



Asian American Certificate Program News

Coordinator's Message

A season of change and transition, fall is a time to be nostalgic, saying goodbye to beautiful spring blooming and sunny summer light; it is also a time to celebrate harvest, looking back on the past, feeling grateful to all the goodness for its existence in life, recharging and being ready to connect again.



Jui-Ching Wang,
D.M.A.
coordinator.

At this time of looking back, AACP is extremely thankful to the NIU community for its enormous support to continue to help us promote the awareness of Asian American cultures in many aspects, including assorted academic and student-organized events on campus as well as countless community outreach programs we engaged in our northern Illinois neighborhood. We continue striving to engage in meaningful dialogues within the

NIU community to make sure that our voices as Asian Americans are heard and our opinions are valued. Among many such efforts to advocate Asian American cultures, we are most proud of our partnership with Asian American Resource Center (AARC) in helping to “make the invisible visible,” a powerful message we will constantly be reminded of as we move forward.

In this time of transition, we welcome our new vice president for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, **Carol A. Sumner**, to NIU. Always appearing with a high energy level, Sumner is passionate about “creating spaces and places where people, regardless of their backgrounds, can learn and grow” to succeed. As part of the ADEI, AACP started to work with Sumner in her role as NIU’s chief diversity officer right upon her arrival. We look forward to advancing our program to better serve our Huskies under Sumner’s guidance.

We also take this opportunity to introduce our newest advisory

committee member, **Jacqueline Mac**, a first-generation Southeast Asian American college graduate and assistant professor in higher education. She has a particular interest in racially marginalized, Southeast Asian American and refugee populations, as well as minority-serving institutions. In the Faculty Spotlight, you will find a story about her and her recent research project on the development of Asian American Studies and its impact on NIU community. Welcome aboard, Jacqueline Mac!

As spring semester registration has started, I am excited to share our spring course offerings for those interested in pursuing AACP. We are also thrilled to update that we have raised \$15,000 since December 2022 to put toward the \$50,000 for an endowed scholarship designated for AACP students. We are thankful for all the gifts we have received and look forward to much more support from you to come in the new year.

— Jui-Ching Wang, D.M.A.

Contact us

aacp@niu.edu

Office Hours: 10 a.m. to noon, Tuesday and Friday.

Asian American Resource Center

Facebook/Instagram: @AACPNIU

AACP Campus Ally: Sherry Fang

As NIU's Asian American Undergraduate Certificate program commemorates its 20th year, we reflect



Sherry Fang.

on the impact of a program grounded in activism, advocacy and community involvement.

The program's journey began in 1994 with the brainstorming efforts of Asian American faculty and staff, and

through the work of NIU's Presidential Task Force on Asian Americans and the Asian American Alliance in 1999. **Robert Wheeler, Ph.D.**, chair of the task force, **Murali Krishnamurthi, Ph.D.**, president of the Asian American Alliance, and **Sherry Fang, Ph.D.**, the program's first coordinator, collectively aimed to improve student services as well as boost retention and graduation rates for Asian American students. To help meet these goals, a proposal to create an academic program was made to the university.

"It was the lack of awareness, knowledge, understanding and inclusion of Asian Americans that was the motivation for us to come together. We started to brainstorm how we could organize a network of Asian Americans and motivate students. The alliance and the task force were people coming together to bring about this awareness on campus," said Fang.

Creating an academic program from scratch was no easy feat. It took three years before the Asian American Certificate Program (AACP) was approved in 2003. During that time, Fang recounts some of the challenges that they had to encounter including lack of resources and personnel support.

"Getting students interested and motivated is just one part. The other is working with administration and

how we had to go through layers and different loops to get things started," said Fang.

This program has evolved over the years to provide academic, cultural and social support for its students. It currently has a strong focus on outreach and recruitment. Despite its changes, Fang feels that progress is rather slow. She calls for everyone to revisit the long-term goal of establishing Asian American Studies as a major. She hopes the program will receive significant commitment from the administration in funding and resources that will be beneficial for years to come.

"Asian American studies offers a unique lens to critically examine [the] United States' policies within a larger context. We can learn about immigration, citizenship, race and identity, capitalism, and even imperialism within the context of Asian American history and experiences. We also need to see how our culture and history intersect with others as well as the social, cultural and economic contributions we have made in this country. Asian American studies also provides us a platform to think about global issues and our relationships with others in the world," Fang said.

Fang emphasizes that Asian American Studies has great implications and relevance. She reiterates that you do not have to identify as Asian American to support and learn from this academic program. Other than culture, it is also important to understand the history, experiences and contributions of Asian Americans in the United States. Fang shares that it is extremely relevant, especially with the significant increase in the violence and crime against Asian Americans since the pandemic.

"When I first started the program, I did a survey of all the high school social science textbooks that I could put my hands on. About 80% of the textbooks had no mention of Asian American history or experiences, and the 20%

had only just one paragraph. This pervasive and very profound sense of lack of knowledge and understanding motivated me to educate others about Asian American studies," Fang said.

In 2021, the Teaching Equitable Asian American History (TEAACH) Act became law in Illinois, requiring public schools to include units on Asian American history. The AACP currently shares and incorporates information and instructional materials that meet this requirement. Fang mentions that among other things, Asian American Studies also helps students become more aware about social justice, and also provides insight of global perspectives that will prepare them for their careers outside of college.

"One cannot ignore that Asian Americans are increasing not only just in numbers but also in terms of relevance, both politically and socially. Students can therefore develop skills of critical thinking, activism, advocacy and collaboration that will help them work with diverse individuals in their chosen field," Fang said.

When asked about the future, Fang hopes that NIU will create measures to sustain and develop the program. This includes funding, resources, a physical space, and faculty and advisors specializing in Asian American Studies. Hiring experts on this field would help provide direction to build a unique curriculum for the academic program that reflects the lives, cultures and histories of Asians in America.

"Asian Americans are very diverse. We are many things, but we are not perpetual foreigners, and we are definitely not model minorities. We have been here for more than 10 generations, and we are very much part of the fabric of the U.S. We have our challenges and our successes, and people need to know about that," Fang said.

Fang believes that the Asian American community still has some room to grow in terms of connecting

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AACP Campus Ally: Sherry Fang

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with each other to fight racism. She also believes that the communities of color have to be united to fight for social justice and awareness.

“If we want people to listen to us, we need to come together. If we want people to lift us up, we need to lift ourselves up too. We have to be united to share our perspectives and voices. We need to connect with each other, use resources and encourage others to acknowledge that we are here,” Fang said.

Congratulations to Richard A. Flournory Award Recipient Linh Nguyen, Ph.D.



Linh Nguyen.

devoted a sizable share of her busy life to community service, mostly

“Linh Nguyen was passionate about closing the achievement gap in her classes. She targeted her efforts toward under-represented minority and nontraditional students. She

to the advancement of women’s issues in DeKalb County. She served as the president of the League of Women Voters of DeKalb County from 2020 to 2021. Through the organization, Nguyen conducted 18 voter registration events. She is very passionate about equity and voting rights and ran on that platform for the DeKalb County Clerk position in 2022.”

– Division of Academic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Michelle Bringas.

Congratulations to DeKalb ATHENA Award Recipient Michelle Bringas, Ed.D.

“Michelle Bringas celebrates 30 years at Northern Illinois University and was instrumental in establishing the first stand-alone Asian American Resource Center in the northern Illinois region. Michelle provides leadership and oversight for the facility, its functions, programs and services. She serves as a coach and

supervisor to the staff and provides professional development opportunities to foster their success at NIU and beyond. Bringas develops collaborative efforts for diverse educational programming and leads cultural immersion trips domestically and abroad.”

– DeKalb Chamber of Commerce

ILAS 225

INTRO TO ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY INQUIRY

This course provides an introduction to the study of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States. Through a transdisciplinary inquiry, this course explores influences and manifestations of Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic identity from the perspectives of language, literature, history, geography, religious studies, education, and other social sciences. This course also helps students to better understand contemporary Asian American experience in Asian and other diaspora communities in the United States.

Tuesday & Thursday 5:00-6:15pm
Reavis Hall 202 & Online
Starts on January 16, 2024 (Tuesday) and continues throughout the Spring semester.

ASIAN AMERICAN CERTIFICATE CORE COURSE

for any information contact:
Dr. Jui-Ching Wang (jcwang@niu.edu)

Required for the Certificate in Asian American Studies

Counts as General Education Credits

Fulfills Human Diversity Requirement



Faculty Feature: Jacqueline Mac, Ph.D.

The Asian American Certificate Program (AACP) warmly welcomes its new faculty advisory board member, **Jacqueline Mac, Ph.D.** Mac is a first-generation Southeast Asian American



Jacqueline Mac.

assistant professor at the Department of Counseling and Higher Education. She currently teaches courses on assessment, applied research, and equity and justice in higher education.

Mac was first exposed to Asian American Studies as a high school student, when she enrolled in the DePaul Asian and Asian American Opportunities (DAAAO) program that was headed by Yvonne Lau, Ph.D. At that time, Mac did not know that she was taking Asian American Studies courses. She learned about different immigration histories of Asian populations in Chicago, as well as the role and significance of ethnic enclaves in Chinatown, Uptown and Devon Avenue. Mac also recalled that she learned about her mother's refugee story through one of their assignments. She was then able to relate her family's journey through the lessons she learned in class. During this time, she was also interviewing business leaders and owners in different ethnic enclaves, which was her first experience conducting research.

"There were so many seeds that got planted during those two years. It's like a snowball effect. You start with a little experience and ... then it becomes bigger until it's become my whole world. It just shaped so much of what I think about and what I know," Mac said.

Those experiences led her to become involved in Asian American student organizations during her undergraduate years and eventually take Asian American Studies as a minor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. It has also influenced

her later work in student affairs and nonprofit organizations. Mac also now uses the skills she has learned in Asian American Studies as a professor and researcher at NIU.

Mac's current research interests include racialized campus environments, institutional transformation toward equity and higher education access policies. She has a particular interest in racially marginalized, Southeast Asian American and refugee populations, as well as minority-serving institutions. Along with undergraduate student researchers, she is currently working on a participatory action research project to understand how faculty, staff, administrators and alumni understand the need for an Asian American studies program at NIU. She also hopes to understand the experiences of students and alumni in relation to Asian American Studies.

"So much of my research agenda is heavily influenced by Asian American Studies in terms of the topics and how we go about conducting research related to Asian Americans or even experiences of students of color. Experiences of colonialism and imperialism — the way that war and militarism have shaped our policies — have continued to shape lives and our communities," Mac said.

Through her research, Mac aims to understand where the emergence of NIU's Asian American studies program came from. She also hopes to identify the major points of acceleration where faculty and staff were able to relate, develop, think about and dream about the program.

When asked what she thought was something unique about Asian Americans, Mac likened being Asian American to a journey of learning about yourself while navigating through racial stereotypes and experiences. Mac explains that Asian Americans are still being racialized as the "model minority" and recounts being advised by a high school counselor to not apply

for a particular scholarship because she "did not fit the type of minority student the scholarship was looking for." As a first-generation student seeking support to apply and pay for college, this experience left a bitterness that comes up any time Asian Americans are excluded from educational equity conversations.

"One of the most beautiful things about being Asian American is being connected to others who also believe that this racialized identity should not be minimized, stereotyped, forgotten or used as a political wedge," said Mac.

Mac explained the importance of creating a space to explore what it means to be Asian American. She stated that Asian American Studies allows students to see the root of what is happening today, and allows them to understand social, political and historic mechanisms shaping the lives of Asian American and other communities of color in relation to a western world framework.

"Asian American Studies is also about Asian American experiences, which a lot of people, particularly students of color, can connect or relate to. These are experiences of poverty, racism, sexism, exclusion, militarization and colonization. It's also not just understanding experiences but analyzing it through lenses that can help us unpack some of these larger systems of oppression," Mac said.

Mac invites students who have taken Asian American classes to spread the word about it and reach out to her. She invites other students to consider sitting in a class to understand what these conversations can look like. She also advises faculty to reach out to students and promote not only Asian American Studies, but ethnic and cultural studies as well. Mac is looking forward to getting to know the community and hopes to increase her involvement with the Asian American Studies program. You can learn more about Mac and her current projects on her [NIU faculty webpage](#).

Student Feature: Mariah Edison

Mariah Edison is a senior English major with a Southeast Asian Studies minor. She is also currently pursuing the Asian American Studies certificate. Edison is an amazing advocate of cultural diversity and inclusion and has taken great initiative in promoting Asian American culture in NIU.

Edison transferred to NIU with the goal of finding programs that would align with her interests in learning about other cultures. This inspired her to learn more about Asian American Studies — something she never learned about in her earlier school years.

Some of the most memorable experiences that Edison had were the field trips which gave her a chance to immerse herself in environments she learned about throughout the semester. Edison recalled that she found the ILAS 225 field trip to the Thai Cultural Center and Temple to be both enjoyable and enlightening. During that trip, the group learned about Thai food, etiquette, history, music and dance. She also enjoyed the trip to the dim sum restaurant, MingHin Cuisine, where the class was able to eat various traditional Chinese cuisines.

It provided her a chance to connect the topics learned from class to outside experience. Edison shared that the field trips also made her look forward to her upcoming SEAS courses. Most classes for the Asian American certificate are eligible for the SEAS certificate, which allows students to have a wider understanding of the connection between the two minors.

“As an African American girl, I got the opportunity to learn the experiences of Asian Americans in the diaspora and learn the views of other minorities with different experiences. I believe other ethnic people can learn from other ethnic experiences, as they are not the same. I believe being conscience of others’ histories is key in understanding the world around us today,” Edison said.

Edison is now able to apply the lessons she has learned by practicing minority mindfulness. She has been active in events hosted by various cultural departments, and even co-founded a new organization with her roommate Alexis Allen. Seeing the lack of clubs that was inspired by K-pop and incorporated other multicultural



Mariah Edison.

elements of dance, they established the Idol Club Organization, of which Edison is currently president.

“Since we were both part of the Honors Program, we decided to build the club up for Honors credit and to give people an outlet for dancing (and eventually other talents) to other genres that they never thought they could partake in or just never had an opportunity to try. While starting up the organization was a bit difficult, I believe the process with my roommate has been worth it!” Edison said.

Edison plans to become a flight attendant after graduation. She believes that Asian American Studies will be important in this career path because it provides her with understanding of another minority group. This will be useful as she interacts with people from diverse backgrounds. She encourages other students to learn about other cultures, especially the experiences of the “silent minorities” that were never discussed in the American classroom before.

“As someone who has always been interested in other cultures, I often found myself worried about taking classes that were not correlated with my societal-placed identity because I am not the ‘topic’ of the class. Whenever I signed up for language classes that were not as popular to take, I would receive weird looks and remarks. I was often questioned why I would take them if they ‘would not help me in the future.’ I think it takes a lot to come out of your comfort zone and learn about different experiences, but I stand by the fact that you will always come out with a different point of view!” Edison said.



Mariah Edison and fellow students with Victor E. Huskie.

Graduate Assistant Unboxing: Chih-I Hsiao

I am one of the graduate assistants for the Asian American Studies Certificate Program and am pursuing graduate studies in world music at NIU. What I have learned so far in my studies here leads me to realize that the world of music is way wider and more diverse than I thought and that to further develop my musical horizon, an open mind to eliminate my bias and prejudice is extremely important. To do so as a performer, I am always up for opportunities to collaborate with musicians from various backgrounds. I also actively participate in various cultural events on campus, and I am most excited about my role as a GA for AACP because working for an interdisciplinary program like this requires me to get out of my comfort zone by reaching out to different classes, instructors and students across the campus. All the experiences I've gained not only have enriched my own cultural experiences but have also allowed me to connect with a diverse group of individuals who have since become friends and collaborators in my journey as a student at NIU, which is absolutely rewarding and fascinating.



Chih-I Hsiao.

Look Back at Events

Spring Lecture Series

The **Spring Lecture Series** offered students a diverse array of subjects covering Asian American history and culture. Students had the opportunity to gain knowledge from both NIU faculty and guest lecturers who shared their expertise on topics such as Asian American history, social movements, popular culture, gender roles, politics and education.



April 18, Shipu Wang's talk.

World Music Festival

In honor of Asian American Heritage Month in 2023, the Asian American Resource Center and the Asian American Studies Program collaborated with the School of Music's world music program to curate the annual **World Music Festival**. This festival was designed to spotlight the rich musical traditions originating from Asia and acknowledge the significant contributions made by Asian American



April 13, concert: Wei Yang and Friends.

performers to the artistic communities in the United States.



April 25, Field trip to Thai Temple.

Field Trip to Thai Temple (Wat Dhammaram) in Chicago on April 25

In the beginning, Professor. Kanjana guided the students on a tour of the temple. During this introduction, Kanjana provided insights into the temple's history and the Thai American community in Chicago. Additionally, a monk introduced the concept of meditation and led students in a walking meditation practice. For lunch, the students enjoyed a meal prepared by the temple, and Kanjana shed light on the rich food culture of Thailand. In the afternoon, students experienced Thai traditional music and dance under the guidance of volunteer instructors from Thailand, who dedicated a year of service to the temple.



Homecoming with AARC on Oct. 14



Oct. 14, Homecoming with AARC.



Community Corner: CBCAC – Bringing Vision and Voice to the Chinatown Community

By Justine Nham

As an Asian American raised in the Chicagoland area, I have witnessed changes in Chicago's Chinatown throughout the years. A new library, community recreation center and more Asian American leaders in government are just a few that come to mind. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I volunteered with a food distribution initiative that was a collaboration of faith-based and local community organizations to provide free groceries for Chinatown residents. It was there that I learned about the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC), an organization that works to bring vision and voice to the Chinatown community.

What is CBCAC?

CBCAC began in 1998 as a volunteer-run organization convening businesses and social service organizations and unifying their voices to push back against the proliferation of casino buses in Chinatown from Indiana targeting the elderly immigrant population. Since then, the organization has led voter registration and mobilization efforts in Chinatown and surrounding neighborhoods, giving non-partisan and comprehensive information on elections to amplify the civic voice of Asian Americans through voting. In 2011, CBCAC led redistricting efforts to create an Asian influence state representative district that includes 90% of the Asian Americans in the Greater Chinatown area, and in 2022, to create a first-ever Asian American-majority city ward. Additionally, the CBCAC successfully led advocacy for the Chinatown Library and the Ping Tom Park Field House and created a Chinatown Community Vision Plan together with Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. This award-winning plan has been the road map for community development efforts. Among many who contributed to such a success, Grace Chan McKibben, the executive director of CBCAC, has been vital helping strengthen the community tie since 2019.

Coming from a broad background working in student affairs, academic advising, health and safety services, senior management in government and corporate, and social services and advocacy organizations, McKibben's skills and experiences in diverse network have been very helpful in her current work. "Over the course of my 30-plus years of professional work, I am lucky that I keep

gaining colleagues, partners and friends who I can continue to work with in other arenas and on other projects," McKibben said.

The Community CBCAC Serves



CBCAC seeks to serve low-income, first-generation Chinese immigrants, and elderly immigrants who are limited in English proficiency, to help eliminate their language and cultural barriers to participating fully in civic life in Chicago and the U.S. society. This organization also serves as a coordinating and convening body for Chinese Americans or those who are interested in Chinese American issues to help raise their voice and visibility. McKibben said:

"Asian Americans are relatively invisible in the public policy arena and our mission and vision is to change that. We are also coordinating with Chinese/Asian-serving organizations in other parts of the city and across the state, as well as across the country, to support each other, share information and to lift up Asian American issues together."

McKibben describes the CBCAC as an "intentionally big tent" to include voices across the political spectrum, those who speak different dialects of Chinese and those who do not speak Chinese at all, all the while working toward partnerships with non-Chinese communities as well.

CBCAC's Current and Future Plans

When asked about current and future projects, McKibben shared that they've just completed a strategic plan for 2023-2025 to focus on how to inform and strengthen the ties among each other in the community. Some projects to help CBCAC fulfill this goal include "a one-year plan to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety in Chinatown and surrounding areas, the Chinatown Community Vision

Plan, voter registration and education efforts for the March 2024 Illinois primary, and a digital literacy program helping those with the lowest technology skills learn how to use cell phones and laptops," said McKibben.

Interested in volunteering with CBCAC?

There are opportunities for individuals of all ages and skills to be involved. McKibben highlights an opportunity for college students to discuss their journey to college with high schoolers during their youth program. Bilingual volunteers are needed to interpret for community meetings and to help clients with cell phone and laptop use. For those without language skills, there are several opportunities during the year when they collect and pack items for care packages for special needs communities. They also need policy-minded folks who are willing to volunteer some time to do research and help draw maps.

To learn more about CBCAC's visionary work, visit cbcacchicago.org.



Educational Resources

Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Chicago:

Advancing Justice is a coalition leader in Chicago and nationwide that seeks to empower individuals in their communities with opportunities such as civic engagement, bystander intervention training and TEACH resources. Educational resources offered include sample lesson plans, book lists and free Zoom professional development workshops for Illinois K-12 educators.

For more information, please visit advancingjustice-chicago.org/teach.



focus on Asian American history and Asian American contemporary issues. Teachers can earn up to 36 professional development credits by completing all three modules.

For more information, please visit UIUC.

The Asian American Education Project:

Civil rights activist Stewart Koh recognized the need to tell the stories of Asian Americans in the K-12 learning experience, and he co-edited the book “Untold Civil Rights Stories: Asian Americans Speak Out for Justice” with Russell Long of UCLA. Patricia Koh and a team of teachers then developed lesson plans with the stories from the book. In 2021, the Asian American Education Project was formed as a nonprofit organization offering a variety of educational resources that were developed in partnership with Stanford University, PBS Learning Media and Asian Americans Advancing Justice. The website offers a database of lesson plans that can be searched by grade, subject, time period and topics. Thematic units, activity booklets, video streaming and live virtual professional development workshops are also available.

For more information, please visit asianamericanedu.org.



UIUC Teaching Equitable Asian American Community History:



This professional development module series designed by faculty, staff and doctoral students from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s College of Education is free, completely asynchronous and customizable for the individual educator’s needs. The three modules



Stay Connected!

If you would like to sign up for our AACP newsletter, please contact aacp@niu.edu to be added to our AACP email list. For more information about AACP, contact Chih-I Hsiao, chsiao1@niu.edu; Vianca Ocampo, vocampo1@niu.edu; or Justine Nham, jnham1@niu.edu.



Thinking about our Asian American Studies Certificate?

Visit niu.edu/asian-american-certificate/program/courses.shtml for fall courses.

Available Courses for Spring 2024

HDFS 384	Asian American Families (3 credits)
ILAS 225	Introduction to Asian American Studies: A Transdisciplinary Inquiry (3 credits)
ART 489	Topics in Art (3 credits)
ARTH 370 B	Studies in Asian Art – B-Japanese Art (3 credits)
ENGL 335	World Literature (3 credits)
MUHL 431	Music of Southeast Asia (3 credits)

MUSE 321-02	Mixed Ensemble – Thai/Laos Music Ensemble (1 credit)
MUSE 321-04	Mixed Ensemble – Korean Drumming (1 credit)
MUSE 370	Gamelan (1 credit)
MUSE 375	Chinese Music Ensemble (1 credit)
SEAS 225	Southeast Asia: Crossroads of The World (3 credits)

Various courses in Asian languages: Burmese, Indonesian, Japanese, Tagalog, Thai and Khmer.



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