

Executive Summary of the Asian and Asian American Studies Program at CSULA December 2010

Background:

The interdisciplinary B.A. Degree program was founded in 2005. There has been no hiring of tenured and tenure-track faculty in the program. It is housed in Anthropology and is given minimal support. The struggle to create the program goes back 30 years at CSULA when faculty tried to propose a program but the institution was not responsive. A group of ten faculty taught *pro bono* the program's very first introductory course on "People, Culture and Society of Pacific Asia" This class is now the AAAS 200.

The B.A. Degree program combines the learning of Asia as a foundation with the learning of the history and contemporary Asian America. It was created after receiving external funding from the NEH and the Ford Foundation for campus-wide conversation on combining Asia Studies with Asian American Studies emphasizing the transnational connection between Asia with Asian America. The program draws from faculty from other disciplines and part-time faculty to teach classes for our 13 majors and 8 minors as well as our 450 other interested students.

Many of our courses are cross-listed with Chicano Studies, Pan African Studies, Latin American Studies, Anthropology and Sociology, making our program unique in our diverse perspectives. AAAS boasts a team-taught course on Comparative Ethnic and Area Studies 108, taught by faculty from three other area and ethnic studies.

Students:

- An estimated 450 students annually take about a dozen courses offered in AAAS, some of the courses are cross-listed.
- Despite the lack of institutional support, the program graduated five majors and two minors during its first five years. There are currently 21 students (13 majors, 8 minors) in the program.
- Other non-majors, about 100 students, annually seek out the program to learn about Asia and Asian America. These include students from interdisciplinary M.A., post-baccalaureates, and students who cannot choose AAAS courses as their option.
- The introductory course on Asia (AAAS 200): People, Culture and Society of Pacific Asia is the only course at CSULA that provides an introduction to Asia. With program suspension, this source of learning about Asia will be gone completely.

Campus Cultural Vibrancy:

- AAAS has maintained a vibrant presence on campus through collaborative programming with Pan African Studies/Chicano Studies/Latin American Studies/Women's Studies. Without AAAS, we will not have, for example, the annual forum on "Why Race and Gender Still Matters" and other programs.
- The AAAS Program has been a critical support to the Cross Cultural Center's programming. Students and faculty have participated in annual Lunar Year Celebrations, Heritage awareness events, and the Asian Cultural Graduation. These are some of the only Asian-culture specific programming on campus.
- The AAAS Program is the "face" of Asian and Asian America at CSULA. International scholars and visitors, local community groups, the media, students, as well as outside individuals, contact the program on matters that pertain to Asia and Asian America.

Funding:

- The program earned a \$25,000 NEH grant to establish itself on campus in 1996.
- The program has earned the Ford Foundation Grant in 1998.
- Asian American playwright, C.Y. Lee, has funded the two C.Y. Lee Creative Writing Contests in collaboration with the AAAS program.
- Dr. Emil Berger as granted the program a "trust" of his estate and annually gives an object of Asian art.
- In 2010, the program won the attention of a community philanthropist who granted \$100,000 to support AAAS students and faculty research.

Events leading to Dean James Henderson's suspension of AAAS Program

The AAAS program was scheduled for its very first Program Review in December 2010. At the Dean's meeting with the Program Director, Dr. "Swan" ChorSwang Ngin, the Dean announced his plan to suspend the program ahead of Program Review. His reason was that the program did not have the majors, faculty support, and community interest. Dr. Ngin is a full professor in Anthropology and receives 1 course off per year to run the program (normal teaching load is 9 courses). She advocated for the program and presented its importance to the Dean. Dean Henderson then requested a meeting with interested faculty to hear their view. At the November 29th meeting more than 50 faculty and students packed into a conference room, some holding signs saying "Cutting AAAS=Cutting Diversity." Many valid questions were posed to the Dean, such as: Why suspend the program at this time? How will suspending the program help it to grow? Because the program is so lean (operating on only \$4,000/year) why cut it when it provides vital programming for diversity on campus. However, Dean Henderson's argument was the suspending the program would "force the program to reapply in three years" and that somehow this would "result in program growth." The suggestion from concerned faculty to form an advisory committee to help grow the program was ignored by the Dean. At the meeting, the Dean stated that he "did not know when he would make the decision" since he was going on vacation. There has been no word from Dean Henderson since that time.

Since the news broke, students, faculty and community groups have expressed outrage at the Dean's decision. Letters of support for the program have come in from universities, faculty, students, and community groups. Many have written letters to President Rosser and Dean James Henderson to protest the decision. Individuals and groups are getting organized. A website serving as a central source of information was created by a group of concerned students and community members: saveaaascalstatela.wordpress.com Please visit this website for more information.