

Asian American Awareness Month Competition 2006
Essay Topic: - Envision how the Asian American community at UIUC can build upon our recent achievements.
Winner: Patrice Yao

The 2005-2006 school year marks the year that Asian Americans have been most recognized for our recent achievements at the University of Illinois. Although the recognition is only now surfacing, it is a culmination of years of struggle and sacrifice from our past generations who wanted to leave a legacy for the campus community.

In order to envision how the Asian American community at UIUC can further our progress, we must first consider the development of our roots and the effort that ensued. We must be aware of the student leaders who began the fight and took the first steps to create the success we enjoy today. For example, students like Ho Chie Tsai and Anna Hui began a book drive that has since expanded into a library of Asian American resources that is accessible to the entire public. Such seemingly small efforts have combined together to create a synergy that accumulated to the opening of the Asian American Cultural Center this past fall- a monumental success.

Upon recognizing our great accomplishments, I pause to reflect on the goals and direction of our community. To envision is to hope for something in the future. It is to motivate us towards a common dream.

I envision an Asian American community at UIUC where self segregation does not exist, and people create bridges rather than roadblocks that connect us to other communities. Open communication is always encouraged and people are judged on the actions and initiatives they have created, rather than a position or title to which they have been assigned.

I envision an Asian American community at UIUC where we continue to fight for services and resources that enable increased understanding and respect to Asian and Asian American cultures. One that expands our "Food for Thought" lunchtime series, while reaching out to new communities that are not familiar with Asian Americans.

I envision our new Asian American Cultural Center as both a physical facility and an emotional catalyst where people are drawn to it like they are a charismatic leader. It becomes an environment where ideas are exchanged, politics are debated, and people are intellectually stimulated to think in new ways. I hope visitors are pulled towards the AACC as a center for learning. And if a program or service is not yet offered, I hope that people will make suggestions to continually improve the Cultural Center.

Similarly, I envision our Asian American Studies Program to continue offering the existing top quality courses. Increasing the number of students pursuing a minor in AAS, we should remain active until we can establish an Asian American Studies major. The recent beginning of the AAS Minors Club is a great step to unifying those interested in this academic pursuit. Additionally, I encourage AASP to continue to invite distinguished guest speakers to campus to share their research, similar to this year's subjects ranging from how Asian Americans are portrayed on the internet, to the ethnic breakdown of Chicago's Chinatowns. I also encourage the collaboration of the Asian American Studies Program with other ethnic studies departments on campus to create events and programs addressing our similarities and focusing on combined efforts in academic arenas. The support from AAS to the other programs shows our dedication

to reaching out to the entire campus community without limiting it to Asian American specific audiences.

I envision alumni and friends of the University investing their time and service to the development of Asian American student leaders because of their vision for the future. Speakers who return to share their struggles and their insight become invaluable to the development of our next generation.

I envision Asian Americans who become civically engaged in the campus and local community by giving back simply because we are able. To paraphrase Jimmy Lee from the White House Initiative on APIA, "We are all products of those that have invested in us from the past." We must realize that it is never too early to give back.

I envision an Asian American community that takes responsibility for what happens- both in challenges that occur, as well as opportunities that are created. We should learn from our successes, but we should learn even more from mistakes, challenging us to constantly evolve and adapt as new opportunities present themselves. Because of this, we should never be afraid of making mistakes, and always continue to take risks.

Finally, I envision an Asian American community at UIUC that builds upon our recent achievements of the Asian American Studies program and Cultural Center, but never ceases to be satisfied. Always stopping to reflect on the progress that has been made, but also continuing to demand more of ourselves and of the community. As Michelangelo once said, "Lord, grant that I might always desire more than I can accomplish." I envision us to set expectations higher each time we fulfill an achievement.

A guest speaker at the 2006 Unseen Unheard conference stated, "If you are just coasting, you can only go downhill." As an Asian American community at UIUC, we must never coast by and do the bare minimum or else we risk being superceded and overcome- never again able to achieve the same status of success from the past.

Through our recent accomplishments, we have given the University of Illinois only a taste of what to expect for the future. We must challenge ourselves to do more, to be better leaders, and to always aim higher. Only through this can we continue to build upon our success as an Asian American community at the University of Illinois. Only then can we continue to be a model for other universities and communities outside of Champaign, Illinois. And only then will we be able to leave a lasting legacy that many before us dreamed to achieve.
