

Asian American Awareness Month Competition 2005

Topic: Describe how Asian Americans on campus or nationally have been breaking ground for their communities.

Winner: Akito Yoshikane

The efforts of Asian Americans both locally and nationally have been significant in developing an environment of multiculturalism and visibility for minorities. Students and academics alike have been working to establish scholarly works and cultural resources for their communities in order to raise awareness on issues of concern while providing outlets to exert and preserve our ethnic identities. Yet as we celebrate Asian American awareness, the progress we have made in our campuses and communities could not have been accomplished without the vision and determination of those who have struggled to be heard.

Asian Americans have been fighting for social justice and equality by challenging the status quo in the communities and institutions. The development of Asian American Programs over the years is evidence of student, staff, faculty, and administration led efforts for a more multicultural discourse. Whether it was accomplished through protest or negotiations, there have been breakthroughs in new perspectives, reexamining previous areas as well as raising concern to areas that were once marginalized. And while the academics have become more diverse, so has the faculty as more minorities are being hired in the field of Asian American Studies. The emergence of the program has broken ground not only in academia but in the community also as Asian Americans have helped to change the dynamics of our society and institutions.

While progress has been made nationally the development of the Asian American Studies Program here at U of I is symbolic of how we have broken ground locally. Battling model minority myths and stereotypes of complicity, the persistence of Asian Americans here on campus has enabled us to have an academic program and cultural center. Their hard work in showing our diverse ethnic backgrounds and demonstrating the need for a building has helped to improve our quality of life on campus. The persistence of active Asian Americans has given us the opportunity to take courses that relate to us while in addition to having access to a center that address the needs of our community.

The advancements we have made both nationally and locally show that passivity and silence is not something that is endemic to Asian Americans. We have been helping to break ground in creating academic, cultural, social, and political channels for which we are able to express ourselves. The progress of Asian Americans here on campus is a testament to the development of not only our local community, but as a whole as well. The establishment of the Asian American Studies Program and Cultural Center is evidence of the groundbreaking measures Asian Americans have taken to increase our presence and dispel myths of being a silent minority. Just as the construction of the Cultural Center was commemorated by breaking ground, Asian Americans will continue to do the same in the future as well.