAPISI and AAPI community on campus, guiding and supporting incoming AAPI students and strengthening their institutions and their communities.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Leadership development for AAPI students involves an intentional reframing of leadership education. When working with AAPI students, understanding who they are and their families' lived experiences are important considerations for administrators and practitioners to design and implement leadership education (Museus et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2018). AANAPISIs serve as an ideal vehicle to provide programming to design and implement leadership development education for AAPI students. In doing this work, AANAPISIs must be invested in and accountable to their purpose: serving AAPI students.

Challenges

In order to serve AAPI students effectively, especially with regards to leadership development, certain challenges must be addressed. These constraints are found both at the policy and institutional levels. As a federally funded program, AANAPISIs require annual appropriations from Congress, which appears to be more contentious than ever. More specifically, AANAPISIs are the least funded MSI designation categorically, as well as per institution (Nguyen et al., 2020) and per student (Anguiano & Navarro, 2020). This limited funding reduces the number of awards that can be given to a high number of institutions eligible to become AANAPISIs. Increases in funding for AANAPISIs should not, however, be at the expense of other MSIs. In order to create greater educational equity for all students of color, MSIs must coordinate and advocate for one another collectively.

At the institutional level, and for AANAPISIs with dedicated leadership initiatives, these co-curricular activities are typically offered through an AANAPISI program on campus rather than a strategy or leadership outcome that is built into the fabric of the entire institution. As noted earlier, AANAPISIs, like other enrollment-based MSIs, are PWIs that over time have become AANAPISIs. Thus, these institutions were designed, and many still operate, without AAPI students in mind. Given this reality, there still remains a limited understanding of AAPIs and their educational experiences. In some cases, there remains a widespread lack of awareness by many campus community members that their institution is an AANAPISI or is even eligible for AANAPISI funding (Alcantar, Pazich et al., 2019). As a result, this forces AANAPISI staff to defend, explain, and rationalize the need for and existence of services, including leadership development, for AAPI students (Nguyen, 2019). Alternatively, Pacific Islander experiences are often misunderstood due to the conflation of AAPIs (EPIC & AAJC, 2014; Hall, 2015), especially within the realm of higher education research (Teranishi et al., 2019) where both Asian American and Pacific Islander students are problematically aggregated as one group (Yi et al., 2020). These inaccurate, harmful, and dangerous perspectives are incompatible with notions of leadership for AAPI students (Venturanza & Nguyen, 2020).

Recommendations

As more AAPI students enroll in postsecondary education, more institutions will become eligible AANAPISIs. As a result, there is great potential to address the many challenges

regarding AAPI students' leadership education and development. At the policy level, and perhaps most self-evident, the federal government should appropriate more funding for AANAPISIs. This will allow for a greater number of institutions to be funded as well as increase the amount of funding per institution. Additionally, the ED maintains flexibility to create prioritization categories for the AANAPISI grant competition. Thus, ED can create a prioritization category for leadership education in its next grant cycle, thereby encouraging more institutions to include leadership initiatives in their AANAPISI programs.

At the institution level, administrators, staff, and faculty should recognize that AAPI communities are not monolithic and dislodge any assumptions and stereotypes about AAPI students that may inform these institutional agents' approach to supporting this population. A concrete step to begin this process requires an accurate accounting of AAPI students on campus. In other words, institutions must disaggregate AAPI data in order to capture the full picture and complexity of AAPI communities on campus (CARE, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2015). Additionally, in designing leadership programs, AANAPISI staff should construct initiatives that account for the diversity of experiences within and between AAPI communities. Collaborating across campus and building partnerships with institutional agents that best understand AAPI communities is a useful strategy. Faculty from academic departments, such as Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies, and student affairs professionals from AAPI resource centres are some of the most qualified and experienced campus resources to lead or partner with on the construction of an AANAPISI-based leadership program. However, these institutional units are often understaffed and overworked, and calling upon them requires serious consideration as to how AANAPISI resources can be used to enhance, rather than overload, their work.

Finally, empowering, faculty, staff, and students to make these changes is key to a holistic approach to leadership education. Thus, institutions must not be resistant to the change that will occur in providing leadership development and education for AAPI students. Rather, they should embrace the work of AANAPISI programs on campus, which can also serve as a model for other racially based leadership programs.

CONCLUSION

Though efforts to incorporate a multiculturalism framework in leadership education are now more common, AAPIs students continue to be situated at the margins with regards to these programs (Liang et al., 2002; Manzano et al., 2017). As traditional understandings of leadership prevail as common practice, this article provides an understanding that these conventional efforts are a disservice to AAPI students as this approach does not incorporate their cultural practices and perspectives. Given that the mission of the AANAPISI designation is designed with AAPI students in mind, these designated institutions have a moral obligation to holistically develop AAPI students in preparation for future employment, leadership within and beyond their communities, and participation within the larger social fabric.

While traditional leadership education may be geared towards students who have some level of exposure to leadership (e.g., resident assistants, orientation leaders, and officials within student government), a critical juncture for AAPI leadership development is the nexus between AAPI identity, cultural orientations, and leadership in practice. Demonstrated by the programs we have highlighted, AAPI students' authentic leadership development needs are met by grounding programs and services in these students' cultural epistemology. The integration of AAPI identity constructs informed by socio-historical contexts (e.g., colonization, immigration, generation) and a critical understanding of the

heterogeneity within the AAPI community through shared and distinct experiences are all necessary for the holistic development of AAPI students' sense of self and their relation to the world.

Preparing students' participation in the workforce, engagement in social justice activism, and leadership and advocacy within the family, community, and other spaces they may inhabit can be accomplished through intentionally developing an AAPI student leadership program. As AAPI students work towards transfer or graduation from an AANAPISI, administrators, faculty, and staff must empower AAPI students to fulfill their greatest potential as students, self-advocates, collaborators, and change agents. Racially equitable leadership development for AAPIs must decolonize western leadership paradigms and centre cultural anchors, values, and practices. The context of an institution's geographic location and the uniqueness of the AAPI student body are also critical considerations. AAPI student characteristics, student ethnic diversity, institution type, and other specific needs of the students at a given campus should ultimately inform programming. The future direction for AANAPISI leadership education should effectively connect students to the wisdom of their community in order to guide their individual leadership aspirations and responsibilities, as well as inspire them to confidently operate and assert themselves from a place of authenticity.

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