Statement from the AAS Department Chair

Dear CSUN AAS students, faculty, staff, alumni and allies,

I am writing my last message to you all as I end my second term of chairship. During my terms, I have tried to focus on student needs and support faculty’s work that provide opportunities for our students to be empowered and connected to community activities. I thank the faculty, staff, donors, alumni and students who have made it possible and help create transformative experiences for us all. I am proud of our faculty’s initiatives to prepare and take undergraduate students to present at the Association of Asian American Studies and to visit SFSU, to help start the DREAM Center, and to institutionalize service learning/internship work for our students with the Pathways Project. As a result of our work, we have earned three endowments from generous donors who believe in the student-oriented work and political stance that we have taken. These large donations by Glenn Omatsu, Kenyon Chan, Shirley Hune, Prosy de la Cruz, and Enrique de la Cruz have provided us with more resources than ever before to provide student scholarships and to continue and increase our student activities and learning opportunities. Smaller donations and in-kind donations are also invaluable for they provide a stamp of moral affirmation in the work that we do. I wish to again thank everyone who has given so much time, energy, vision, and resources to help our department initiate so many opportunities for our students. I want to especially thank Dr. Buenavista and Dr. Lai for their selfless work mentoring our students, especially on the politics and ethics of Ethnic Studies where individual empowerment intertwine with collective liberation.

We have entered a time of great challenges as the U.S. reverses course and moves closer to authoritarianism. When white supremacist ideas are normalized and vulnerable people are scapegoated and vilified, those of us with some privileges and power must resist. When unsound policies are executed claiming to help student success, critical thinkers must stop the process and ask questions. I and other colleagues had the chance to do this with the CSU Chancellor’s Office Executive Orders 1100 and 1110. We were successful to save Section F of our GE requirements at CSUN and to not comply with EO 1100, but we could not yet stop the unethical experiments on incoming students in Math this Fall 2018 with EO 1110. We are also working to prevent a disaster with incoming students in writing classes because of EO 1110. Our experts in writing and math think this executive order had many flaws and wanted time to study and revise it before implementing sweeping changes. Unfortunately, our administrators are pushing forth, violating faculty governance on curricular matters. We will need to continue the resistance as we move forward. As Howard Zinn had said, “[We cannot] be neutral on a capitalist moving train.”

Dark times for our vulnerable populations are increasing, but I hope you will find solace in the millions of people who are marching and resisting institutional and everyday racism, misogyny, heterosexism, transphobia, Islamophobia, and classism. Please know that you are not alone to stand up for justice. We must practice sustainable activism to envision and realize a democratic and equitable world where facts matter more than manipulation of information, where power-reflexivity and kindness are intertwined to create a culture of accountability and restorative transformative justice. For me, education is to liberate us so that we can better serve those less fortunate. I leave you with a few quotes that have inspired me.

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.* – Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Be the change you wish to see in the world.* – Mahatma Gandhi

*Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.* – Frederick Douglass

*When I dare to be powerful -- to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.  /// The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.* – Audre Lorde

*When you can, help others; when you cannot, refrain from hurting others.* – Dalai Lama
AAS Students Unite at AAAS 2018

By Abigail Garcia

While it has been a couple years since the Association of Asian American Studies saw CSUN students turn out for its annual conference (AAAS), we were no strangers to those among the undergraduate field. CSUN used to draw as many as 10-15 students to the AAAS Conference with groups attending and presenting at the 2013 and 2014 conferences in San Francisco, CA and Evanston, IL respectively, but due, in part, to budgeting issues and in part, to logistical issues coordinating a large group of students for conference travel, the number has dwindled significantly. In addition, undergraduate and community attendance at AAAS in general has not been high for many years, as the conference has become predominantly an academic space with very few undergraduates in attendance, but the 2018 AAAS in San Francisco proved to be an exception, as it was, in many ways, the 'year of the undergrads'.

On the first day of AAAS (March 29th), I was able to have my registration waived by volunteering my time at registration. While it was an early shift, I did not miss out on the panels I was looking forward to seeing. As I was checking out many Asian American Studies academics and OGs, I encountered a few undergrads to recruit for the next day's meet up. But little did I know how many undergrads were actually there with the same purpose and mission in mind.

I first came into this space thinking that I was going to create friendships and connections with other undergrads and it will continue to be rainbows and sunshine afterwards. I didn’t realize how truly different yet similar our needs were and how exhausted many of the students I had encountered were. Many were exhausted by continuously being ignored by their academic institutions' administrations or even lack of programming and services offered.

Friday the 30th was the fun day and the most crucial day for undergraduates. There were so many undergraduate panels, roundtables, and even a conference plenary being led by students from San Francisco State University, Hunters College, California State University, Fullerton, University of California, San Diego, and University of California, Irvine who discussed various needs or presented on research and community service opportunities. Most significantly, undergraduates from these institutions and others agreed on Friday to organize an informal undergraduate caucus, which convened in the hotel lobby and later moved to the second floor in front of the elevators as many students arrived. As we all sat around the small hallway in the middle of the conference, we agreed that there was a need to assemble a lifeline of sorts of Asian American Studies students across the nation. Our various institutions face various issues and creating a solidarity space for our needs that is accessible through online resources is imperative.

One of the major takeaways from the conference was that our needs are virtually the same but vary in degrees. I also understood that even though we all have the same goals in mind, they can easily be channeled through various means. I’ve come to understand that not everyone wants to stay in academia, be the “boots on the ground” for the next protest, or even head towards the political leadership sphere. Asian American Studies unifies us but also creates rifts between us that we need to keep building upon. Even though I had faced adversity within the beginning of these discussions, the need to continue building upon them is important. There will be a time when our institutions will need support from other academic institutions, so we become the answer to the lifelong question of, “If not now, then when?” I believe that the momentum developed at this 2018 AAAS will continue with the Association’s leadership hopefully continuing to sponsor and encourage undergraduate participation in AAAS and with future AAS undergrads maintaining dialogue between each other so that future collaboration is possible.
This semester I walked into my very last AAS class of my undergraduate career, AAS 495: Social Movements in SH 321 with Professor Lai, feeling somewhat surreal because it was within that exact classroom and with the same professor that I had started my AAS education, AAS 201. But, this time it was a completely different experience than the beginning because I really knew and connected with everyone in that class and I had acquired experiential knowledge from all the AAS courses that I took to date. Within AAS 495 our learning objectives included applying our oral skills, research experience, communication skills, and critical thinking to our service learning placement. Overall, the main purpose of the class was to pair each student up with an AA/API community organization in order for us to tangibly see how what we have learned within our courses can be used in the world outside of our classrooms and campus. Through this course we were also able to create connections with integral people within the community. We started off the semester with exercises that refined our professional resume and went over the Asian American Movement in-depth. It was important for us to lay a basis of understanding because in order to work and serve within the community, we needed to understand the history of grassroots organizations and why the need for these organizations arose. After completing my AAS 495 course this semester, I developed a better understanding of what community meant to me. Personally, I found that community signifies a collective consciousness of people with the same values, understanding of society, and shared experiences. Through being able to work with both AASPP (Asian American Studies Pathways Project) and CPAF (Center for the Pacific Asian Family) as my placements for the semester, I was able to see how one can make an impact within the community by the larger and smaller gestures through the channels of involvement. These placements helped me realize that Asian American Studies was quite prevalent in the work that I was doing at both sites. First, I saw that the Asian American Studies Pathways Project was the epitome of what our AAS 495 course was trying to accomplish, which was to create a better connection between the community and the students. As Professor Glenn Omatsu has said, “Asian American Studies (and Ethnic Studies) belongs to students and their communities.” The structure of AASPP was much like that of the motto and the values of AAS because we had freedom in what we wanted to create and how we wanted to execute it. For example, we held an open mic event early in the semester. Although it was a fun community event, it possessed core principles of AAS because it focused on the CSUN student community and their needs of expression as well as giving students the space to feel welcomed and in solidarity with another. In contrast to AASPP, my involvement with CPAF was touching upon a different core value within in AAS, which was to challenge dominant narratives. CPAF is one of the first organizations in the United States to have shelters that specifically address the needs of API individuals who are victims of domestic abuse. Generally, people have assumed that Asian American households do not have problems with domestic abuse because it is hardly talked about. CPAF is challenging the dominant narrative that domestic abuse in Asian American relationships do not occur because they understand that domestic abuse happens to everyone, and that API women deserve resources like CPAF in order to live a better life. Within CPAF I was able to do more hands-on work with clients and volunteers than AASPP, such as: help with child care, setting up for events, and even editing a video for a social media campaign. Even though I was not part of the larger aspects of this organization, such as planning for the events or staffing the shelters, I could see how the little help that I was able to give helped them with the efficiency of the programs. If the smaller aspects of the space were taken care of, they were able to better serve their clients, thus making an impact as soon as they could. From my experience, I feel that this organization really focuses on the immediate needs of the women involved so that they can continue on with their communities hold a claim to this field of study historically as well as in the present when social justice issues and interracial solidarity are more necessary now than ever.

1 Professor Omatsu goes on to add that ‘belonging’ does not mean that the university, administrators, AAS faculty or the AAS department own AAS but rather students and
their lives and find a better situation for themselves. Often while doing social justice work we understand that the work that we are doing is to build a better future for those who come after us, but with CPAF I saw that their results are generally quite instant compared to other social justice work I have done. I loved experiencing service learning from the different levels within the organization, and I believe that it gave me a good basis to understand a little bit of everything.

By working at different capacities within the two sites I was able to connect some of the textual coursework that we had discussed within the classroom. A lot of our readings focused on personal accounts of history and I was able to compare them to the work that I was doing within the movement now. I believe that the AA Movement is still present, but we are fighting the fight in a different way. I analyzed the way that others organized before us, such as the creation of Gidra or the fight for the I-Hotel, and compared it to how vastly different it is from the way that we are organizing now. I saw that this generation uses more social media and online interaction in order to connect to people versus the in-person protests that were more prevalent before. Creating a sense of community is the most important job for us within this new movement, and I believe that through my service learning I was able to connect with many people who felt that they belong within the AAS department and community.

I was also able to practice social justice at CPAF but to a lesser extent of having full control of what the organization would do. As aforementioned, I participated in a lot of the smaller duties that the main staff persons were not able to do. But, I believe that my work was social justice work because the organization as a whole is trying to bring justice to those who have been abused within domestic violence. They are trying to help those who are hurt to survive and thrive within the situation, and any help that they can get is integral. I understand that my small interactions with the organization have helped them distribute resources and fight the larger cause of fighting to end sexual abuse and domestic violence. Although domestic violence is historically seen as a gendered issue, CPAF is fighting the fight on the basis of race and gender.

Overall, I believe that AAS 495 is integral to our learning because my experience with the class has been memorable, and I was able to apply a lot of what I have learned within this class and the major into the work that I did within AASPP and CPAF. Without this course I would not have been able to tangibly apply and record the work that I have done related to this field before I graduated. This course has adequately informed me of what doing community service looks and feels like, and it is an integral part of being a major within the AAS Department. I hope the AAS Department continues to support community-based courses and initiatives, as this student (and others like me) expect the department to maintain and grow these vital opportunities.
PEP Pre-Conference: Reflections on the Role of AAS in the Asian American Community
By: Angelo Mutia

This spring semester the Association for Asian American Studies held its annual conference in San Francisco from March 29th to the 31st. The day before on Wednesday, March 28th, 2018, Asian American Studies Pathways Project interns including myself attended the Pin@y Education Partnerships’ (PEP) Pre-Conference at San Francisco State University (SFSU). The PEP Pre-Conference aimed to provide a space that was for and by the community, something I noticed the AAAS Conference struggled to provide. To this end, the event was free, open to the public, and was intentionally held at SFSU as a nod to the Third World Liberation Front and Asian American Movement that made this all possible.

PEP was founded in 2001 by Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and her students at SFSU as well as current CSUN AAS Professor Dr. Tracy Buenavista, to bridge the gap between the Filipino community and higher education. PEP was founded on the principle of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the idea that the community should be a part of the research process so that they can learn how to improve their own lives.

The highlight of the conference was the Youth-PAR (Y-PAR). The Y-PAR was created out of the need for youth to actively research about their communities to enact positive change. Groups from Balboa HS, Burton HS, Denman Middle School, and Longfellow elementary all presented their Y-PAR research with subjects ranging from depression and stress to violence in school. Working together with their PEP teachers, school faculty, and one another, the groups developed several action steps to address the problems they were researching.

Looking back on the pre-conference, I couldn’t help but think that what I witnessed was Asian American Studies in action. It also made me wonder how much has AAS been pacified and distanced from the community as it became a part of the institution. This question had been on my mind after attending both conferences. Although the AAAS conference provided a space for Asian American scholars to share their research, I was left wondering if it could have been more inclusive. The AAAS conference was held in an expensive hotel in downtown San Francisco, far out of the reach of many community members that could benefit from attending. Asian American Studies was founded upon the principle that learning about ourselves was key in our uplifting and liberation. However, if the people who need it the most can’t access it, is it doing what it was meant to do? One line that Dr. Roderick Daus-Magbual, the director of program management had said stuck with me, “It’s like having a superpower and you’re not using it”.

If folks in Asian American Studies aren’t going into the communities they are studying and including them in the process, is Asian American Studies really for the community?
Angelo Mutia  
Asian American Studies Pathways Project Intern,  
Asian American Studies and  
Urban Planning Double Major  

Painting: Al Cruz  
Asian American Studies Pathways Project Intern,  
Asian American Studies
Putting the Solid in Solidarity
By Parit Kasemrsi

In seeking a safe place to find refuge and a sanctuary in a stressful world, the Asian American Studies Pathways Project (AASPP) put together a solidarity circle for the students here at CSUN. One of the founding statements of AASPP is to build a greater ethnic studies culture here at CSUN as well as to form connection to the greater community at large here on campus. This circle was the first of many steps put forward by the project to help bridge this gap. Students were invited to an inviting and warm space, illuminated with fairy lights and candles as soothing vapor-wave music filled the space. As the music died down the circle began, leading the circle was our intern Al. They began by sharing a story about themselves and the purpose of this circle, to find peace and community amongst the students. They began asking us to join them in what is known as a unity clap, a clapping circle that begins slowly and gains momentum becoming more unified and ending when Al saying the term, “Isang Bagsa.” We began to dive into some serious issues, I immediately noticed that every student here was going through a different journey. I assumed that the general audience was going to be mostly ethnic studies majors and minors, familiar faces I've seen in the classroom or walking about the halls of Sierra Tower and the JR building. To my surprise, we had majors and minors from a variety of colleges from music to business in attendance, it seems that everyone wanted to say something or at least wanted their voices to be heard. This brought up my second concern, how were we going to come to a common ground. Initially, I did not believe that a mere circle was going to bring anyone together in anyway. But I was wrong, the whole point of this circle was to hear the needs of the student body. Many students mentioned how they felt a lack of emotional support from their families. The thought “what am I going to do after college” was a common theme tonight. Although they receive the proper physical care that they felt that a child deserved from the families, when it came to education and the purpose of their majors this is where they are met with hostility and questions. The most common response to our students majoring in ethnic studies and humanities where “what are you going to do with that degree?” this questions often left our students to question their own interest and path in life. Where they really getting the most out of college? Should they have picked a better major? Are my interests invalid? Am I invalid? Although the circle could not answer the toughest questions that life has thrown at it showed us that many of the students here need more support than we can see from a surface level. Behind the academic lens and over the desk they sit in everyday, we have students that struggle just getting through the day wondering what comes next. We have more common ground than we realized despite the path we have taken to get to where we are, somehow all of us found our way into the solidarity circle to share that journey with each other. Pathways is looking forward to having similar circles in the 2018 to 2019 year. Through the solidarity circle, Pathways plans to conduct a needs assessment of CSUN students with a focus on AAPI students, who Higher Education scholars have
identified as two of the most underserved and least satisfied student populations on college campuses.

**Building Our Community of Leaders: The Legends, the Students, and Me**
By Karen Loong

I woke up the morning of Thursday, April 26th and I was instantly nervous. All I could think about was how important today was and how there was still so much to do. I had class in the morning, then the Leadership Seminar with Dr. Kenyon Chan, and then the AAS Department Distinguished Lecture with Dr. Shirley Hune and the Student Awards ceremony. Since I was the recipient of the Kenyon Chan Outstanding Leadership Award this year, I kept thinking about meeting Dr. Kenyon Chan, what intelligent things I had to say to him and how I needed to show that I was deserving of this award. (Oh the pressure!) With a whirlwind of thoughts in my head and emotions in my heart, I got ready for the day with the nervousness never leaving my side. On the way to CSUN, I recited my speech in my head over and over again knowing that it would probably change as the day went on. In class, I tried to focus on Professor Uba and taking notes with the nervousness still scratching away at my brain. Once class was over, I headed for the Omatsu House to start preparing and setting up for the Leadership Seminar. I was thankful that some of the other Asian American Studies Pathways Project (AASPP) interns and volunteers were already at the house cleaning up, but I wanted to make sure that everything was perfect for the arrival of Drs. Kenyon Chan and Shirley Hune. Students from the DREAM Center, Revolutionary Scholars, VSA, and EOP started to arrive and I felt so excited for everyone and this seminar. It was great meeting and chatting with some of the students and it brought me joy to see how they were so eager to learn and be a part of something big on campus.

I was so proud of AASPP in this moment and how far we’ve come to be hosting a Leadership Seminar at the Omatsu House with Dr. Kenyon Chan. What an honor and privilege to meet Dr. Kenyon Chan, who was the first Department Chair of CSUN’s Asian American Studies. I often think about what a great opportunity it is to be a part of the first cohort of AASPP and how thankful I am that the Department was finally able to offer an internship program. In my mind, the AASPP interns were learning how to organize the same way young activists learned in grassroots organizations. We were a group of students who applied for this first ever internship opportunity with the department, half of us had never met before, but we had AAS in common. We were all passionate about the Movement, about AAS, and about making a difference and forming a community on campus. In the beginning, we were lost. However, there is always a learning curve when starting anything new and I believe we all worked so well together. Seeing each intern grow and develop up to that point, and seeing the changes in myself through the Pathways Project, I felt so proud to be a part of it all.

The guests of honor arrived early to the Omatsu House and we were all caught off guard. Frazzled, we made sure everything was in place, everyone had a seat at the table, and everyone felt comfortable. I was listening
in on the chat between Dr. Kenyon Chan and Dr. Gina Masequesmay about the beginning of the push for Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies at CSUN. I love talk-story and listening to the experiences that they went through when they were students like us. I was in awe when Kenyon Chan mentioned a couple of the pioneers like Jorge Garcia, Gary Mayeda, and Bob Suzuki and how they would gather around and talk about how they needed a platform to speak, how they needed a community space, and how they would challenge the administration. Next thing you know, Jorge Garcia comes strolling into the kitchen of the Omatsu House. (What a surprise!) You see magic happen when old friends reconnect and start talking about old times. For me, my heart melted a little bit watching Kenyon and Jorge catch up and laugh about the things they did to get Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies at CSUN. They reminisced about how they would have conversations around wanting to learn about their own culture, why they did not have a space to call their own, and how they could make that happen. I felt this overwhelming feeling of appreciation and privilege to be in the same room with such legends.

When the Leadership Seminar began, I sat on the couch to listen and observe. Being that I was a graduating senior, the Leadership Seminar was more for the continuing students at CSUN to develop their leadership skills to promote further change on campus. I listened intently as Dr. Kenyon Chan asked this amazing group of young leaders, what leadership was, what they thought their personal leadership style was, and to introduce themselves with what they thought was significant in their lives. (Talk about a loaded introduction.) As students introduced themselves, I could sense a strong willingness to serve the people and the need for change. Throughout the discussion, each one of the leaders discussed what they defined leadership as, how the community motivates them to promote change, and personal life struggles and barriers that have developed them into the person they are today. Kenyon Chan mentioned that we are a part of a legacy of people who came before us and did all these little steps to pave the way, and that there will be a long legacy of students and activists after us. There will always be social issues and injustices that occur in our society; it is up to us to create safe spaces for our communities to grow, yet it is up to us to lift people up even though we may feel defeated; it is up to us to persevere and challenge our comfort levels, and it is up to us to evolve into the leaders that the world needs. I could see the wheels turning in everyone’s head and I was so inspired listening to the overall discussion. At the end of the seminar, I felt so empowered and inspired to develop myself into the leader that I want to see and I felt so excited for the future of AASPP, the DREAM Center, Revolutionary Scholars, EOP, VSA, and CSUN.

The nervousness came rushing back when it was time to start heading to the AAS Department Distinguished Lecture with Shirley Hune and the Student Awards ceremony. Being a part of AASPP and an award recipient, I wanted to help make sure everything went smoothly, but at the same time enjoy the event and mingle. I was still feeling super inspired from the seminar, mixed with the excitement of the event and the anxiety of receiving the award. Listening to Shirley Hune’s lecture brought such warmth to my heart and
made me so proud to be a part of Asian American Studies. She spoke about the struggle and the Movement and how her and Kenyon would do community organizing out of their little apartment. They have been together while they were students and have supported each other through their academic careers, have pushed for Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies, and have persevered through adversity.

The AAS Department feels so much like home to me. It felt so nice to be a part of such an intimate and supportive community in this space and everyone was so happy to see me and congratulate me. I felt so proud of all my friends that were receiving awards that night; Parit Kasemsri, Shei Bundalian, Yoo Jin Lee, Bhernard Tila, Alice Tran, Abigail Garcia, my best friend Eryn Aquino, who was the recipient of the Enrique De La Cruz Social Justice Award this year and who I met through AAS, and so many other aspiring leaders and amazing AAS students. At the end after I received my award and gave my speech, I felt like I was in such a haze. To be in the same room as the people who fought for the very curriculum that we are learning today, to shake hands with people who saw that there was a need and sought out how to provide it, to listen to the stories of real life experiences through hardships and defeat, all I could think about was, “Wow!” I was speechless and so honored to be in their presence and so blessed to have shared such a memorable moment with my mentors, my friends, and with the leaders that I aspire to be.

Photos of the attendee’s, Asian American Studies department staff and faculty, and student awardees.

Photo: Dr. Kelly Fong
Unity Through Community
By Shei-Lina Bundalian

CSUN Asian American Studies offers me an experience that I have found difficult to replicate in my undergrad years. To give more perspective, I am involved in several organizations on campus including the foundings of a club called CSUN Love Your Melon Campus Crew, serving as Club President for two terms, and CSUN Dance Marathon. I am also a loyal member of the sorority Kappa Kappa Gamma. This past academic year I was granted the opportunity to be a part of the first cohort of the Asian American Studies Pathways Project (AASPP) and hired as one of the AAS Department’s Student Assistants. I have found that my dedication to this department catalyzed my involvement not only on campus, but in the larger community. This past semester, AASPP partnered with the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), a community-based organization based in Historic Filipinotown, which focuses on workers’ rights, to connect valuable resources to the San Fernando Valley and CSUN. For the last several years, PWC has been working with Pilipino and Pilipino American caregivers, many of whom live in the San Fernando Valley. In doing so, AASPP and Professor Clement Lai’s AAS495 Senior Capstone seminar hosted a Workforce Development Training Program for caregivers at the Glenn Omatsu House on April 29, 2018. This training workshop offered its audience of caregivers the opportunity to become not only certified but also to be aware of their rights as homecare workers. Many of the workers shared their personal stories of how they became caregivers, their struggles, and triumphs, not only in regards to their occupation but also their lives. It is important to connect with resources, like the Pilipino Workers Center, to enhance our education for it to be applicable in real world settings, and it is equally important for CSUN’s AAS Department to actively develop and maintain ties with Asian American and Pacific Islander community-based organizations. The need for community and camaraderie has not dissipated since the founding of the ethnic studies, as we see the need for unity during our present social climate. Thank you Asian American Studies for paving my journey in creating the change I want to see in the world.

Shei-Lina Bundalian
Community Builder Award Recipient, Asian American Studies and Public Health Double Major

Alejie Plaza, caregiver and PWC Member, reviewing the process of certification.

Photo: Shei-Lina Bundalian
Celebrating Asian Pacific American Heritage Month with the Asian American Health Fair
By Mark Llavore

I recently served as the student scholar for AAS 345, a class on Asian American Health, taught by Professor Edith Chen. For 15 weeks, I assisted with helping AAS 345 students to develop poster presentations and educational activities for the Asian American Health Fair, in commemoration of Asian Pacific Heritage Month. Guest lecturers included Scott Chan, Program Director of Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement who provided insights on how to pull off a successful health fair that would resonate with our audience, namely the CSUN campus community. Health Science Professor Patty Kwan gave some informative talks on developing culturally-tailored educational materials for Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Latinxs. The fair—sponsored by the AAS department, the Office of Community Engagement, and the National Institute Health BUILD PODER program—took place May 8th at the Whitsett Room.

As a double major in Graphic Design and Asian American Studies, being a student scholar was an opportunity for me to share my knowledge and experience as a graphic designer with an ethnic studies community. A common misconception is that graphic design is only about making ‘nice’ graphics or flyers—graphic design includes not just making visuals, but also building empathy and relationships with people, communicating ideas and messages effectively, and utilizing one’s sense of aesthetics and artistic principle with a wealth of technical skills and creative tools. A designer’s primary goal is to help their client to communicate and to connect with their audience. My role with the 345 class was two-fold: to give technical guidance for the students in building their own health posters, and to assist in the development of the fair’s structure and activities—to have the students share what they’ve learned in class with the CSUN community.

As a Filipino American, learning about the different health issues Asian Americans face connected with the students and myself—these are issues that we could see in our own lives. Often times, Asian Americans are seen as ‘healthy, wealthy, and wise,’ yet have a number of overlooked health issues impacting our communities. Asian Americans have higher rates of diabetes compared to whites at a similar body mass index. Young females have the highest rates of suicide compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Young adults have the lowest rates of physical activity compared to all other racial and ethnic groups. U.S. born Asian Americans are four times more likely to overweight and obese than their immigrant parents. Perceived as a model minority, Asian Americans receive little public attention to these issues—that’s why experiences like our Asian American Health are needed.

The day of the fair saw large groups of people coming to enjoy the event and to learn. The fair was the culmination of months of planning, collaborations with community partners, and intensive research. The students of the 345 class built seven stations—each one focused on a different aspect of Asian Americans and health: Filipinos and diet, diabetes, overweightness, mental health, and LGBT health issues. One station also served Thai curry from Chutamas Thai Cuisine as a way of presenting brown rice and quinoa as healthy alternatives to white rice—
a staple in many Asian diets. We had several community partners at the fair. Librarian Jennifer Quinonez-Skinner was on hand to share the Oviatt Library’s resources on Asian Americans. Sensei Timothy Komori along with his students from the Kinesiology department, provided an exciting Aikido demonstration. Lastly, we had interns from the Asian American Studies Pathways Project—I myself am one of them—on staff to share tutoring resources, events, and internship positions for the next academic year. Overall, the fair was a lively success.

My experiences as student scholar for a health class have certainly shaped and influenced my post-graduate life. I’ve made a couple of big life decisions in the time since. One, I signed up for a gym membership! Juggling a double major, a part-time job, building my professional brand, and my personal life left little, if any time for consistent exercise. Having a sedentary lifestyle for most of my life and learning about the low rates of physical activity in Asian American youth reinforced my decision to pursue a healthier lifestyle post-graduation. The gym is hard work, but I’m glad to be taking better care of my health. The second big decision I made is to pursue a teaching credential for art. Going through my undergrad studies in graphic design, I’ve realized that although I’ve honed my skills and enjoyed doing graphic design, I’ve felt more joy in sharing my love of design with others. I mentioned that a designer’s primary goal is to help their client to communicate and to connect with their audience—I think this goal coincides perfectly with the role of a teacher. To give people tools, knowledge, and experiences to better their own lives and the lives of others in their communities, I think, is what design is all about. I’m returning to CSUN for Fall 2018, eager to learn, eager to give back.
Students, faculty, and staff from CSUN stepped away from their busy finals schedule on Wednesday, May 9th to support the undocumented student population and learn about the deportations of Southeast Asian refugees in the groundbreaking play, “Tam Tran Goes to Washington.” “Tam Tran Goes to Washington” examines an American experience through the lens of Vietnamese filmmaker, scholar, and undocumented activist Tam Tran. Presented by The East-West Players’ Theatre for Youth, this play was in honor of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month highlighting the experience of one in five undocumented Asian Americans in California. In addition, Dr. Tracy Buenavista facilitated the Q&A panel with actors from the production to discuss undocumented student issues and Mr. Tung Nguyen, founder of API-ROC (Asians & Pacific Islanders Re-Entry of Orange County), was present to discuss the deportations of Southeast Asian refugees.

The play focuses on filmmaker Tam Tran a graduating student from UCLA and her best friend Cinthya Felix both undocumented Americans and student activists. The play’s plot centers on Tam Tran being asked to testify in 2007 on behalf of the DREAM Act to the Senate Subcommittee but is confronted with her discomfort at being in front of the camera. More importantly, Tam fears that her family will be detained and deported if she testifies. With the help of her friends, Tam Tran gains the courage to speak the truth and her right to dream. However, her right to dream came at a cost and her fear suddenly becomes a reality. She assembles her friends, professors, and every public official she can contact until the release of her family which came three days later. Even after this terrifying event, Tam Tran and Cinthya Felix continue their activism while attending graduate school at Brown and Columbia respectively. On May 15, 2010 three years after Tam’s Senate hearing, Tam and Cinthya are killed by a drunk driver. Nonetheless, their legacy continues to grow in this play, with the creation of the EOP DREAM Center, DACA, and the fight for a Clean DREAM Act.

Watching the performance definitely struck a chord with myself and the other students and faculty present. As I watched the play I kept noticing the similarities between Tran’s experience and my own. It began with her friend during finals week discussing their grades and their future academic paths. I couldn’t help but notice that I, too, am in my own finals week worrying about my grades and what that will mean to me and my future at CSUN. I could feel the stress and worry that Tam is going through in this scene because I am feeling the same worry and unease. Later on, Tam spoke about her doubts, her anxieties, and how her status has shaped her to becoming accustomed to letting things go no matter how
hard she worked for them. Personally, I could not relate. I don’t know what that would honestly feel like. To work so passionately and to dedicate your time for something to just let it go. It made me realize how blessed I am and how I take things for granted in my own life because I assume I am always eligible for those resources. Yet, the number one thing I could connect to throughout the whole play was the friendship that Tam and Cinthya shared. Throughout it all, they were together supporting each other through the struggles they shared. Whether it be their classes, academic careers, or their politicized immigration status. The long nights they shared in the library to them cooking together, sharing a meal, or listening to Radiohead, they were there for each other.

This event not only confronted me about the struggles undocumented students face but introduced me to the struggles that formerly incarcerated Asian Pacific Americans experience. Mr. Tung Nguyen, the founder of API-ROC, shared his organization’s goal to guide formerly incarcerated individuals out of marginalization; to reshape the perception of API communities’ fear and stigma of incarcerated individuals and their families; as well as to establish a reentry organization specifically in the API communities of Orange County and then beyond. Overall, they envision the mobilization of the API communities with other populations to advocate for criminal justice reform, end mass incarceration of people of color, disrupt the school to prison pipeline, and amend the 1996 IIRIRA (Illegal immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act) and the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDA), which redefined any crime with a sentence of a year or longer as an ‘aggravated felony’ and a deportable offence for non-citizens, to stop the unjust deportation of immigrants. The number one thing I learned from API-ROC is their goal to dismantle people’s perceptions of the incarcerated as dangerous and shameful. They seek to provide a safe and nurturing place for the formerly incarcerated so that they can get the help and support needed to contribute to society. Moreover, this organization does not only focus on the individual, but makes it a point to include the families of the formerly incarcerated since they are impacted as well. Overall, the inclusion of API-ROC was befitting because it highlighted another experience that Asian immigrants face that is often not talked about.

With the spectacular acting, meaningful story, and connection with the audience, the East West Players’ Theatre for Youth has extended this critical production to engage a wider audience to the experiences of Asian Pacific Americans as well as to examine the politicized lives of undocumented students and their ever-changing future. Furthermore, API-ROC will return to CSUN during the Fall and Spring semester to give presentations on their stories and how the campus can help formerly incarcerated individuals re-enter society and become involved in the fight against API deportations for committing so-called ‘aggravated felonies’.