

University of Massachusetts Boston
Asian American Studies Program



Graduation Celebration
2007-2008

27 May 2008

Celebrating our 2007-2008 Graduates in Asian American Studies

Since we began offering AsAmSt courses every semester in Spring 1987, many undergraduate students have completed a six-course program-of-study and eleven students have designed and completed 10-course individual majors in Asian American Studies. They are: Steven Ward, Richard Lee Sheehan, Frances Ma, and Series Fung (all 1993); Elaine Ng (1994); Hyun Jung Lee (1998); Lisa Goldstein, Tzena Wong, and Lola Tom (all 1999); Kim Mach and Shivan Butler (both 2001). Two additional students, Vineeta Samlal and Ngook Tung, proposed and should have completed individual majors in 2001 as well, but were denied the opportunity due to the UMB bureaucracy. Each of these individuals made important contributions to the Asian American Studies Program while as students, and all have gone on to do inspiring work personally, educationally, and professionally, while continuing to remain in touch as dedicated alumni. Along with our Spring 2008 program-of-study graduating students, Dang Huynh and Judy Mai, we are proud to recognize our first individual major since 2001, Janet Hồng Võ.

Individual Major in Asian American Studies

Janet Hồng Võ



As the daughter of refugees from Vietnam, I am always living and learning from my family's history and experiences, while trying to bridge two conflicting cultures and identities. Born and raised in the U.S. as a 2nd generation Vietnamese American—ingrained with Vietnamese values yet American culture. My closest tie with the Vietnamese American community growing up was through the Buddhist temple. Even then I was uninspired and remain disconnected to the community. This changed in college when my educational experiences with the Asian American Studies Program helped shape my goals, passions and involvement in the community.

The first Asian American Studies class I enrolled in, "Asian Minorities in the U.S.," spoke to my identity at the time. I finished the course, still full of questions about the struggles and development of our Asian American communities. Eventually after a couple more AsAmSt classes, I decided to pursue a double major in History with an Individual Major in Asian American Studies. Over the years, I was able to find a balance and integration between the two—community history. Asian American Studies has given me the opportunity to find my voice. Through the classes, I was able to discover and share, not only my own but also the unclaimed voices of others. When I became involved with Asian American Studies Outreach (AASO), I felt a sense of belonging in a safe space with other students who passionately cared about the community outside of required class assignments/projects. I was also encouraged to carry out projects connected to my interests and to provide support to other students.

The sense of working and connecting with the community remain a part of my future. Though I still struggle to be fully accepted in the Vietnamese American community because of the language barriers—my elementary literacy and intermediate speaking with a Hue accent—I hope to continue to develop my skills in community development and organizing, to become a valued resource for the Vietnamese American community. And maybe somewhere down the line, I will continue collecting the voices and stories of Asian Americans, and share them with our communities. Learning and giving back to the communities will continue for the rest of the life.

Program-of-Study in Asian American Studies

Dang Khoa L. Huynh



I emigrated from Vietnam and came with my family to the United States when I was four years old. I am the first person in my immediate family to graduate from college here in the United States and I am proud of this achievement. My major is Economics and I hope to pursue a business career in the near future, incorporating what I have learned at UMass Boston .

I decided to include a focus of Asian American Studies because I had a desire to learn more about issues in the Asian American community and the culture. Being Asian myself, I felt that it was necessary for me to have a background of the history of my people here in the United States. My involvement in the Asian American Studies Program has impacted me because I gained knowledge of many different issues concerning Asian

America that I couldn't learn elsewhere such as Asian Women in the U.S., Boston's Asian American communities, Southeast Asians and the Immigration Experience.

It is difficult to predict about what's going to happen next on my long journey but like I said, I hope to see myself working a business career in the near future. My connections in learning Asian American Studies will be useful to me even after college because now I tend to be more aware in discovering issues affecting the Asian American community. Also if the time calls, I would even volunteer my time for a just cause.

Judy Thi Mai



I am 22 years old and the middle child of Vietnamese refugees. I was born and raised in Boston in the diverse neighborhood of Dorchester. I will graduate this August and receive a Bachelor's Degree in both Criminal Justice & Sociology and a Program of Study in Asian American Studies from the University Of Massachusetts Boston.

For my undergrad career at the University Of Massachusetts Boston, I had decided to focus on Asian American Studies along with my double major because I wanted to learn about my heritage. I truly believe that in life you need to know where you are from to know where you are going as it plays a significant role in shaping your path in life. My decision to attend this university has ended up in giving me the ability to gain knowledge about Asian America history as well as who I am and how I connect with my parents' culture. So I took up the opportunity, and taking these courses did, in fact, help me to finally feel a sense of belonging. My involvement with Asian American Studies has definitely influenced me in my life as a student at UMB, and particularly with my involvement in the Gulf Coast Project. Overall, that experience has taught me the importance of being active in your community. Responding to and documenting the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on the New Orleans Vietnamese American community of Versailles made me realize that even one person can make an impact. Thus, everyone should be involved in and interact with people in their community because we are all entwined with matters of voice, space, and rights issues.

With regards to my future plans after UMB, I am determined to pursue a career in my major field and will hopefully also go back to school soon to obtain a masters degree. The connections and learning I have been part of through the Asian American Studies Program will be useful to me as I grow older in life because everything that I have gained so far has prepared myself for the "real" world and will indeed benefit me. I intend on staying involved with Asian American Studies work and am hoping to serve the needs of the Dorchester Vietnamese community in the future so that it will continue to flourish and exist for future generations. I believe everyone should have a community that they can belong to because it has such a positive effect on society when people feel welcomed and accepted.

We also offer congratulations to other graduating students who have made important contributions to the Asian American Studies Program, including:

Reaksa Chhum — a generous core member of the AASO volunteer student staff in the Asian American Studies Program office since 2006, Reaksa has completed his bachelor's degree in Management, and will hopefully return to UMB for his MBA in the future.

Soramy Le — active since 2004 and coordinator of AASO operations in 2006, Soramy pioneered the use of documentary video and digital story production for student projects in the Asian American Studies Program. Her photographs of post-Katrina Gulf Coast Vietnamese communities were selected for display as part of the Smithsonian Institution's national exhibition on Vietnamese American history in 2007. Soramy completed her bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and continues to be our video producer-of-choice when she is available.

Yu-ting Liu — currently working at the Asian American Civic Association in Boston Chinatown, Yu-ting completed her Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and provided critical leadership to the production of CHORD Magazine, together with ***Yasuhito Yamamoto***, who also completed his graduate degree in Applied Linguistics while teaching Japanese language at UMass Boston and in the Boston Public Schools.

SongKhla Nguyễn — active in Asian American Studies since taking Resources for Vietnamese American Studies in 2007, Kha has completed her B.S. in Biology. After spending the summer in Biloxi, Mississippi helping to develop a model for culturally responsive Vietnamese community youth science education known as Project Green Tortoise, Kha will return to UMass Boston as a graduate student in education and complete the AsAmSt program-of-study while maintaining her longterm commitment as a youth teacher/mentor at the Chua Viet Nam temple in Roslindale.

Helen Quach — involved with AsAmSt ever since she was a high school student in the Coalition for Asian Pacific American Youth (CAPAY), Helen completed her bachelor's degree in sociology.

Anna Tsui, Loc Tran, and Ulisses Varela — active as campus-wide student leaders, each found meaningful ways to connect and collaborate with AsAmSt. Anna established *Lux Magazine* which has featured AsAmSt stories in each issue while Loc served as coordinator of the Asian Center during 2007-2008, and Ulisses, a student in the 2007 Gulf Coast-focused Resources for Vietnamese American Studies course, helped to lead UMB's Student Senate.

Nathan Wright — completing his bachelor's degree in Psychology, Nathan has provided valuable volunteer support for AsAmSt activities since 2006, and also helped to develop a strong campus and community voice for Korean American adoptees.

The Asian American Studies Program also recognizes with appreciation:

- SongKhla Nguyễn and Sơn ca Lâm, undergraduate recipients of the 2008 Anthony Chan Award presented by the Institute for Asian American Studies;
- Undergraduate Vu Tran who, as a member of the U.S. Marine Corps, was deployed to Iraq in May 2008;
- New affiliated faculty, LeeZa Ong, Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling & School Psychology, and Wenfan Yan, Professor and Chair of the Department of Leadership in Education, who will join us in Fall 2008;
- Rajini Srikanth, who completed her two-year term as President of the national Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) and Karen Suyemoto who, as vice-president of the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA), will bring its annual convention to UMB in August 2008;
- Tri Quach and CAPAY, Eunsook Hyun, Haek Lee, Lusa Lo, Sam Museum, Pat Neilson, Shiho Shinke, Rajini Srikanth, Shirley Tang, Steve Ward, Paul Watanabe, and other colleagues who received grants or funding support in 2007-2008;
- Alumnus Giles Li who was profiled in the Spring 2008 issue of *Lux Magazine*;
- Former affiliated faculty, Lin Zhan, who was appointed Dean of the School of Nursing at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Science in 2008;
- Higher Education doctoral student, Nguyễn Thị Minh Phương, who will begin offering courses in Vietnamese language at UMB in Fall 2008;
- American Studies M.A. student, Jon Iftikar, and Clinical Psychology doctoral students, Phuong T. Nguyen, Nancy Lin, Tef Day, John Tawa, Sue Lambe, and Christian Chan for numerous contributions to AsAmSt teaching and student support in 2007-2008;

We are especially thankful to our alumni, community partners & donors as well as to our affiliated faculty, staff, and dedicated AASO students. We offer our warmest wishes to all graduating students who have taken Asian American Studies courses with us during their time at UMass Boston.