August 23, 2012

Dear Alum/Alumna,

My name is Peter Van Do, Director for the Pan-Asian American Community House (PAACH) at the University of Pennsylvania. In July 2012, I had the honor of being selected as the new Director. My most recent experience has been in student affairs at Cornell University.

From my seven years of experience in higher education, I recognize the importance of outreach, established connections, and advocacy in order to create a home away from home for historically underrepresented students. As PAACH Director, I see myself facilitating resources and co-curricular learning, while developing mutually beneficial relationships with students, offices, academic departments, and organizations on and off-campus.

As many know, PAACH is a recognized leader within the Penn community. The Community House provides a positive, safe, supportive, and educational environment, thanks to the collaborative efforts of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and local community supporters. Within my role in PAACH, I will continue strengthening the successful initiatives of our beloved community center as we empower and strengthen the entire Penn community. For the upcoming months, I plan to help support PAACH with the following goals:

- Synergize the interests of students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, alumni, administrators, and the Greater Philadelphia community
- Enhance the educational energy within the Asian American community and overall campus
- Educate the interests of PAACH within the wider campus culture
- Develop and promote Community House space and identity
- Facilitate PAACH’s success and growth through continued assessment projects

PAACH is such an important space and we hope that you continually support us in the future. Specifically, mark your calendars for our program with the University of Pennsylvania Asian Alumni Network (UPAAN) during Homecoming (October 2012), the fifteen year anniversary celebration banquet of the establishment of Asian American Studies (ASAM) at Penn (March 2012), and the expected completion of PAACH’s new renovated space in the ARCH (December 2013 / January 2014). In addition, feel free to connect with us through Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr. The PAACH Team is also available via telephone and email.

Overall, I look forward to working with you as we push forward to prepare PAACH to better serve the next generation of leaders.

Warmest regards,
Peter Van Do
Director
Thanks to the $15 million gift from an anonymous donor in May 2011, work has begun on the renovation of the historic ARCH building, located in the heart of campus at 3601 Locust Walk.

During the renovation period, the Pan-Asian American Community House, La Casa Latina: Center for Hispanic Excellence, and Maku Black Cultural Center will be housed in Houston Hall (3417 Spruce St.), Suite 240. The Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships (CURF) is located at 220 South 40th St.

The goals of the project include preserving Arts, Research, and Culture as the foundation of the building’s program and to create new and better space for the centers housed in the ARCH, as well as creating new social and programming space that will bring even more students into the building.

The newly renovated building will boast an open concept lobby leading into a new dining establishment, a 2nd floor auditorium with updated audio-visual capabilities and retractable seating, an elevator, and increased office space for the three cultural centers.

The renovation is being done by Saylor-Gregg Architects and is scheduled to be completed December 2013/January 2014.

For more information and updates, visit the ARCH blog or email PAACH Staff.
A Toast to Dear Old Penn
By Nicky Singh, CAS’12

It’s a bleak time for Asian Americans. An atrocity of intolerance and ignorance has resulted in seven deaths, including that of six Sikh Americans. The sergeant who harassed Private Danny Chen to the point of suicide has been deemed not guilty of negligible homicide. Each day, there is a new example of Muslim Americans facing Islamophobic bigotry.

I hope you read that first paragraph and became immediately angry with me. Because you know what? It is an all-but-bleak time for Asian Americans. We have been given the opportunity to build the greatest solidarity in Asian American history. Moreover, we are ready to take this opportunity and run with it. This solidarity runs deep: it is not limited to Asian Americans, but applies to Americans as a whole.

How do I know? Because Penn taught me so. I’ve learned a great deal over my four years at Penn: from approximating the waveform of electrons to learning to play the tabla. Some of the most beneficial learning I’ve done, however, has taken place far beyond the borders of the classroom. This had never been more evident than after the recent Sikh Gurdwara shootings.

I remember when I first discovered the situation in Oak Creek. Information was still scarce and I could not have been more shocked. I grew up going to a Gurdwara only five hours from Oak Creek and shuddered at just how possible it was that this could have taken place not only there, but Philadelphia, or my new home of Houston. As news slowly began to disperse, fear and shock turned to anger and frustration and eventually to drive and determination. How should I react to this? What can I do to help?

My resultant response and the actions I took because of it sparked from my time at Penn. It was through my time on the board of Sangam, a Pan-Asian discussion group, that I learned to spark purposeful dialogue among my peers, thus allowing me to sprout these conversations with my newfound friends in Teach For America and spreading greater awareness of the event and consideration of its implications. It was my dedication to the board of the Asian Pacific Student Coalition that taught me best practices for effectively using social media, phone calls, and articles to disperse information among acquaintances, thereby rallying people to unite against intolerance and injustice. It was through working with the five other minority coalition boards and their leaders that I recognized that binding together is not only beneficial, but absolutely necessary to bring about change when this very change seems impossible. And last, but certainly not least, it was my greatest of friends and mentors at Penn, many of whom I met through PAACH, that kept me sane through a time when I had never felt more impassioned, who gave me advice and outlets when I was unsure where to focus my energy, and who continued to be there for me even when they were hundreds if not thousands of miles away.

And, most empowering of all, I’m blessed to be part of such an outstanding group of people – the students and alumni of the University of Pennsylvania – who stand together to fight this injustice, whether they are South Asian American or not.

The key to tangible change, we members of Penn have learned, is unity:

First they came for the communists,
and I didn’t speak out because I wasn’t a communist

Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn’t speak out because I wasn’t a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn’t speak out because I wasn’t a Jew

Then they came for me...

And there was no one left to speak out for me. As Penn students, we’ve undoubtedly heard this Martin Niemöller quote and an increasing number of us dedicate our college and post-college experiences to acting contrary to its connotations. We all but “go with the flow.” We, whether Penn degree-aspirers or degree-holders, recognize that injustice may wear many costumes, but is the same beast underneath. We are the ones that work together, especially in times like these, to battle this beast. And because of this, I couldn’t be more proud to call myself an alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania.
First Steps Out of the Penn Bubble

By Jenny Fan, WH’12

Graduation was the ultimate test for a nostalgic sap like me. It took about a thousand photographs on the steps of the ARCH and a never-ending stream of teary goodbye hugs, but by the time my diploma finally arrived in the mail months into the summer, I had begun to sift through my thoughts and memories of college as if it were truly a part of my past (the first sign of the mental shift into alumni-hood?). While the community and camaraderie of college, especially of PAACH, is a difficult thing to leave, I’ve come to especially appreciate a number of opportunities that PAACH offered that I could’ve never fully appreciated without having the benefit of hindsight.

PAACH is a community without walls – literally, now, as the ARCH undergoes renovations. It forms when people come together with some sort of common bond. It’s not a bond of place – I’ve seen “PAACH” in the lobby of ARCH, in the audience at culture shows, the new location in Houston Hall, and even in impromptu gatherings in a high rise dorm room. It’s not a bond of time – how many alumni have I seen come into the building, looking for Kusum with a bright smile and reminiscing about the very first PTS Culture Show or the times spent fundraising for APAHW? It’s not even a bond of purpose – the changing student population of Penn will inevitably call for a changing and evolving raison d’être of PAACH and the support of resources it offers. It’s that ambiguity that makes it so wonderful – a community with no limits. There aren’t limits to who can belong to the community, and it doesn’t stop after a period of time. Even after we graduate, PAACH connects so many students who have once claimed any sort of affinity to it.

Especially after graduating and being launched into a wider pool of people from many different colleges and circumstances, I’m reminded even more how privileged we are to have a place like PAACH. Outside of my Penn bubble, I realize how lucky I was to have been able to celebrate cultural communities and identities in college, especially when I meet people who may be unwillingly perpetuating gender and race stereotypes, or have no concept of what an APA community can do for them. I can’t help but wonder: what would they have been like if there were PAACHs in every college? It’s the same thought that occurred to me for the first time at ECAASU 2010 at Penn. To see so many students affected by a community and its ideals was humbling and inspiring, and I have PAACH to thank for catapulting me into that world. There were a thousand directions I could’ve taken in college, but the perspective of student activism and cultural awareness has been formative in shaping the opinions I have and my goals for the future.

Recent graduates can’t help but feel a little like it is the end of an era, perhaps only because the world outside of our bubble is so unknown. Once the graduation goggles are off, things become clearer: we are in for a world of constant change and beginnings! PAACH will have a new location, new director, and new fresh-faced students next year. For the Class of 2012, we’ll just be entering the alum world, bringing PAACH all over the globe with the experiences and relationships that started in that single room.
When I come back to PAACH this fall, there are definitely going to be a few changes. There won’t be couches to nap on, and fitting the same number of people inside on a Friday afternoon will be something akin to Tetris. Those of us who visit frequently will get more exercise with a set of stairs between us and PAACH, though the proximity of the Creperie may cancel that out. There will be new faces gained in the incoming freshman class, and familiar faces moving on who we'll only see once in a while at homecoming and the like.

And yet, the more things change, the more some will stay the same.

PAACH will still have amazing programming, from the PEER mentoring program, to our APALI workshops, to our heritage week, APAHW. It will continue to be a resource center for anyone willing to use it, from an APSC constituent group, to a non-APA student interested in learning more, to anyone in between. It will continue to be an activism center to combat APA issues in our community and abroad. The PAACH staff will always provide an amazing experience for anyone who steps through the doors of whatever room happens to house it. Upperclassmen will always be helpful and inspiring as those who came before us, while incoming students can barely imagine the powerful experiences that are in store for them.

No matter the changes in store for PAACH in the future, no matter where the winds will blow or how the tides will turn, PAACH will be a special place where magical things can happen. PAACH will always be a home for whoever needs it.

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

By Paulo Bautista, WH’14
I’ve been doing a lot of reflecting lately, as I apply to medical schools and try to answer probing questions that are like sandpaper on the soul. One topic that appears repeatedly: “Describe a situation where you were not in the majority.” This prompt, in a backwards way, always makes me think of PAACH. At Penn, after jumping headfirst into the PAACH community, it was reasonably easy to surround myself with peers who felt APA issues were as important as I did. My passion grew as I learned from them and I constantly felt supported and validated when an on-campus issue or instance of racism in the media made me upset. In the post-graduate world, this is not always the case. It is difficult now for me to find a person who is convinced that Asian American struggles are even important, let alone someone who has an inherent passion for advocacy. Whereas my Penn friends forwarded me article after article about the Jeremy Lin trade, my colleagues at work couldn’t understand how this was particularly heart-breaking, an Asian American issue. In fact, I struggled to explain it to them, having relied for so long on the unspoken understanding laid within the PAACH community. Even now, I am nervous to discuss pertinent topics with my new peers, such as why the Sikh temple shooting is falling so short of the attention that the Aurora shooting received. Instead, these conversations take place through emails and on Facebook, thriving amongst the friends I made through PAACH years ago. Through all this, I’ve realized how lucky we are to have belonged to a community like PAACH that was so passionate, so inspiring, for four formative years. I learned a great deal there about what was important to me and what kind of individual I wanted to be. The larger outside world has the tendency to stifle some of those discoveries, as I now find myself uncomfortably in the minority of people who embrace Asian American advocacy and identity issues. Hopefully, though, what I’ll be able to do is pay it forward – take the passion and inspiration I found at PAACH and spread it around where I am now, slowly creating a new community that takes interest and cares. If alumni can do this across the country and around the world, PAACH will continue to stay alive not only at Penn, but through all of us. The core friends and ideals we found at Penn will always be there, but now we also have the unique opportunity to take them with us wherever we go.
It’s Never Too Late
By Ben Watkins, CAS’13

Born half-Taiwanese, I passed off as "white" the majority of my childhood. Sure, I went to the annual moon festival and Taiwanese Christmas banquets. I went to Taiwan almost every winter in elementary and middle school. I even grew up speaking Mandarin with my mom. However, I never really embraced my heritage and took a lot of things for granted.

Even when I first came to Penn, I didn't "do anything Asian." Joining the Penn Taiwanese Society sophomore year was a start, but it wasn't really until junior year when I started to think about my biracial background as an identity. As I started to hang out in PAACH, I got to know everyone from the regulars to the occasional passersby. It became my second home and I was lounging, errr, studying on the couch almost every day. That year, I was a PEER mentor and part of the Spring 2012 APALI class. It was through these programs that I actually started to talk about my background as more than a statement on a piece of paper. Through these experiences, I think I grew the most as person and now feel even more comfortable with and understanding of my Taiwanese American identity.

Through PAACH, I have found a greater cultural understanding, friends I don't think I would've met otherwise, a strong personal, career, and life support network, but more importantly, another home. And while I do wish I had found PAACH earlier, it's never too late. Lots of people say once freshman year ends, you have to settle on what you're already involved in because it's too hard to join anything else. PAACH will always be welcoming, no matter what year you are. And even though the physical location may have changed, I believe PAACH can and will still be there to provide the same experiences I was privileged to have at Penn.
I don’t think I considered myself a PAACH student until the end of my sophomore year. Having participated in APALI and PEER this year, my visits grew more frequent. I used to always hear people filling in the blank: “PAACH is: HOME” and I admit, I didn’t know what people meant; were they referring to the “home-like” sofas? Or perhaps the privacy the space provides? Or maybe they were talking about convenience? A couple months later, I understood.

To me, PAACH is a welcoming community. Whenever I walk into PAACH, there is always someone there to greet me, whether it’s the staff, friends, work-study students, or a new face. I particularly like seeing new faces or underclassmen just because I wish I, myself, had found PAACH sooner. As a PEER mentor this year, I got to see the mentees branch out and join different APSC organizations and get involved early. They also had an end-of-the-year project where they were broken up into small groups with assigned presentation topics. I recognized the impact that the project mentors had on their group mentees. I believe that leading by example is the best way to encourage and motivate others and PAACH is in no way short of these kinds of these leaders and mentors.

PAACH students inspire me. Many times that I am there, there are people working on projects. One day during the last week of classes, I walked into the computer room and saw a freshman from the Vietnamese Student Association hard at work, trying to edit footage of the VSA cultural show and looking up instructional videos on YouTube on how to use the editing program. I asked how her week was going, expecting to hear about midterms and review sessions, but instead, she told me how she had been working on the video and she had yet to choreograph and teach a dance for the VSA end-of-the-year banquet. This is only one of many instances where I’ve seen such amazing dedication of PAACH students to their organizations.

PAACH is a spark, a catalyst that encourages us to explore and embrace our APA identity. PAACH helps us grow and recognize issues we want to tackle. This spring, I was so impressed to see one of my APALI-mates recruit and lead a protest outside of College Hall in defense to a news matter that needed to be brought to attention. I also saw another one of my APALI-mates constantly walking around with his video camera recorder, scheduling interviews with PAACH students to work on a homemade documentary about PAACH and the APA community at Penn. It makes me feel so honored to know the people I’ve met, who are not afraid to speak up and shed light on relevant APA issues that are easily overlooked by others.

PAACH is a support system and family. It is what makes us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. Perhaps that is why people find the word “home” to be more fitting than “community house.” I have faith that the PAACH spirit will live on despite the move. Because even with the upcoming relocation, I know PAACH is not a confined space within particular walls. Instead, PAACH will remain an environment that motivates us to break down walls and stand strong.

Consider giving to PAACH—ask us how! 
http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/paach
Greetings from UPAAN!
Laura Lin, SEAS’02 & Calvin Chen, WH’97
Hold for UPAAN article.

Are you looking to get more involved with UPAAN? We encourage both alumni of any age and current students to become involved! Our regional chapters in New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Boston, San Francisco/Bay Area, and Los Angeles have held many interesting social, cultural, educational, and community service events. UPAAN is always looking for energetic and enthusiastic alumni to help guide these chapters and create exciting events for all alumni to enjoy.

Please contact us at upaan@upaan.org, visit our website to subscribe for email updates, or join one of our chapters on Facebook!

[ PAACH STAFF ]

Peter Van Do, Director
pvan@upenn.edu

Shiella Cervantes, Associate Director
shiella@upenn.edu

Kusum Soin, Office Coordinator
kusums@upenn.edu