A Note from the Coordinator

Spring is always a time to celebrate the blooming of life anew that brings joy and energy. At this beautiful time, I am happy to share that we continue to inject positive energy and creative ideas to our Asian American Certificate Program for it to grow on the NIU campus. With our dedication to flourish, we continue to offer lectures, concerts, social events and community outreach activities to keep our students inspired to engage in transdisciplinary inquiries about the significant roles and contributions of Asian American and Pacific Island (AAPI) populations in the U.S., and to take initiatives to promote the awareness of AAPI cultures from the perspectives of diversity, equity and inclusion.

As the fall semester registration has started, I hope that more students will consider signing up for AACP courses (a complete list of courses is available below) to be part of our community. We are also excited to share that we’ve set up an endowed scholarship fund. We hope that soon we’ll be able to award scholarships to students interested in pursuing this certificate. As a starter, we’ve raised $5565 with the NIU Foundation’s crowdfunding project at the beginning of the spring semester. We appreciate if you can give or help us spread the word about this fundraising opportunity so we can soon reach our goal of $50,000.

Lastly, it’s always hard to say goodbye! After eight years serving as the vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion and the chief diversity officer at NIU, Vernese Edghill-Walden, the amazing supporter of our AACP, will head to her alma mater Bucknell University as its inaugural vice president for DEI in July 2023. The AACP is forever grateful to Dr. Edghill-Walden for her tremendous support in helping us increase the visibility of our program on campus in the past couple of years. We’ll remember your wisdom, guidance and memories we shared. Farewell, and best wishes to you in this journey, Dr. Edghill-Walden.

Message from the Vice President

The Asian American Certificate Program (AACP) has grown tremendously thanks to the dedication of the faculty, staff and students that work with this program. I am thrilled that the crowdfunding campaign successfully generated donations to create an endowed scholarship program to support future generations of students to study and learn about Asian history and experience in America and the diaspora. This scholarship will also help recruit Asian American high school and transfer students to attend NIU. I am proud of the growth of the certificate program and the synergy Jui-Ching has created with the cultural and academic resource centers across campus to reflect the intersecting identities of NIU’s Asian population.

The AACP will continue to center the experiences of Asian Americans and share the rich history of Asians in America and the diaspora. I know that we have worked hard together to elevate the voices and dispelling stereotypes about Asian Americans. During my tenure I have enjoyed working with the program leadership. I look forward to the program’s continued growth and impact in the coming years.

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

Vernese Edghill-Walden, Ph.D.
vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion.

Contact Us
aaccp@niu.edu
Office Hours: 10 a.m. to noon, Tuesday and Friday
Asian American Resource Center
Facebook/Instagram: @AACPNIU
The NIU community welcomed Christina Carpio as the associate director of the Asian American Resource Center (AARC) in December 2022.

Starting as a shy and timid student when she first entered NIU, Carpio broke out of her shell in her second year when she became involved in Alpha Phi Gamma sorority. This opened doors and opportunities for her to develop leadership and professional skills. She then started building relationships with faculty and staff on campus after getting involved with the AARC and other organizations such as the Philippine Student Association and the Multicultural Greek Council.

“Every time I would think back to what I loved doing, it always came back to working as a student leader, working as a peer mentor and helping students find their own path — helping students develop their own skills and helping them find their voice,” Carpio said.

With her love for helping others, Carpio returned to NIU to obtain her graduate degree in adult and higher education. She worked as a graduate assistant to the AARC which, according to her, started her career in student affairs. After graduation, Carpio worked for five years at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s Asian American Cultural Center. Prior to returning to NIU, she also worked at Elgin Community College where she helped a lot of first- and second-generation students navigate through college.

“It’s been a blessing to see their growth happen from when they first start as freshmen or transfer students all the way up until they graduate. Then to see them a couple years down the line join nonprofit organizations serving Asian American communities in Chicago and beyond... It’s just amazing to see the impact of the work that we’ve been doing,” Carpio said.

“My favorite thing is definitely the students; they are my driving force. I love seeing those light bulbs when they think about a new program or initiative. There’s so much opportunity for students and to be able to give them that platform or tools to be able to do that it’s fantastic,” Carpio said.

Carpio aims to further establish a strong relationship with AACP, helping each other’s initiatives and increasing student participation. She also hopes to further support international students, plan campuswide activities, raise awareness about Asian American culture and reach out to the communities outside of NIU. Additionally, she hopes to strengthen alumni relationships for career and professional development programs.

“Students might not feel it, but they actually have the most power. You find the most growth when you’re most uncomfortable. Try to attend something new, strike up a conversation with somebody, learn a new language, start a new student organization — a Korean drumming group, a Bollywood dance group or a Hindu spiritual group. Don’t be afraid to take a chance because you’ll be surprised with how many doors it will open for you,” Carpio said.
Linh Nguyen’s journey of leadership and community building started from a single statement and has flourished into a campaign and movement for Asian American voices to be heard. Making a mark not only in the academe, but also in the greater DeKalb community, Nguyen continues to touch the lives of people around her.

Looking back on her journey, she expressed that it was the mass shooting in Atlanta on March 16, 2021, that ignited the first flame. Eight people were killed in the event, most being Asian American women. As the president of the League of Women Voters, Nguyen sent out a statement that was later on published in the Daily Chronicle condemning the acts of violence, racism and sexism against Asian American women. This first step forward set her into the trajectory of where she is now. She was then invited as a speaker at a virtual event at the Asian American Resource Center (AARC).

“There’s a power in being a compassionate leader, and anybody can do that. Regardless of my multimarginalized identity as a woman — as a woman of color, as an immigrant who speaks English with an accent, regardless of who we are, people have the power to push for change and for a better world,” Nguyen said.

Crunching in the numbers, Nguyen shared that in the most recent census, a total of 25% of the DeKalb County population are nonwhite, which results to 25,000 people who come from all sorts of racial backgrounds. This prompted her to run for office and represent people from different backgrounds, to help make ordinances and policies that would benefit everyone in our community. When asked what kept her going, Nguyen answered that it is in believing that people are kind. She told the story of Hy-Vee bakery manager, Joe Bauer, who kindly gave her a box of cinnamon rolls when there were no donuts for her family available.

“It was a kind act from a stranger. He didn’t have to give me free food, he didn’t have to offer to walk me out. He just decided to help me. And there’s a lot of instances like that where people just see humanity in me. It was such a nice reminder that there is kindness in the world, and I believe we have a lot of good people here at NIU and the DeKalb community,” Nguyen said.

She praised the leadership of NIU President Lisa Freeman and the vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion, Dr. Vernese Edghill-Walden and their staff who continuously work hard to make everybody feel welcome. She also commended NIU Libraries dean Fred Barnhart who cares deeply about the students’ needs, as well as the Child and Family Development Center for doing an excellent job at teaching good citizenship.

“I hope NIU continues to be the champion for diversity, equity and inclusion not only on campus, but also to extend their practices and educate the community. I hope that everyone in NIU continues to lead and inspire and invite the community outside of campus to grow together to benefit everyone,” Nguyen said.

Leading by example, Nguyen continues to shine by establishing a relationship with others and recognizing their work and efforts. She invites everyone to connect with each other, find common ground, ask questions and listen with the intention to understand. She ends with a message of encouragement for students to think of themselves as a person who can initiate change in their communities.
The Introduction to Asian American Studies: A Transdisciplinary Inquiry (ILAS 225) is a course offered by the Asian American Certificate Program every spring. This course dives into different issues of race, gender, migration, and social and political activism among others. Students learn about Asian American culture through different perspectives and fields of study such as art, literature, music, religion and other social sciences.

Given its wide scope, the class proves to be beneficial in learning about the Asian American experience.

When asked what they have enjoyed about the class so far, the students responded that the guest lecturers, documentaries and discussions allowed them to gain deeper insights about Asian American cultures.

Quade Evans, an English major, shared that he enjoyed learning about the Hmong religion and traditional practices exploring the conflict between tradition and assimilation.

Shade Gill, a psychology major and a second-generation Indian American, also shared appreciation about the documentary film “38 at the Garden,” mentioning how through Jeremy Lin’s story, she learned to look at her own culture and experiences with a different insight.

Mariah Edison, an English major with a minor in Southeast Asian Studies, expressed that she enjoyed the seminar by geography professor Ishan Ashutosh of Indiana University in which he shared his research on diasporas and internationalism using Chicago’s Devon Avenue as a case study to illustrate how the current trajectory of diaspora communities in the U.S. heads toward cultural essentialism and similarities.

The students were also able to participate in different university events. They performed a dance with IMAGEN during the “Cultural Night: A Trip Around Asia” event. This coincided with discussions on how music and art play an important role in Asian American identity and culture.
Student Perspectives: The ILAS 225 Experience (continued)

“Music is a way for people to uphold culture and tradition while still feeling included. It also allows us to be able to connect with other communities. For example, how African American and Asian American communities came together to connect and share their stories through jazz music,” said Gill, after attending the lecture “Intersection...” by NIU history professors Taylor Atkins and Stanley Arnold.

“Art is a part of us. In order to fully appreciate art, we need to evaluate the cultural context in which it was made. The art that Asian Americans produce is wide and varied but they all highlight some aspects of the Asian experience. Whether it be through reflecting sorrow or simply a look into their everyday existence, each piece tells a story. While individually they may be completely different, together they make up a vast patchwork of stories that can rightfully be considered American in their own right,” said Evans.

Students recognize how various art forms help create the identity of Asian Americans. During the class, they also learn Asian American history through different poems and artworks. Edison shared that Asian American literature helps establish the foundation on which these cultures and histories are built on.

“As an English major, I have come to understand how literature can impact the way we view people and their history. Literature has the ability to transcend time. It also has the ability to transform how different cultures are perceived. Teaching and learning about Asian American literature could spark more Asian Americans to write about their experiences, thus bringing more literary material to discuss in schools and increasing a sense of representation,” said Edison, explaining the importance of the class to her chosen field of study.

ILAS 225 is only one of the many classes listed under our Asian American Certificate Program (AACP). Students can learn about Asian American culture through different programs. Values, skills and knowledge learned in AACP courses are relevant to today's society, with applications in various fields such as arts, education, law and medicine. To learn more about how you can obtain this certificate, contact program coordinator Jui-Ching Wang, D.M.A. at aacp@niu.edu.
Raising Funds for Asian American Studies

In just three weeks, the Asian American Certificate Program (AACP), with the help of 46 generous donors, was able to obtain its goal and raise a total of $5,565 during the NIU crowdfunding event held Feb. 16 to March 8, 2023. The amount exceeded the initial goal of raising $5,000. Most of the donors were from Illinois. Other monetary gifts were also received from Virginia, Ohio and Georgia in the U.S. and internationally from Taiwan and Singapore.

With the fifth-largest population of Asian Americans, Illinois is the first state in the U.S. to require Asian American histories be taught in public schools with the Teaching Equitable Asian American History Act (TEAACH Act) which went into effect Jan. 1, 2022. With this, the AACP has lead the NIU community in preparing our Huskies for the knowledge and skills needed in their careers to better serve the fast-growing Asian American population in the nation. Launched in 2003, the program has continuously provided students with a strong sense of the Asian American experience and its impact on individuals, communities and the nation. The scholarship investment will therefore be used to meet the needs of our growing student body and expand its course offerings to enrich our students’ education regardless of their background and cultural heritage.

Our AACP Undergraduate Student Scholarship is still accepting donations through the NIU Foundation’s “Donate Now” page (https://foundation.myniu.com/give.php). Our ultimate goal is to raise $50,000 for Asian American Studies at NIU. A link in our AACP website will also take you to the NIU crowdfunding page for updates. Our program hopes to use these funds to provide generations of students with the opportunity to learn about the Asian American experience. These funds will also be used to collaborate with other campus departments and centers, as well as recruit more Asian American high school and community college students to attend NIU.
A Look Back at Featured Events

Our Spring Lecture Series gave students a wide range of topics about Asian American history and culture. Students learned from NIU faculty and guest lecturers who provided insights on Asian American history, social movement, pop culture, gender roles, politics and education.

Feb. 21 lecture with Taylor Atkins.


March 28 lecture with Mimi Nguyen.
Jan. 24 “Defining Tunes of the Chinese Diaspora” by Nancy Yunhwa Rao, professor of music, Department of Music, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.

Feb. 21 “African American and Asian American Relations” by Stanley Arnold and Taylor Atkins, Department of History, NIU.

Feb. 28 “From Devon Avenue to Diaspora Internationalism” by Ishan Ashutosh, Department of Geography and Asian American Studies Program, Indiana University.

March 21 “Asian Americans in Community-Building” by Linh Nguyen, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, NIU.

March 28 “The Right to Be Beautiful” by Mimi Thi Nguyen, associate professor and chair of Gender and Women’s Studies, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

April 18 “You Have That in Your Closet? Adventures in Rediscovering and Re-presenting Exclusion-era Asian American Art” by ShiPu Wang, Coats Endowed Chair in the Arts and Professor of Art History, University of California, Merced.
To celebrate Asian American Heritage Month in 2023, the Asian American Resource Center and Asian American Studies Program collaborated with the world music program in the School of Music to curate its annual World Music Festival to showcase music cultures of Asian origins and to recognize the important contribution of Asian American performers to the U.S. artistic communities.

Curated by music librarian Sarah Holmes, a special collection in the music library (both in physical display and electronically) showcases the rich resources of Asian American performing arts and music the library possesses with highlights of NIU Asian American faculty’s contribution in the School of Music.
By Matthew Werstler and Justine Nham

As a graduate student at NIU, I was involved with many different communities, some of which allowed me to connect with Asian Americans in the Chicagoland area through opportunities such as participating in music and other cultural practices. These experiences not only make me feel welcomed but also give me a strong sense of belonging, wanting to connect more with the communities. The experiences we have with the Chinese American communities in Chicago illustrate this aspect well.

The Chinese American Community in Chicago

The Chinese Americans reside in various parts of Chicagoland. Two distinct communities known as Chinatowns developed over time: The iconic Chinatown formed in 1912 and the “new Chinatown” on the northside of Chicago in Argyle where refugees from Vietnam found home in the 1970s. Now, many Chinese have moved into the suburbs with a large population near Naperville, Wheaton and Westmont. Even though the Chinese population is growing outside of the original Chinatown area, the community center in Chinatown still plays a significant role providing services to address the needs of the Chinese American community. Pui Tak Center, a faith-based community in the greater Chinatown south of the Loop, is one such example.

What is Pui Tak Center?

Located in Chicago’s Chinatown, Pui Tak Center is a church-based community center, a ministry of the Chinese Christian Union Church that has served more than 30,000 Chinese immigrants in the Chicago area since 1994. In the wake of the rise in anti-Asian violence, Pui Tak Center shows the importance of the role that faith-based organizations have in supporting the Asian American community as a whole. Some of the programs Pui Tak provides include (but are not limited to) ESL and citizenship classes, children and youth programming, disability services and crisis intervention.

Our Experience

In addition to their regular outreach programming, Pui Tak Center hosts many special events throughout the year, one of which is a Thanksgiving lunch. At this lunch, ESL students and guests from the community share a traditional Thanksgiving meal and learn about the Thanksgiving story and how they all have a place to be in Chicago to live meaningful lives. In previous years, Justine Nham has served with her family at Pui Tak’s Thanksgiving lunch helping to prepare and serve the food. Most recently, we were given the opportunity to present the history and traditions of Thanksgiving together to groups of Cantonese and Mandarin-speaking ESL adult students.

With the Pui Tak Center for many summers, Nham has served the Jumpstart JSP (formerly known as the July Summer Program), a summer program that provides academic review sessions, Bible teaching and creative arts projects to preschool to junior high school students in the community. The students were also taken for field trips to visit the many educational sites Chicago has to offer. Throughout Nham’s various roles as an assistant for preschool and music classes and as a lead teacher for lower elementary grades, she enjoyed the relationships built with students, families, volunteers and staff members. These connections create a sense of community and belonging that extends beyond the summer months and walls of Pui Tak Center into the Chinatown community year after year.

For more information on the amazing work Pui Tak Center does, visit https://www.puitak.org.
Thinking about our Asian American Studies Certificate?
Click here for fall courses. https://www.niu.edu/asian-american-certificate/program/courses.shtml.

Available Courses for Fall 2023

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANTH 302</td>
<td>Asian American Cultures</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDFS 384</td>
<td>Asian American Families</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTH 370C</td>
<td>Studies in Asian Art C-Southeast Asian Art</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTH 457</td>
<td>Cultural Perspectives in Asian Art</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUSE 321-0002</td>
<td>Mixed Ensemble — Thai/Laos Music Ensemble</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUSE 321-0004</td>
<td>Mixed Ensemble — Korean Drumming</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUSE 375</td>
<td>Chinese Music Ensemble</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAS 225</td>
<td>Southeast Asia: Crossroads of the World</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Various levels of courses in Asian languages: Burmese, Indonesian, Japanese, Tagalog, Thai, Khmer.
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 or Vianca Ocampo vocampo1@niu.edu.