

# **Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI)**

## **2024 Focus Groups Report**

**North Seattle College**

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## Background

In October 2021, North Seattle College was awarded a 5-year federally funded Asian American & Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) grant to enhance the institutions capacity to serve Asian and Pacific Islander students (A&PI) and low-income students. North Seattle College (NSC), an AANAPISI-funded institution, is committed to understanding the experiences, needs, and challenges of A&PI students and enhancing their academic success.

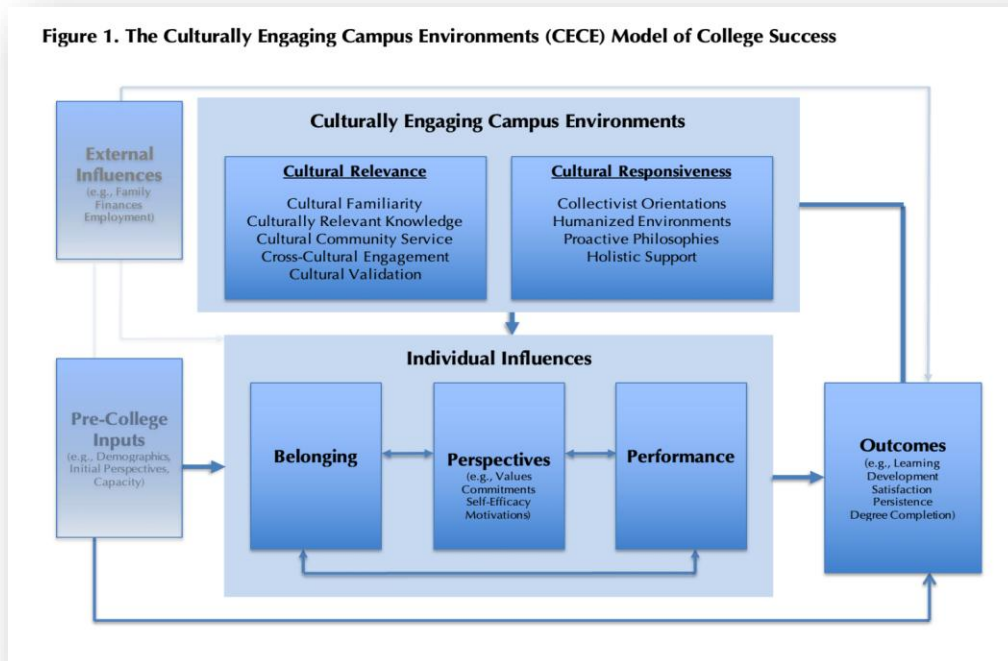
The purpose of this report is to present the findings from a series of focus group discussions conducted with Asian and Pacific Islander students at North Seattle College during academic year 2023-24 (Year 3 of the grant) with collaborative work with the Division for Access, Community, & Opportunity (ACO). Additionally, these focus groups expand on the work done the year before with focus groups that were held in the 2022-2023 (Year 2) academic year. These discussions were driven by the need to gain valuable insights, voice concerns, and identify strategies for enhancing the AANAPISI program's effectiveness in supporting North Seattle College's A&PI student community. By engaging directly with A&PI students, we gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, perspectives, and aspirations within the college environment, and inform institutional efforts to address their specific needs.

This report will explore the key themes that emerged from the focus group discussions, reflecting the experiences of A&PI students at North Seattle College. Also, highlighting the recommendations and solutions proposed by student participants to improve A&PI student experiences relating to academic and personal growth. Such insights and recommendations will be of immense value to the North Seattle College administration, faculty, staff, and other partners invested in the success and well-being of A&PI students.

## Framework: The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model

One of the main goals of NSC's AANAPISI grant is to increase student success outcomes and create a stronger sense of belonging by implementing community responsive and sustaining programming while providing holistic student support services. To ground the work of the grant, we utilized the [Culturally Engaging Campus Environments \(CECE\) model](#) that is "derived from qualitative interviews with 150 undergraduate students (e.g., Asian American, Black, Indigenous, Latino, Pacific Islander, and multiracial populations) across the United States, qualitative interviews with more than 30 educators at institutions that have 2 demonstrated relatively equitable outcomes across student groups, three decades of existing research on students in college, and practical observations and experiences working with undergraduate populations" (Museus, 2014).

According to the National Institute for Transformation and Equity (NITE): "The focal point of the CECE model emphasizes that college students' access to culturally engaging campus environments is positively correlated with individual traits (such as sense of belonging, self-efficacy, motivation, and performance) on success and an increased probability of succeeding in college. The CECE model posits that undergraduates' access to engaging campus environments is directly and indirectly (via individual characteristics such as sense of belonging, values, commitments, self-efficacy, motivation, and performance) related to a greater likelihood of success" (NITE Education, 2017).



**Figure 1.** The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of College Success

Based on the positive correlation between having an engaging campus environment and student’s likelihood for success, the AANAPISI program at NSC and the questions and recommendations in this focus group report are based on the CECE Model.

Lastly, Terrell L. Strayhorn, author of *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*, writes “Students can find a sense of belonging when we, as educators and leaders, do the hard work of changing our institutions in ways that make belonging possible for all” (Strayhorn, 2023). Through these focus groups and this report, we hope to provide insights and recommendations from our A&PI students to shape how North Seattle College can continue to reimagine the work of ensuring a sense of belonging is an integral part of our institution and systems for all students.

## Report Overview

The report is divided into several sections, covering different aspects of the focus group discussions. These sections will include an overview of the research methodology, an analysis of the major themes, challenges identified, and recommendations for action and improvement. By presenting these findings, we aim to contribute to the ongoing conversations about student achievement and success at North Seattle College. Ultimately, we hope to foster an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers A&PI students to thrive academically and prepare for their future careers.

## AI Statement

In the preparation and writing of this research report, the AANAPISI Team utilized ChatGPT as a function in analyzing data by presenting key themes and potential recommendations for the North Seattle

College community to aid in the research process. However, all interpretations and conclusions are the responsibility of the authors, who have thoroughly reviewed and refined this report to ensure accuracy.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically facilitating two focus groups during Spring Quarter on April 24<sup>th</sup> and May 22<sup>nd</sup>, the purpose of the focus groups was to gain in-depth insights into the lived experiences of North Seattle College's Asian and Pacific Islander students regarding their 1) Sense of belonging and 2) Perceptions of support for success at North Seattle College. Focus groups were chosen as the primary data collection method due to their ability to foster dynamic discussions, allow for the exploration of shared experiences, and elicit rich, nuanced perspectives on each topic. Both focus groups had two facilitators guiding the discussion and one notetaker. Both focus groups took place inside the Grove Seminar room where tables were arranged into a half circle with the facilitator at the front facing the participants.

The focus group was 1.5 hours long and included a total of 11 questions under three major themes:

- 1) Sense of Belonging- 5 Questions
- 2) Student Services- 3 Questions
- 3) First Year Experience- 3 Questions

Though our focus group questions changed from the year previous (Year 2, 2022-2023), we intentionally decided to continue to frame questions around the theme of 'Sense of Belonging'. This enabled our team to track students' perceptions and feedback.

See Appendix A for a comprehensive list of all questions asked in the focus group.

### Sample Selection & Eligibility

Participants were selected based on specific pre-qualification criteria to ensure the relevance and focus of the discussions. The criteria for participation were as listed: 1) Self-identification as Asian and/or Pacific Islander, and 2) Current enrollment as a student at North Seattle College.

### Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a mixed-method approach including purposive and convenient snowball sampling methods. A purposive sampling method allowed for a targeted approach inviting Asian and Pacific Islander identified students at North Seattle College. Two series of email campaigns were sent specifically to students at North Seattle College who had self-identified as Asian and Pacific Islander and met the participation requirements. Additionally, a series of internal emails and Canvas announcements targeting AANAPISI enrolled students were sent. Additionally, a convenience sampling method was deployed by posting visually appealing flyers (see Appendix B) in high traffic areas around campus, and we utilized AANAPISI social media accounts. Finally, a snowball sampling method was utilized to expand our reach to more participants. As students confirmed their participation, we asked them to share this opportunity with other eligible friends and classmates, helping us spread the word widely and connect with a range of Asian and Pacific Islander students.

To incentivize students into participating in this study, AANAPISI offered a \$50 gift card (funded by ACO) to any student that participated in the focus group discussion that was eligible. AANAPISI also catered food & drinks (banh mi sandwiches & boba tea) for both focus groups.

## Data Collection

Data was collected through two distinct 1.5 hours focus group sessions, each with two facilitators and one notetaker. A semi-structured discussion guide was utilized to ensure consistency across both groups while allowing flexibility for emergent themes and in-depth exploration. The facilitators posed open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' perceptions and experiences about their sense of belonging within the North Seattle College campus environment, and the types of support they found beneficial to their academic and personal success. All focus group sessions were audio-recorded with the explicit consent of the participants to ensure accurate capture of the discussions. Detailed notes were also taken to document non-verbal cues, group dynamics, and contextual observations.

## Data Analysis

The audio recordings from both focus groups were transcribed verbatim to facilitate comprehensive data analysis. Thematic analysis, an iterative and systematic process for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (or themes) that arise within the data, was employed to analyze the qualitative data. The analysis process involved several stages:

1. AANAPISI staff independently familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading of transcripts
2. Initiated coding to identify interesting features across the entire dataset
3. Searched for themes by collating codes into broader potential themes
4. Reviewed themes to ensure they are coherent and distinct
5. Defined and named themes with the support of AI ChatGPT
6. Produced the report
7. Found discrepancies in coding and theme identification, which were discussed and resolved through consensus

The identified themes and sub-themes directly addressed the research questions regarding students' senses of belonging and perceived support for success.

## Participant Demographics & Background

This section of the report will provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants who took part in the focus groups. The information below was gathered at the beginning of the focus group with each participant self-identifying information to the group and written down by the notetaker.

### Focus Group #1

Demographics Breakdown	
<b>Date of Focus Group</b>	4/24/2024
<b>Total Participants</b>	14 students
<b>Age</b>	18 (3), 20 (20), 21, 23, 24, 26 (2), 40, 70, unknown (2)
<b>Gender</b>	Female (10), Male (4)

<b>Ethnicity</b>	Asian (1), Chinese (2), Chinese/Japanese (1), Filipino (2), Korean, Unknown, Vietnamese (2), Vietnamese/White
<b>International Student Status</b>	6 International Students, 8 Domestic Students
<b>Student Status</b>	8 Full-Time, 6 Part-Time
<b>Field of Study</b>	Academic Transfer DTA (3), Associate in Arts-DTA, Computer Science, Accounting, ESL, Early Childhood Education, Associate in Arts, Associate in Science-DTA (2), Non-Degree Other (2), Electronics Technology & Electronics Engineering

Figure 2a. Chart showing demographics breakdown of focus group #1

### Focus Group #2

Demographics Breakdown	
<b>Date of Focus Group</b>	5/22/2024
<b>Total Participants</b>	11 students
<b>Age</b>	17, 19, 20 (2), 22, 31 (3), 39, 44, unknown
<b>Gender</b>	8 Female, 3 Male
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Asian, Asian-mixed race, Chinese (2), Japanese, Mongolian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Unknown, Vietnamese (4)
<b>International Students</b>	1 International Student, 10 Domestic Students
<b>Student Status</b>	4 Full-Time, 7 Part-Time
<b>Field of Study</b>	Academic Transfer DTA (2), Associate in Science-DTA (4), Early Childhood Education, Non-Degree- Parent Education, Real Estate Certification, Undecided (2)

Figure 2b. Chart showing demographics breakdown of focus group #2\

## Findings

The findings from North Seattle Colleges 2024 Asian and Pacific Islander focus groups are presented below. This section is organized by the main discussion of categories and questions, followed by the themes that emerged for each specific question. The themes are supported by direct participant quotes, and recommendations for the institution to consider in their efforts to foster an ever-increasing environment conducive to meeting the needs of Asian and Pacific Islander students at North.

### Sense of Belonging

**Goal 1: To better understand how students define “sense of belonging”, discover the ways they feel and do not feel like they belong at NSC, and their ideas to increase belongingness on campus.**

Several key themes emerged from participants’ definitions of belonging and highlighting ways that they have experienced belonging and ways they have faced and felt excluded.

<b>On a scale of 1-5, Do you feel like you belong at NSC?</b>
Of the 25 participants- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 (16%) reported they feel like they belong a little</li> </ul>

- 5 (20%) reported that they feel like they somewhat belong
- 10 (40%) reported they feel like they belong
- 6 (24%) reported they feel a strong sense of belonging

**Figure 3.** Chart showing participants reported sense of belonging on a Likert scale of 1-5

To see a breakdown of each focus group’s response, please see Appendix C.

## **Emerging Themes**

### **Relationship Building is key to A&PI students feeling a sense of belonging on campus**

Through both focus groups, students expressed that they feel a sense of belonging on campus with 63% of Focus Group #1 participants responding that they felt a sense of belonging at NSC, and 60% reporting this in Focus Group #2. Both focus groups highlighted that they felt a sense of belonging through fostering relationships with on campus programs, staff/faculty, and resources. A participant shared *“The first year didn’t feel a sense of belonging but when I built more relationships and connections with people, I felt I belonged.”*

#### **Relationship Building with Teachers:**

- *“My teachers have provided emotional support and have been helpful when I have reached out for support.”*
- *“Some teachers provide support outside of academics and connected me with resources.”*
- *“Teachers make me feel like I belong in the classroom and when my classmates include me in conversations and group work.”*

#### **Relationship Building with Programs:**

- *“I got connected with AANAPISI which creates more avenues for me to engage with people of my culture.”*
- *“AANAPISI has helped me in various ways to solve my problems.”*
- *“This focus group itself is a great way that makes me feel like I belong as you are hearing what I am thinking and feeling”*

#### **Relationship Building from Student Worker Jobs:**

- *“Being part of student leadership has really made me gain a sense of community here on campus.”*
- *“If more students can have more access to more paid positions on campus, that’s a great way for students to meet and network with people in this community and build more sense of belonging”*

### **Feelings of Exclusion in the Classroom, Tutoring Services, & Online Classes**

This theme reveals that A&PI students experience feelings of exclusion in the classroom, in tutoring opportunities, and in the online class modality. In these spaces, students indicated that due to language barriers and being English language learners, they have felt exclusion from staff, faculty, their peers, and services they have tried to seek for support. Additionally, students that predominantly take online classes shared that due to physically not being on campus and the plethora of online modality options, it is harder to feel a sense of belonging.

**Exclusion in the Classroom:**

- *“At the beginning of spring quarter sociology class, the teacher speaks very fast. In the group discussion, everyone was chatting and talking, and they didn't involve me. It was easier for them to build connections because they speak English and it's hard for me to keep up with their conversation.”*

**Exclusion when receiving Tutoring:**

- *“English is not my first language and then I'm writing the essay so the tutor helps me organize a sentence so I have no word is wrong word and you can tell me at least this is wrong this is how the right word spelled but she just repeat herself three or four five times until I get it right.”*
- *“She's (the tutor) speaking really fast and until to the point that I feel that I shouldn't ask her anymore.”*
- *“The tutor spoke very fast, and I wanted to change the tutor because I didn't feel comfortable. The tutor seemed frustrated at me because of the language barrier.”*

**Online Courses contributing to sense of disconnect:**

- *“I took a lot of online classes, and I felt a big disconnect from the school”*
- *“For online students, I feel disconnected, and the events are all in-person. And I'm not aware of the various events taking place.”*
- *“All my classes are online, and I missed the in-person belonging and receiving the email to know that they exist, and the resource exist and when I want to know.”*

**Student Services**

**Goal 2: To better understand and indicate which services A&PI students find most helpful and confusing at North Seattle College, the barriers they face, and their ideas on how services can be improved.**

Using the Poll Everywhere application and providing students with a comprehensive list of 16 student services offered at North (Appendix D), we asked each participant to indicate the top three services they found most helpful and the top three that they found to be the most confusing. We then proceeded to ask them to share why they found these helpful and/or confusing.

<b>MOST HELPFUL Student Services at North Seattle College</b>	
<b>Focus Group #1</b>	<b>Focus Group #2</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Advising</b></li> <li>2. <b>Faculty</b></li> <li>3. Library</li> <li>4. <b>Tutoring</b></li> <li>5. <b>Financial Aid</b>/Student Leadership</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Faculty</b></li> <li>2. <b>Advising</b></li> <li>3. <b>Tutoring</b></li> <li>4. <b>Financial Aid</b></li> <li>5. Career Services</li> </ol>

**Figure 4a.** Chart showing top 5 most helpful student services as indicated by students in a word cloud

<b>MOST CONFUSING Student Services at North Seattle College</b>	
<b>Focus Group #1</b>	<b>Focus Group #2</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Financial Aid</b></li> <li>2. <b>Advising</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Financial Aid</b></li> <li>2. Student Leadership</li> </ol>

3. Disability Services	3. Opportunity Center
4. Workforce Education	4. <b>Advising</b>
5. International Program	5. Student Media Center

**Figure 4b.** Chart showing top 5 most confusing student services as indicated by students in a word cloud

In both groups, Advising, Faculty, tutoring, and Financial Aid were voted to be the most helpful student services for A&PI students, while Financial Aid was voted the most confusing services as well as advising (this is shown through the services being bolded above).

Please see Appendix E & F for a more detailed breakdown, including the word clouds and summary from each focus group.

## *Emerging Themes*

### **Students find services most helpful when it comes to those that are responsive & provide resources**

In both focus groups, we defined ‘most helpful’ to be the services they needed to access frequently, in relation to their academic studies here at North, contacts on campus with whom they are familiar, where to access assistance and/or have had positive interactions I would reword this whole sentence. I am not sure what you mean. In Figure 4a, services like Advising, Financial Aid, Faculty, and Tutoring were ranked as the most helpful in both focus groups.

Students expressed that when they are associated with a program (e.g. Running Start, International Programs, etc.) or an on-campus job, they felt like this service was not only helpful, but it also instilled a greater sense of belonging for them on campus. Through student stories, we were able to identify themes that they defined what “most helpful” meant to students:

#### **Responsive**

- *“As a running start student, I think that the advisors have been super helpful and responsive by email, which is something that can be lacking sometimes”*
- *“Most of my professors have been very direct about their class and what they want from their students are and how to contact them, if you have a good professor”*

#### **Providing Resources & Accommodations**

- *“The library is great because I can borrow textbooks and calculators as well as access study rooms whenever I need.”*
- *“The tutoring center because I am taking a computer class and it was really hard, and I would go to the tutoring center, and the tutors were really helpful*
- *“My teacher helped me with networking and keeping me in mind and sending me resources and I have taken up many of those opportunities and changed my life for the better or my perspective my life or career path. They have been very influential, and it meant a lot”.*
- *“The quality of instructors here at North are really great and the different accommodations that instructors can provide are really helpful.”*

## Limited staffing and communication gaps contribute to student confusion

In both focus groups, we defined most confusing to be services “*you don’t know or have any information about*” or “*that you tried to access, but you didn’t understand how to use it*”. In Figure 4b, services like Financial Aid and Advising were ranked as the most confusing in both focus groups. Even though the Opportunity Center was not listed in the top 5 of most confusing services, participants from each group mentioned and elaborated on this. Themes around feeling “tossed around,” not getting what they need, long response/wait times, and lack of information (ex. from websites, advisors) contributed to the feeling of confusion.

### Feelings of being “tossed around” between services

56% - Over half of our total participants (14 out of 25 participants) indicated feeling “tossed around” when it came to accessing services and getting the support they needed. We defined being tossed around as “*you go to one service or person seeking help and they tell you to go somewhere else or someone else for help.*”

- “*I had an issue with my financial aid, and I had gone to the window several times and my issue kept not being solved. I had to go my advisor and then ultimately Jordan for help.*”
- “*I was trying to find work on campus, but I kept being told to go to different places to ask around.*”
- “*Talking to advisors and also talking to Jordan (navigator) to help me get what I need. I like talking to Jordan about everything, but I don’t want to use him to help me advocate for me just because I am not heard.*”
- “*I have emailed my advisor and then they told me to talk to so and so and then they said I actually need to email so and so, so I am constantly playing email tag and then finally, this person just told me to look on the website and so, I’m like “uhm, okay great.”*”
- “*I’m not an international student, but I share the same experience that they went through. Talking with an advisor, not getting the help I needed and then needing to go to Jordan (AANAPISI Navigator) for support. Jordan is not my advisor... I don’t want to make him the person that needs to advocate for me because I am unable to be heard.*”

### Other Services:

- “*The Opportunity Center, I tried contacting them and it’s very difficult to find someone to talk to in my experience, especially with career services. My teachers don’t know who to go to either when I ask them.*”
- “*When I tried to apply for EBT at the Opportunity Center, they sent me to like 3 different places and then someone totally unrelated to North called me and said you can either fill it or we can help you and then I asked about other situations and they just said they didn’t know... then they sent me to United Way and I don’t know how they are connected to the Opportunity Center.*”
- “*For advising, for advisors, many people come here to take classes to go to grad school or nontraditional students and it feels like advisors here are unfamiliar with pathways that students want to take.*”
- “*Financial Aid is the next most confusing to me and they kept sending me so many messages and told me to talk to so and so for this and another person for that and eventually, I just gave up, and I was just really angry.*”

### International Programs

In Focus Group #1, 6 of the 14 participants were international students, and they spoke in depth about their challenges with accessing International Programs at North.

- *“It would be helpful if International Programs had more advisors that students could choose to see. We can only reach out to one person.”*
- *“As international students we have certain requirements and when I have tried to speak to someone about these requirements, I am told I have to email the advisor and that I cannot talk to someone right away.”*
  - Two other students in Focus Group #1 shared a similar experience
- *“(As an international student) I had to go to Seattle Central to find help instead because all they (North’s International Program) kept saying to me was “no, we can’t talk to you right now, please email us.”*
- *“Being an international student is not easy. Jordan is really helpful, but he is not my actual advisor. He cannot give me permission number and something.”*
- *“It (International Programs) feels like they are gatekeeping information because they always ask us to email and then in the automatic reply, it says it takes 3-5 business days to respond, it actually took two weeks and by that time, the class I wanted to get in already closed, which I already knew.”*

**Observation:** *The student services that A&PI students find most helpful are also the same ones they find are most confusing to navigate.*

In both focus groups, students shared that advising and financial aid were two of the most helpful services that they use. At the same time, these same services are also the most confusing for them to navigate. Participants shared that they found the services the most helpful because they need these services to navigate their educational journey, but what made it confusing to navigate is that information about the service or how to navigate it was limited. Participants mentioned that these services were hard to find initially as a new student and that some services weren’t well advertised, or they simply did not know that they existed.

For example, you can read in Figure 5a. for Focus Group #1, Financial Aid was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in most helpful, but 1<sup>st</sup> for most confusing services accessed by A&PI students. Advising was ranked 1<sup>st</sup> for most helpful, but 2<sup>nd</sup> for most confusing.

In Figure 5b. for Focus Group #2, Financial Aid was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in most helpful, but 1<sup>st</sup> for most confusing services accessed by A&PI students. Advising was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in most helpful, but 4<sup>th</sup> for most confusing.

Focus Group #1	
Most Helpful Student Services	Most Confusing Students Services
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Advising</li> <li>2. Faculty</li> <li>3. Library</li> <li>4. Tutoring</li> <li>5. Financial Aid/Student Leadership</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financial Aid</li> <li>2. Advising</li> <li>3. Disability Services</li> <li>4. Workforce Education</li> <li>5. International Program</li> </ol>

**Figure 5a.** Chart showing Focus Group #1 Most Helpful vs Most Confusing Services

Focus Group #2	
Most Helpful Student Services	Most Confusing Student Services
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Faculty</li> <li>2. Advising</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financial Aid</li> <li>2. Student Leadership</li> </ol>

3. Tutoring	3. Opportunity Center
4. <b>Financial Aid</b>	4. <b>Advising</b>
5. Career Services	5. Student Media Center

**Figure 5b.** Chart showing Focus Group #1 Most Helpful vs Most Confusing Services

## First Year Experience

### **Goal 3: To better understand A&PI students’ experience as a first-year student**

The idea of the “first-year experience” (FYE) is crucial to the academic wellness of the student as well as the institution and we wanted to ask participants about their experience, especially as North was (at the time the of focus groups) creating a mandatory new student orientation (NSO).

<b>From a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your first-year experience at North Seattle College?</b>
Of the 25 participants-
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 (12%) reported that their FYE was really challenging and they received no support</li> <li>• 3 (12%) reported that their FYE was challenging and they received little support</li> <li>• 10 (40%) reported that their FYE was okay and they received some support</li> <li>• 3 (12%) reported that their FYE was good and they received support</li> <li>• 6 (24%) reported that they FYE was really good, and they received a lot of support</li> </ul>

**Figure 6.** Chart showing participants response to rating their first-year experience

To see a breakdown of each focus group’s response, please see Appendix G.

### **Emerging Themes:**

#### **The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted students’ first-year classroom experiences & orientation**

Many students mentioned that their first year was impacted due to Covid and its aftermath. Since some services and classes are just offered in the virtual modality, some focus group members reported that it was more difficult to find or create a sense of belonging and know where and what resources were available to them.

- *“All my classes were online, and I wasn’t spending any time on campus at all and the email system at the time was just sending lots of information that I didn’t have time to go through to identify the resources I needed.”*
- *“Having everything on zoom and that was really difficult for me and my learning style.”*
- *“As a running start student during the pandemic, it was really difficult to figure out resources at North Seattle College during that time, and I could only take online classes. My high school counselor didn’t know how to advise me and I didn’t know who to ask about classes here, and I failed most of those classes because I didn’t know how to navigate that.”*
- *“I asked my instructors to waive my class at the end when I was failing, and they said they couldn’t... it was a really hectic time.”*

#### **Gaps in information sharing to first-year students**

When asked “Reflecting on your first-year experience at North Seattle College, what were challenges that you encountered?”, participants expressed challenges in finding information that they needed, especially in the areas of International Programs, student jobs, and information gathering.

### International Programs

- *"I did not understand what was being discussed in orientation for international students or what was being discussed in class as people were speaking too fast."*
- *"I did not feel like there were enough opportunities for me to connect with other international students when I first got here. I felt really lonely when I first got here."*

### Student Jobs

- *"During my first year, I worked for EDIC (now ACO), and being in proximity to other programs, I got exposed to different people and the resources they provide and that's what really helped me know more about resources. If I didn't have that job, I don't think I would know so much."*
- *"It was until I got a job, the current position that I am in now, that I get more help from people and services... but when I was a student my first year, I was trying to find everything by myself and it was hard."*

### Information Gathering

- **Running start-** *"I suggest for running start advisors to be more transparent about options so students can choose the best decision for themselves as well as offering an introduction to North Seattle College/College in general as our high school counselors do not provide as much information to us or they just don't know."*
- **Advisors-** *"Advisors seem to not know the class schedules really well either because it seems like they are sent the class schedules when we do almost... I asked my advisor if a class was going to be offered next quarter and they didn't know so I had to talk to my professor to actually advise me on what classes I should take here... seems like there is also a lot of turnovers here."*
- **Website-** *"The Noth Seattle college website is hard to navigate and slow to update"*
  - In Focus Group #2, when asked the follow up question *"Do you find North Seattle College website helpful?"*- 2 people responded yes, 2 said kind of, and 7 said no.

## Recommendations

### 1. Increase Sense of Belonging through trainings, student worker jobs, and events

- **Provide More Culturally Responsive Trainings:** Implement ongoing trainings from the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) faculty and staff on cultural humility and culturally responsive practices. This will equip staff and faculty with a better understanding of best practices they can use to better serve students from varying backgrounds. This can also include training opportunities for TLC faculty and staff on adaptation to supporting students in their different needs and environments.
- **Provide More On-Campus Student Worker Jobs:** Participants from both focus groups cited that their on-campus student worker jobs were one of the main ways they felt an increased sense of belonging, as well as what got them more familiar and comfortable with student services. When asked *"What resources or ideas do you have that you think would have helped your first-year experience be better,"* participants responded with *"having more student worker jobs available for students to apply for."* Not only do student worker jobs help integrate students better into the college campus and ecosystem, but it also helps students stay invested in the college, help shape their leadership development, and helps them be more prepared for their future endeavors.

## 2. Improving Engagement & Communication throughout Campus:

- **Better Engagement for Online Students:** As we move into a post-covid era where classes are back to being offered in person, many classes are still offered online/hybrid, and/or students prefer to take their classes online. Based on what was shared in the focus group, some possible ideas that the institution could explore include:
  - Encourage faculty to include zoom from Navigators to explain the resources available to these students;
  - Provide trainings from the TLC that train specifically on creating a sense of belonging and stronger engagement for students for online courses;
  - Create an in-person event for online students once a quarter to help with community building;
  - Encourage student leadership to host events that take place online or hybrid (instead of just in-person); and
  - Conduct a focus group with NSC online students to further understand the needs and challenges of this group.
- **Meeting Students Where They Are At:** When it came to discussions and participants' suggestions on how to make student services less confusing and more accessible, ideas that students shared included:
  - Have advisors and other student services staff sit in The Grove and have a drop-in table like they do for Let's Talk from the counseling team;
  - suggest that faculty share resources in their classes, no matter what the modality, so students can get information more readily;
  - Update the college's website more frequently with updated information; and
  - Streamline and establish what a "hand off" looks like between student services staff so students don't feel as "tossed around" when it comes to looking for support and getting their questions answered.

## 3. Increasing Capacity and Support for International & Running Start Students

- **Increase Capacity in North's International Student Program:** International students in both focus groups expressed that they wish there were more than one International Program Advisors at North to give them more opportunities to connect with someone in-person (instead of mainly email), decrease the need for a long response time, and provide international students what they need in a more reasonable time (ex. permission codes).
- **Listening to International Students Voices:** Throughout Focus Group #1, international students spoke continuously of how their needs are not being met at North when it comes to getting timely support and engagement. To continue to identify challenges and barriers that international students face as well as participants stating that this focus group itself helped them feel a sense of belonging and heard, it would be impactful if International Programs at the Seattle Colleges district can commit to conducting one focus group each year on each campus to assess how international students are feeling, if they feel support, and if not, what can IP do to meet their needs.
- **Building a "Bridge" between Advisors & High School Counselors/Advisers:** Running Start students in both focus groups voiced that there is a lack of information their high school counselors/advisers provide in advising them on their Running Start journey. Many high school counselors/advisers simply don't seem to know enough about resources and services at the college and tell students to seek support on their own. This leads to Running Start students not

knowing how to navigate North when they first make the transition with their classes at North. Running start students in the focus group suggested the following:

- Develop strong relationships between high school advisors at North and high school advisors or counselors;
- Provide more information about the different options and timelines Running Start students can consider; and
- Create a system where faculty are notified if they have running start students in their class. By notifying instructors, they can tailor resources and information for Running Start students.

#### 4. Requiring Orientation & Secondary/Follow-Up Orientations for First-Year Students

- **Established Orientation\***: This recommendation highlights the need for a required orientation for incoming students. Students going into their first year of college tend not to know everything about college and the resources available. A required orientation should be in place to ensure students' success.
- **Explore having two orientations dates**: Participants in the focus group suggested that the institution consider having two orientations dates so there can be more options for those that miss orientation and can make it up. For example, North could have one in early September and then have another one the week (or two weeks) after school starts for students that couldn't make it.
- **Explore different types of orientations (ex. Secondary or Follow-Up Orientations)**: Participants also suggested having different types of orientations where information can be spread out, not feel so overwhelming, and can have different focuses. Participants mentioned how after 2-3 weeks, they start to get a feel for the campus, and it could be helpful to have a secondary orientation where students can ask questions that have been coming up for them or bring up challenges they have encountered with accessing services.
- **Explore building a First-Year Peer Mentorship Program**: In AANAPISI, we have seen great success with the Peer Mentoring Program where AANAPISI Peer Mentors provide support to first-year students (or students with less than 45 credits). Peer mentors are fellow NSC students trained to help first year AANAPISI students explore campus resources, build confidence, and navigate their academic journey. North could explore having first-year students sign up and match them with a Peer Mentor who can guide them through their first year as well as build programming specifically for first-year students.

*\* At the time of this focus group, orientation was not a requirement due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and Campus Connect were in development and not rolled out until Fall Quarter of 2025.*

## Conclusion

This focus group report provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of Asian and Pacific islander students at North Seattle College, shedding light on the critical factors that influence their sense of belonging, accessing necessary services, and first-year experience. While North Seattle College continues to make commendable strides towards fostering a supportive campus climate and provide targeted support, the discussions also reveal areas where A&PI students seek further development to meet the needs of their Asian and Pacific Islander student body. The hope for this report is that it gives the institution ideas, based on A&PI student voices, of how to continue building relationships, spaces,

and programs that are inclusive, responsive, and foster a strong sense of belonging that will in turn improve student retention, completion and graduation/transfer.

## References

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*The CECE model*. (2017). National Institute for Transformation & Equity <https://nite-education.org/the-cece-model/>.

## Appendix

### A. Focus Group Questions

#### **Theme #1: Sense of Belonging**

1. On a scale of 1-5, Do you feel like you belong at NSC?
  - 1- You don't feel like you belong at all
  - 2- You feel like you belong a little
  - 3- You feel like you somewhat belong
  - 4- You feel like you belong
  - 5- You feel a very strong sense of belonging
2. What are the ways you feel like you belong at North? Please provide some examples.
3. What are the ways you don't feel like you belong at North? Please provide some examples.
4. Have you faced any type of discrimination specifically as an Asian & Pacific Islander student here at North Seattle College that has impacted your sense of belonging? If you are comfortable sharing, what happened and how did it make you feel?
5. What are ideas or thoughts you have that could make NSC a more welcoming place where you can see yourself belong?

#### **Theme #2: Student Services**

1. [Using word cloud] Which 3 Student Services do you find the MOST HELPFUL to your success as an API student?
  - a. Please type into Poll Everywhere
  - b. Why?

2. [Using word cloud] Which 3 Student Services do you find the MOST CONFUSING that causes barriers to your success as an API student?
  - a. Please type into Poll Everywhere
  - b. Why?
  - c. Probing question- “How many of you here have felt “tossed around”- you go to someone for something, we can’t help here, go here instead and you have to find someone else?”
  
3. If you could change or improve anything about our student services, what would you change?

### Theme #3: First Year Experience

1. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your first-year experience at North Seattle College?
  - 1- Your first-year experience was really challenging & you received no support
  - 2- Your first-year experience was challenging & you received little support
  - 3- Your first-year experience was okay & you received some support
  - 4- Your first-year experience was good & you received support
  - 5- Your first-year experience was really good & you received a lot of support
  
2. Reflecting on your first-year experience at North Seattle College, what were the challenges that you encountered?
  
3. What resources or ideas do you have that you think would have helped your first-year experience be better?

## B. Recruitment Flyer

Flyer that was used to advertise the A&PI focus group discussion/research

Your Voice Matters, Join the Conversation

### Asian & Pacific Islander Student Focus Group

*AANAPISI in collaboration with District EDIC*

**Date & Time (Pick ONE in-person session to attend)**  
 Wednesday, April 24, 2024, FROM 12:30PM TO 1:30PM  
 Wednesday, May 22, 2024, FROM 3:00PM TO 4:00PM

All participants will receive a **\$50 Gift Card**  
**Bubble tea & food will be provided!**

Join us in a conversation to share your experience as an Asian & Pacific Islander (A&PI) student at North Seattle College

**Sign-up by April 17th or May 15**

**Any Questions?**  
 Please email Dawn Cheung at [Dawn.Cheung@seattlecolleges.edu](mailto:Dawn.Cheung@seattlecolleges.edu)

**AANAPISI**  
 Asian American and Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Serving Institution

### C. Breakdown of each Focus Group’s Response for Sense of Belonging Question #1

On a scale of 1-5, Do you feel like you belong at NSC?	
Focus Group #1	Focus Group #2
Of the 14 participants- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 (14%) reported they feel like they belong a little</li> <li>• 3 (21%) reported that they feel like they somewhat belong</li> <li>• 6 (42%) reported they feel like they belong</li> <li>• 3 (21%) reported they feel a strong sense of belonging</li> </ul>	Of the 11 participants- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 (20%) reported they feel like they belong a little</li> <li>• 2 (20%) reported that they feel like they somewhat belong</li> <li>• 4 (30%) reported they feel like they belong</li> <li>• 3 (30%) reported they feel a strong sense of belonging</li> </ul>

### D. List of Student Services that were given to focus group participants to reference during World Cloud Activity

1. Advising
2. Career Services
3. Child Care
4. Counseling
5. Disability Services
6. Faculty (your instructors)
7. Financial Aid
8. HDC 101 Seminar
9. IT Services/Computer Lab
10. Library
11. Opportunity Center
12. Student Leadership
13. Student Media Center
14. Tutoring
15. Veteran Affairs Student Leadership
16. Workforce Education

### E. Most Helpful Student Services- Word Cloud & Summary

Which 3 do you find the MOST HELPFUL to your success as an A&PI student?
Focus Group #1

<p>Which 3 Student Services do you find the MOST HELPFUL to your success as an API student?</p> 	<p>Most Helpful:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Advising</li> <li>7. Faculty</li> <li>8. Library</li> <li>9. Tutoring</li> <li>10. Financial Aid/Student Leadership</li> </ol>
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**Focus Group #2**


	<p>Most Helpful:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Faculty</li> <li>7. Advising</li> <li>8. Tutoring</li> <li>9. Financial Aid</li> <li>10. Career Services</li> </ol>
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In Summary:

- **Advising-** Students shared that Running Start advisors were responsive and supportive during their first year at North. Another student agreed.
- **Faculty-** Students felt that the quality of North faculty is “really good” and appreciated the accommodations provided to them. Students acknowledged the different needs between community college and university students.
- **Library-** Free textbook rentals are helpful to students who struggle to afford books.
- **Tutoring-** International students expressed that they rely on tutors to assist them in their coursework
- **Student Leadership-** Students affiliated with student leadership, or a student program shared a stronger sense of belonging.

**Career Services-** Students like receiving help with their resume and a place to answer their career questions.

## F. Most Confusing Student Services - Word Cloud & Summary

<p><b>Which 3 do you find the MOST CONFUSING that causes barriers to your success as an API student?</b></p>	
<p><b>Focus Group #1</b></p>	
<p>Which 3 Student Services do you find the MOST CONFUSING that causes barriers to your success as an API student?</p> 	<p>Most Confusing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Financial Aid</li> <li>7. Advising</li> <li>8. Disability Services</li> <li>9. Workforce Education</li> <li>10. International Programs</li> </ol>

Focus Group #2	
	<p>Most Confusing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Financial Aid</li> <li>7. Student Leadership</li> <li>8. Opportunity Center</li> <li>9. Advising</li> <li>10. Student Media Center</li> </ol>
<p>In Summary:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Financial Aid</b>- Student shared that they need more support and better communication from the financial aid office.</li> <li>2. <b>International Program (IP)</b>- International student participants all agreed that the IP needs more support as they have all experienced not getting the help they need in a timely manner and/or not being able to speak to someone in person when they need assistance.</li> <li>3. <b>Advising</b>- Students shared having challenges speaking to their advisor and speaking to navigators instead for support</li> <li>4. <b>Opportunity Center</b>- Students expressed that they don't really know what the Opportunity Center is and found it confusing to go there for career support. Students also shared that they didn't know how to connect to this resource.</li> </ol>	

## G. Breakdown of each Focus Group's Response to First Year Experience Question #1

From a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your first-year experience at North Seattle College?	
Focus Group #1	Focus Group #2
<p>Of the 14 participants-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 (7%) reported that their FYE was really challenging, and they received no support</li> <li>• 1 (7%) reported that their FYE was challenging and they received little support</li> <li>• 7 (50%) reported that their FYE was okay and they received some support</li> <li>• 3 (21%) reported that their FYE was good and they received support</li> <li>• 2 (14%) reported that FYE was really good, and they received a lot of support</li> </ul>	<p>Of the 11 participants-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 (18%) reported that their FYE was really challenging and they received no support</li> <li>• 2 (18%) reported that their FYE was challenging and they received little support</li> <li>• 3 (27%) reported that their FYE was okay and they received some support</li> <li>• 4 (36%) reported that FYE was really good and they received a lot of support</li> </ul>