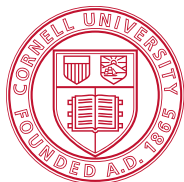


Originally Presented on:	3/10/2016
Type of Action:	Recommendation
Status/Result:	New Business



Cornell University Student Assembly

S.A. Resolution #45

Call for an Asian American Studies Major at Cornell

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ABSTRACT: Extending the Student Assembly’s support for creating and implementing the Asian American Studies minor into a major.

Sponsored by: Diana Li '17

Whereas, Cornell University currently offers Asian American Studies as a minor, which requires students to take five courses in Asian American Studies, Feminist, Gender, Sexuality Studies, American Indian Studies, Latino/a Studies, Africana Studies, and Asian Studies,

Whereas, Cornell University’s motto is “any person can find instruction in any study” and yet Cornell does not have a major dedicated to Asian American Studies or an equivalent in that subject area despite there being an increased demand,

Whereas, Cornell’s Asian American Studies program was amongst the best in the country when it was first founded, and while enrollment in its classes have increased, the available resources and number of professors have decreased,

Whereas, other peer institutions have looked to Cornell as a model for their own Asian American Studies programs,

Whereas, in recent years, the demand for Asian American Studies courses has increased by almost 200% since 1998 [see appendix],

Whereas, currently Asian American Studies professors are jointly appointed to departments such as Anthropology, History, and English, creating an overwhelming split between two different departments with different responsibilities,

Whereas, currently the narratives and experiences of marginalized communities are not currently reflected in the selection of majors at this university,

Whereas, this is an echo of the demands of Black Students United that “We want the university to support the planning and development of Latino Studies, American Indian Studies, and Asian American Studies majors by the end of the Academic Year 2016. We also want the university to provide all necessary support and resources to explore the option and feasibility of creating doctoral programs in these departments,”

40 **Whereas**, the program is currently not conducive to all Asian American narratives mainly, South
41 and Southeast Asian; expanding the minor to a major will help recruit and retain faculty to cover all
42 Asian American experiences filling critical gaps within the current program,
43

44 **Whereas**, the Asian American Studies Program already holds very well-attended Spam and Eggs
45 Community Breakfasts and Wednesday Lunch Series that many major departments similarly do —
46 programming that majors have financial support for but programming that significantly drains the
47 AASP budget,
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49 **Be it therefore resolved**, that Cornell University offers a Bachelor of Arts in the study of Asian
50 American Studies,
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52 **Be it further resolved**, that Cornell University strongly consider that this major be an University-
53 wide, interdisciplinary major to enable students across all studies to access and engage with Asian
54 American narratives,
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56 **Be it finally resolved**, that a copy of this resolution and the appended letter be presented to the
57 Deans of all seven undergraduate colleges, Vice President Lombardi, and Provost Kotlikoff to
58 affirm the student support for, underscore the importance of, and expedite the creation of an Asian
59 American Studies major.
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61
62 Respectfully Submitted,
63 Diana Li '17
64 *Undesignated At-Large Representative, Student Assembly*
65

66 Linda He '16
67 *Facilitator (President) of CAPSU, Asian Pacific Americans for Action (APAA)*
68

69 Michael Stewart '16
70 *A3C Staffer, Asian Pacific Americans for Action (APAA)*
71

72 Xiao Yin Ma '18
73 *Asian Pacific Americans for Action (APAA)*
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75 Emily Dong '18
76 *Asian Pacific Americans for Action (APAA)*
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78 Krystle-Mei Chow '18
79 *Director of Advocacy of CAPSU, Asian Pacific Americans for Action (APAA)*
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81 Stephanie Hahm '17
82 *A3C Staffer*
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84 *(Reviewed by: DIVERSITY COMMITTEE, MARCH 6, 2016)*
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APPENDIX:

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1987, the Cornell Asian American Studies Program was the first of its kind in the Ivy League. However, since its creation and despite a growing demand and interest in Asian American Studies in recent years, the Program has remained under-resourced and understaffed as a program that has one of the smallest operating budgets in the College of Arts and Sciences. In this light, we echo the Fall 2015 demands of Black Students United to create a plan for implementing an Asian American Studies major, a Latino/a Studies major, and an American Indian Studies major by the end of 2016. We call for the establishment of an Asian American Studies Major at Cornell University.

WHY ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES?

As an institution that aspires to the motto “Any Person, Any Study,” Cornell has historically been an institution to offer courses of study that are rarely offered anywhere else. Asian American Studies focuses on the experiences and histories of the Asian diaspora in the Americas, with a particular focus on the United States. With the Asian American Studies Program, Cornell enables a space to teach and share narratives that are otherwise forgotten, hidden, and marginalized. This makes Cornell one of the few universities today to even acknowledge Asian American Studies. Born out of the Civil Rights Era and the work of the Third World Liberation Front, Asian American Studies, much like its counterparts in Latino/a Studies and American Indian Studies, provides students with a critical lens through which to examine today’s world, social and political frameworks, and the foundational tools of a liberal arts education that enable students to turn theory into practical application. As Cornell continues to fund traditional departments they are failing to understand how the courses in these departments may not fully understand or speak to the breadth of the national and geopolitical climate of the 21st century world. Asian American Studies, along with Latino/a Studies and American Indian Studies, provide the scholarship that illustrate the theory behind the constructive nature of the identities that form the American consciousness in an international context. By recognizing the validity of these studies, Cornell will be at the forefront of creating a new consciousness that tells a truer American story. Most importantly, the Asian American Studies Program acknowledges the diverse histories of the Asian diaspora and affirms that Asian American experiences are valid and worth interacting with beyond just the cultural and extracurricular realm.

WHAT DOES THE PROGRAM LOOK LIKE NOW?

Currently, the Asian American Studies Program offers around 4 to 5 classes a semester that are cross-listed across various departments, such as History, Anthropology, and English. The Asian American Studies Program is currently budgeted for 4 full-time faculty. Currently, there are 2.5 positions (3 faculty) appointed full time in the program. Professor Shelley Wong and Professor Derek Chang currently occupy one position each, while Professor Virajini Munasinghe occupies a line shared with the Anthropology department. This leaves 1.5 lines currently empty, while Professor Chrissy Lau remains an adjunct faculty member as a Visiting Assistant Professor and not considered full-time. All of our faculty are jointly appointed with other departments. While a majority of the faculty have been at Cornell University for a long length of time, additional faculty who provide crucial support for the courses in the Asian American Studies Program experience a high turnover

132 rate. Indeed, although the size of the program's faculty has largely remained the same, there has been
133 an increased demand and interest in Asian American Studies courses. Enrollment totals from the
134 1997 - 1998 school year indicate that there was a combined enrollment of only 125 students, but
135 enrollment since then has grown to a combined enrollment of 252 students, as indicated by 2015 -
136 2016 school year. It is clear that despite the stagnant growth in the size of our faculty and our
137 allocated resources, we have seen steadily increasing numbers of students enrolling for Asian
138 American Studies classes.

140 **WHAT BARRIERS DOES THE PROGRAM FACE?**

141 Relative to many other programs and departments, as well as considering the portion of
142 students who are of Asian descent, the Asian American Studies Program remains under-resourced
143 and understaffed. From year to year, only a small number of classes are taught, and the diversity and
144 variety of communities, histories, and topics within Asian American Studies are unable to be
145 covered. For example, due to the small number of faculty and thus a small number of courses, many
146 of the varied histories and narratives of Asian American communities are unable to be taught. These
147 communities include many facets of the experiences of South Asians and Southeast Asians in the
148 United States, groups that represent a large portion of Asian America and whose identities and
149 experiences are rarely included elsewhere in academia.

150 With a small number of faculty in the Asian American Studies Program, changes in the
151 number of faculty and their responsibilities pose a large threat to the stability of the program. In
152 recent years, faculty who have left the university leave a void in which their courses and their subject
153 matters are unable to be taught to interested students. Numerous responsibilities for faculty outside
154 of teaching leave our faculty unable to teach or overburdened by new responsibilities, exacerbated
155 by the limited support that the Program receives. These changes put pressure on the two
156 administrative staff and the remaining Program faculty, who must sacrifice their sabbatical and
157 resting privileges to ensure that enough courses can continue be taught from semester to semester
158 under Asian American Studies. Consequently, a lack in the breadth of courses available due to
159 insufficient resources greatly reduces the Program's ability to attract and retain students. The
160 fluctuation of class offerings can prevent students from completing the minor due to scheduling
161 conflicts that arise from having limited class options at limited time slots. In the upcoming 2016 -
162 2017 academic year, a record low of only 3 courses will be taught in the fall semester by only 2
163 faculty members already burdened by other responsibilities, greatly reducing the Program's ability to
164 attract and retain interested students. These threats to the stability of the Asian American Studies
165 Program will only stifle the growth of a program that greatly contributes to Cornell's commitment to
166 diversity and inclusion.

167 Many of the problems that greatly impact the Asian American Studies Program stem from
168 systemic reasons within university structures. In particular, barriers in hiring procedures greatly limit
169 the search and retainment of faculty members for the Program. The stipulation for faculty members
170 to be jointly appointed with and approved by a department, such as History or Anthropology,
171 despite salaries coming from the Asian American Studies Program, significantly reduces the
172 autonomy of our faculty. The Program's faculty are forced to take on more work than other faculty
173 members. In addition, budget shortfalls have caused existing searches for new faculty members for
174 the Program to be suspended, although larger departments, such as Economics, remain able to
175 search for and hire new faculty. Indicative of a larger campus climate that fails to fully acknowledge

176 the validity of the Asian American experience, these barriers contribute to a lack of courses that
177 engage students and inhibit the ability for the Asian American Studies Program to grow.

178

179 **WHAT ARE WE ASKING FOR?**

180 There is a clear and strong interest in the Asian American Studies Program across the
181 student population and across colleges, yet the resources allocated towards the Program do not
182 reflect the growth and urgent need for the Program's expansion. We believe that all programs and
183 departments across all subjects at Cornell University deserve stability; we believe that the Asian
184 American Studies Program has not been given the opportunities to achieve this stability. We demand
185 greater resources for our Program and more efforts dedicated towards hiring and retaining faculty,
186 so that interested students may intellectually engage with Asian American narratives, histories, and
187 experiences. Specifically, we demand a renewed search for more Program faculty members and
188 action from the university to create and implement a plan for an eventual Asian American Studies
189 major by the end of the Fall 2016 semester. We demand a greater acknowledgement of the validity
190 of Asian America and a greater recognition of the importance of the role of Asian American Studies
191 in teaching our students to think critically and engage deeply in histories relevant to our
192 understandings of the societies in which we live.

193

194 **CONCLUSION**

195 In the end, the way to measure Cornell's commitment to diversity and inclusion is plain and
196 simple: we see it in the dollars that are allocated into programs and departments that enable students
197 to engage in scholarship that will "open doors, open hearts, and open minds." These courses
198 provide opportunities for students to explore and grapple with the experiences of different
199 communities. These courses provide students the scholarship to critically think about unique
200 experiences and issues within our campus and greater society. Each interaction and incident on this
201 campus, at a local level, and on the national and international stages can be more easily examined
202 with the lens and vocabulary gained from these classes. Academic engagement in narratives and
203 histories of diverse communities is a first and critical step towards building a truly inclusive campus
204 and society. Pamphlets that pledge "diversity" are not enough-- it is time for the university to fully
205 commit to its founding aspirations of "Any Person, Any Study." It is time that the university
206 commits to being visionary in its pursuit of academics by serving as an example of what a successful
207 Asian American Studies Program can look like among the Ivy League and our peer institutions.

208

209 The University must give Asian American Studies more resources, because students want to
210 learn about these histories. The current program is crucial in allowing students the opportunity to
211 engage with the experiences of a diverse and varied community that comprises almost 25% of
212 Cornell. For too long, the majority of these voices have been absent from or silenced on a local and
213 national scale. We demand that the University hear us as we call for the creation of an Asian
214 American Studies Major.

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