

Minutes from the Public Hearing
Reorganization of the Asian American Studies Program to the Department of Asian
American Studies

April 11, 2011
3:30-4:00 pm
210 Illini Union

Professor Abbas Aminmansour, Chair of the Educational Policy Committee, welcomed everyone and asked that if anyone had comments to send them via email to aamin@uiuc.edu. The speaker was the Director of the Asian American Studies Program Professor Lisa Nakamura. The program was established in 2000-2001 and in 2004 was given enhanced rights to hire and promote faculty. The program offers an undergraduate minor (established 2003) and graduate minor (established 2010). The faculty offer a wide range of courses, including a focus on newer areas of research such as Phillipine Studies and LGBT studies. The program is the largest Asian American Studies academic program in the CIC. Nationally, Asian American Studies really shines, they are larger than, more productive than and offer more courses than many departments in the country. They are the largest AAS program east of California, ranking 5th nationally. AAS housed the Secretariat for the Association for Asian American Studies from Spring 2009 through Summer 2010 giving the program and university a high visibility in the field. The program has 9 faculty (5 tenured, 4 tenure track; 1 at 100%, 8 at 50%). The program has 14 core faculty with MOUs to teach 50% or more in AAS. A big strength of the program is its wide range of affiliations across LAS departments and other Colleges. AAS faculty are affiliated with the Colleges of Education, Fine and Applied Arts, Media, Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences and the School of Social Work. Faculty in AAS have enormous research productivity, since 2002 they have received 15 book awards. This productivity positively impacts the quality of instruction. The program has awarded 48 undergraduate minors, 2 Individual Plans of Study degrees, and has 1 declared Graduate minor. An undergraduate major has been approved by the faculty and will be submitted soon to the College. Asian American Studies courses, especially the general education courses, are popular with students. Since 2002, student enrolment in AAS courses has grown from around 250 to 3000. Events and Programming in AAS has highlighted the range of research performed by AAS scholars, including Technologies of Migration (April 21, 22, 2011) and Phillipine Palimpsests (March 7-8, 2008) which was the first of its kind on this topic. The reorganization from program to department will not have a budgetary or staff impact on the unit except for minimal costs associated with identity (letterhead, website, business cards). The reorganization will help the unit retain faculty who wish to be associated with a department. The floor was open for questions.

Jeff Nihan, Senior in Biochemistry, asked what are the benefits for becoming a department. Associate Dean Diane Musumeci answered that it will provide a greater visibility on campus for the unit and will offer a parallel in organization with other ethnic studies units that have become departments.

Stephanie, Junior at U of I, asked if there were obstacles to departmentalization.

Professor Aminmansour answered that there have not been any obstacles to departmentalization. The unit has had enhanced status for a few years. A few years ago the Senate asked Colleges to review the programs and move them to departments if they were ready. This unit is now ready.

Agusto Espiritu, Professor in Asian American Studies and History, emphasized the intellectual aspects of reorganization into a department. The field has grown tremendously over the last 15 years and the Asian American Studies Program has contributed to the growth. Faculty perform some of the most contemporary research in the field: Transnationalism (impact migration, globalization, diaspora) Popular Culture (food, media, communication, film), and Interdisciplinary theory in Race and Gender. The faculty are also very diverse- representing South Asia, Korea, Japan, China and the Philippines. The intellectual synergy and vibrancy of the faculty in the program deserves the recognition of a department.

Chantal Nadeau, Professor and Chair of the Department of Gender and Women's Studies, commented on the quality of scholarship- the buzz at Humanities and Social Sciences conferences has been in the Asian American Studies field. The faculty in Asian American Studies are like a constellation of stars, they provide a stimulating atmosphere for all other faculty. Also, the quality of the students in the program is tremendous. If you have a student in your course who has taken an Asian American course, you can see the quality of their thinking, which speaks to the quality of the program and its faculty. It is time to move the program to a department.

Cecilia Aragon, student, stated that the Asian Pacific American Coalition supports the reorganization.

Phil Geil, member of the Educational Policy Committee, asked if there are plans to offer a degree.

Professor Nakamura answered that the AAS faculty have voted on an undergraduate degree. Reorganization into a department is the first step, then the major.

Professor Aminmansour announced that the vote taken at the department and college levels on the reorganization was unanimous.

Jeff Nihan, Senior in Biochemistry, said that before he took AAS 100, he felt that saying "I'm Asian American" divided him from other students. He thought that by taking AAS courses he would continue the perceived racial disharmony. But AAS courses are breaking down the stereotypes and affirming his identity as an Asian American individual.

Stephanie, Junior at U of I, has taken higher level AAS courses and the level of integration is amazing. The caliber of AAS faculty are amazing. Students will see how relevant Asian American courses are as the department is formed.

Pai Lin, Junior in Biology, said her roommate was taking an AAS courses and it was cool seeing how much she is learning about Asian American culture. It is inspiring to see such open minds in the students. Being able to take advantage of AAS courses is great.

No other questions or comments were asked and the meeting was adjourned.