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## An Ethic of Care in Student Affairs: Humanizing Relationships and Asserting Cultural Values at an AANAPISI

Aida Cuenza-Uvas and Demeturie Toso-Lafaele Gogue

### **ABSTRACT**

As Asian Americans and Pacific Islander (AAPI) practitioners in higher education, we assert our cultural values to leverage important connections between members within the community. These values are centered on collective responsibility, demonstrating care for the community, offering respect, and acting with love. These values manifest through our daily interactions with others and in the spaces we occupy, whether it is in physical proximity or virtual settings. COVID-19, the unprecedented global health crisis that forced campus closures across the nation, along with tensions provoked by blatant racism, racial violence, and ongoing microaggressions, have reminded us that AAPIs are not immune to the injustices present in society. These environmental conditions have prompted negative self-perceptions, induced stressors, compromised physical and mental health, and destabilized income. Student affairs professionals have the potential to intervene, offering students guidance and support as they contemplate personal decisions (e.g., family health crisis, job loss, food and housing insecurities, unattended cultural practices) amidst these harrowing conditions. This article discusses how student affairs professionals at Mt. San Antonio College, an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution, utilized their cultural values and employed creative strategies to demonstrate an ethic of care and responsibility

for the student community amidst COVID-19 and the rise in violence toward Asian Americans.

### **ABOUT MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE AND THE ARISE PROGRAM**

Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) is a single-campus district located in Southern California in the East San Gabriel Valley. During the 2020–21 academic year, Mt. SAC enrolled 45,060 students with Asian (18.45 percent), Filipino (3.79 percent), and Pacific Islander (0.22 percent) students representing 22.46 percent of the diverse student body (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, n.d.). Since 2011, the college has been awarded two Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) grants, which provided federal funding to establish the Arise Program. The mission of the Arise Program has been to build a community of holistic support for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students to (1) help them navigate their educational experience during and beyond their time in community college; (2) provide opportunities that recognize, validate, and honor their cultural values and identity; and (3) offer programs and services that enhance their personal, student, and leadership development. Through these intersecting activities, students work toward self-growth; identify and manage their “why’s” as a college-going individual; and empower themselves to define and meet their goals while dealing with the challenges they confront along the way.

Student affairs practitioners in the Arise Program have leveraged their own cultural values to positively influence student engagement within the program. These values include collective responsibility, respect, love, and approaching their work with an ethic of care. According to Museus’s (2014) Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model, multiple conditions promote a positive environment for the holistic engagement of students of color. These include nine tenets: “Cultural Familiarity, Culturally Relevant Knowledge, Cultural Community Service, Opportunities for Meaningful Cross-Cultural Engagement, Collectivist Cultural Orientations, Culturally Validating Environments, Humanized Educational Environments, Proactive Philosophies, [and] Availability of Holistic Support” (Museus, 2014, 207). These conditions focus on the interactions between institutional agents and the students; that is, the CECE model focuses on the relational aspect. The CECE model implores institutional agents to ask critical questions of their work and the

environment they cultivate: How are students made to feel welcome? How do we ensure we are listening to their needs and primary concerns? How do we create affirming spaces that validate their sense of belonging, experiences, and feelings? How do we help students identify the strengths they bring with them from their community, such as social, navigational, and familial capital (Yosso, 2005)? These are critical questions that we at Mt. SAC repeatedly ask ourselves as we engage with students who come through our program. These questions became even more relevant as we thought about how we would address them within a virtual setting given the impact of COVID-19 on college campuses.

### **THE ARISE PROGRAM'S APPROACH TO SUPPORTING AAPI STUDENTS**

The Arise Program provides support through academic advisement and counseling, peer mentoring, tutoring, and referrals to other campus resources (e.g., financial aid, student health, basic needs). Throughout the year, we build community with students through different student development programming, including small group and large group activities, with some activities offered as a single workshop (e.g., *Fale Fono*, Samoan term for “house meeting”), multiday event (leadership retreat), or a long-term project (*Digital Stories*), which address different topics related to personal development, academic soft skills, career exploration, cultural identity development, and leadership. We also expose them to other educational endeavors through conferences and educational fieldtrips that provide AAPI sociohistorical perspectives.

One noteworthy example of how we support students is through the Arise Student Action Plan! (ASAP!). Since the spring of 2017, the program has sent Arise students an electronic report on their academic progress after each major term. ASAP! is personalized for each student and reports both term and cumulative data on their English and math course completion, GPA, and percent of unit completion. Students were asked to respond to a survey using our Arise Canvas Hub to obtain their feedback on the ASAP! letter. One student wrote, “I feel that the ASAP was a great way to visualize the progress I made towards transferring. It provided important information that gave me a quick and easy way to gauge how much work I had done and how much I had to do.” Another student expressed what part of the ASAP! they found valuable, “A really helpful area was where it said to ‘check

in with a counselor.’ This helps because I might not know that I should constantly be checking these areas and checking in because I am very busy with work and school. It’s a lot to remember and keep track of so this part is helpful.” Another student noted, “I feel good since there is ARISE who always keep on looking for us, they become our strong support that gives us proper foundation in progressing through our academic career.” The ASAP! letter is a means for us to proactively engage with students by creating a “data selfie,” which allows us to check in, provide updates, and remind students that we are a resource for their navigation of the college experience.

Applying culturally relevant practices in counseling and advisement is an important strategy when working with our AAPI students, some of whom depend on or factor in their families’ input as part of their decision-making processes. It has required our staff to comprehend the perspectives of parents/families more fully, which sometimes conflict with that of the students’ (e.g., values, motivations, priorities). In this process of inquiry, we also investigate familial knowledge of college terms, policies, and processes. Staff have spent time demystifying college systems, regulations, policies, and processes and interpreting ways to address resolutions to temporary but sometimes persistent barriers (e.g., tax records for financial aid applicants, nonresident reclassification for out-of-state students, enrollment concerns). In various situations, student affairs professionals have had to clarify Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations—a federal law that protects the privacy of students’ educational records—or process distinctions in program application requirements within the community college versus other country’s programs (e.g., nursing programs in the Philippines vs. California community college). Staff strive to develop meaningful relationships with students, demonstrating their care for and commitment to understanding students’ meeting their needs. This is an example of Museus’s (2014) “humanized educational environments.” When the campus closed, many of our students were grappling with the uncertainty and angst over when they could return to campus while sharing their personal dilemmas (e.g., online learning challenges, familial basic needs, mental health, feelings of isolation). Our weekly virtual check-ins were created to support the continuity of care where we could listen, process with, and communicate resources and updates regarding campus decisions. Students appreciated the sense of community that this provided as we helped them to prioritize their well-being.

As part of our collective responsibility, establishing trust is an important element in developing human relationships. It lays the foundation for staff to engage in teachable moments between themselves, the students, and, when necessary, the family. For example, in working with the Pacific Islander community, some students move from other geographic locations (e.g., American or Western Samoa, Hawai'i, Utah) to attend our campus. Necessary communication between the student, parent, and staff may be difficult to establish for different reasons. For some of our Asian American students, a portion of which are more recent immigrants, they may be less familiar with the U.S. education system or still managing language acquisition skills, which requires staff to be proactive in their approach in advocating for students. Different AAPI subgroups confront microaggressions, negative stereotypes, and external pressures that can affect self-confidence, impede performance, or discourage participation. For example, Asian American students have described pressures they feel in the expectation to succeed academically while worried about missing out on the social development opportunities in college or they have expressed lack of success in effectively balancing their social and academic life. Pacific Islander male athletes combat microaggressions, such as only being recognized for their athletic abilities and not their interest in academics. One student reflected, "People expect that we are only good in sports, and that we aren't smart enough for school. People expect us to fail, and not expect us to be anything in life" (Pacific Islander student, personal communication, April 10, 2013). The message, as another student put it, "Polys are not expected to succeed" (Pacific Islander student, personal communication, April 3, 2013).

We are obligated to serve the whole student. We have to be inquisitive about and understand the external factors that may influence the student's sense of self to help them determine how they will be able to journey through their educational path with intention and success. This requires us to infuse an ethic of care for the community in every moment we interact with them. According to Noddings (2012), an ethic of care requires an intentional willingness to take action. It is an act of love and care. In the Tongan culture, the term *'ofa* is described as exhibiting love, compassion, and humility while *fetokoni'aki* represents responsibility for others (Vaioleti, 2006). Our moral compass as educators is guided by such cultural values; intentional acts must support and encourage students if we are to enact such responsibility.

This is manifested in daily interactions with students, in formal and informal conversations, and during the activities that students attend.

In addition to providing targeted and culturally relevant programs and services, we have had to consider the uniqueness of each student's situation. The AAPI student demographic is a heterogeneous one (Gogue et al., 2022). As a result, a multitude of concerns revolve around their particular background, such as their understanding of the U.S. postsecondary educational system or California college systems; pursuit of athletics knowledge of athletic requirements and readiness to play (athletic eligibility, academic preparedness, affordability); food, income, or housing instability; sense of belonging; importance and degree of family involvement in student's decisions; resource gaps (e.g., financial, technology, academic, and soft skills); and emotional pressures (e.g., combatting isolation or home sickness, academic performance expectations). When a student's need requires attention to many of these concerns, especially when there is limited knowledge and awareness, we have had to be mindful of enacting "proactive philosophies" (Museus, 2014) to connect the student and their families to resources more efficiently and effectively. That is, the Arise Program staff served as a broker, communicating the needs between the student, their family members, and the institution in situations in which effective solutions or increased awareness was sought. There may be communication gaps or lack of transparency between the student and parent, which is a common reality. This is an important perspective to acknowledge, especially when working with AAPI students who actively involve their families or whose families are strong advocates. Staff must carefully navigate how to effectively respond to identified student support needs while promoting accountability and respecting regulations such as FERPA (e.g., managing disclosure of student records with student consent) intended to protect a student's right to privacy. The interaction with the student's family is also part of collective responsibility, which is central to AAPI communities.

### **ADJUSTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES DUE TO COVID-19**

Prior to the pandemic, the Arise Program hosted various in-person talking circles to allow students to come together to discuss critical issues regarding identity, navigating the college culture, and balancing academics and familial priorities. Specific talking circles were held among Asian students, Filipinx, male athletes (primarily Pacific Islanders), and Pacific Islander females to help us learn about

concerns within each group. During the pandemic, some of the issues raised during the in-person talking circles continued to be primary concerns for students during campus closure. The pandemic exacerbated students' experiences given that the public health crisis and forced shutdowns meant loss of income, health crises, new family priorities, and other individual concerns. When our campus closure occurred, staff recognized that a virtual space was not conducive for certain types of programming, such as our Digital Stories Project and leadership retreat, both of which require highly interactive engagement and lend themselves to participant vulnerability. Still, the Arise Program staff recognized the need for continued support for students and worked to determine ways to sustain engagement virtually.

Our main objective during the pandemic was to build an online community by (re)creating those spaces that fostered a sense of community among students prior to the campus closures. Not only did this bring students together but also it helped program staff remain cognizant of what students were most concerned about and their experiences in navigating this virtual space. As a team, we first focused on the concepts of "continuity of care," "community," and "normalcy" when reflecting on how to engage students virtually. We used Schlossberg's transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) and the "4 S's" (situation, self, support, and strategies) as a framework to process and plan for our transition to virtual support services. More specifically, the 4 S's helped to frame our needs within a virtual context and explore creative ways to address them. This led us through a self-assessment of what we were confronting (situation), our strengths and areas of growth (self), online tools we needed to access and learn (support), and actions to take (strategies), such as develop/increase social media activity, create a means for centralized communication, and establish a way to promote consistent access to the program. As we operationalized these strategies, we reassessed our approaches and made appropriate adjustments based on feedback from staff and students. We determined that we had to triage our approach: create virtual space for frequent check in on students' emotional well-being, respond to questions and requests for counselor meetings, share real-time updates about the program, alert students to resources becoming available (e.g., technology loans), and create virtual events based on students' needs and wants. We realized the importance of responding to the crises (e.g., pandemic, personal challenges—students and staff—in adapting to the unforeseen event) by serving as a lifeline to campus, maintaining



structure in a chaotic environment, and enabling staff to capitalize on their creativity and initiative to learn and apply new skills as we adapted to a new environment while also learning together.

When the pandemic hit, it was early spring 2020. We were barely a few weeks in and we had just held what would be our last in-person event for an unknown period. Our welcome back event, held at the beginning of each major term, gave us the opportunity to reconnect with current students, welcome those new to the program, and share upcoming events and programming. During the initial campus closure resulting from the global pandemic, students were gravely concerned about family circumstances, capacity to learn online, purpose, loss of community, conducive space for study, mental health, isolation, inability to engage in cultural rituals, lack of technology, and adapting to a virtual learning environment and support services. As the pandemic and its resulting impact on higher education institutions unfolded, we focused our efforts on how to demonstrate care for the campus community and their families remotely. The Arise Program staff mobilized to create ways to easily access our resources virtually and to provide a means by which to sustain communication. We used two tools to maintain connection to our students and to facilitate support services. The first, Zoom, enabled us to create a virtual space to meet with students where we scheduled wellness check-ins and pivoted some of our programming. For example, prior to the pandemic, we hosted an in-person Fale Fono (our house meetings), which allowed students to discuss critical issues impacting their navigation of and success at Mt. SAC. Given the campus closure, we hosted the Fale Fono using Zoom, continuing programs that students were already familiar with through a virtual platform.

Zoom also helped us to later establish the Arise Virtual Front Desk (VFD), which served as the main portal for students to visit the program, meet with counselors, drop in for tutoring, and meet with a financial aid representative. Because students could not visit our on-campus facilities during this time, we scheduled time slots that a member of Arise Program staff would be in the VFD to greet students and coordinate the virtual spaces for meetings. This meant that an Arise Program staff member was always present during typical campus hours of operation. Zoom served as an integral tool, and its various capabilities enabled us to provide a lifeline to students, establish a regular means of communication, and facilitate support. The best way to describe the adjustment was that we were all learning

together. Students were so patient, appreciative, and compassionate in their understanding. The program relied on their willingness to learn, remained flexible, and encouraged students to talk openly about shared frustrations. The bottom line is that there was a mutual expectation of grace as we navigated through the practical challenges of technology and overall change brought about by a major event and shift in our daily norms.

In April 2020, Frank Harris and J. Luke Wood led a webinar discussing equity-minded practices in the student services online environment that staff found helpful. Based on seven recommended strategies, we used these guidelines to adapt our programming. These strategies reminded us to (1) consider the use of multiple platforms, (2) create a repository of information, (3) enact timely responses, (4) demonstrate an ethic of care, (5) use videos and virtual spaces, (6) maintain essential interactions (e.g., counseling), and (7) adapt in uncharted waters. As both staff and students searched for a sense of “normalcy,” these efforts created a means for members of the campus community to still feel connected to the college space—an experience many desired in the midst of navigating the virtual learning environment. We missed walking about campus, seeing other students, and being in the space that for many felt like “a second home.” At the beginning we wondered how long it would take to reopen campus. None of us knew that it would last for nearly two years.

The second tool that we learned to use was Canvas, which was primarily an instructor’s tool to manage their courses and communicate with those who were enrolled in their sections. While Canvas has been a tool used by other members of the campus community, it was a new platform for the Arise Program staff and the majority of other Student Services units. Through Canvas, we created an Arise Canvas Hub, which allowed us to create a repository of information with links to campus resources. For example, students could access the hub and gain information around navigating the college experience during the pandemic, which included links to the COVID-19 Student Health Information. Students could also use the hub to access counselor appointment scheduling, online tutoring resources, transfer and graduation resources, and announcements both from the Arise Program and Mt. SAC at large. Overall, the Arise Canvas Hub afforded us the opportunity to centralize our services and easily provide students with a variety of virtual campus resources at their disposal. The hours it took staff to activate and build the hub to its current application was

a major undertaking. It required the development of a new set of skills to engineer the tool that was not packaged for student services.

Together, these tools have enabled our team to continue fostering a sense of community for our Arise students and staff. While these platforms have existed well before the pandemic, the move to an online learning environment required that we think about innovative ways to use these platforms to offer programs and services that became even more integral for many of our isolated students. As noted earlier, these tools led us to creating the Arise VFD to mimic the experience students would generally have when they arrive at the Equity Center on campus. Moreover, we centralized information about our services using the Arise Canvas Hub to ensure students were aware of the different services provided by Mt. SAC that students could not access virtually. By continuing to foster a community among our Arise students and staff, we witnessed opportunities to check in with each other, shared struggles, received support and validation from the community, and realized that we were not alone in our experiences. For Arise Staff specifically, they were able to challenge and broaden the ways in which they develop and sustain community both for the students as well as those outside of the Arise Program and institution. They were also able to share with other institutions about ways to use platforms like Zoom and Canvas to further support students at the AANAPISI Community Forums (ACF). The pandemic forced us into an online environment; however, through community, support, and a desire to center our students' needs and experiences, we were able to persist and thrive in this new age of teaching and learning.

## **ADDRESSING ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE AND CENTERING AAPI COMMUNITIES**

Despite the challenges that a virtual environment posed for certain activities that we have traditionally held in person, we were still able to engage in meaningful programming. For example, one of the social issues that arose in relation to the pandemic was the rise in anti-Asian violence across the nation. The social unrest that resulted in acts of violence, discrimination, and racism invoked concerns and fears among the Asian American community for themselves, their family, and other members of the larger AAPI community as witnessed through social media as well as through stories that were shared. Using the skills that we developed for transitioning to an online format, we were able to host community talking circles using Zoom. Prior to the

pandemic, we hosted weekly talking circles on campus to bring students together to talk about critical issues impacting them and their community. Shifting to weekly virtual talking circles as a result of campus closures, these talking circles became a healing space where our community of students as well as staff, faculty, and administrators could reflect on their transition from being on campus to being in an online learning environment, and even the unfortunate events that ultimately transpired during the pandemic, specifically the anti-Asian violence.

One noteworthy talking circle that we hosted was in response to the Atlanta shooting, which took the lives of six Asian individuals. Our Zoom meeting had close to one hundred participants present, representing Mt. SAC faculty, students, staff, administrators, and even a member of the Board of Trustees. Similar to other talking circles, we provided a space for members of the community to gather virtually and reflect on these events and process their emotions with others. Those who were present shared how they were feeling and how angry they were at the event that unfolded in Atlanta. Given what we had learned during the beginning of the pandemic and our move to online instruction, we were able to use other tools to expand these talking circle conversations. For example, we used Padlet—a real-time collaborative virtual platform that allows groups to share resources, images, and messages as well as comment and react to other's posts using a virtual bulletin board—to further engage members, especially during this particular talking circle. Titled "Stop Asian Hate," members who were present during this talking circle could post comments (e.g., experiences, words of support and solidarity, and images that reflected their emotions) with the understanding that the space and its related tools for engagement were grounded upon rules of respect, bravery, and openness. The Padlet platform also included resolutions and organizational statements on anti-Asian hate (e.g., Board of Trustee resolution; the college president's message to the campus community; African American Male Education Network and Development's [A<sup>2</sup>MEND], Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education's [APAHE], and California Community College Organización de Latinx Empowerment Guidance & Advocacy for Success [COLEGAS] AAPI statements), historical information of anti-Asian racism and links to related articles, and personal reflections from various members of the community. Using Padlet during this talking circle was a virtual representation of community engagement,

especially as the platform updated in real time as members present posted their thoughts and reflections on the topic. Moreover, the platform allowed for anonymity; participants could freely share without fear of being identified. This would have been difficult to achieve if we were together in person. One anonymous comment read, "I felt nauseous when I read the details of the shooting . . . I'm very afraid, I don't feel confident in the political and historical changes." Another participant wrote, "I don't know what's stronger: my fear of being racially profiled or the pandemic? It's been getting so hard to live day to day knowing that something so intangible could put me in danger. #StopAAPIHate #BLM #StopRacism." Given our use of Zoom and the sensitivity of the topic, mental health counselors and academic counselors were available in the event students wanted to have a private conversation in a Zoom breakout room.

In addition to holding space for members of our community to reflect on the anti-Asian racism, discrimination, and violence, we also recognized the importance of cultivating space to continue learning and celebrating our AAPI communities, especially during Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month (APIHM) in May. Because Zoom allowed folks to speak and present from any location in the world, we took advantage of this opportunity to invite guest lecturers and speakers who could talk about the legacy of AAPI communities. Faculty held a talk on the sociohistorical perspectives of "Yellow Peril." Dr. Russell Jeung from San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies and stopaapihate.org presented on the current climate and rise of violence against Asians during the pandemic. Female Asian actress Kelly Hu discussed her experiences with stereotyping and discrimination in Hollywood. Finally, Chef Sam Choy, a guest speaker for the "That's Major: Business Edition" shared stories about cultural lessons he derived from his family that have driven his success as a renowned chef and restaurateur. Through each of these guest speakers, the message of pride for AAPI communities and their heritage was resounding. Coupled with these virtual speaking engagements, we also used Padlet to celebrate members of our campus community. AAPI students shared how they celebrated their heritage. Moreover, AAPI staff, faculty, and administrators were encouraged to respond to the following prompt on Padlet: "What does it mean to you to be an AAPI educator?" Finally, Arise Peer Mentors posted videos they created, documenting aspects of their culture and traditions to share with the campus community. Similar to our Arise Canvas Hub, we also included links to various

resources (e.g., stopaapihate.org, mental health resources, and library research guides) on Padlet should students need additional support and information. The talking circle, APIHM events, and the use of Padlet supported a virtual space for community validation, program support, elevating conversations about AAPI communities and solidarity, sharing community resources, and documenting participants thoughts and expressions about the events we hosted.

In the beginning of the pandemic, we were in constant communication with students around plans for their return to campus. However, students' needs evolved as it became clearer that campus would be closed for an undetermined amount of time. Thus, students were no longer asking about when they would be able to return to campus. Instead, it was how do they thrive in isolation, away from their peers; how do they stay attentive in their courses when their home environment may not be conducive to their learning? When we held weekly check-ins that our Arise Peer Mentors named "What's Up Wednesdays," we asked students to tell us what kind of events would be helpful to them. Their responses included fun virtual gatherings to destress, tips for mental health, learning strategies, and virtual workouts. Given the number of personal distractions and challenges students faced, we had to adapt programming to realign with students' interests and consider ways to take advantage of virtual events. Our Arise Peer Mentors were attuned to the needs of their peers and created intentional programming as a result. For example, the Arise Peer Mentors coordinated the "That's Major" event, a career exploration presentation series. Given what we as staff learned about facilitating events in a virtual space, we were able to pass this knowledge on to our students and guide them as they prepared for this series. They took on tasks to invite guest speakers from various industries, a general counselor, and a program representative to offer insight and advice on the featured major. In the spring of 2021, the series included nursing, business, arts, STEM, and undecided. The Arise Peer Mentors fielded questions, facilitated the agenda with the speakers, and led a Q&A segment between the speakers and students. Guest speakers were able to offer advice on soft skills and share their educational journey and experience. The event attracted many of our AAPI students who were navigating the decision process around choosing a major. Given its popularity, the "That's Major" series will continue and be delivered as a hybrid model so that we can continue to bring guest speakers from other parts of the country.

It has now been about two years since we have operated virtually. During this period, we have had two groups of graduates/transfers. We met students for the first time in person at a graduation fest drive-through event hosted by the Student Services Division at Mt. SAC. The grad fest was a collaborative event between the different Student Services programs (e.g., the Dream Program for undocumented students; the Aspire Program for African American students; and our REACH Program, which focuses on foster youth students) where students were able to pick up their complimentary cap and gown, food pantry items, and various graduation recognition items from the different programs. Students were appreciative of the different gifts that we were offering, and they were even more excited to see people from campus during this celebratory event leading up to commencement. For some staff members, it was their first time meeting students in person because all their prior engagement took place virtually. The human connection that we had missed was mutually felt at this Student Services-sponsored event. As we send off our graduates and welcome in a new cohort of students amidst the pandemic, we anticipate another transition of (re)building our community while sustaining hybrid modes of engagement. We will (re)learn what students are interested in, what they need, and the ways in which they would like to engage. That is, we will consider sending out preliminary surveys to students to understand the contexts in which they are situated in prior to starting in the fall and develop programs and services to ease their transition to the online learning environment. This will afford us the opportunity to revisit and redesign activities and events that we have not been able to offer. For example, during the pandemic, we were unable to continue our Digital Stories Project; however, the pandemic and these various virtual platforms have inspired creative opportunities to get students to document some of their experiences at home and how this translates to their virtual campus experience.

The fall term is a period of adjustment as community colleges across the state are returning at different rates and vaccination requirements and COVID-19 testing become a part of campus life. Relearning today's students' interests begins with our observations of student engagement and participation while taking stock of the challenges we encounter as we implement programming efforts. As we continue to adapt to this new form of learning and the various challenges and opportunities it presents, we have to reimagine what college life looks like in a hybrid environment. We will need to consider focus groups,



surveys, and reflection on semester outcomes to assess and determine what students' expectations are of their college experience and how they have shifted, if at all, as a result of the pandemic.

## **LEARNING FROM THE PAST AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

As we forge ahead anew, taking the lessons we have learned by working through the pandemic about how we center the continuity of care for the community and practice collective responsibility, we will emerge as we have been—a culture of practitioners who have found creative ways to connect and support our students in ways that transcend physical spaces and flow into virtual environments as seamlessly as possible. What we learned at the beginning of the pandemic and the unprecedented experience of moving entirely into a virtual environment will inevitably shift yet again as new technology is created and different platforms are developed. As a result, student affairs practitioners must remain open-minded to the possibilities as we prepare for our return and consider models that have worked and been more accessible for our students (e.g., student adaptation to online environment, resource utilization, college socialization). We will likely employ hybrid modes of engagement where possible. Some of the challenges that students faced, which seem to have been amplified during the pandemic, will continue to impact our students well beyond the pandemic. We will need to remain cognizant of the student's human ecological framework—the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994)—that provides a framework to understand the interactions between the students and their environment (Renn, 2003). In this student-environment theoretical framework, Arise is well positioned in both students' mesosystems (i.e., between their home life and campus life, whether in person or virtual) as well as their microsystems (i.e., their interpersonal relationships that they have with peers in the Arise Program as well as the Arise Program staff). Our relationship with our students is in constant flux as students come through the program during their time at Mt. SAC, and even as they transfer to other colleges or graduate and enter the workforce. The pandemic has also shown us that we can sustain the relationships of our alumni virtually, allowing us to keep informed of their progress and invite them to connect with current students. It is these relationships and interactions that can support students' progression and success within their college trajectory. As we think about our role as AAPI higher education practitioners, it is imperative that we lean into our cultural values to guide



our work and inform our approach to sustaining relationships both in person and beyond physical space. While the pandemic prompted campus closures for nearly two years, our values continued to inform our programs and services, thereby promoting an ethic of care for our students and the community at large.

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We would like to acknowledge the Arise Program staff, outstanding professionals who have demonstrated an outpouring of love and concern for our students and colleagues alike. They were instrumental in building an online community that focused on what mattered most to students and how to ensure we were accessible. They provided support and encouragement to other areas including the AANAPISI community (ACF presentation), by passing along knowledge and skills they learned to adapt to a virtual environment. This was collective responsibility in practice. Throughout the uncertainty of the pandemic, we prioritized community support, creativity, and innovation fueled by reminders to each other about self-care, tapping into the synergy that was channeled through creativity and will, and the hope instilled by finding the silver linings in opportunities we discovered along the way.

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