Asian American and Pacific Islander Presidential Fellows Report

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Presidential Fellows Report

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 2010 Census, Oregon’s Asian American population has grown by 42.3% and its Pacific Islander population has grown by 57.3%, making these groups the fastest growing in the state (US Census Bureau, 2019; US Census Bureau, 2020a). In the Portland metropolitan area, these populations experienced a growth of 42.1% and 64.7%, respectively (US Census Bureau, 2019; US Census Bureau, 2020a). Although Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are often lumped together as a monolith, they differ from each other in ethnicity and also culture, politics, socioeconomic status, language, religion, immigration status, and migration and colonization histories. Given the history of anti-Asian exclusion laws in the US and the colonization of the Pacific Islands, AAPIs are often invisible in the US cultural, social, and political landscapes. Furthermore, the racist stereotype of the model minority — successfully assimilated, high-achieving, and upwardly mobile — erases the heterogeneity of AAPIs and their long history of racism. More recently, racist phrases associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have fueled anti-AAPI racism and xenophobia.

As an anchor institution, Portland State University aims to provide all Oregonians with an opportunity to pursue a college education in an environment that promotes access, inclusion, and equity as its pillars of excellence. With its proximity to organizations that serve AAPIs, such as APANO (Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon), Asian Health & Services Center, and Asian Family Center, Portland State has an enormous opportunity to meet the higher education needs and aspirations of AAPIs, especially among those who live in the Portland metropolitan area where much of their population growth has been concentrated. In order to attract, retain, and graduate AAPI students, Portland State must distinguish itself as an institution that values equity in higher education and is inclusive of all students, including those who identify as AAPI.

The needs of AAPI students at PSU, however, have long been overlooked and misunderstood. Although more than 13% of undergraduate and about 8% of graduate students identify as AAPI, Portland State still does not have an AAPI Studies Program despite almost a decade of activism led by students with support from faculty and staff. Recently reported findings from Students First, a campus-wide initiative focused on student success, are also troubling. Compared with other racial groups, Pacific Islander students have among the lowest retention and graduation rates. And the 2020 Student Experience Survey (Loper & Garrity, 2020) shows that, compared to their peers, Asian American students experience greater challenges related to academic support, commuting to campus, and emotional or mental health. Cultural representation among faculty and staff on college campuses is critical for reducing the negative effects caused by racist stereotypes such as the “model minority” and “forever foreigner” and to
increase a sense of belonging (Yeh, 2004; Poon et al., 2016). Yet the number of AAPI faculty and staff at PSU has not kept pace with the increasing numbers of AAPI students.

This report presents three priority actions that Portland State can take towards fulfilling its commitment to ensuring that all of their students, including those who identify as AAPI, have the opportunity and support they need to experience the transformative power of a college education.

ACTION 1: Establish an Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies Program in the School of Gender, Race and Nations by the 2022 Fall term.

ACTION 2: Collect disaggregated and nuanced data to better understand the experiences and challenges faced by Asian American and Pacific Islander students at Portland State.

ACTION 3: Establish policies and practices to retain, recognize, and reward Asian American and Pacific Islander faculty and staff whose efforts help to enable the University to deliver on its access mission.

It is imperative to recognize that AAPI students, faculty, and staff laid the groundwork for these actions through their activism over the past decade and that the recommendations made by the Task Force for Asian American, Asian, and Pacific Islander Student Success in Spring 2017 provided the framework. In Fall 2020, President Percy appointed two Presidential Fellows to develop an action plan for the Task Force recommendations. That term, the Fellows reviewed institutional documents, interviewed current and former AAPI employees, facilitated two listening sessions with AAPI faculty and staff, and met with faculty and staff across campus to prioritize the Task Force recommendations, and develop a plan for their implementation.

President Percy has publicly expressed his commitment to the goal of eliminating all forms of racism and discrimination. He acknowledged that many students, faculty, and staff had already spent considerable time and energy in anti-racist work only to see their efforts fall flat. “We are creating a huge injustice if we let that happen again, and we can’t do that,” he said in his address at the 2020 PSU Racial Equity Summit. The implementation of these actions are critical first steps towards healing in the AAPI community, which has long been invisible at PSU.
**ACTION 1: Establish an Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies Program in the School of Gender, Race and Nations by the 2022 Fall term.**

The persistent invisibility of AAPI students at PSU is reflected in the continued absence of an AAPI Studies Program in the School of Gender, Race and Nations (SGRN), despite almost a decade of activism led by students, and supported by faculty and staff. Students who identify as AAPI now make up more than 13% of our undergraduate population, and about 8% of our graduate population. With only a few courses in Asian American Studies, and none in Pacific Islander Studies, Portland State has failed to deliver culturally responsive pedagogy for its AAPI students and to introduce all students to AAPI communities and issues as part of critical conversations about race. This absence ignores and minimizes the unique challenges and struggles of AAPIs and the important contributions they have made throughout history to the development of Oregon and the United States.

As Portland State works to address institutional racism and inequity, the conspicuous absence of AAPI Studies in the SGRN — formed in 2013 to “better understand and advocate for historically under-served populations crucial to Oregon’s success” — stands in direct opposition to PSU’s mission to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Critical Ethnic Studies is a field of study that emphasizes the separate and interdependent processes of racialization, as well as the coalitions and solidarities necessary to dismantle white supremacy and settler colonialism.

An AAPI Studies Program at Portland State will enable our students to connect the antiracist and decolonial projects of Black Lives Matter and indigenous people’s movements to the struggles for immigrant and refugee rights, the xenophobia directed at such communities, and the threats to their livelihoods and wellbeing. It will foster an intellectual environment in which students think relationally about how racialization and racism impact AAPIs and positions them against Black Americans, Latinx Americans, and Indigenous populations.

In conceptualizing a future PSU that is inclusive, it is especially critical to center Pacific Islander experiences, and to highlight how they differ from Asian American experiences. Pacific Islanders encompass many island nations, and the persistent invisibility of Pacific Islanders on campus and in our curriculum reflect how histories of colonization and militarization collide, intersect, and overlap with histories of migration.
In order to establish and sustain an AAPI Studies Program at PSU, start-up funds as well and ongoing institutional investment are needed. As first steps towards meeting the curricular needs of AAPI students, the Office of Academic Affairs should:

- Create a committee by the end of the 2021 Spring term to develop the AAPI Studies Program infrastructure. The committee should be composed of up to 10 individuals who are faculty, staff, students, or community members. Committee members should receive course-buyouts or stipends commensurate with their committee responsibilities.
- Hire two new faculty members dedicated to the AAPI Studies Program. Given the historical imbalance between Asian American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies, the Program Director should be a tenured full professor whose scholarship and teaching focus on Pacific Islander Studies. The second position should be a tenure-track faculty member whose scholarship and teaching focus on Asian American Studies.
- Provide stipends for 10 faculty to participate in a summer workshop to develop new or revise existing courses that could be offered as part of the AAPI Studies curriculum. The workshops should be facilitated by faculty with research expertise in AAPI and Critical Ethnic Studies. The workshops and compensation for faculty participants and facilitators should be modeled after the proposed Race and Ethnic Studies Requirement.
- Provide the committee with a $30,000 budget to market the program and offer public lectures, readings, and other events focused on AAPI experiences.

ACTION 2: Collect disaggregated and nuanced data to better understand the experiences and challenges faced by Asian American and Pacific Islander students at Portland State.

The “model minority” is a racist stereotype that defines all AAPIs as successfully assimilated, hardworking, and upwardly mobile (Poon et al., 2016). It is used to erase the reality and heterogeneity of AAPIs, and to pit AAPIs against other racial/ethnic groups. The model minority myth persists, in part, because of the lack of disaggregated and nuanced data. Although Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are federally recognized as two separate racial group categories, both are highly diverse. The Census Bureau defines Asian as a person with “origins in any of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asian, or the Indian subcontinent, including for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam” and Pacific Islander as a person with “origins in any of the
original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, New Zealand and the Marshalls or other Pacific Islands” (US Census Bureau, 2000b).

In higher education, aggregated data obscures important differences in the educational experiences and outcomes between AAPI sub-groups (Teranishi et al., 2019). Disaggregated data on educational attainment, for example, reveal significant differences between sub-groups. Research conducted in the state of Washington by the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education showed that Asian Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans earned a bachelor’s degree at higher rates than the statewide average (32.1%) while the educational attainment of other groups, including Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, Guamanian/Chamorro, and Samoan were lower than the statewide average and in some cases, more than 15 percent lower (Nguyen et al., 2015). Socioeconomic status and patterns of migration from Asia to the United States are among the factors that contribute to differences in educational attainment among Asian Americans (Teranishi et al., 2013). For Pacific Islanders, sense of belonging, type of high school, and citizenship and residency status, which determines access to financial aid, all impacts access, persistence, and graduation (Teranishi et al., 2019).

Pacific Islander students1 at PSU have among the lowest retention and graduation rates of all full-time undergraduate students (see Appendix). Among those entering in Fall 2013 who were full-time first-time students (n=9), 55.6% (n=5) returned to PSU after their first year. Only 33.3% (n=3) of this cohort graduated within six years compared to the 48.8% graduation rate of all full-time first-time students (n=1,543). Pacific Islander students who transferred to PSU (n=20) fared better than their full-time first-time counterparts with 50.0% (n=10) graduating within six years. However, the six-year graduation rate for Pacific Islander transfer students is still well below the 63.7% rate for all full-time transfer students in the Fall 2013 cohort (n=2,316). Both first-time and transfer Pacific Islander students experience a 13-14% gap in graduation rates compared to their peers.

Among full-time first-time Asian American2 students entering PSU in Fall 2013 (n=179), 81.0% returned to PSU for their second year (n=145) and 57.8% (n=107) graduated within six years. For the Fall 2013 full-time transfer population (n=114), 71.9% returned to PSU for their second year (n=82) and 65.8% (n=75) graduated within six years. While

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1 Based on students who self-identify as Pacific Islander only on their admissions applications; does not include students who self-identify as more than one race or ethnicity.
2 Based on students who self-identify as Asian only on their admissions applications; does not include students who self-identify as more than one race or ethnicity.
these numbers are relatively encouraging, it is important to note that, as illustrated in Appendix I, PSU lost 33-36% of first-time and transfer Asian students during this time.

Although Asian American students at PSU have higher retention and graduation rates than students in other race/ethnic groups, data from the Student Experience Survey (Loper & Garrity, 2020) conducted in Spring 2020 suggests that they are less satisfied with their experience than other students. Asian American respondents reported more challenges related to academic coaching or tutoring, felt less able to express themselves in the community, and felt less welcomed at PSU than their peers. Asian American respondents also reported greater personal challenges, specifically with commuting to campus and emotional or mental health. The disconnect between retention and graduation rates and student experiences is consistent with previous studies (Panelo, 2010) and reflects the critical need for more nuanced demographic data to expose the opportunity gaps of these students.

Race/ethnicity data at PSU is collected through the admissions application, which gives Asian American and Pacific Islanders each only one option (i.e., Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander) to describe their Asian and Pacific Islander backgrounds. This practice erases the heterogeneity of these groups. Moreover, when these data are used to make important decisions about recruiting students to Portland State and supporting their academic success, the educational needs of underrepresented and disadvantaged AAPIs may be misunderstood or overlooked. To more accurately capture the AAPI student population at Portland State, AAPI subgroups should be added to the admissions application.

The call to disaggregate data about AAPI students is consistent with recommendations made by the PSU Task Force for Asian American, Asian and Pacific Islander Student Success in 2017 and other universities. Public colleges and universities in Washington (Teranishi et al., 2015) and California (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015) have been collecting disaggregated data by ethnic groups for more than a decade as a key strategy for meeting the diverse needs of their students.

Disaggregated data can be a powerful tool for addressing racial equity. In addition to raising awareness about the educational needs of AAPI students, it can be used to more effectively address student success by targeting limited resources where they are most needed.
As first steps to understanding the experiences of and challenges faced by AAPI students, the Office of Global Diversity & Inclusion should:

- Form a workgroup to determine the most appropriate procedures for collecting and reporting AAPI subgroup data and to develop an implementation plan. The workgroup should complete its activities by the end of the 2021 Spring term.
- Hire a Pacific Islander employee in Spring 2021 to conduct focus groups with Pacific Islander students to identify the resources and support they need to successfully complete their degrees at PSU. Focus group findings should be used to develop new student success programs for Pacific Islander students.

**ACTION 3: Establish policies and practices to retain, recognize, and reward Asian American and Pacific Islander faculty and staff whose efforts help to enable the University to deliver on its access mission.**

Although racial/ethnic diversity has increased among faculty at Portland State, it does not reflect the diversity of the student population. In 2019, 36.3% (n=7,595) of undergraduate students and 21.7% (n=1,103) of graduate students identified themselves as Black, Hispanic/Latino, Multiple Ethnicity/Race, Native American, Asian American, or Pacific Islander compared to 21.5% (n=379) of all faculty. This imbalance extends to AAPI faculty and staff. Although AAPI students make up more than 13% of undergraduate and about 8% of graduate students at Portland State, only 10.5% (n=186) of all faculty identify as AAPI.

Among academic professionals, which includes staff who provide critical student support services, such as advising, counseling, and programming, only 11.8% (n=40) identify as AAPI. Consistent with patterns in higher education broadly (Prinster & Prinster, 2016; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018)), there is a dearth of AAPIs in senior-level positions at Portland State. Of the University’s 109 administrative positions, only 6.4% (n=7) are held by AAPIs. Of these seven positions, two are held by Pacific Islanders.

Numerous studies have shown that meaningful relationships with faculty are associated with college student success (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). According to Kim et al. (2009), however, AAPI students are less likely to have high-quality relationships with faculty than their students from other racial/ethnic groups. Trust, comfort, and cultural connection with faculty and staff are crucial considerations for AAPI students (Hwang et al, n.d.). In order for AAPI students to thrive at PSU and reduce the impact of negative stereotypes, we need far greater numbers of AAPI faculty who can understand the rich cultural background of AAPI students and support them holistically.
As stated in the PSU Diversity Action Council (DAC) Committee on Recruitment and Retention of Diverse Faculty report submitted to President Percy in June, 2020, “a commitment to (1) improving faculty searches so that they attract a more diverse candidate pool and lead to greater diversity in hiring, and (2) creating a campus climate and support structures that allow diverse faculty to thrive on our campus so that we can retain a more diverse faculty, is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative.”

Retention among AAPI faculty and staff is a concern. Significantly, since the Task Force for Asian American, Asian and Pacific Islander Student Success completed its work in 2017, four of seven members in student-facing staff positions have since left Portland State. Lack of upward mobility and associated salary compression, lack of cultural fit, and outside opportunities better suited to their strengths were among their reasons for leaving.

Current and former AAPI faculty and staff, indicated during interviews and listening sessions that oftentimes they feel a responsibility and obligation to support AAPI and other BIPOC students and communities, and that they are frequently asked to take on above-level service work to represent diversity for the university. This work receives little recognition, adds an unfair burden to their workloads, takes time and energy away from other critical tasks, and ultimately leads to burnout. When faculty are engaging in diversity-related work on behalf of the University, they have less time for activities that are valued by the University in the promotion and tenure process: writing grants, conducting research, and publishing their work. In October 2020, the PSU Faculty Senate moved to appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to craft language on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the University Promotion and Tenure Guidelines. This development is encouraging.

AAPI faculty and staff also expressed feeling isolated at Portland State, and described experiences with racial microaggression and overt discrimination. These experiences — responsibility to achieve institutional diversity, equity and inclusion goals, racism, isolation, promotion inequities — have been described in the literature as the "minority tax" or the “cultural tax” (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Foreign-born faculty, especially those who have recently immigrated to the United States face additional challenges that can negatively impact job satisfaction, including the navigation of visas and negotiating the ins-and-outs of teaching in a U.S. American classroom (Hereto, 2016). The lack of mentors to help navigate the promotion and tenure process exacerbate feelings of isolation among AAPI faculty and a sense that in order to succeed at Portland State — an institution that centers whiteness — they need to change their values.

At the same time that AAPI faculty and staff are asked to represent diversity for the university, their racialized experiences are often erased or dismissed in conversations
about racial equity. They expressed that they are viewed as over-represented and privileged, like white people, and thus rendered invisible. As a result, instances of anti-Asian discrimination are often ignored or dismissed. Furthermore, they expressed frustration that they only “count as minorities when it is convenient and don’t count [as minorities] when it isn’t convenient.” For example, AAPI faculty have been told by their supervisors that they are ineligible for supplemental funds for BIPOC faculty from Global Diversity and Inclusion. As described by a former faculty member in a peer-reviewed publication about her time at PSU, such hostile work environments lead to discouragement, disengagement, and eventually resignation (Duncan, 2014).

As first steps in retaining, recognizing, and rewarding AAPI faculty and staff who efforts help to enable the University to deliver on its access mission, the Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion should:

- Provide AAPI faculty and staff with formal mentoring and leadership development opportunities to support their career progression and ensure representation of AAPIs in senior-level positions.
- Create a job description for the University’s Affinity Groups & Employee Resource Groups (APERG) (co)chairs that includes compensation that reflects the skill, knowledge, and value they bring to the University. These groups are critical in the retention of diverse faculty and staff and (co)chairs, who organize their respective AGERGs, have been leading these groups on a voluntary basis.
- Encourage supervisors of Academic Professionals to update job descriptions to accurately reflect the percentage of time that employees dedicate to committee service and activities (e.g., serving as adviser to student groups) so that their service becomes part of their annual reviews and used to determine merit increases.
- Develop an on-line training to educate Portland State University employees at all levels about the model minority myth and how it harms all BIPOC students and employees by fostering structural and institutional racism.

CONCLUSION

In order to live up to its diversity, equity, and inclusion values, Portland State must address the longstanding inequities experienced by BIPOC students, faculty, and staff. The Task Force for Asian-American, Asian, and Pacific Islander Student Success submitted their recommendations to the University in 2017. Disappointingly, the report was shelved for more than three years. At this moment of racial reckoning, the AAPI community trusts that PSU recognizes the urgency with which the three actions described in this report should be implemented.
REFERENCES


Retention, graduation, and non-enrollment over a seven-year time span, Fall 2013 cohort of Full-Time First-Time Undergraduate Students

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Retention, graduation, and non-enrollment over a seven-year time span, Fall 2013 cohort of Full-Time Transfer Undergraduate Students

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</tr>
<tr>
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</table>
Retention, graduation, and non-enrollment over a seven-year time span, Fall 2013 cohort of Full-Time First-Time Asian Undergraduate Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years from Entry</th>
<th>Fall Term</th>
<th>Number Students Retained</th>
<th>Percent Students Retained</th>
<th>Number Students Graduated</th>
<th>Percent Students Graduated</th>
<th>Number Students Not Retained</th>
<th>Percent Students Not Retained</th>
<th>Total Number Students</th>
<th>Total Percent Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>179</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
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<td>30.70%</td>
<td>179</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1.70%</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>179</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>41.30%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21.80%</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36.90%</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<td>10.10%</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>50.80%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>39.10%</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
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<td>3.90%</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>59.80%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>36.30%</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
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</table>
Retention, graduation, and non-enrollment over a seven-year time span, Fall 2013 cohort of Full-Time Transfer Asian Undergraduate Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years from Entry</th>
<th>Fall Term</th>
<th>Number Students Retained</th>
<th>Percent Students Retained</th>
<th>Number Students Graduated</th>
<th>Percent Students Graduated</th>
<th>Number Students Not Retained</th>
<th>Percent Students Not Retained</th>
<th>Total Number Students</th>
<th>Total Percent Students</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>114</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24.60%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45.60%</td>
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<td>114</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.90%</td>
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<td>37</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2018</td>
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<td>74</td>
<td>64.90%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34.20%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>2019</td>
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<td>0.90%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>65.80%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Retention, graduation, and non-enrollment over a seven-year time span, Fall 2013 cohort of Full-Time First-Time Pacific Islander Undergraduate Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years from Entry</th>
<th>Fall Term</th>
<th>Number Students Retained</th>
<th>Percent Students Retained</th>
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<th>Percent Students Not Retained</th>
<th>Total Number Students</th>
<th>Total Percent Students</th>
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<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<td>33.30%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>2018</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>2019</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Retention, graduation, and non-enrollment over a seven-year time span, Fall 2013 cohort of Full-Time Transfer Pacific Islander Undergraduate Students

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<th>Number Students Not Retained</th>
<th>Percent Students Not Retained</th>
<th>Total Number Students</th>
<th>Total Percent Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Year 1</td>
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<td>100.00%</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>65.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>50.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>2019</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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