Communication Campaign Leans on Data, Increases Survey Effectiveness

By Mehmet "Dali" Öztürk, Ph.D., Dean, Research, Planning & Institutional Effectiveness; Co-chair, Institutional Review Board, College of the Sequoias

Our institution, College of the Sequoias (COS), is a mid-sized, designated Hispanic Serving Institution in central California committed to helping a diverse population of students achieve their educational goals. As part of this commitment, we wholeheartedly support the learning and working environments of our students and employees. We rely on campus-wide feedback and data to enhance our ongoing self-improvement and self-assessment processes. This feedback is valuable to our continuous improvement efforts, as guided by our 10-Year Educational Master Plan Goals and our 3-Year Strategic Plan Objectives.

When our college received accreditation recommendations regarding use of data...
and research capacity for institutional planning, the Office of Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (Research Office), was highly motivated to improve the decision-making system, planning process and assessment procedures, as reflected in the graphic, below.

One of the Research Office’s improvement goals was to be able to routinely and effectively conduct and/or facilitate surveys and questionnaires that support our college’s planning activities, outcomes and assessment cycle. A quick review of our college’s survey administration practices revealed that too many uncoordinated and sometimes poorly designed surveys were being administered college-wide.

Another potential issue was survey fatigue among respondents, which may decrease the effectiveness of surveys, the number of survey responses, and the quality of information received. In addition, it was unclear if the feedback collected was being used effectively, or if survey results were being communicated college-wide.

In order to address these issues, the Research Office was determined to oversee and coordinate our college’s survey needs, design high-quality surveys, and reduce the number of surveys administered in a short timeframe.

The following actions were taken by the Research Office:

- Developed and implemented guidelines on requesting and conducting surveys. (These guidelines are designed to improve effectiveness and efficiency of data collection through survey measures. All managers were trained on these guidelines.)
- Launched a survey and questionnaire website, which houses copies of major surveys used and their schedule for administration.
- Reduced the size, number, and frequency of surveys administered college-wide. (For example, multiple surveys were replaced with a college-wide survey which included only essential items from each campus area.)

These actions and strategies have resulted in college-wide alignment and coordination of surveys. These efforts have also noticeably reduced the number and length of administered surveys, which allowed for the assessment of critical elements across multiple campus areas without inducing survey fatigue.
Our commitment to increase utilization of data-driven planning and evaluation, for continuous improvement efforts, has resulted in enhancements across our campuses. These improvements are highlighted in a campaign series called “You Speak, We Listen” and communicated to COS students and employees via email, web, print (posters, flyers, etc.), and social media. (See Illustration below.)

COS utilizes this campaign to publicly acknowledge the specific needs and concerns expressed by students and employees, as well as the actions taken to address them. The data-driven decisions that are highlighted in the “You Speak, We Listen” campaign are primarily based on feedback and data from the “Student Support Services Survey.”

The student survey, which is administered biennially, asks our students to reflect on their experiences at COS, including their awareness and satisfaction of the following COS programs, resources, and services:

- Library Services
- Counseling Services
- Student Services
- Support Programs & Services
- Campus Safety
- Health Center
- Facilities Services
- Technology Services
- Campus Climate
- Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- Quality of Education

To date, the survey has been administered three times to COS students (Spring 2015, Spring 2017, and Spring 2019), and the next administration is scheduled for Spring 2021.

Disseminated to the entire student body, the most recent administration of the Student Support Services Survey received 2,880 responses (more than a 25 percent response rate) with over 5,000 comments to open-ended questions.

We used incentives to increase student interest and participation in the survey. Survey participants were entered into a drawing to earn 100 cash prizes, ranging from $20 to $500. The survey results generated 15 campus-level and area specific reports, which were distributed to area managers and administrators for their review and action.
The area reports include more focused feedback specific to particular departments, programs, units, or campuses. These customized reports allow area managers to use survey data to conduct needs assessments, identify areas that need improvement, and develop action plans that lead to improvements.

One area manager had this to say about the effectiveness of the campaign:

*The campaign has become a crucial part of our initiative development and planning. I now have much more confidence in the department decisions we make, as they are now rooted in reliable data and direct feedback from students. When I review the campaign data, our staff feels like we are having a conversation with thousands of students at once.*

*The campaign has given our department a unique opportunity to achieve the highest level of student relevance and support. Being able to demonstrate to students that they were heard and [making] changes based on their thoughts and feelings leads students to trust our department more and in the end utilize services. We know that our relationships with students has improved because of “You Speak, We Listen.”*  
— Mary-Catherine Oxford, Director, Learning Resources

In addition to area reports, managers and staff can access the *Interactive Student Survey Results Dashboard*, which allows users to disaggregate and/or filter survey data by campus location, gender, race/ethnicity, load (full-time/part-time), first-generation status, and student type (first-time, returning, continuing). We also shared the survey results at our Fall Convocation and with the college’s participatory governance groups, including Student Senate, Academic Senate, Board of Trustees, and others.

The following are some examples of the data-driven improvements made based on the student survey results that were communicated as part of our “You Speak, We Listen” campaign (since 2015):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Responses...</th>
<th>Campus Actions (by Department)...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressed a need for more counselors.</td>
<td>Hired several new counselors. (Counseling Division)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed they were not aware of many of the great services offered by the Learning Resource Center (LRC).</td>
<td>Updated web pages, advertised to students and faculty, and expanded hours. (LRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requested permission to borrow class textbooks for more than one hour.</td>
<td>Extended textbook checkout periods to two hours. (LRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed a need for better wireless access.</td>
<td>Added 188 wireless access points to achieve full coverage in 2017-2018. (Technology Services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed they need newer computers.</td>
<td>Replaced 187 lab computers in 2017-2018 and plan to replace 200 more in 2019-2020. (Technology Services)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One student had this to say about the campaign:

*As a student, I like how organized and brief the survey is. I also like that the survey results are available online. It’s really reassuring to see that students’*
Responses aren’t just stored away in some file cabinet, and the management teams receive it and take action. I am proud of the work COS has been doing and how far it has come. — Rihab Boumzough, COS Student Trustee

Effective communication and campus-wide dissemination of survey feedback provided us an opportunity for self-reflection, inspiration, motivation, and further commitment to our continuous improvement efforts.

These are just a few examples of our college’s continuous improvement efforts that we believe contribute to our students’ success. Moving forward, our “You Speak, We Listen” campaign practice will be further institutionalized to support these continuous improvement efforts, which include addressing student needs and concerns, as they arise.

For questions, email the author at mehmeto@cos.edu.

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Lessons From the Past Help Inform Students’ Reading and Learning Strategy Development

By Michelle Andersen Francis, Ph.D., Professional Development Chair/Reading Professor, West Valley College; and Sonya L. Armstrong, Ed.D., Professor/Director of the Doctoral Program in Developmental Education, Texas State University

As reading researchers with many years of experience in the field, we often hear lamenting about the death of dedicated college reading courses. We, too, are disheartened by the elimination of these courses. With the reduction or elimination of these courses at our institutions, it essentially means that our colleagues across campus, from the discipline departments to student support services, are now responsible for teaching students college reading and learning strategies. How can we share the expertise and wisdom of the college reading and learning field with faculty and staff trained in completely different disciplines?

As our colleges implement AB 705 and Guided Pathways, we can use past reading and learning strategy research to inform the future for our students. Although there are many lessons from the past to address in this short piece, we focus here on just two important lessons from the past: one aimed at what to teach and one that stresses the importance of evaluation of resultant learning. We contend that looking to the past can ultimately aid the design and implementation of initiatives moving forward.

#1: Intentional transfer of reading and learning strategies improves success. College reading professionals have long recognized that learning strategies are context-dependent and situated within each discipline or field (Maxwell, 1979, 1997; Nist & Simpson, 1987), and students must learn to modify each reading and learning strategy to fit each different course of study.

This modification and awareness of the different needs of each discipline is called transfer of learning, or the ability to transfer reading or learning strategy from one course or learning situation to another seemingly unrelated course or learning situation (e.g., Perkins & Salomon, 1988; Salomon & Perkins, 1989).

Given the extensive body of scholarship on transfer of learning, what we know
from the past is that transfer of learning does not happen automatically (Simpson & Nist, 2000; Simpson, Stahl, & Francis, 2004). In other words, students generally need explicit instruction in discipline-specific reading and learning strategies.

Therefore, course supports in reading and learning in the disciplines are best when intentional scaffolding of strategy instruction maintains an eye toward transfer to a wide variety of coursework. That is, courses that teach transfer of reading and learning strategies connected to particular areas, such as “Reading in the STEM” or “Critical Thinking in the Social Sciences,” can lead to examples of how the strategies can be utilized in multiple courses.

Without such explicitly connected course supports in place, students are, essentially, left to their own devices to seek out non-course-based supports (e.g., learning assistance centers, tutors, supplemental instruction leaders). The research also demonstrates that students already deemed ‘at-risk’ are less likely to utilize such supports consistently (Rose, 2012).

#2: It is not enough for our discipline colleagues across campus to pick up the slack prompted by the elimination of developmental reading courses or reading graduation requirements. Instead, one lesson that we in the field of college reading have learned from the past is that we must engage in thoughtful reflection and evaluation to determine whether students are indeed transferring reading and learning strategies across multiple courses.

Just asking our colleagues across the disciplines to embed reading and learning strategies in their courses does not push the needle enough. Instead, instructors must reflect and evaluate their students’ use of said strategies and demonstrate that students are using the strategies in various situations across multiple courses.

Further, extensive qualitative and quantitative research is needed to evaluate the efficacy of the types of reading and learning strategy transfer described above. Programs that appear to work must be evaluated and replicated, specifically as a partnership between reading faculty and discipline faculty.

Scholars from within developmental education and learning assistance have been calling for such integrated and inclusive evaluation studies for years (e.g., Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997; Grubb, 2001; Simpson, 2002), arguing that program successes and challenges are too often assumed or supported merely by anecdotal data, rather than systematic and robust research.

That is, it is not enough to say that a change in reading and learning strategies instruction works at a particular institution; we must demonstrate empirically what that change means and why it works (Goudas, 2018). Further, these evaluations of changes made at the institutional level — if they are to have any impact on future design and implementation — must involve the voices of faculty and students (Simpson, 2002).

Faculty voices can add to the rich conversation of what instructional changes are working and what innovative strategies can be tried next. Student voices can help us narrow in on the true impact of the change and whether or not the changes are making strides in increasing students’ actual transfer of reading and study strategies.

If we concede that past learning can inform the future, best practices must be conveyed to faculty across all disciplines so they can change their teaching
practices to integrate reading and learning strategies in their curriculum, especially given that developmental reading courses are being eliminated.

Professional development that focuses on reading and learning strategy integration into the disciplines is key, and will continue to be as the body of research quickly expands to include best practices for helping students transfer reading and learning skills into various situations and disciplines.

If we call on previous knowledge about strategy transfer and harness research, we can demonstrate how the integration of reading and learning into other disciplines can benefit students not just in the first semester, but for the duration of their entire academic career.

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References


Integrating ESL Reading and Writing: How Long Beach City College Has Started the Conversation

By Dr. Meena Singhal, Professor, Long Beach City College; Editor, The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal

In the process of maintaining our ESL curricular program — one that is divided into separate reading and writing strands — we have prevented ESL students from moving forward to transfer-level courses in a reasonable amount of time. We have also perpetuated the myth that reading and writing are separate and discrete skills that should be taught as such.

Although the link between reading and writing seems obvious, reading has often not had a significant place in writing classes. It was not until the turn of the century, that Harvard and other universities decided that reading literature was essential to learning how to write (Brereton, 1995).

There are numerous academic benefits to the integration of reading and writing. Reading introduces students to a variety of texts, genres, and writing styles, expanding their knowledge of language. Reading also exposes students to much more content knowledge, inspiring new ideas and perspectives.

Critical thinking can be taught explicitly through reading activities. This could involve teaching students how to identify direct or implied main ideas and supporting points, distinguish fact from opinion, identify propaganda techniques, identify the author’s tone, recognize the relationship between ideas, and recognize bias.

Reading also allows for the development of analytical skills which results in deeper, more mindful reading. These can include activities such as examining the evidence or arguments presented in a text, the effectiveness and reliability of the evidence itself, the interpretations made, and whether the evidence and argument support the conclusions.

Finally, reading illustrates models of excellent writing, offering students instruction in organization, evidence, syntax, vocabulary, purpose, tone, voice, audience, rhetorical appeals, and language.

As summarized on the Chancellor’s Office website, AB 705 requires that a community college district or college maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within a one-year timeframe.
The new law came in response to research findings that showed significantly more students would complete transfer requirements if enrolled directly in transfer-level courses rather than remedial courses.

Research also demonstrates that when used as the primary criterion for placement, assessment tests tend to under-place students; and a student’s high school performance is a much stronger predictor of success in transfer-level courses rather than standardized placement tests. Additionally, the current goal of AB 705 for ESL is for ESL students to complete degree and transfer requirements in English within three years.

This is in response to research that shows students placed in ESL classes several levels below transfer are less likely to complete the sequence or transfer level-courses (Rodriguez, Bohn, Hills, & Brooks, 2019, p. 3).

While many colleges are moving the needle in the right direction, much more could be done.

Currently, our department offers, as many other colleges do, separate reading and writing courses. By requiring students to take both, it takes much longer for students to complete these sequences, which are often five courses or more, in order to reach transfer level coursework in English. To this end, our Department of ESL and Linguistics at Long Beach City College (LBCC) has been focusing on curricular reforms, specifically the integration of reading and writing courses in order to reduce the number of courses.

Below are some of the ideas we have been discussing and gradually implementing in terms of how reading and writing can be integrated:

- Introducing reading materials that pair well with writing assignments to teach a particular writing form. (For example, if teaching students how to write a summary, we introduce students to a specific article and read it together.)
- Examining various rhetorical modes such as argument texts but limiting attention on the content of the text and focus on the features of the text, identifying and evaluating the claims that are made, how an argument is constructed, how appeals are used, what the writer does effectively, and so forth.
- Providing students with mentor or exemplar texts which are well written and taking time in class to talk about what makes it a strong or effective piece of writing. (The same can be done with models of ineffective writing so students learn what not to do.)
- Tailoring writing assignments around selected literature, such as literary analysis which involves constructing an argument and supporting that with evidence from within the text and outside research.
- Generating a written text together based on a reading. (This can be done as a collaborative effort followed by articulating the qualities of good writing in your discipline.)
- Having students work in groups and providing them with rubrics to evaluate written texts and ask them to discuss their thoughts according to rubric standards. (Rubrics also give students the language they need to analyze texts of varying quality so they learn to distinguish what makes a text exemplary.)
- Encouraging students to write short response papers to readings. Sometimes a prompt can be provided to emphasize attention to specific
By integrating both reading and writing, students participate in their learning to a greater degree. They understand that they must provide a context for an audience that exists apart from the writer. In other words, their own writing must have purpose and clarity, and fully engage the reader. The reading and writing activities working in tandem are intimately intertwined; reading stimulates writing just as much as writing stimulates reading.

In the context of AB 705, the amount of time to reach transfer-level English is also shortened and students are better prepared to succeed in transfer-level courses. Rather than requiring our students to complete four, credit writing courses and four, reading courses prior to transfer-level English, instruction in which reading and writing are explicitly interconnected develops the academic and literacy skills needed to succeed across disciplines.

For this new approach to succeed, the integration of reading and writing courses as described here requires change at the level of the classroom, the program, and the college. While AB 705 provides the impetus for change, ESL programs are in a position to do much more than simply respond to these directives. At LBCC, the ESL Department is now in the process of streamlining course sequences and revising course outlines to reflect the integration of reading and writing in composition classes.

As educators, taking an active role in transforming the way in which our curricular offerings are structured will help prepare our students for transfer-level work and increase their chances of completion toward their long term goals.

For questions about this article, email the author at misinghal@lbcc.edu.

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What’s Next After iPASS? Proposed Steps Following the First Large-Scale iPASS Evaluation

By Omid Fotuhi, PhD, Research Associate, University of Pittsburgh; Director of Learning Innovation, WGU Labs; and Jason Levin, Executive Director, WGU Labs

Driven by the desire to better retain and serve their students, colleges and universities across the US have been jumping on a tsunami of technological and predictive analytics solutions that has been sweeping across the nation over the past decade.

At nearly every student touchpoint, it seems like colleges are scrambling to create a more personalized and data-driven student experience through the adoption of
predictive analytics and visualization dashboards. Up until recently, an exception to the digital- and data-driven revolution in education seemed to have been in the student-advisor space, where the goal for those interactions has traditionally been to foster a collaborative exploration of the student’s academic and professional options.

These opportunities to consult with a supportive advisor are especially critical for students in greater need of support. However, in an era of restricted funding and larger advising caseloads, we’ve seen a surge of interest in data analytics and technological tools to help advisors enhance their ability to improve student outcomes.

This set of tools, commonly referred to as Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS) captured the attention of many post-secondary institutions because of the promise to better understand, serve, and guide students at critical junctures in their academic journeys.

The basic premise for offering these tools is the idea that you can input big, diverse, disparate, and messy data into these tools and, in return, receive clean and easy-to-interpret insights about the needs of your students.

Specifically, these tools set out to (1) offer more simplified, and personalized summaries of the often complex network of interconnected course requirements needed for an efficient path towards degree completion, thus freeing up the advisor-advisee time for more efficient conversation; and (2) provide early alert systems so that at-risk students can be identified more quickly, and (in theory) be directed to the necessary resources (see the Framework for Advising Reform, CCRC).

However, after nearly five years of implementation, the first large-scale evaluation of the iPASS programs seems to show mixed results. As part of a randomized control trial, which included more than 8,000 students from three different schools, the authors of that evaluation states that “Overall, the enhancement to iPASS have not yet produced discernable positive effects on students’ academic performance” between the students who were assigned to the iPASS-enhanced advising programs, compared to those students who received the institution’s typical advising services (Mayer, et al., 2019).

While it’s still too early to conclusively determine whether these tools are effective, it’s possible that, in this case, the pace of technological innovation temporarily leapt ahead of our ability to learn how to apply it effectively. However, given the relatively small number of sites tested, all we can say conclusively at this point is, that in its current form and application and among the initial set of sites where this was tested, these particular iPASS strategies were not as effective as intended.

Now, the question turns to why these initial trials were not as effective as expected, so that future attempts to employ iPASS solutions have a better chance of improving the advising experience.

In particular, the question of what happens after a student is identified as experiencing academic difficulty has not yet fully been included as part of the iPASS strategies. Much like how a diagnosis from a doctor doesn’t sufficiently contribute to the healing process unless a clear and personalized treatment plan is also included, it can be argued that the iPASS tools could be more effective if relevant response options for students’ specific needs were incorporated.
In order to begin to take technologies such as iPASS to the next level, we need to explore connecting tailored and context-specific solutions to students’ specific needs.

For some students, it may be as easy as being referred to appropriate resources, such as tutoring, counseling, or financial services. For others, a potentially more sophisticated diagnostic process could connect them with the necessary skills training that they might need in order to succeed. For instance, some students may struggle with core self-regulation strategies (e.g., time management, effective study skills) or access to critical non-cognitive training (e.g., learning about growth mindset, dealing with math anxiety, resilience training).

The good news is that most, if not all, of the solutions to common student challenges have already been developed and tested. The challenge, however, is to effectively incorporate a thoughtful and data-driven triage system that correctly connects students to the appropriate resources, as well as ensure the sufficient training of school advisors and administrators on how to better support students after a problem has been identified.

To do this effectively, there are two things we can do.

First, we can continue to invest in a continuous improvement approach to help bridge the gap between the diagnosis and response phases. This begins with the recognition that the diagnostic algorithms that operate under the hood and the visualization dashboards offered by many iPASS solution providers fall short of the intended goal of being able to help our students.

As competition grows among technology providers to offer iPASS-related solutions, it may no longer be sufficient to accept an interactive visualization dashboard without also demanding that those providers also offer relevant strategies to be directly linked to the diagnostic output. At the same time, we ought to be cautious of outsourcing all the diagnosis and advising work to a set of predictive algorithms. Instead, we need to recognize that much of the guidance that students need comes from a collaborative and iterative process of joint discussion and exploration with their advisors — a process only made possible once a student is able to trust that their advisor is there to listen and support their aspirations.

Second, it should be noted that a powerful tool is only as potent as the skill-level of the person using that tool. While iPASS dashboards promise to synthesize large sets of data, it is critical for those digesting the summarized data to have a clear understanding of what the results mean at the student level, as well as how to respond effectively in the face of that new information.

This could include some professional development training about the common causes for which students tend to struggle and how to identify critical touch points when a student might be flagged as being in need. In addition, ongoing training on proven response strategies can empower advisors and administrators with the knowledge and most effective strategies on how to respond, once a student has been flagged.

As the wave of technologically-enabled solutions continues to seep through into our educational spaces, it is crucial not to allow the convenience or attractiveness of a new technological innovation to drown out the importance for a solutions-based approach to student success. Further research, too, may be needed to understand how these solutions can be improved.
Students from Irvine Valley College (IVC) talked excitedly in a conference room at the Marriott hotel in Oakland, California. They had just finished their first full rehearsal for “This Is Us, America,” a reader’s theatre piece, in front of a few IVC faculty, counselors, and classmates.

All were there for the Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE) Conference presenting IVC’s ELEVATE AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander), an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) funded program aimed at serving IVC’s diverse population. Their actual performance would be the following day, in front of educational leaders and students who were part of various AANAPISI programs throughout the US.

The intent of such programs is to support the rising number of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students entering institutions of higher education in the US. In Orange County alone, AAPIs account for about 21% of the 3 million residents in the region (Vo & Hom, 2018), and have large presences at local colleges, with 36% of UC Irvine’s undergraduates, for example, identifying as AAPI (National Center of Educational Statistics, n.d.).

However, despite the common stereotype that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are naturally suited for academic success, the reality is that they face educational disparities, unique academic pressures, increased school bullying, and low representation of AAPI educators and administrators (Vo & Hom, 2018).

AANAPISI programs aimed at addressing these disparities have shown positive outcomes, especially for often marginalized populations. For example, subgroups of the AAPI community have seen increased rates in retention, degree completion, and transfers to universities, when they participated in these programs (Teranishi, R. T., Alcantar, C. M., Martin, M., & Nguyen, B. M. D., 2015).

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Our data at IVC is consistent with these findings as our students who take advantage of AANAPISI-funded offerings, such as tutoring, counseling, and faculty-led workshops, have higher persistence and GPA growth rates (IVC Office of Research and Planning, 2018).

However, while such programs help students academically, schools have also used AANAPISI funds to strengthen cultural engagement and understanding, often utilizing a Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model in which campuses encourage cultural familiarity and meaningful cross-cultural engagements, provide culturally validating environments for students and faculty to interact, and teach culturally relevant knowledge (Museus, Wright-Mair & Mac, 2018).

In doing so, minority students who participate in culturally relevant activities can develop a stronger sociopolitical awareness (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015) and desire to engage academically (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009), and can “learn about their own identities and develop a deeper understanding of the issues that exist within their communities” (Museus, Wright-Mair & Mac, 2018).

With this in mind, we (in our roles as AAPI leaders on campus) proposed having our students attend the APAHE conference and participate in a reader’s theatre performance. We believed that reader’s theatre could help address roadblocks students may face in dissecting their own identities while allowing them the ability to unlock performative potential they may not have realized they had, and help them develop other skills, such as teamwork and critical thinking.

For the performance, we decided to focus on the students’ personal narratives. Pedagogically, this serves many benefits, such as opening the opportunity for introspection that encourages scholarly discourse (Heidelberger & Uecker, 2009) and giving students, with the guidance of a supportive learning community, the ability to apply knowledge personally, professionally and academically (Beattie, 2009, pp 29-30).

To begin preparation for this performance, we had the students write poems in which they answered one simple question: Where are you from?

In conversations facilitated by faculty, the students (all of Asian descent) shared intimate experiences related to their backgrounds, the cultural confusion they sometimes felt, and the mistreatment they’ve endured because of their physical appearances.

This led to an exploration of concepts such as stereotype threat, the perpetual foreigner, intersectionality, and the conflicts that arise as a result, offering our students valuable personal insight and catharsis. During this process, we heard many encouraging student voices. Some are as follows:

I’ve never really shared my personal stories and just rather been holding them
in and keeping them to myself, so having a safe space to share my stories was
definitely what I needed to let go of some of the stress I was dealing with.
— Ellie Bui

I realized that, even though we’re all just ‘typical college students,’ we all have
unique experiences that we can learn from... I was able to understand my
personal experiences within a larger context of the Asian American experience.
— Peter Votran

Having to really take a few moments to think about my story, I remember feeling
like I didn’t even know who I was. It was that sense of ‘oh shoot, I really truly
forgot about who I am.’ It was the moment I realized that coming into America
was a great culture shock to my growth and native tongue, having noticed that I
have forgotten bits and pieces of my culture that was once so important to me.
That’s what I would say my takeaway is from reader’s theatre — finding my way
back to my roots. — Pia Ramos

Using their poems, as well as personal narratives that we discussed during our
weekly meetings, we finally developed a script, and, after several weeks of
rehearsals and rewrites, the students were finally ready to perform in front of an
audience of college administrators, professors, and students.

On the day of the performance, for the full twenty five-minutes, the students did not
miss one beat. The audience laughed and nodded at the stories they told. Some
audience members later said they saw themselves in the students.

This was certainly a unique experience for the students. Not only were they able to
think critically about issues within their communities, work as a team and with the
guidance of AAPI faculty mentors, and develop a stronger sociopolitical
awareness, but they were also able to share with the world what they had
discovered about their own identities.

Since that day, the “This is Us, America” script has seen three iterations that
allowed new cast members to share their personal narratives in various venues
from California to Washington D.C..

In a Facebook post, one of our former performers, Kayhlia Yang, who transferred
to a university, wrote, “Thank you ELEVATE for your endless opportunities, your
community, and your space. Because of this program I have been able to find
more of my identity.”

AANAPISI programs have the ability to empower students not just to thrive
academically. They also help them gain a better understanding of self and others
so they might declare, “This is who I am.”

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