

**Asian American Awareness Month Essay Competition 2004**  
**Topic: Describe the significance of an Asian American Cultural Center for our campus**

**Winner: Antoinette Fadera**

*Unity. Solidarity.* These two simple words hold great meaning to the reason why an Asian Pacific American cultural center is integral to the U of I. On a campus where Asian Americans are not considered a minority, the time has finally arrived where APA students will rightfully claim a property as their own to unite with other students of color, and to raise cultural awareness among the majority.

The diversity among APA students is incomparable to those of other students of color. The languages, colors, and cultures of the APA community span so many countries and origins. And while we each individually fight for our own heritage's recognition and respect, we will never gain these two deserving characteristics unless the non-APA community sees that we are in fact united together first. No one group can forge ahead without unity. If there is separation among the many groups of the APA population, then certainly there can be no progress or advancements made in the higher education and resources for APA students.

The cultural center will do just this. It will bring together students of all backgrounds, hopefully both APA and non-APA into one central location to share their stories, their experiences, and their friendships. Just the other day during a PSA fashion show practice in the other room I could hear Asian Indian music playing, and AAA was in the other room practicing for their show. I saw students of various ethnicities peeking into each other's practices, admiring each other's work and praising one another. This is the prime example of the importance of the cultural house. Finally there is one place where we can all gather to share all these wonderful elements of our culture with one another, rather than trying to compete or outdo the other organization.

An Asian American Cultural Center will bring about new change and hope for the APA community. Already our solidarity has been shown in our long struggle to establish and claim this house, and now that it has become a reality, the APA community now has a source and sanctuary to expose more of its diverse cultures to the U of I community.