

Viewing Higher Education as a Sea of Islands:

The Impact of Student Engagement on Cultural Validation of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
Students

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College completion is an ongoing concern for educators, policymakers, and practitioners. National data trends reveal that the six-year graduation rate for college students hovers near 60% for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year postsecondary institutions (NCES 2016). These rates vary across ethnic/racial groups, with Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders exhibiting the highest rates of attainment (AAPI; 70%), followed by White (59.4%), Hispanic (53%), Black (41%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (40.6%) students. Differences exist within the AAPI racial category as well, with the graduation rate for Asian Americans at 70% and Pacific Islanders at 50%. Moreover, there are disparities between different AAPI ethnic groups. For example, within the Asian American group, 76% of Asian Indian, 52% of Chinese, and 12% of Laotian adults over 25 years old have a bachelor's degree. Among Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders (NHPI), no ethnic groups have rates have a bachelor's degree attainment rate among those 25 years and over that is equal to or higher than the national average of 28%. For example, Native Hawaiians (17%), Marshallese (4%), and Samoans (10%) all have baccalaureate degree attainment rates far below the national average (Museus, 2014). Demographic information compiled by community advocates, scholars, and state and federal agencies reveals pervasive educational inequality for the NHPI community at all levels of education (EPIC & AAJC, 2014; Museus, 2013; UCLA 2006). Despite these disparities, there is very little information on Pacific Islander college students and their experiences in higher education.

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander¹ students are often the most invisible populations on U.S. college and university campuses, even at a time when Pacific Islander cultures are ubiquitous (Disney's *Moana*, the ascendance of popular Polynesian athletes/celebrities such as Troy Polamalu or Dwayne "the Rock" Johnson, *lu'au* themed party decorations). Due to overreliance on the "Asian American Pacific Islander" or "Asian Pacific Islander" racial category, institutions that tend to aggregate "NHPI"

¹ In this paper, Pacific Islander (PI) and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) are used interchangeably.

into “AAPI” may not be aware of the unique needs of this small population. As a result, we know very little about this small population or how these students are faring in higher education.

The purpose of this paper is to present emerging research on Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, drawn from the National Survey of Student Engagement survey data. We begin by introducing the conceptual frameworks that guided this project: student engagement and cultural relevance. Then, we turn to the literature on NHPI college students, and provide an overview of the small but growing body of work that describes the experiences, conditions, and outcomes of this small population, with close attention to research on both student engagement and culture. The remaining portion of the paper presents the results of our analyses on NHPI student engagement and cultural validation.

Theoretical Frameworks in Research on College Student Success

Higher education scholars have focused much time and attention on the issue of college retention and graduation. For several decades, Tinto’s theory of student integration (1987) has dominated research on college student retention. Braxton (2005) points out that it has reached paradigmatic status, manifested in hundreds of citations and related dissertations. Tinto derived his theory from the work of Van Gennep, a social anthropologist who studied rites of passage in tribal communities, and how a person moved through different stages to transition from childhood to adulthood within a culture. The idea of linear movement was key, and how “in that movement, the individual or group leaves an old territory or community (separation), in some fashion crosses a border...to a new setting (transition), and takes up residence in the new location or community (incorporation)” (Tinto, 1987, p. 93). Tinto (1987) theorized that student adjustment to college could be explained by a similar process or movement by students separating from their home communities, transitioning from high school to college, and becoming integrated into the culture of their college.

Tinto also relied on Durkheim's theory of suicide to explain student integration into the college community. Durkheim posits that egotistical suicide takes place when an individual is unable to cement their membership in a group or society. In Durkheim's theory, two forms of integration – social and intellectual – are required for membership into any human society, and it is the absence of membership that leads to egotistical suicide. Tinto's theory follows a similar line of logic, positing that the student's interaction with a college's formal and informal (or *academic* and *social*) systems can lead to departure from the institution. External pressures may also influence a student's choice to depart. Thus, the extent to which the student interacts with the academic and social environments of the college or university is related to their likelihood to persist (or depart). Overall, the model suggests that "individual integrative experiences in the formal and informal domains of the academic and social systems of the college are *central* to the process of departure, especially that which take place voluntarily" (Tinto, 1987, p. 120; emphasis mine).

Tinto's theory laid the groundwork for much of the literature on college student retention, persistence, and departure. One of the frameworks that draws upon Tinto's work is student engagement, characterized as "participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes," (Harper & Quaye, p. 2). The term is "usually used to represent constructs such as quality of effort and involvement in productive learning activities" (Kuh, 2009). Engagement has evolved over several decades, incorporating concepts such as social and academic integration, student involvement (Astin, 1984), good practices in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), and time on task (Tyler, 1930s; Kuh, 2009). Born in the late 1990s in response to growing public attention to collegiate rankings, as well as state and federal concerns about accountability, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was created to provide institutions a way to understand the quality of student learning and the overall educational experience (Kuh, 2001). More broadly, NSSE was designed to stimulate national discourse about the

markers of quality in undergraduate education. The introduction of NSSE as an assessment tool cemented student engagement as a fixture in higher education lexicon.

However, there have been important critiques leveraged at Tinto's interactionist theory, and particular concerns about the theory's flexibility to accommodate the experiences of minority students (e.g., Braxton et al., 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1999). Museus (2014) characterized these critiques of Tinto's theory as follows: the *cultural foundations* critique, which points to the implicit cultural bias of the theory and the influence on students coming from non-majority backgrounds; the *self-determination* critique, which points out that the onus is placed heavily on the student to succeed in college, without enough emphasis on the role that the institution plays in fostering success; the *integration viability* critique, which was leveraged at the constructs of academic and social integration, and the empirical evidence in support of those constructs; and finally, the *psychological dimension* critique, which examined the failure of most research based on Tinto's theory to account for the psychological dimension of student success, and instead focuses heavily on behavioral measures. Scholars have raised similar concerns about scholarship on student engagement.

These critiques led to the development of important new theories on college student success, and helped to uncover different elements of the college experience that had not been explored. Based on these critiques, scholars focused on the experiences of minority students have either revised these models (i.e., Nora and Cabrera, 1996) or diverged from them conceptually (i.e., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon, 1994; Tierney 1999). Museus' Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) framework of student success builds on and extends the work of these and many other scholars to shift the paradigm toward a more serious consideration of culture and how it shapes the experiences and outcomes of college students (Museus, 2014). This theory offers two important features: it considers the way that culture (both cultures of origin and campus culture) shapes the experiences and outcomes of diverse students, and it offers a set of testable constructs that can be quantified and validated.

Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model

The CECE model posits that external influences (employment, finances) and precollege inputs (demographic characteristics, academic preparation) shape individual influences (motivation, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, intent to persist) and success outcomes for diverse college students (Museus, 2014, p. 207). The model also introduces a set of nine indicators that describe the types of campus environments that are positively associated with positive individual influences (sense of belonging, academic dispositions, and academic performance), which in turn are positively related to success outcomes (e.g., learning, persistence, degree completion). These nine CECE indicators can be lumped into two categories that include indicators of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness. For the purposes of the current analysis, we focus on the cultural relevance indicators.

Cultural relevance indicators focus on the ways in which campus environments are relevant to the cultural backgrounds and identities of diverse students. *Cultural familiarity* refers to campus spaces for students to connect with faculty, staff, and peers who share and understand their cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences. *Culturally relevant knowledge* has to do with opportunities for students to learn about their own cultural communities via culturally relevant curricular and co-curricular opportunities. *Cultural community service* includes opportunities for students to give back to and positively transform their communities. *Meaningful cross-cultural engagement* is facilitated by programs and practices that facilitate educationally meaningful cross-cultural interactions among their students that focus on solving real social and political problems; and finally, the construct at the core of this research project. Finally, *cultural validation*, which refers to campus cultures that validate the cultural backgrounds, knowledge, and identities of diverse students. The concept of cultural validation, in particular, is central to this study. Rendón (1994) first introduced the concept of cultural validation into the higher education literature, noting the ways in which culturally diverse students articulated the importance of validation as a motivating factor for their success. Rendón pointed out that educators on

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a college campus had to take an active role in fostering validation, reaching out to students, and promoting an interpersonal, connected environment. Cultural validation has become a widely used theory for education scholars seeking to understand the experiences of diverse students, and is commonly used alongside both traditional and emergent frameworks such as critical race theory.

Pacific Islanders in Higher Education

In a 2008 *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* article, Kauanui (2008) pointedly asked, “Where are Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders in higher education?” Her question was timely, given that over a decade had passed since the U.S. Office of Management and Budget had issued Directive 15 in 1997, mandating the disaggregation of Pacific Islanders from the Asian American racial category in the federal government. As one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States (EPIC & AAJC, 2014), Pacific Islanders have slowly emerged within national consciousness, despite the long history of imperialism, colonization, and economic and political affiliation that characterizes the relationship between the U.S. and the Pacific region.

Scholarship on Pacific Islanders is hard to find. Several publications provide descriptive or demographic analysis of education issues for Pacific Islanders (EPIC & AAJC, 2014; UCLA, 2006; Benham, 2006; Wright & Balutski, 2013), offering sober statistics on low levels of retention, degree attainment, and high levels of college attrition. Benham provides a thorough examination of the literature on education issues for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) and what educational institutions can do to ensure the academic achievement of NHPI children and youth. She scans national and institution-based databases for information, covering both published and unpublished conceptual, empirical, and applied work in both mainstream and native academic venues. Additionally, she discusses areas of teaching and learning that require further research, including alternative pedagogy, teacher preparation, and culturally relevant assessment practices. She concludes with recommendations aimed

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at Pacific Islander researchers, emphasizing the need for more culturally relevant research on, and with, these communities.

Regarding higher education, the bulk of literature on NHPI experiences is focused on Native Hawaiian students in Hawaii (Hagedorn, Lester, Moon, & Tibbetts, 2006; Hokoana & Oliveira, 2012; Ichiyama, McQuarrie, & Ching, 1996; Makuakane-Drechsel & Hagedorn, 2000; Museus, Mueller, & Aquino, 2014; Ogata, Sheehey & Noonan, 2006; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008; Thomas, Kana'iaupuni, Balutski & Freitas, 2012). For example, Hokoana and Oliveira (2012) provide several examples of the factors that increase college success for Native Hawaiian students, such as student engagement in educationally effective activities, and a supportive college environment. These factors became an important feature of a new initiative aimed at targeting learning communities, financial aid workshops, and first-year experience programs to provide support for Native Hawaiian students at a community college in Hawaii. Their findings corroborated a quantitative study (n=2,516) conducted by Hagedorn, Lester, Moon and Tibbetts (2006) on Native Hawaiian students and their journey from the Kamehameha Schools (private schools established for Native Hawaiian students) through higher education. Their research focused on precollege variables (such as high school grade point average, socioeconomic status, and family support) to understand factors that predicted college degree attainment. They found that, for Native Hawaiian community college students, feeling a sense of belonging to the Hawaiian culture while in college was increased the likelihood of bachelor's degree acquisition by 7%. More recently, Thomas and colleagues (2012) underscored the importance of cultural validation in supporting Native Hawaiian students navigating undergraduate education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Widening the lens, there is a limited, but growing, body of scholarship on the experiences of other Pacific Islander student populations across the continental United States. Much of this research is either demographic in nature (for example, EPIC & AAJC, 2014; UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) or focused on barriers to access, retention, or persistence (Ah Sam &

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Robinson, 1998; Lee & Kumashiro, 2005; Saltiban, 2012; Tran, Wong, Wright, Fa'avae, Cheri, Wat, Camacho, & Foo, 2010; Tsutsumoto, 1998). However, recent scholarship on institutions designated as Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) has offered perspectives on the experiences of Pacific Islander college students. For example, Gasman and Conrad (2015) conducted a case study of a residential community at the College of the Marshall Islands, and found that access to culturally relevant and community-oriented practices, programs and spaces, as well as close engagement with faculty and staff, has led to increased grades, retention, and completion for the predominantly indigenous Marshallese student population. Saelua, Wright, Kukahiko, Aina, and Thornton (2017), former Pacific Islander undergraduate and graduate students at UCLA, share how access to culturally validating, proactive faculty and staff helped them to feel a sense of belonging on their campus, motivating them to create one of the first student-initiated, student-run outreach programs that specifically target Pacific Islander high school students.

In this review of higher education literature, we begin by tracing the lineage of theories that are seminal for the conceptual frameworks used in this study. We traced the roots of the student engagement framework to Tinto's interactionist theory, and followed with a discussion of some of the critiques that were leveraged against this theory. These critiques led to a flowering of research emphasizing the importance of culture, particularly for understanding the needs and experiences of minoritized student populations. More recently, the culturally engaging campus environments model has emerged as a new way to think about the experiences and success of diverse college students, with an emphasis on cultural validation as one of several indicators for educational environments that allow diverse students to thrive. By honing in on culture – both institutional culture, and student culture of origin – as a critical element for understanding the experiences of diverse student populations, scholars in our field have become attuned to the need for research that is culturally engaged, or focused on specific cultural communities, such as Pacific Islanders. The existing literature on this racial group

indicates that access to culturally validating and relevant environments are important factors for supporting Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander college students. While there is some evidence to support the need for culturally validating environments for NHPI students, more empirical research is warranted. As it stands, the literature is primarily qualitative in nature; there is little quantitative evidence to support the relationship between cultural validation and student outcomes. Furthermore, while it seems clear that campus environments and interactions that affect cultural validation, there is little evidence to suggest the types of environments, or specific forms of interaction, that help NHPI students feel culturally validated.

The evolution of student success discourse has resulted in several strands of research that occupy dominant positions within our field, and it is important to acknowledge the strengths and limitations of these frameworks before employing them in conducting research. Considered alongside the small body of literature on NHPIS, it became clear that information on how NPHI students engage in educationally purposeful activities could add significantly to what we know about this small population; *and* it is also important to understand what, if any, elements of their campus environment are connected to validating their cultures, which positively influences student outcomes or this community. Put differently, we decided to enter uncharted waters and use this project to bridge the parallel universe of student engagement and cultural relevance. In doing so, we hope that this paper can serve as a vehicle to bring together a conversation about student engagement, culturally engaging campus environments, and cultural validation, which are typically held apart by higher education scholars.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the elements of a campus environment that influence cultural validation for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander first-year and senior students. The following research questions guided this study:

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1. How does cultural validation for NHPI students compare to students with other racial/ethnic identities?
2. To what extent are NHPI students' experiences with effective educational practices (specifically, Supportive Campus Environment, Effective Teaching Practices, Quality of Interactions, Student-Faculty Interactions, and Collaborative Learning) related to cultural validation?

Through this project, we hope to contribute to the limited but growing body of scholarship on NHPI college students, and provide new information about the aspects of a campus environment that are associated with cultural validation.

Methods

Data Source

The data for this study come from the 2017 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE measures the time and effort that undergraduate first-years and seniors invest in activities that relate to student learning and development. More specifically, NSSE asks students how often they engage in various effective educational practices, their perceptions of their college environment, and how they spend their time in and out of the classroom. In 2017, NSSE was administered at 725 four-year colleges and universities across the United States and Canada. Institutions are able to append Topical Modules, short sets of questions on designated topics, so that institutions can collect more in-depth data on content areas that are of importance to them. In 2017, a new Topical Module, Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity was offered by NSSE, and 131 institutions chose to append this item set to their NSSE administration. This Topical Module examines the environments, processes, and activities that reflect the engagement and validation of cultural diversity. A subset of this Topical Module, items about people valuing the knowledge and experiences of students' cultural community are the focus of this study. These items were adapted with permission from the

Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Survey, and were developed to measure the cultural validation indicator.

Respondents

The respondents for this study consist of over 19,000 first year and 25,000 senior students who attended institutions that administered the Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity Topical Module and responded to an item about their racial or ethnic identification. Around a third of respondents identified as men and two-thirds as women. The majority of students identified as straight with smaller proportions identifying non-straight. Around half of students reported receiving mostly A grades at their institution. Around two in five students are first-generation students, and around four in five are of traditional college-going age. Most students are enrolled full time, and about a quarter of students are in a STEM major. Very few of the respondents took all of their courses online. More details about respondents by racial or ethnic identification can be found in Table 1.

Measures

Cultural Validation. The focus of this study is a subset of items on the NSSE Topical Module Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity. These items asked students how much they agree with statements about the value of their cultural community on campus. A definition for the term “cultural community” was given to students: “The term ‘cultural community’ can refer to a racial or ethnic community, a religious community, a community based on sexual orientation or gender identity, the neighborhood where you grew up, etc.” Then students were asked about the extent of their agreement with statements about people on campus valuing knowledge and experiences from their cultural community and whether or not their cultural community was valued overall. We combined these three items to create the *Cultural Validation* scale ($\alpha = .94$). Information about this scale and the full listing of individual items can be found in Table 2.

Demographics. A variety of demographic items were used as part of this study, the most critical being students' racial or ethnic identification. We identified the NHPI students in this study by a survey item asking students to select all categories that apply to them from the following options: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White, or Other. We categorized any student who chose Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander as NHPI. Other demographics used in models included students' class standing, gender identity, sexual orientation, grades, first-generation status, age, enrollment status, major, and whether or not they were taking all of their courses online.

Engagement. To explore relationships between cultural validation and engagement, we examined the students' scores on five aggregate measures, called NSSE Engagement Indicators, created from multiple survey items: *Collaborative Learning (CL)*, *Student-Faculty Interaction (SF)*, *Effective Teaching Practices (ET)*, *Quality of Interactions (QI)*, and *Supportive Environment (SE)*. We rated all of these measures on a 0 to 60 scale. CL, comprised of four items, represents how often (very often, often, sometimes, never) students worked on group projects, asked others to help with difficult material or explained it to others, and worked through course material in preparation for exams with peers. SF, comprised of four items, represents how often (very often, often, sometimes, never) students interacted with their faculty outside of courses such as talking about career plans, discussing course content, discussing academic performance, and working on non-course activities. ET, comprised of five items, represents students' perceptions of how much (very much, quite a bit, some, very little, their instructors use clear explanations, are organized, use examples to explain difficult points, and provide prompted and detailed feedback on drafts or tests and completed assignments. QI, comprised of five items, represents the quality of student interactions (excellent to poor) with their peers, advisors, faculty, and other staff and offices. SE, comprised of eight items, represents students' perceptions of how much their institution emphasizes (very much, quite a bit, some, very little) services and activities

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that support their learning and development. NSSE staff created the engagement measures in this study to measure the overall engagement of first-year student and seniors at bachelor's-degree granting institutions. More information about the component items on these scales can be found on the NSSE website nsse.indiana.edu. Descriptives on these Engagement Indicators by students' racial or ethnic identification can be found in Table 1.

Analyses

To investigate the degree NHPI students felt the campus environment validated their cultural background, knowledge, and identity (compare to students with other racial and ethnic identities), we employed ordinary least squares (OLS) regression as the analytic method. The Cultural Validation scale served as the dependent measure and racial and ethnicity identity as the independent variable. Specifically, NHPI students were the reference group while dummy variables for the following eight racial and ethnic identities were created: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, White, Multiracial, Other racial/ethnic identity, and 'prefer not to respond'. Since a small percentage of the variance in the dependent variable ($ICC=1.6\%$) was due to the differences between institutions, we only included student-level variables as independent controls. These variables controlled for other demographic (first-generation status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity) and academic characteristics (class level, online learner, enrollment status, college grades, and stem major). The dependent variable was standardized prior to entering the model. This allowed the unstandardized regression coefficient for the independent variables to be interpreted as an effect size.

To address the second research question, we used OLS regression to analysis the survey responses of NHPI students only. In order to examine to extent effective educational practices were related to Cultural Validation, we added an Engagement Indictor as the independent variable of interest

to the student-level control model. Again, Cultural Validation served as the dependent variable. Supportive Campus Environment, Effective Teaching Practices, Collaborative Learning, Student Faculty Interaction, Quality of Interactions were entered separately which resulted in a total of five regression models. Two of the models (SE and ET) focused on the relationships between Cultural Validation and students' experiences with specific aspects of the campus environment inside and outside the classroom. The remaining three models investigated the relationships between Cultural Validation and students' engagement with other students (CL), faculty (SF), and the general campus community (QI). Similarly, the Engagement Indicators and the dependent variable were standardized prior to entering the models.

Results

Controlling for student demographics and academic characteristics, Table 3 shows the estimated standardized deviation difference in Cultural Validation between NHPI students and other students with different racial and ethnic identities. Overall, the model explains very little of the variance (3.3%) in Cultural Validation which suggests more research needs to be done to better understand what impacts this measure. Nonetheless, we found NHPI students scored significantly lower on the Cultural Validation scale compared to other students who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and White. The average Cultural Validation score for White and American Indian/Alaskan Native students was approximately one-fifth of a standard deviation higher than NHPI students. Compared to NHPI students, the average Cultural Validation score among Hispanic/Latino students was nearly one-sixth of a standard deviation higher and Asian students averaged approximately one-tenth of a standard deviation higher score. Alternatively, students who identified as Black or African American, multiracial, with another racial or ethnic minority group, or preferred not to identify a race or ethnicity reported statistically similar Cultural Validation scores as NHPI students.

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To address the second research question, we tested the impact of select effective educational practices on Cultural Validation for NHPI students. Table 4 shows a summary of these results. After controlling for student demographics and academic characteristics, all five Engagement Indicators were positively related to Cultural Validation to varying degrees. In addition, by including an element of student engagement to the model we found a greater portion of the variance in Cultural Validation was explained (ranging from 22.7% to 10.6%). For Supportive Environment, as NHPI students reported a more positive experience with the campus environment being supportive of academic and non-academic responsibilities, they tended to be in greater agreement that the campus climate was also culturally validating. On average, for every one-standard deviation increase in the Supportive Environment indicator, the Cultural Validation scale increased by 44% of a standard deviation. NHPI student experiences with clear and organized course instruction (ET) and important people connected to their learning such as advisors, faculty, students, administrators, and student affairs professionals (QI) were also found to be moderately related to student feelings of cultural validation. On average, the effect of these measures resulted in more than one-third of a standard deviation increase in NHPI students' Cultural Validation score. Lastly, we found a statistically positive relationship with Cultural Validation and the amount of time NHPI students worked with other students to understand the course materials (CL) and had meaningful conversations with faculty members about their academics and career goals (SF), although the strength of these relationships were weaker in comparison. Specifically, for every standard deviation increase in Collaborative Learning, Cultural Validation increased by a 28% standard deviation. For Student Faculty Interaction, a one-standard deviation increase resulted in approximately a one-fifth standard deviation increase in NHPI students' Cultural Validation score.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be noted. The sample was restricted to four-year colleges and universities that opted to and could afford participation in NSSE for the purposes of

institutional improvement. Our sample is not a national representation of all four-year colleges and universities in the US nor is it a comprehensive reflection of the NHPI college student population. Although the sample was racial and ethnically diverse, less than 1% identified as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander for a total of 322 students. We advise caution when applying these results to different institutional contexts, particularly two-year institutions where NHPI student experiences may greatly vary. Further, the design of this study limits us to examine casual relationships. We can only conclude that engaging in these selected effective educational practices are positively correlated with Cultural Validation. Nonetheless, our findings are aimed to shed light on conversations to improve the campus climate and overall college experiences for NHPI students.

Discussion

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the results provide important new information about how NHPIs perceive their campus environments. As mentioned previously, prior studies have determined that cultural validation is a key element for NHPI students to achieve positive outcomes (Gasman & Conrad, 2015; Saelua et al, 2017). Scholars have begun to pay closer attention to the experiences of this population, but there is much more to understand. This study adds to the existing literature by providing a more comprehensive analysis of how specific aspects of the campus environment both within and outside of the classroom, and engagement with other students, faculty, and the general campus community are associated with cultural validation.

Second, our study underscores the importance of examining the elements of a campus environment that positively support NHPI student populations. Previous studies have focused much-needed attention to the barriers these students face accessing, persisting, and graduating college (Ah Sam & Robinson, 1998; EPIC & AAJC, 2014; Tran et al, 2010). While we acknowledge the significance of this research, we call attention to the positive aspects of college campuses as an equally important area

of scholarship. Our study rounds out the existing literature by focusing on institutional assets, and potentially offers a more complete picture of how NHPI students navigate higher education.

Third and most importantly, the findings of this study affirm the critical need to disaggregate data on NHPI students from the racial category “Asian American and Pacific Islander.” As mentioned previously, our results show that NHPI students scored significantly lower on the Cultural Validation scale than their Asian peers. The present study builds on the recommendation of several scholars to disaggregate the racial term and builds on the limited quantitative research that examines NHPI students and communities separately (EPIC & AAJC, 2014; Museus, 2014; Wright & Balutski, 2014; Panapasa, Crabbe, & Kaholokula, 2011). Reliance of racial projects (Omi & Winant, 2014) such as racializing and categorizing NHPIs into the umbrella “AAPI” classification has worked to erase NHPIs from institutional focus. This has resulted in a prevailing discourse of success that the “model minority” myth has engendered, at the expense of NHPI students.

Implications

This study has several important implications for research and practice, but due to space limitations, we focus on three. First, more research should be conducted on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations, with larger sample sizes, and a more diverse array of institutional contexts, including community colleges and institutions in the Pacific territories. A larger sample size could potentially yield results that are generalizable to the broader NHPI national population. Second, future inquiries on cultural validation for NHPI students should expand to include other potential mitigating factors, such as opportunities to participate in ethnic organizations or access to culturally relevant coursework or service learning experiences.

In regards to higher education practice, the results suggest that college and university staff, faculty, and administrators should consider cultural validation as an important feature in building

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support for NHPI students. Building on Rendon's model of cultural validation, educators may want to enhance existing initiatives that offer institutional support for academic and non-academic responsibilities, and work with faculty to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to be able to validate the cultural backgrounds of all students. For example, El Camino Community College in Southern California recently partnered with a community-based organization, Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, to offer a training for faculty on the history and community conditions of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Programs such as this one can enhance the way faculty interact with, and impact, NHPI students and potentially have a larger impact on the reputation of the institution within the NHPI community.

Pacific oral tradition tells us that there was a vibrant network between island societies prior to contact with the Western world, circulating goods, ideas, and bloodlines across thousands of miles and years (Hau'ofa, 1998). In 1998, Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa encouraged Pacific scholars to reframe their perspective of the Pacific, not as small islands scattered in a far sea, but a sea of islands – tapping into the world view of the ancestors, who saw the sea as an extension of their home, and a roadway to other islands. In the same way, we urge institutions to consider our findings and take the opportunity to shift campus environments to be more validating for students from minoritized populations. The journey of NHPI college students through higher education can at times feel isolating and disconnected, surrounded by an unforgiving ocean of hidden norms, austere faculty, and unfamiliar traditions. Our study reveals that elements of the campus environment, and certain types of interactions with peers, faculty, and staff, can potentially influence NHPI students feeling culturally validated. Active, personal validation of NHPI students has transformative power, and can shift their perspective of a campus from a place of isolation to a place of connectedness: a sea of opportunity, full of places to explore, people to meet, and experiences from which to learn and grow.

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Table 1.
Select Respondent Characteristics by Racial or Ethnic Identification

		Non NHPI (%)	NHPI (%)
Gender identity	Man	33.4	31.7
	Woman	64.4	63.7
	Another gender identity	1.1	3.1
	I prefer not to respond	1.1	1.6
Sexual orientation	Straight (heterosexual)	85.4	78.6
	Bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer, questioning or unsure	11.2	17.0
	I prefer not to respond	3.4	4.3
Class level	First-year	43.3	50.6
	Senior	56.7	49.4
Grades	Mostly A's	52.4	43.2
	Mostly B's	41.5	49.7
	Mostly C's	6.1	7.1
First-generation		41.2	43.2
Traditional age		82.5	82.6
Full-time enrollment		90.9	91.3
STEM major		26.7	26.7
Taking courses all online		5.0	5.3
NSSE Engagement Indicators		Non NHPI (mean)	NHPI (mean)
<i>Collaborative Learning</i>		33.86	36.71
<i>Effective Teaching Practices</i>		39.62	37.73
<i>Student-Faculty Interaction</i>		23.87	26.26
<i>Quality of Interactions</i>		42.31	41.23
<i>Supportive Environment</i>		34.64	34.91

Note: Note NSSE Engagement Indicators are on a 0-60 scale.

Table 2.
Select Topical Module Items and *Cultural Validation Scale* Information

	Non-NHPI		NHPI		EFA
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Factor Loading
The term “cultural community” can refer to a racial or ethnic community, a religious community, a community based on sexual orientation or gender identity, the neighborhood where you grew up, etc. Considering the community with which you most strongly identify, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?					
<i>(Strongly agree = 5, Somewhat agree = 4, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Somewhat disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1)</i>					
In general, people on campus value knowledge from my cultural community.	3.49	1.05	3.24	1.17	.894
In general, people on campus value the experiences of people within my cultural community.	3.52	1.03	3.32	1.12	.919
In general, my cultural community is valued on campus.	3.63	1.04	3.33	1.16	.867
<i>Cultural Validation Scale (Cronbach’s α =.94)</i>	3.54	0.98	3.30	1.09	--

Table 3.
Cultural Validation Coefficient Estimates by Racial and Ethnic Identity, Other Demographics, and Academic Characteristics (N=44,840)

		Unstd B	SE of Coeff.	T-test	Sig.
	Constant	-0.42	0.06	-6.87	
Racial/ethnic identity ¹	American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.27	0.08	3.20	**
	Asian	0.18	0.06	3.14	**
	Black or African American	0.07	0.06	1.25	
	Hispanic or Latino	0.23	0.06	3.98	***
	Multiracial	0.09	0.06	1.51	
	Other racial/ethnic identity	-0.08	0.07	-1.10	
	White	0.29	0.06	5.22	***
Age	Prefer not to respond	-0.10	0.06	-1.57	
	Traditional aged	0.06	0.02	4.02	***
Parental education	First-generation	-0.02	0.01	-2.20	*
Gender identity ²	Man	-0.06	0.01	-6.17	***
	Another gender identity	-0.42	0.05	-9.17	***
Sexual orientation ³	I prefer not to respond	-0.22	0.05	-4.42	***
	Bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer, questioning or unsure	-0.15	0.02	-9.77	***
	I prefer not to respond	-0.20	0.03	-7.03	***
Class level	First-year	0.11	0.01	10.97	***
Enrollment status	Full-time	-0.01	0.02	-0.64	
Major	STEM	-0.10	0.01	-8.82	***
College grades ⁴	Mostly A's	0.24	0.02	11.69	***
	Mostly B's	0.16	0.02	7.79	***
Online learning	Taking all courses online	-0.04	0.02	-1.53	
Adjusted R-square = .033					
SE of Estimate = .983					

Note: dependent variable was standardized prior to entering the model.

***p<.001; **p<.01, *p<.05

¹ Racial/ethnicity identity reference group: Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders

² Gender identity reference group: Women

³ Sexual Orientation reference group: Heterosexual (straight)

⁴ College grades reference group: Cs or lower

Table 4.
 Summary of Cultural Validation Coefficient Estimates among Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders (N=322) for Select Effective Educational Practices

Independent Variables of Interest		Unstd B	SE of Coeff.	Sig.	Adj. R-square
Effective Educational Practices	Support Campus Environment	0.44	0.05	***	.227
	Effective Teaching Practices	0.36	0.06	***	.173
	Quality of Interactions	0.34	0.06	***	.171
	Collaborative Learning	0.28	0.06	***	.127
	Student Faculty Interaction	0.23	0.06	***	.106

Note: IVs of interest and the DV were standardized prior to entering the regression model. Each IV of interest were entered into the model separately. The control independent variables included age, first-generation status, gender identity, sexual orientation, class level, enrollment status, majoring in STEM, college grades, and online learning.

***p<.001; **p<.01, *p<.05

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