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To Serve, Help Build, and Analyze

Paul Ong and Don Nakanishi

AAPI Nexus is rooted in a long struggle to bridge the gulf between academia and community. The journal's mission is to facilitate an exchange of ideas and research findings that strengthens the efforts through policy and practice to tackle the pressing societal problems facing Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities.

Since the inception of ethnic studies, the goal of "serving the community" has been at the heart of Asian American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies. This can be seen in the writings of two seminal publications. The first issue of *Amerasia Journal* (1971) included contributions from those "...sincerely concerned about the fate of Asian-American communities and are trying hard to see if they can make the lives of their immigrant brothers and those who live in ethnic communities a little bit better." The preface to *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (1971) declared that the book was published in response to the needs of "Asian Americans who have tried to serve their communities as social workers, organizers, lawyers, businessmen, workers, housewives and students."

That tradition has continued in subsequent publications. The founders of *Asian American Policy Review* stated, "It is our hope that the *Review* will stimulate discussion and analysis of the political, cultural and economic issues affecting the Asian American community" (1991). The same spirit is apparent in the series of policy books produced by the Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics and UCLA's Asian American Studies Center in the 1990s. The writers of *Beyond Asian American Poverty: Community Economic Development Policies and Strategies* wrote "Our intent is to help empower Los Angeles' 'invisible' Asian population, the over 124,000 who are part of the working poor, the unemployed or those dependent on welfare" (1994 and 1999). We are proud to have *AAPI Nexus* follow in the path beaten by other pioneers.

Spanning the gown-town divide is necessary but difficult. The academy is a crucial societal institution that *should* contribute to solving economic, social and political problems, including those in AAPI communities. It is not the only source of knowledge and wisdom, but it is uniquely set up to pursue both. Universities are rich in resources and expertise, and academic research is influential in political and policy debates because its findings have legitimacy. This is not to negate the fundamental role of power in decision-making, but there is much to be said for bringing to bear the weight of solid research. Asian American Studies can make a contribution because it has matured into a vibrant and serious multidisciplinary field of scholarship, teaching, and creative expression during its nearly thirty-five years of existence. While the number of scholars in Pacific Islander Studies is smaller, it too is a discipline that can offer much to the community.

Unfortunately, the full potential contribution of academia is solemnly realized, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Universities tend to be isolated from daily realities, scholarship is frequently esoteric, and most members are elitist. Asian American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies can easily become entrapped in the prevailing culture of the academy because the reward system works against directly “serving the community.” One could argue that basic and theoretical scholarship within ethnic studies—even the most abstract—ultimately contributes to the AAPI cause by challenging the mainstream. We accept that argument, but a balance is sorely missing. One of the major founding missions of the fields—generating practical research—needs to be reinvigorated. There is far too little applied and community-oriented research, and what exists is scattered. There is a critical need for meaningful venues and forums for such work.

This journal is meant to be a part of the effort to expand the arena for applied and community-oriented research. It follows the standard protocols that ensure quality and enhances its legitimacy within the academy. For example, articles are peer-reviewed—a critical process within academic publishing. Our goal, however, is to go beyond normal practices for scholarly journals. *AAPI Nexus* is designed around lessons learned over the years about what would be most useful.

We are reaching out to a broad range of scholars. The journal draws on researchers with an interest in helping to build, to

analyze, and to offer practical insights on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders from the local to the national levels. This includes the growing numbers of scholars and students in the professional schools like public health, law, urban planning, education, social welfare, and information studies, along with applied social science scholars and practitioners.

We believe that it is important to have voices closer to the community. The editorial board includes not only faculty, but also practitioners and public policy advocates. Our review process for articles includes readers from both the academy and the professions. We also created a regular section called the “Practitioner’s Essay,” written by community and professional leaders.

We recognize the necessity of being anchored in the contemporary and emerging realities and challenges confronting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. This population has grown from 1.5 million in 1970 to over 12 million today and to 20 million by 2020. Equally important, it has diversified, changed, and been challenged in dramatic and significant ways during the past three decades. Some ethnic neighborhoods that had been vibrant centers of communal life for over a hundred years are confronting nearly irreversible trends of decline, while an extraordinary array of new and dynamically complex communities have arisen and flourished from Lowell, Massachusetts to Artesia, California. Racial prejudice and discrimination still persist in both subtle and invidious ways to limit participation and advancement even among the most highly educated and talented. At the same time, there are deep concerns about the one-in-ten Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who are trapped in poverty, lack adequate schooling, housing and health care, and are among the nation’s forgotten poor. Finally, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have actively sought to be recognized actors in the grand theater of American public policy and politics and have developed a number of local and national organizations and leaders to undertake an ambitious agenda for social change, improved quality of life, and inclusion.

AAPINexus seeks articles that enlighten us on the magnitude and nature of the problems, and on the possibilities for intervention. The goal is to help those pursuing social change to become more effective through a greater understanding. The journal will publish empirically based applied research. This includes articles analyzing the structures and processes that produce and repro-

duce socioeconomic inequalities, identify factors that empower people to overcome barriers and adversities, assess policies and programs relevant to AAPIs, and evaluate the effectiveness of organizations, strategies and actions. We are also interested in articles that speak directly to ways to build bridges between the university and community. Our past experience tells us that community-based organizations and advocacy groups want and need basic and timely statistics and analytical tools; consequently, we will have a regular “AAPI Almanac” section. The journal will also include conceptual works presenting theories of action and intervention.

Each volume will focus on a single topic, which the “Practitioner’s Essay” and the “AAPI Almanac” sections, will explore. When appropriate, we will work with guest editors who are the leading experts in each field. Each volume can contain both articles based on the common theme and open articles not related to the theme. We are very pleased that the first volume focuses on community development. Some upcoming themes and topics include civil rights, work force issues, and health and public health.

We are indebted to the founding editorial board for helping launch *AAPI Nexus*, to Julia Heintz-Mackoff, Dennis Arguelles, Mary Uyematsu Kao, and Brandy Liên Worrall for their time and energy, to our many friends and colleagues supporting this effort, and to the Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for assistance. UCLA’s Asian American Studies Center has been extremely generous in providing a home and funding. The journal, however, is not the province of one university. Its success will come from future contributors seizing this opportunity to fulfill the goal of “serving the community.”

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