

# Department of Asian American Studies

## Newsletter

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California State University  
**Northridge**

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### PLEASE VISIT AAS!

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### Dear Friends of CSUN Asian American Studies,

2013-2014 proved to be a BUSY academic year for the students, faculty, and staff of the CSUN Asian American Studies (AAS) department!

In addition to our annual Open House event, Distinguished Lecturer & Student Awards night, APA Heritage Month celebration, and departmental graduation reception, we hosted several new activities. Thanks to the contributions from generous donors, we began the year with the inaugural AAS Student Retreat. We also supported ten students and alumni to travel to the Bay Area to present their research at the annual conference of the Association for Asian American Studies. These students also had the opportunity to tour UC Berkeley and meet with renowned scholar, Dr. Michael Omi; visit the Asian American bookstore Eastwind Books, learn from community activists Harvey and Bea Dong, and attend a community-organized conference at the historic I-Hotel. They even had a chance to meet benefactors Dr. Enrique de la Cruz and Dr. Shirley Hune!

On April 29, 2014 we also formally renamed the Asian American Studies Activities Center, aka the "Asian House," to **The Glenn Omatsu House**. We held a renaming ceremony to honor Professor Omatsu's many contributions to campus and the field of Asian American Studies, during which he also reminded everyone to pursue the social justice mission of Ethnic Studies with "militant humility." In the process, the space was blessed by Shinto priest, Reverend Alfred Tsuyuki, and members of the Tataviam Tribe, a sovereign indigenous nation on whose land the Glenn Omatsu House stands.

We wrapped up the semester by bringing Asian American activists to campus to share and to inspire students about the various community projects informed by Ethnic Studies. We ended the year with our annual graduation reception where we honored 18 AAS students graduates! For more details of each event and more, please read on!

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## Inaugural CSUN Asian American Studies Student Retreat

by Gregory Pancho

On August 21, 2013, in the humble space of the Asian American Studies Activities Center, now renamed The Glenn Omatsu House, something special took place. A group of Asian American Studies students and professors met as a community with a common goal and understanding.

Many freshmen who enter college for the first time do so with a neoliberal agenda: Go to college + get a job = Contribution to society. Many young people are taught to believe that their major will directly translate into what they will be doing for the rest of their lives and are rarely offered other models of success. Unfortunately, those who shape academia's production and dissemination of knowledge have adopted this narrow mentality. With relatively minimal funding, which comes from a lack of institutional support at the university and state level, Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies suffer as a result and in a multitude of ways.

CSUN's Asian American Studies Department is no exception. Issues with recruitment have plagued AAS for years and miscommunication with departmental goals and third party advisors negatively affect AAS student experiences and success. With all of these oppressive elements affecting Asian American Studies, a discipline whose history and birth is rooted in student activism, one can't help but wonder where the movement is? When I got news that there was going to be a summer retreat for AAS faculty and students I began to wonder what could possibly take place. What I expected was some sort of symposium on how and what I could gain from pursuing a degree in a Asian American Studies. What I found was surprising.

Instead of solely promoting personal gain and success, those who attended discovered the importance of community and creating an atmosphere conducive to cultivating knowledge through shared experience. One example of such messaging was a panel comprised of recent alumni, Wanda Pathomrit, Brian DeGuzman and Tran Le, who spoke about their journey as undergrads and offered invaluable advice on how one can achieve fulfillment beyond CSUN.



AAS Student Retreat Participants: Top row: Brian DeGuzman, Sunny Lee, Samantha Jones, Gregory Pancho, Presley Kann, Kevin Guzman, John Chan, Alina Nguyen, Lawrence Lan, and Allan Aquino. Bottom row: Clement Lai, Julie Mac, Emi Vallega, and Gerita White.

In addition to the presence of AAS alumni, it was inspiring to see how professors like Clement Lai, Tracy Lachica Buenavista, and Allan Aquino were there in active support. Not only did they facilitate many of the activities that promoted the values of community and support, which are the cornerstones of Asian American Studies, they participated in all the activities and wholeheartedly engaged with us. Through this unique interaction, students were able to gain and establish pivotal relationships with peers and faculty.

When I asked graduating senior Presley Kann what was the best thing he gained from the retreat, his response was, "we need Asian American Studies because it's a movement by the students and we need to keep it for the students..."

From the perspective of people who did not attend, they might have viewed this event as a glorified meet-and-greet or doubted what a retreat for AAS could really achieve. Lo and behold, by the end of the academic year, retreat participants Samantha Jones, Alina Nguyen, Presley Kann, and I were among the students who were able to get organized and present our research at the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) in San Francisco in April 2014. Coincidence? I think not.

Consciously or unconsciously the AAS Student Retreat created an atmosphere of belonging for those whose lives and experiences continue to be marginalized and misrepresented.

*[Students: Be on the lookout for the 2014 AAS Student Retreat!]*

# Asian American Studies Welcome Back Barbeque and Orientation

by Alina Nguyen

On September 10, 2013, the Asian American Studies Department had their annual open house at The Glenn Omatsu House. First, the professors that were present introduced themselves and reminded students that they could speak to any one of them if they were interested in minoring, majoring, or double majoring in AAS. Following introductions, Department Chair, Gina Masequesmay asked all the audience members in the main room to form a circle and advised them that Professor Edith Chen would facilitate an activity. Professor Chen proceeded to ask questions, and if they resonated with attendees, they were to step forward and form an inner circle. The purpose of this activity was to get the students to engage with and inform each other about the resources that are available to them on campus.

During the activity, Professor Chen utilized social media as a way to connect to the students and informed everyone that AAS has a Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/333743283338487/>) where they could find out about major events within the department and community. Since most people use Facebook at least three times in a week, the CSUN AAS Facebook group is convenient for users.

Professor Chen also introduced Professor Tomo Hattori, who is the Faculty Advisor for the AAS newsletter, and explained that he is always looking for writers who might be interested in contributing to it. Getting involved is a great way to become associated with the department and to improve writing skills. If anyone is interested, they should contact Professor Hattori at [tomo.hattori@csun.edu](mailto:tomo.hattori@csun.edu).

There are a lot of clubs that are Asian-centered but none is exclusive only to Asian American members. For instance, members from the Asian Pacific Student Union introduced themselves and informed the audience of their first ever meeting on September 17, 2013. They invited students from all ethnic groups to join them in creating a community with a home-away-from-home atmosphere.

Professor Chen then introduced the Writing Lab as a new resource for students. Professor Masequesmay further explained that tutoring was open Monday through Thursday from 2 pm to 4 pm for all students who need help with their assignments in any AAS classes. Also, in order to get the best help, students were advised to make an appointment.

The open house event provides a good way to become more informed about what the Asian American Studies Department has to offer. Attending one will give some insight into all the great things that are happening in our community and I encourage you to attend the ones in the future!



AAS Alumni, Isa Fonua and Amber Rivero



AAS Alum Emi Vallega, Baby Noah, Gerita White and AAS faculty & students

# Asian American Studies as a Major

by Chelley O. Quiambao



Chelley Quiambao, AAS students and faculty speaking with Meng So, Undocumented Student Program Coordinator at UC Berkeley

If you're in your late teens or well into your twenties, you'll often get asked: where do you go to school or what you do? A conversation will ensue and you'll be inclined to talk more about yourself. From my perspective, the question of what I do in a schooling context often is associated with mental computations around money. Answers to these inquiries supposedly signal to people our worth on an economic spectrum upon graduation.

My path to graduation has not been without some self-exploration. My academic trajectory has been a soul-searching endeavor. Society looks ambivalently at my change of majors.

When it comes to talk about college, conversation and questions like where you go, your year, major, and interests often arise. More often than not, the type of degree you get will give a clue about your income after graduation. I have been measured in dollar signs incessantly over my college career. Here are the usual reactions:

First major: Marketing— \$\$\$. "You'll make money"  
Second major: Accounting— \$\$\$ "Wow. You'll be set for life."  
Third major: English— \$ "Do you like reading?"  
Double major: Asian American Studies? -\$ followed by a "Why?"

"Why am I an Asian American Studies major?" I'm asked. "You're already Asian! You already know your history; you live your life as an Asian American, what more do you need to learn about yourself?" they ask.

This is a common turn of conversation that many Asian American Studies majors encounter on an almost day-to-day basis. I have no intention of speaking on behalf of all AAS majors but I'd like to

speaking of how I happily ended my college career as an AAS major with a degree to parade around.

Asian American Studies was founded by students who believed that their history, experience and struggle should be included in academic discourse. They fought for this field because it was a source of exploration and realization of one's identity. In any ethnic studies classroom, students learn about themselves and/or other people, their experiences, and influence in American society. Asian American Students started a movement for visibility and representation and they got it.

AAS has given me a way to explore and analyze social constructions. Before I became an AAS major, I used the reasoning of "it is what it is" to explain injustices that I could not imagine altering. For one thing, the U.S. is the land of liberty and equality, right?

AAS has enabled me to identify and challenge societal norms that hinder equity for all. It has allowed me to deconstruct normative ideas through a critical and analytical examination of different roadblocks in our society— education inequality, privatization of our basic rights, unequal access to our nation's resources, and gendered political structures and expectations.

The department and faculty inspire students to think for themselves, own their thoughts, and speak their minds. They bridge the academic institution to the community. Most importantly, AAS drives students from varying ethnic and economic backgrounds to think of the society as a whole instead of following individual pursuits. After all, a society is a community and to influence society requires a collective effort. The communal foundation of Asian American Studies is the very thing that can mobilize further movement for equality. This department was founded upon the principle of social justice and it will continue to be so for as long as the inequality is present.

As a member of the community and an Asian American Studies major, I'm on a relentless pursuit of improvement and results in community building, youth development and educational equity. I am a multi-faceted individual whose strengths have been shaped by my academic, personal, and professional endeavors— all of which have been positively influenced by CSUN's Asian American Studies classes and its supportive and empowering professors.

## CSUN AAS Distinguished Lecture

by Tracy Lachica Buenavista

Asian American Studies across higher education, and particularly in the California State University system, has faced several challenges in the past few years. Some challenges include declining institutional support, threats of elimination or consolidation with other academic entities, and a lack of commitment to hire new faculty that reflect the growing diversity of the AAPI student population. In response, CSUN desired to reflect back on the roots of Ethnic Studies and drew inspiration from the very people that helped to create and build the Asian American movement. One such person is Professor Glenn Omatsu, who was honored as the 2014 CSUN AAS Distinguished Lecturer.

Omatsu is a highly regarded educator, activist, and scholar. His work within higher education is largely informed by his years of involvement in social movements across the U.S. His teaching and community work are grounded in the concepts of anti-colonial mentoring and liberatory pedagogy, in which he promotes students to engage in grassroots movements to develop agency and become empowered to serve their communities. Such was the message he articulated in his April 24, 2014 keynote address, which received a



Professor Glenn Omatsu

standing ovation from the hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and community members in attendance. The following are excerpts from his distinguished lecture, “Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies Belong to Students and Our Communities.”

### “Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies Belong to Students and Our Communities”

by Glenn Omatsu

Although I am closely associated with both the Asian American Studies Department and EOP, I want to emphasize that everything that I say tonight represents my own views and not the views of the leaders of these two programs. Tonight I am presenting only my own viewpoints.

Tonight my presentation focuses on one simple statement: **Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies belong to students and our communities.** I repeat: Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies belong to students and our communities. These programs do not belong to faculty, and they are not owned by the university. These programs exist because four decades ago students and supporters from our communities fought to make them possible. Students protested, went on strike, and were arrested and beaten to win the right to what was then called “relevant education.” The student and community demand for “relevant education” was not limited to what needed to be taught in classrooms. It was also connected to demands to open admissions in universities for those previously excluded and to redefine the mission of higher education to serve not the rich and powerful but the voiceless sectors of our communities. In other words, because of what Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies stand for, they are fundamentally subversive. They embody student and community empowerment in higher education, and they should always serve as vehicles to challenge and expand the institution’s mission and values....

Today we see intensifying attacks on Ethnic Studies. These attacks are occurring for two main reasons. First, people in power strongly oppose the assertion that Ethnic Studies belongs to students and our communities, and they do everything possible to maintain institutional control over these programs. They respond to student demands with arguments focusing on institutional ownership of academic disciplines, faculty governance, and other traditional university practices.

Second, people in power realize that potentially Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies are subversive forces in education that can influence students from other departments to demand more rights. People in power consider Ethnic Studies to be potentially subversive not because of what is studied and taught but because of how and why. That's why it is so important for students to always emphasize the vision of what Ethnic Studies can potentially become because this vision can help all students to transform higher education.

One controversy is happening on our campus and focuses on the partnership announced by top university officials with the National Autonomous University of Mexico, or UNAM for short, to promote Latin American Studies.

I want to share my opinions on this controversy because I think it is an issue that students, including those in Asian American Studies, need to speak out on. But because I will be criticizing university officials who are in this room, I want to first say some clarifying statements. I am a lecturer on this campus and generally do not have much contact with top campus officials. In the few interactions I've had with them, I have found these officials to be good human beings. I say this because more than twenty years ago when I worked at UCLA, I encountered some high-ranking officials that I regarded as vicious people. Here at CSUN, the officials I have met are good people, but they are people who play a role of defending the interests of this institution. From my own experiences in dealing with institutions of power, I see these institutions as never at the forefront of social change or social justice. In fact, these institutions often play a reactive role to the demands for change and justice coming from the margins of the institutions. I think this is why we often see good people in positions of leadership in these institutions defending unfair policies and decisions. These can include a Provost defending denial of tenure to a highly qualified faculty member of color based on biased and incomplete evaluations by a Chair and a Dean. These can also include top university officials refusing to acknowledge that they made a mistake in not consulting in advance with an Ethnic Studies department for an initiative that directly affects that department and the students and communities it serves.

So let me end my presentation by emphasizing one final point. It is not so much a role and a responsibility as it is a value to live by, a value that will help students carry out their roles and responsibilities. This value was shared with me through my early interactions with Asian immigrant workers, and as I have grown older I recognize my own responsibility to share it with new generations. This value is what I call militant humility.

In the broader U.S. society, the quality of being humble is regarded as being weak, and humility is not associated with movements for social change. Instead, most activists focus on militancy, and students are trained – both consciously and unconsciously – to see political power and social change in terms of militant struggle. In contrast, the tradition of Asian Pacific Islander activism – born from the struggles of early generations of immigrant workers – integrally linked militancy with humility. This tradition of militant humility enabled them to fiercely fight for equality and justice while also developing patience for the challenging process involved in grassroots organizing.

Elders from our communities also caution us to understand that practicing militant humility requires ideological clarity. We must be humble towards those we serve but be militant towards those who oppress our communities. However, on college campuses, we oftentimes see students who express humble respect for faculty and administrators, even for those who do not deserve respect. In contrast, these same students ignore or abuse immigrant workers on our campus. Similarly in our communities, we oftentimes see people give humble respect to politicians and other powerful people while ignoring the poor and the powerless. This is why our elders caution us to understand that practicing militant humility requires ideological clarity. Even when we think we understand, we should always reflect on whom we are humble towards and whom we militantly defy.

In other words, practicing militant humility relates back to upholding the special mission that distinguishes Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies from all other programs in the university. All programs on our campus value knowledge and teach students that they need to gain knowledge to understand the world. Some programs go further and encourage students to use the knowledge they gain from classes to change the world. But Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies emphasize the mission of students to change the world while simultaneously transforming themselves.

Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies belong to students and our communities. To defend and expand these important programs, students and we as community supporters need to practice militant humility. Through militant humility, we can serve the people and at the same time remold ourselves.



EOP Director Jose Luis Vargas and Professor Glenn Omatsu (top row, center) with students, alumni and staff

## **The Glenn Omatsu House Renaming** *by Gina Masequesmay*

On April 29, 2014, over 100 CSUN faculty, administrators, students and community people gathered at 18356 Halsted Avenue at the northwest periphery of CSUN campus to honor Professor Glenn Omatsu by renaming the Asian House, the Glenn Omatsu House.

The weather was very windy which somewhat helped to cool down the 90s degree Fahrenheit heat. The dedication event was held outside because there was not enough room inside the house. Attendees had to hold down the poles of the canopy so that it wouldn't fly.

There were folks in the community who would have liked to attend the afternoon event but could not because of work. The Asian American Studies Department had to create a page for well-wishers and friends of Professor Omatsu to send their personal appreciation messages to him.

The webpage has messages that are similar to the messages of attendees at the dedication event. For many, Professor Omatsu is not only a teacher but a long-time activist, an ally, a mentor, a benefactor, and even a surrogate father to some.

He is more than just “a great human being” but a symbol of unity, harmony, and militant humility working for social justice.

A new plaque is set in the house with an explanation that this dedication” recognizes Professor Omatsu's lifetime of mentorship, of building community, and of struggle, and in the hope that each generation listens, teaches, and commits to building a new world.” The plaque provides a quick history of the house:

This house was provided to the Asian American Studies Department in 1992 to become a center of activities for Asian American students and communities. In Fall 2008, the Women's Research and Resource Center moved into the house because its original house burnt down and AAS volunteered to temporarily share part of our house. In the interests of solidarity we continue to share the Glenn Omatsu House today. . . . From this day onward, may we remember and honor Professor Omatsu's commitment to anti-colonial mentoring and liberatory pedagogy.

Professor Omatsu's message is also imprinted in the plaque: “Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies belong to students and our communities.”

[story continued on next page]

On this day 22 years ago, LA experienced an upheaval. Depending on one's take on privilege and power, April 29<sup>th</sup> is also an anniversary of the LA Riot or Uprising. April 29<sup>th</sup> is also one of the closing days of the US war in Viet Nam 39 years ago. Near the end of April is when many Vietnamese Americans are commemorating their exile and loss of home.

The Vietnamese have a saying that when you eat a fruit, you need to remember the gardener and the conditions that gave rise to the fruit. The sun, the rain, the soil, the bees are non-fruit elements that made the fruit possible. As we celebrate the house dedication, we must also pay respect to our land ancestors and attend to the history of settler colonialism that led to the dispossession of land of those who came before us. There are Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Mexican farmers whose lands were taken from them by eminent domain. There are the Fernandino Tataviam people who are the indigenous people of the San Fernando Valley who, by systematic deception and violence, lost most of their land in this valley.

Before we could celebrate the renaming of the house, we did a purifying ceremony to honor our land ancestors whose dispossessions gave rise to our settlement and dedication of the house. We welcome all to take part in this dedication and remembrance so that we can move forward with more mindfulness about interconnectedness. This is the least that we could do to honor our friend and our mentor, Professor Glenn Omatsu.

Omatsu in Japanese means great/big pine. May the Glenn Omatsu House facilitate deep roots in our community and thrive to shade all peoples.

## 2014 AAS Student Awards

by *Clement Lai*

After careful consideration of student applications, resumes, academic performance, statements of purpose, and faculty feedback, the AAS Department would like to congratulate the following students with this year's departmental honors and scholarships:

### Community Builder Award

Alina Nguyen                      Julian Recio

### Academic Achievement Award

Julie Mac

### Donna Kawamoto Special Achievement Award

Gregory Pancho                      Gerita White

### Enrique de la Cruz Social Justice Award

Chelley Quiambao

### Kenyon Chan Outstanding Leadership Award

Presley Kann

## Donor Acknowledgements

AAS would like to thank our generous donors, whose financial contributions have supported departmental scholarships, activities, and student work: **Sharlene Bagon, Kenyon Chan, Enrique de la Cruz, Bob Suzuki, Glenn Omatsu, Woo W. Puanani, Helen Beltran Gonzales, Glen Kitayoma, Tony Osumi, and Prosy de la Cruz.**

## Alumni & Student News Corner

**Dr. Jean-Paul deGuzman '04** recently completed a Ph.D. in American History at UCLA where he previously earned an M.A. in Asian American Studies. He will begin a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California Center for New Racial Studies, based at UC Santa Barbara.

**Tony Osumi '91** graduated from CSUN with a B.A. in Art and went on to earn his M.A. in Asian American Studies at UCLA. He has been a LAUSD teacher for 18 years. Osumi and his colleague **Glen Ikuo Kitayoma** donated a large collection of books to catalogue and add to the departmental library, including first editions of Chicana/o Studies scholar Rudy Acuna's work.

We are proud of the many AAS students and alumni were selected to participate in prestigious summer 2014 opportunities! **Ilaisaane Fonua '13** was accepted into the Future Public Health Leaders Program at University of Michigan. **Louise Fonua '13** is a Fellow for the JACL Local Leaders program. **Julie Mac '15** is a summer intern for the LEAP Leadership in Action program. **Presley Kann '14** is co-coordinating the Summer Activist Training (SAT) program in Los Angeles, and the following AAS students were also selected to participate in SAT: **Raymond Bacsal '16, Thea Fernandez '16, Louise Fonua '13, Chelley Quiambao '14, Greg Pancho '14, and Calvin Ratana '15.**

Congratulations to the AAS students moving onto graduate school and other postgraduate programs! **Kevin Guzman '13** and **Gregory Pancho '14** will pursue the M.A. in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University, and **Lawrence Lan '13** will pursue the same degree at UCLA. **Hansook Oh '14** will begin the M.A. in Mass Communications program at CSUN and **Chelley Quiambao '14** was accepted into the Urban Teacher Center to pursue a career in education. **Tran Le '13** was selected as a 2014-2015 Coro Fellow in Public Affairs.

**Professor Buenavista** received a Campus Quality Fee (CQF) grant to begin providing resources for undocumented students at CSUN. **Professors Masequesmay and Turnmeyer** also successfully received a CQF grant renewal for the AAS Tutoring Center.