

A photograph of three people sitting at a table in a cafe or office setting. In the foreground, a young man with dark hair, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, is smiling warmly at the camera. Behind him, a woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a yellow top, is also smiling. To the left, another man in a dark blue t-shirt is smiling. On the table, there are two white coffee cups and a small potted lavender plant. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a modern interior with large windows.

Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions

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A primer on Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).

In order to increase the ability of institutions to serve Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, the Higher Education Opportunity Act authorized the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) program in 2009. Two years later, AANAPISIs were incorporated into Title III of the Higher Education Act and were officially added to the list of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) alongside Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). The AANAPISI program allows eligible institutions of higher education to improve their academic quality, increase their self-sufficiency, and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the success of AAPI students.¹

AANAPISI grants were authorized by the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007, which granted eligible institutions access to a limited pool of federal funds. To be eligible for AANAPISI status, an institution's undergraduate student enrollment must be at least 10% Asian American or Native American Pacific Islander. In addition to being an accredited institution, schools need to demonstrate that at least half of their enrolled students received federal financial aid and must maintain less-than-average expenditures per FTE student. Institutions that meet these standards can apply to be designated as an AANAPISI by the U.S. Department of Education. Once an institution has been designated as an AANAPISI, they may apply for discretionary grants, up to \$350,000 per year for five years, with a cumulative maximum award of \$1,750,000.²

AANAPISI grants encourage schools to provide students with support services, develop summer bridge programs between two-year and four-year colleges and universities, strengthen student advising and academic support, provide professional development to faculty, and develop an endowment fund to meet costs for maintenance and technological upgrades. AANAPISI funding also provides resources to increase access to leadership development, create first-year experience programs, establish student learning communities, and provide mentorship opportunities for students. AANAPISI dollars may be used to conduct research on the AAPI population and to provide staff development opportunities to help AANAPISI administrators, faculty, and campus personnel better understand the complexities of the AAPI communities.³

In FY21, the most recent available data, 32 AANAPISIs received funding, for a total distribution of \$9.6 million dollars, an increase of \$839, 326 from FY 2020, when 28 grants were awarded. A complete list of currently funded AANAPISIs can be found here.⁴

1 U.S. Department of Education AANAPISI Program: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/aanapi/index.html>. An institution of higher education (IHE) may have a Title V, Part A, Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) grant and a Title III, Part F, AANAPISI grant simultaneously. An institution may not have a Title V, Part A and Title III, Part A simultaneously. An institution can have any Title III, Part F grants simultaneously.

2 U.S. Department of Education AANAPISI FAQ: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/aanapi/faq.html#q5>

3 U.S. Department of Education AANAPISI FAQ: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/aanapi/faq.html#q11>

4 U.S. Department of Education AANAPISI Program: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/aanapi/funding.html>

Enrollment/Demographics

The types of institutions designated as AANAPISIs are wide-ranging and include community colleges, regional campuses, and state flagship institutions. Most are concentrated in areas with high percentages of AAPIs, including California, Hawaii, Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Texas, Washington, and Guam. The number of institutions designated as AANAPISIs has fluctuated over time, from 116 institutions in 2009, to 133 in 2016, up to 192 in 2022. Many more institutions qualify for AANAPISI designation than are awarded limited funding; only 32 of 192 eligible institutions received federal AANAPISI dollars in 2022.⁵

Who AANAPISIs Serve

While AANAPISIs serve all students, they play a critical role in educating the AAPI population, a community that is one of the fastest-growing populations in the United States. The current AAPI population is 22.9 million in the United States. Given rapid increases in the AAPI population, the number of institutions meeting AANAPISI eligibility requirements is expected to rise.

The AAPI student population is considerably diverse and includes more than 48 ethnicities, over 300 languages, and a variety of immigration histories, cultures, religions, and socioeconomic statuses. According to the 2020 American Community Survey, of the 23.1 million Asian Americans, the largest ethnic groups were Chinese (5.1 million), Asian Indian (4.5 million), and Filipino (4.1 million). Together, these groups made up 60% of the Asian American population.

AAPIs in Higher Education

AAPI students are often left out of conversations about students of color and are seldom recognized in academic research as facing challenges similar to other racial minorities. Instead, when AAPIs are included in the discourse on access and equity in higher education, they are often referred to as the “model minority,” a reference point against which other groups are compared.⁶ Researchers and policymakers often assume that all of these students have high educational achievement and tend to overlook the need for AAPI student supports.

The model minority myth stems from looking at the AAPI community as a monolith. In truth, there are great disparities in academic achievement and economic status by sub-groups. Ignoring these disparities has led to entire ethnic sub-groups being underserved by higher education. For instance, 22% of Burmese, 26% of Laotian, and 28% of Pacific Islander adults over the age of 25 have completed an associate degree or higher, while 64% of Japanese, 65% of Korean, and 80% of Asian Indians adults have completed an associate degree or higher.⁷

Challenges Facing AAPI Students

There are a number of challenges facing AAPI students in the U.S. higher education system: parent education levels, language barriers, issues with immigration status, lack of family support and guidance, and the prevailing climate of their institutions. Sixty percent of AAPI students are also tasked with playing the roles of translator, caretaker, breadwinner, and cultural ambassador for their families while enrolled in school.⁸ These demands can place physical, emotional, financial, and mental strain on students that puts them at risk of not finishing their degree.

5 U.S. Department of Education AANAPISI Program: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/idades/eligibility.html#el-inst>

6 Teranishi, R. “Asians in the Ivory Tower: Dilemmas of Racial Inequality in American Higher Education.” Teachers College Press: New York, NY (2010).

7 Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_104.40.asp?current=yes

8 “A National Report on the Needs and Experiences of Low-Income Asian American and Pacific Islander Scholarship Recipients.” Asian and Pacific Islander Scholarship Fund, 2013. Retrieved from: https://apiascholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/APIASF_2013_perspectives.pdf

Large proportions of AAPI students also arrive on campus with serious financial need, lack of preparation for college-level work, and — often as first-generation students — a status that comes with its own set of challenges.⁹ Poverty affects many AAPI students and their families and presents serious challenges to affording, attending, and completing college. Twenty percent of AAPI students receive a Pell grant and the number of AAPI students living in poverty increased by 38% between 2007 and 2011.

Impact of AANAPISIs

AANAPISIs are seeing success in serving many in their communities, particularly with respect to enrolling and conferring degrees to AAPI students. Though only a small number of institutions are recognized as AANAPISIs, they enroll half of all AAPI students, confer half of all AAPI associate degrees, and a quarter of all AAPI bachelor's degrees.¹⁰

According to a 2014 National Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Research in Education report, AANAPISIs also serve some of the most underrepresented and highest need communities of AAPI students. For example, the neighborhoods served by the University of Hawaii at Hilo have an average poverty rate for Pacific Islanders of 20%— nearly twice the national rate of 12%. In the neighborhoods served by South Seattle College in Washington State, one of the first designated AANAPISIs, 58% of Asian Americans and 71% of Pacific Islanders report having only a high school diploma or less. These types of findings are consistent with the findings of many other funded AANAPISIs.¹¹

AANAPISIs are also succeeding in creating partnerships with other MSIs to serve even more minority students. Many AANAPISIs serve large percentages of Latino students and apply to receive funding designated for Hispanic Serving Institutions as well.¹² South Seattle College started the Strengthen Pathways for AAPI Students to Become Teachers program through a partnership with four-year Hispanic Serving Institution Heritage University in Toppenish, WA.¹³ This provided opportunities for South Seattle students to earn teaching degrees and diversified Heritage University, which historically had very low numbers of AAPI students enrolled overall (less than 1%) and few AAPI students each year in their education program. This partnership demonstrates how MSIs can work together to serve multiple populations facing similar challenges.

The Future of AANAPISIs

The AANAPISI program has been the most significant federal investment in the AAPI student community to date. Not only does it recognize the unique needs that AAPI students may face at the postsecondary level, but it also provides resources to increase completion rates, particularly among low-income AAPI students. While much remains to be learned about this federal program, AANAPISIs are positioned to improve enrollment, retention, and graduation rates for AAPI students.

9 Measuring the Impact of MSI-funded Programs on Student Success: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573714.pdf>

10 The Relevance of Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders in the College Completion Agenda." National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011. Retrieved from: http://care.gseis.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2011_CARE_Report.pdf
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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131725.2017.1280759?journalCode=utef20>

11 Ibid.

12 U.S. Department of Education AANAPISI Program: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/aanapi/index.html>

13 Measuring the Impact of MSI-funded Programs on Student Success: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573714.pdf>

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- [xii]Ibid.
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[i] An institution of higher education (IHE) may have a Title V, Part A, Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) grant and a Title III, Part F, AANAPISI grant simultaneously. An institution may not have a Title V, Part A and Title III, Part A simultaneously. An institution can have any Title III, Part F grants simultaneously.