The Pan-Asian American Community House at the University of Pennsylvania

Fall 2015

Alumni Newsletter
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Announcements
EVENTS

THE PAN-ASIAN
AMERICAN MOVEMENT

PAACH OPEN HOUSE
September 9th, 4 PM-6 PM
ARCH 108
Come celebrate the start of another year at PAACH and meet new members of the PAACH family!

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES (ASAM)
OPEN HOUSE
September 11th, 12 PM-2 PM
ARCH 108

ARCH FACULTY LUNCHEON SERIES
September 18th, 12 PM-2 PM (Dr. Giang Nguyen)
October 16th, 12 PM-2 PM (TBD)
November 20th, 12 PM-2 PM (TBD)
ARCH 108

ALUMNI MIXER WITH PAACH
New York City: August 2015 UPRAN and yPAACH Summer Mixer
Philadelphia: October 7th, 6 PM-8 PM
Location TBD

HOMECOMING WEEKEND
PAACH HOUSEWARMING
November 7th, 4 PM-5 PM
PAACH Living Room

15 Year anniversary BRUNCH
Saturday
NOVEMBER 7, 2015
10 AM-12 PM

Asian Pacific American HERITAGE WEEK
NOVEMBER 9-14
www.apahw.org

215.746.6046 paach@lists.upenn.edu vpal.upenn.edu/paach
Alumni Reflections on 15 Years of PAACH
“15 More Years of Progress”
Ben Alisuag C’09

At Penn, I spent a lot of time with staple PAACH programs. My first introduction to the community was through APALI (Asian Pacific American Leadersh-ership Initiative), which was hugely influential in my becoming a facilitator a few years later, as well as APSC (Asian Pacific Student Coalition) Chair and Seer of the 2009 Oracle class. I’ve spent the last 6 years in various roles in the education space (TFA, Fulbright, Achievement First), and I recently helped to launch a free online school for the social sector called Philanthropy University. During my time at Penn, I was always impressed at how quickly our PAACH community mobilized in solidarity of one another. In 2008, when the Asian American Studies program faced a debilitating budget cut, our PAACH community sprung into action! Within hours, we had garnered nearly 3000 signatures in a national petition, which also made the front page of Angry Asian Man, as well as other local news sources.

There is no doubt in my mind that our joint team—everyone from APSC constituent groups to ASAM (Asian American Studies) faculty to alumni—were instrumental in securing a budget for ASAM that year, and solidifying the program’s importance amongst the greater Penn community.

As the APSC Chair at the time, I was humbled to be able to lead our community in such a historic moment. My task for PAACH students now: be proactive! Let’s not wait until issues are so grand before we act on them. The problems already exist—we need increased higher education and language access for South-east Asian students, more mental health services for our growing population of students with depression, and improved dialogue around our role and responsibilities as allies during these trying times of unrest in Ferguson and other areas of the country.

Here’s to 15 more years of progress!
Seven years after leaving PAACH and Penn, I still reflect on and apply the things I’ve learned - particularly about my racial identity and about the -isms that prevail in the U.S. APALI was my jumpstart to asking these questions and seeking answers through conversations with my peers. Through my involvement with APSC, PPA (Penn Phillipine Association), and Sigma Psi Zeta, I found other perspectives that helped me better understand myself and my experience. Recently, in my work in urban education, we’re starting to have these conversations, as an organization, to better how we serve our students. I am better equipped to have these conversations, answer others’ questions, represent myself, and ask deeper questions because of my involvement with PAACH. Having visited PAACH a few times since graduation, I’m happy to see these conversations are still integral to its existence. My hope is that cross-community conversations become more regular - to not only raise consciousness within our community but also across communities.

“Continuing the Conversation”

Jun Li C’08
PAACH Board of Advisors

PAACH became my home in my Freshman year when I worked there as a work-study student. Every Thursday, I worked the night shift, and did my work as upperclassmen would watch recording of past year’s CSA culture show on our TV. I learned all about the history of PAACH-affiliated student organizations as I put together binders full of DP spreads advertising the events ever since they were first organized. I applied for APALI in my spring semester and I loved the program so much that I became a 2014-15 facilitator, and led two wonderful classes of Kanolees (Neons were cool, too). I really believe that PAACH taught me the organizational and leadership skills I currently use at my job as a Linguistics Project Manager at Lexicon Branding, a brand name marketing company in Sausalito, CA. I can’t wait for the day to fly back across the country and see what PAACH has become; I hope to see students who love to celebrate the history of PAACH and who welcome anyone that walks by PAACH’s doors.

“Impact Beyond Penn”

Sarah Lee C’15
“Fostering Leadership”
Alina Jamil C’14

To say that PAACH was an important part of my Penn experience would be an understate-
ment! My relation-
ship with PAACH began through my participation in APALI, where I learned firsthand how important the role of the APA student is within the broader Penn community. I was later able to channel important in-
sights from APALI in each of my roles across the Asian Pacific Students Coalition, the United Minorities Council, and South Asia Society.

Subsequently, as President of South Asia Society, I frequently asked Peter, Shiella & Kusum for advice and/or assistance. I was always pleasantly surprised by their willingness to go the extra mile for their students. One year, Peter even sat through an entire SAS election!

At PAACH, I learned how to be a dedicat-
ed student leader, advocate, and friend. I hope that PAACH continues to shape the minds of young leaders in the future, and that students will find PAACH early in their Penn career.

“A Second Home”
Sandra Zhao C’10

When I think about college, I think about PAACH, and when I think about PAACH, I think about the comfy couches, the constant availability of something to eat, and friendly, familiar faces. My involve-
ment in APSC and other initiatives helped me understand and cultivate my interests and skills, but really, what I remember the most fondly are lunches with Kusum, running in and out feeling stressed about something and being relieved to find welcome ears, and making friends who have had a true and lasting impact on way that I exist and interact in this world. PAACH helped me to figure out who I was, and who I wanted to be. Looking back now, I can better appreciate how unusual it was to have this cozy little place, filled with passion-
ate, driven people; a second home where I could ask questions, be inspired, be sup-
ported, be lazy, and, really, be myself. Moving into the future, I’d really love to see PAACH grow, but without losing the warmth and camaraderie that made it a space where in my mind, everyone felt comfortable letting loose, being open, and being themselves.
We have many warm memories of PAACH from our time at Penn. As co-chairs of APAHW in PAACH’s first year, we were grateful for the support of PAACH staff like Yen-Ling, Karen and Kusum, and we were pleased to see PAACH soon grow into a ‘home’ for the APA community on campus. We often had specific reasons to go to PAACH—to attend meetings related to APAHW or the ASAM program—but we also found ourselves dropping in to say hi to Kusum and Ajay and whoever else happened to be loitering there in between classes. It was these impromptu moments of chatting with Professor Azuma or hanging out with friends that made PAACH a treasured part of our Penn experience.

In our eyes, PAACH was, and hopefully continues to be, a common space open to everyone, regardless of which of the many different activities or groups that they were involved in. PAACH also stands a testament to the student activism that led to its creation and we hope that it continues to unite students to advocate for social justice at Penn and beyond.

PAACH was one of my favorite places to hang out on campus during my time at Penn. I have fond memories of sharing stories, lunches, laughs and much more there. There was always bound to be someone napping and someone else cramming for an exam! Although I first went to PAACH on ‘official business’ for APALI (Asian Pacific American Leadership Initiative) and BSA (Bengali Students Association), it quickly became much more than a club meeting spot. Kusum, Shiella, and June were always so welcoming and helpful, whether I needed something for a class or advice.

PAACH helped prepare me for the real world through the activities it facilitated. I am especially grateful that I had the opportunity to be an APALI Facilitator. I brought these experiences to my career and I am thankful to PAACH for it.

Congratulations PAACH on your 15 Year Anniversary and best wishes for many more to come!
PAACH Opens Fall 2000
Though I assumed a strong leadership role in Asian American student affairs during my tenure as a Penn undergraduate, it’s no secret that I arrived on campus in the fall of 1997 somewhat ambivalent about delineating my social experiences along racial lines. After all, growing up as a former refugee to the U.S. in the post-Vietnam War era in an economically depressed, white community in small town Pennsylvania had influenced me. Moreover, as the youngest daughter of a working class family and reluctant member of the 1.5 generation, I longed for the “normal” college experience of my serenely self-confident and worldly peers. Quiet doubts and preoccupation over my lack of exposure to elite perspectives, absence of college preparation, limited personal finances, and emotionally charged family matters back home isolated me socially and academically at times. Seeing an opportunity to resolve these and other types of barriers for Asian American students, a small but tightly knit group of us committed ourselves to the campaign to establish PAACH. For all of us who stayed up late into the night during that memorable time to debate the strategies, challenges, and merits of creating such a Center, PAACH symbolized an earnest collective goal of creating a more inclusive University and global community.

Before PAACH was created in the fall of 2000, Penn’s campus had reached a tipping point of student activism. Latino students had marched down Locust Walk to demand the establishment of the Penn Center for Hispanic Excellence colloquially referred to as La Casa Latina. Meanwhile, the United Against Sweatshops Movement leaders had taken over College Hall to pressure the University to comply with global fair labor standards regarding its apparel manufacturing. At the heels of these student movements, Penn’s Asian American community leaders -- representing twenty-five percent of the University -- stood on the shoulders of student and faculty activists before them to press the University to create a dedicated resource center. Asia Pacific Student Coalition (APSC) members published a full page declaration of demands in the Daily Pennsylvanian and held a rally on College Green urging the University to expand student services and resources. A sometimes contentious public dialogue in the DP ensued, while the student rally garnered attention on the Fox Evening News. Shortly afterwards, then-President Judith Rodin agreed to discuss concrete plans for PAACH. At the same time, the University signaled openness to designate a space for what would become known as MAKUU. With the support of visionaries like Valerie de Cruz of the Greenfield Intercultural Center, Professor Rosane Rocher of the Asian American Studies Pro-
gram, and numerous individual student and faculty members, PAACH opened its doors in November, 2000.

Even after the struggle for PAACH was declared over with a ribbon cutting ceremony in the ARCH building and the hiring of its first full time director Karen Su and staff like Kusum Soin, the Penn community actively sought to define the role and identity of PAACH. Would it focus solely on student life issues, faculty and staff retention and recruitment, academic advising or would it also expand its role to take a stand on campus wide and national level issues affecting Asian Americans? At the time these included concerns over the high percentage of suicide and mental health issues, race based admissions standards, income and economic disparities, and later in the wake of 9/11, the racial profiling phenomenon targeting South Asian Americans. How would PAACH function once it became institutionalized and what did that portend for student input - the involvement of which had been one of the main drivers in its formation -- in the leadership of the center? How would PAACH interact and support the work of existing centers that had traditionally supported students of color and also create a bridge to the vast Asian American community in Philadelphia? While some of these questions remain and evolve, one fact is clear when you talk to students who have graduated since the advent of PAACH: it functions first and foremost as a “home away from home.”

That PAACH has become a home for students over the past fifteen years is genuinely heartening. My hope for its future is that it continues to be a learning institution that evolves to address the changing needs and interests of its students, that it works to expand admissions of marginalized groups, increases resources for counseling and mental health services, advises on nontraditional career paths (including on issues of parenthood/work-life balance), increases faculty retention and recruitment, and cultivates leadership opportunities for Asian American alumni within PAACH programming but also at the University level. PAACH would ideally continue to serve as a strong hub for academics and research, community debates, and political activism, horizontally and vertically integrated into the University ecosystem. I hope to see PAACH’s environment and energy motivate students to question, speak up, and engage in their local affairs so that students graduate from Penn with greater feelings of adequacy, confidence, inclusion, and recognition not just in their professional orbits, but also in deeper personal and spiritual relationships. Since graduating in 2001, my PAACH experience has shaped my various roles as a human rights, development, education, and regional expert focused on Southeast Asia. To be sure, my classmates’ and my willingness to push the boundaries of the status quo can be traced to our formative years at Penn, and more certainly, to our struggle to establish PAACH, for which we are still grateful to celebrate and call home, fifteen years later.
“The PAACH Impact”
Jennie Fan ENG ’17

Coming to Penn in the summer of 2013 and stepping into the myriad culture of the East Coast for the first time, I was glistening with anticipation. New places, new people, a new lifestyle was just ahead of me. However, despite this feeling of excitement, I kept feeling as if something was missing. I missed the sound of my parents greeting me when I came home and the comfort of being completely myself. The culture I was used to back home was very different from Penn’s outspoken activism and open acceptance of all kinds of ideas. For a small town girl, Philly was a change of heart and mind.

Fifteen years ago, the Asian American community at Penn had been at the same place as me, bright-eyed and brimming with expectation. There was a spark kindling among student leaders, spreading across the campus as a small article in the Daily Pennsylvanian demanding more student resources grew to an online petition with 2,500 signatures, national recognition in newspapers, and ultimately led to a fire so heated that it took the courage of 20 students cramming into then-President Judith Rodin’s office, to officially declare the creation of PAACH.

PAACH became a formidable presence on campus: a hub for student life with the Asian Pacific Student Coalition’s 22 constituent groups, support through faculty such as Peter Van Do and Viraj Patel, a center for academic pursuit in the Asian American Studies department, a haven for those suffering from mental health issues through programs such as Active Minds, a voice for those with socioeconomic concerns, an instigator of discussion through APALI on the Asian American identity, and a family with close bonds in PEER. Slowly but steadily, PAACH continued to strengthen and develop into a “home away from home”, a place where one can immediately sense the connectedness of genuine care and concern within the Asian American community. I have no doubt that I speak for many when I say that PAACH has deeply impacted me, more than just in my time here in college, but also in forging my first stepping stone into being comfortable with who I am.

I only hope that PAACH can continue to be the powerhouse that it is, a living proof of the voice we have on campus because there is no end to what we can accomplish as a community. Seeing how far we’ve come in such a short amount of time, I am confident that there will be only more milestones to add. Throughout our struggles we have learned the priceless value of believing in ourselves. As we celebrate PAACH’s 15 years of rich history, it is also a time to look forward to what more will come ahead, and what more we have to offer to a place we can fondly call home even after it is time to leave.
Favorite Things about PAACH

Kusum Soin
PAACH Office Coordinator

- I love it when students come and ask me who my favorite student is

- When student come and tell me, Kusum I want you to meet my boyfriend/girlfriend

- I love sharing my fifteen years of experience at PAACH with students

- The students make me feel young and I look forward to coming PAACH every day.

- Seeing the graduating class on Locust Walk on Commencement day because I watched them grow at PAACH throughout their four years here
Viraj Patel
Associate Director of PAACH

- Getting to meet someone new every day
- The life changing conversations on the purple couch in my office
- Working every day with students, faculty and staff dedicated to building a strong Asian American community and enacting change on and off campus
- That the community extends beyond the physical space- it’s great to see PAACH in other cities and online!

Rich Chaudhary
C’17

- I love spending time at PAACH between classes getting to catch up with Kusum, Viraj, and Peter
- PAACH is a great place to relax and see friends from many different communities
- PAACH is a great resource center but is also a very social place where people love to talk and spend time with each other
- PAACH is a really relaxing place for students
Peter Van Do
Director of PAACH

- Developing empowered undergraduate, graduate, and professional students so that they may contribute to the Asian American Movement

- Partnering with caring and thoughtful alumni, faculty, administrators, and community leaders

- Working with Kusum and Viraj, and being a part of the PAACH family and legacy

- Positioning the PAACH community to be the best that it can be so that it may lead effectively in the community

Top Four Miscellaneous Director Duties

- Capogiro with students
- Dip Dip, Dippity Dip with students
- Animal crackers and nutella with students
- Laughing with students
Are you interested in donating to PAACH?

Please visit: http://tinyurl.com/pxxfjv

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