



University of Illinois, Chicago
Asian American Resource and Cultural
Center
External Program Review

Submitted by
Linda M. Ahuna-Hamill
Angela Rola

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report is a synthesis of the information that we were able to gain in the course of our two-day visit to the University of Illinois at Chicago on February 27-28, 2006. The reviewers had the opportunity to meet with a variety of individuals and groups who provided their perspective on the strengths and challenges for the Asian American Resource and Cultural Center (AARCC). While there were some unique points raised, several common themes emerged. Both elements are included in this report along with recommendations the reviewers offer as a result of our findings.

Recognizing that the AARCC is a newly established cultural center on campus, and space is at a premium, individuals acknowledged that they were glad that the AARCC was able to get some space in a fairly central location. The Center's location was seen as acceptable, though it is not very visible. There were comments that at the very least, there could be better signage that indicated the Center's presence.

The Center space is rather small thus appearing to be more of an "office" rather than a "center" which would allow for space for students to gather, meet, or just hang out. Student staff workers indicated that there are times when they have to displace students using the computers in order for them to get their Center work completed. While the space puts some limitations on what the Center might be able to do, the small space may also indicate to some how valued the Center is on campus. For example, some wondered if support for diversity, and particularly the Asian American population, was sincere or an expression of "tokenism".

There is a perceived lack of general campus awareness about the existence of the AARCC both within the Asian American community and the general UIC population. Perhaps because the Center is relatively new to campus, this may be understandable. The AARCC has participated in "Marketplace" - the campus orientation activity, and

sponsored an Ice Cream Social which attracted a large number of people. Other programs including student-focused workshops and the ASAM Brown Bags have had low turnouts (possibly due to the limited number who could be accommodated in the Center's conference room), but those attending found the programs engaging and useful. The Asian American Studies Lecture Series has had considerably larger crowds. It has been difficult, however, to establish a momentum and build on successful programs. The Center wants to pursue other strategic ways to increase student involvement and campus awareness and integrate the AARCC in the campus consciousness.

Other established cultural centers exist on campus, and one would expect that the AARCC would have some kind of visibility by association with the other centers. If the Cultural Centers were located more proximate to one another, that might provide for more collaboration among them. Physical location, however, should not be the factor that determines whether or not the Centers work together for shared goals that they might have.

A notable difference between the AARCC and the other Cultural Centers is the lack of a Student Affairs counterpart similar to ones established for the Latino and African American students. Because there is no other office that is designated for the student support focused function, it is assumed that the AARCC serves both academic affairs function and a student affairs role. Additionally, without an Asian American Studies Program, the AARCC, by default, has taken on all these roles thereby limiting staff's time and energy in building community. Prior to the Center's development, students had clearly expressed to the Administration that they wanted both a Cultural Center and an Asian American Studies program. There is concern that the Administration has offered no apparent timeline for the development of a Studies Program now that the Center has been funded and staffed. While the Director of the

AARCC teaches Introduction to Asian American Studies and four additional Asian American courses are offered throughout the academic year, this does not constitute a bonafide Asian American Studies Program.

The idea of courses being offered through AARCC strengthens its placement in Academic Affairs. The classes offered, however, should be for academic credit with a focus on student and community leadership. Such courses could eventually be added to the courses offered by the Asian American Studies Program and counted in a minor/major completion.

The student organization leaders with whom the reviewers met expressed their appreciation that the Center's existence has helped provide support when they needed it. They recognize the effort the AARCC is making to bring the various Asian American student organizations together and to help unify them. The Asian American Student Organizations Leadership Retreat held at the beginning of the fall semester proved to be a good start in building community and collaboration yet follow-up opportunities would aid in creating the momentum that is lacking.

The mission of the AARCC is articulated in the Asian American Resource and Cultural Center's "Focus Areas" document. The Center's Self-Study provides even more details. Similarly, the Center also has directly identified areas of focus that include specific strategies in addition to potential future initiatives. There is an expectation that the Center play an integrative role in its service to students, interaction with academic affairs, and service to communities external to the university.

Even though the students and other campus constituents may not be aware of way in which AARCC has worked to address its mission, they are aware that the Center has a committed and dedicated staff. There is a general sense that the Center has been able to accomplish a lot in the short time that it has existed on campus. Individuals are able to identify programs with which they are familiar which is just a small part of the

activities in which the AARCC has been involved. Importantly, there is confidence that the AARCC will continue to build on its already strong foundation and skill/expertise of the staff.

REVIEW PROCESS

All of the UIC Cultural Centers will be undergoing a program review although the reviews will be done individually. The Asian American Resource and Cultural Center (AARCC) is the newest established center and the first to be reviewed. The Director, Karen Su was offered the position in May 2004 and began work on July 1. Dr. Su got approval in December of that same year to hire Corinne Kodama as Associate Director, and Elvin Chan as Assistant to the Director. External reviewers were contacted in the fall of 2005 and were scheduled to come to campus in February 2006. Ahead of the visit, the reviewers were supplied with copies of the AARCC's Annual Report for FY05, a draft of the Summer/Fall 05 Report, the Self Study completed in January 2006, Priority Areas document dated February 16, 2006, the AARCC Focus Areas document, the Center's budget, the UIC Strategic Plan (January 2006), the UIC 2010 Strategic Thinking, and the vita of all three professional staff members. Additionally, upon meeting with the AARCC staff a copy of the Asian American Undergraduate Student Survey Final Report (June 2005) was given to the reviewers.

The two external reviewers were provided with a preliminary list of individuals and groups with whom they could meet during their two-day visit. Suggestions of other staff to add to that list were accommodated and itineraries were developed. The reviewers met the Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs & Dean of the Graduate College, AARCC Staff, Cultural Center Directors, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs/Dean of Students, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Asian American Student Organization representatives, various Student Affairs staff, Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Asian Americans (CCSAA), the AARCC Advisory Board, Asian American Studies faculty and graduate students, and students at large. So,

multiple perspectives were noted and are incorporated into this report. (See Appendix A for a listing of those who met with the reviewers).

Both of the external reviewers have direct experience with Asian American centers. Angela Rola is the founding director of the Asian American Cultural Center at the University of Connecticut. The Center has two professional staff, a graduate assistant, and 17-20 student paraprofessionals with a total budget of over \$310,000. The Center has been housed in three temporary locations and will relocate to a permanent location in the new Student Union in June 2006. The new Center will be approximately 3500 square feet with five administrative offices, conference room, library, computer room, program area, and kitchen.

Ms. Rola also serves on the Advisory Board of UConn's Asian American Studies Institute and Center for Academic Programs. She has been involved with the UConn Asian Faculty and Staff Association since its formation in 1988, serving as its President from 1991-93. She served on the University-wide Strategic Planning committee (1995) and the Diversity Action Plan committee (2002). Her professional involvement includes serving as a board member for Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE), participating as a member of the newly formed Connecticut Asian American Leaders Consortium, and working with community members to lobby for the creation of an Asian American Affairs Commission in the State of Connecticut.

Linda Ahuna-Hamill is the founding Director of the Asian/Pacific American Student Services (A/PASS) office at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO. She was instrumental in developing the office which started with a 10-hour/week director and an operating budget of \$2000. Initially, the office was located in one room in a corridor of a former residence hall along with several other offices. A/PASS is located in the Student Center with a substantially increased budget and is staffed by a full-time Director and Assistant Director, along with an Administrative Assistant and 8-10 student

paraprofessionals. After serving as A/PASS Director for over 20 years, Dr. Ahuna now serves as the Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs.

Dr. Ahuna was an early member of the Asian Pacific American Network associated with the American College Personnel Association. She also served as a member of the advisory board for the Center for Applied Study of American Ethnicity, Asian Studies Board, Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Committee, and President's Committee on Ethnic Diversity Issues. In her current position, Dr. Ahuna assists with the coordination of the Student Affairs in Higher Education graduate program (in which she also serves as assistant professor and advisor) and serves as the Equal Opportunity Coordinator for the Division of Student Affairs.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

As a way to organize the findings of the program review, the Council for the Advancement of Standard in Higher Education (CAS) criteria for Minority Student Programs was utilized. The CAS guidelines identified thirteen different areas in which programs could be assessed. While the guide was developed to assist with a self-assessment process, the goal is to gain informed perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of services/programs. That assessment could then lead to a plan for enhancement and improvement. In addition, a template for the evaluation of Cultural Centers was provided by Dr. Clark Hulse, the Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs & Dean of the Graduate College for the reviewers to consider. The six areas of focus on the template are thus integrated into the report under the CAS identified categories as appropriate. There were some areas that were not assessed and those will be clearly noted in the report.

EXTERNAL REVIEW FINDINGS

Reviewers took independent notes and used some time during the visit to compare observations and identify emerging themes. Reviewers were also able to reflect on what questions still needed to be raised and to whom the questions would best be directed. Each reviewer synthesized the information and organized it using the thirteen categories identified by CAS. The final report reflects the collaboration accomplished over email and long distance phone calls.

MISSION

The Mission of the AARCC is clearly communicated in the Center's Strategic Plan and is restated in both the Self-Study and the Areas of Focus report. Aligned with the University's Strategic Plan, the AARCC's plan outlines goals and initiatives focused on academic, co-curricular, and community initiatives. As is required of Minority Student Program CAS guidelines, the Center does incorporate student learning and student development in its mission. It also promotes the academic, personal, and professional growth of students served while providing educational efforts for both majority and minority students.

PROGRAM

The staff commitment to the AARCC's mission is evidenced in the Center's program development, outreach, training and student support efforts. In the first months after it was fully staffed, the AARCC played a coordinating role for funding and publicity in the Asian Awareness month activities at the University. This involved three major events that included bringing nationally known speaker Ronald Takaki to campus,

collaborating with the Office of Women's Affairs to sponsor the performer Kayhan Irani, and celebrating the Grand Opening of the AARCC.

From its inception, the AARCC has conducted outreach efforts across campus and supported the events organized by many of the Asian American student organizations. The Asian American Resource Handbook which contains information on the AARCC, Chancellors' Committee on the Status of Asian Americans (CCSAA), Asian American Studies faculty, Asian American student organizations, community groups, and other pertinent information is distributed to the student population. The AARCCConnections Newsletter is distributed twice a semester to the Deans, Directors and Department Heads distribution list, specific community organizations, and individual donors. To strengthen its outreach efforts, the AARCC is developing a peer mentoring program to launch in fall 2006 and is also committed to maintaining an informative and inviting website and listserv. The Center also participates in the University's orientation program through its presence at the Marketplace, Fun Fair West and East, and Asiantation. The staff expressed that information dissemination to the larger campus communication needs to be improved.

Besides campus-wide programming, the AARCC has also sponsored "brown bag" events that have a focus on Asian American topics such as identity and generational differences. Staff from the AARCC has also conducted diversity training for other campus departments (orientation, housing). Support provided directly to students through the Asian American student organizations was readily acknowledged by students as helpful. The Center has helped to serve as a unifying force for the various student organizations and has some funding to assist students in their programming efforts.

LEADERSHIP

While the Center has three full-time staff position with clear lines of authority, the staff seems to operate in a team versus hierarchical manner. As a team, the professional staff members have complimentary backgrounds in working with Asian American programs, assessing and addressing Asian American student needs, outreach to Asian American communities, counseling/advising students, teaching, researching, and publishing. All staff members are involved in identifying the AARCC's goals and developing strategies to achieve them. In addition, the AARCC utilizes an Advisory Board which can be helpful in providing suggestions and guidance as to how the Center can best direct its resources.

It appears that the Center itself operates autonomously and with limited direction from the Administration. As a self-directed program, AARCC must assess student and campus needs, establish priorities, and proceed accordingly. The AARCC staff has thoughtfully aligned the Center's priorities with the UIC Strategic goals.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

One challenge for the Center has been to simultaneously define itself while creating the organization that would allow it to be effective. When the Director was initially hired, she had the task of developing the job descriptions for the Associate Director and the Assistant to the Director. Given that the AARCC has no associated student affairs office focused on Asian American student needs/concerns, the Center has multiple areas in which it could be involved, as is reflected in its mission. Clarity of priorities, however, is a challenge since various constituents may define those priorities differently.

The distribution of responsibilities capitalizes on the strengths of the staff members and allows for them to work autonomously and to come together as a team to

collaborate. If there was increased space and funding to hire additional student staff that could enhance not only leadership development for students, but also increase the type and number of programs, the Center could fully develop.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Although the Center seems to have adequate funding to support its current program initiatives, efforts should be made to secure permanent funding for all line items. As is to be expected, the majority of money is allocated to staff salaries. It would be helpful if there were additional funds so that the Peer Mentors could be paid for their outreach efforts to students. There can be a different commitment and sense of accountability with paid employees versus volunteers. Budget projections for anticipated growth (space, personnel, equipment) should be revised on a regular basis. The staff is presently working with the Development Office to identify corporate fundraising efforts. As State commitments shrink, creative fundraising techniques may need to be explored.

FACILITIES, TECHNOLOGY, AND EQUIPMENT

The issues of technology and adequacy of office equipment did not come up in any of the meetings held with the reviewers other than the eventual need for more equipment when the Center relocates and expands. The Center uses the space it has very efficiently, although given the physical layout, there are not many options for any other arrangement. While there is a small and welcoming lounge area right inside the front door, it is also very close to the front desk/reception area. Students especially commented that the Center felt more like an office and they wouldn't feel comfortable gathering there informally and would seek other places on campus for that purpose. There was also a comment that because the lounge area was so small, it could not have

adequate space to reflect the many Asian American ethnic groups represented on campus.

Unless one was purposefully looking for the Center, it would be easy to walk right by it without realizing that a Cultural Center existed in the location. Some students and others who met with the reviewers felt the support from the Administration to the Center has been minimal as indicated by the space provided for the Center.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The reviewers assume that the Center is bound by the same legal obligations as are other University offices with regard to issues of liability, employee conduct, risk management and other legal areas. Nothing specific emerged in any of the interviews.

EQUITY AND ACCESS

The AARCC is open and accessible to all students, faculty and staff. The only issue of access that arose was related to location of the programs sponsored by the AARCC. One student commented that programs should be offered on both the east and west sides of campus in order to encourage their participation. There was also a perception that the Center exists primarily to serve the needs of undergraduate students. Admittedly, however, the graduate students who participated in the interview reported that they tended to attend programs more specific to their academic discipline or future career fields.

CAMPUS AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The position announcement for the Center Director indicated that “The Center will join an existing cluster of cultural and diversity centers, including the African-American Cultural Center, the Latino Cultural Center, the Office of Women’s Affairs, and

the Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns.” There has been an effort to establish some collaboration among the Cultural Centers though it appears that not all Directors were interested in establishing an ongoing relationship with the other Centers. It was somewhat disappointing that only two of the other Cultural Center Directors met with the reviewers.

The other campus departments that met with the reviewers either had direct positive interaction with the Center, or felt that they could work well with the Center. In one instance, a student affairs administrator suggested ways that the AARCC might be involved with various departments in that area and was not aware that some of the activities had already been completed.

It is the reviewers’ understanding that the work to establish additional relationships with various community organizations is on-going. Some community groups already receive the twice a semester newsletter so they are kept aware of the AARCC’s programs, upcoming events, issues facing UIC’s Asian American community, and other Asian American related activities that may be occurring on campus.

DIVERSITY

The programs developed by the Center are aimed at addressing the diversity of Asian American ethnic groups. The Asian American Student Survey conducted by the Research Subcommittee of the Chancellor’s Committee on the Status of Asian Americans identified several key findings related to the diversity of the Asian American population at UIC. This survey can assist the AARCC in better understanding the demographics and other characteristics of the student population that represents over 21% of the overall student body at UIC.

Prior to the establishment of the AARCC, many Asian American students frequented and/or worked at other Cultural Centers. Now that the AARCC is open, continued collaboration among the students from other centers should be encouraged.

ETHICS

The reviewers did not receive any written ethical guidelines that were established by the AARCC. CAS Standards suggest that the Program should have a written statement of ethical principles that is reviewed periodically. Perhaps the Center does not have its own guidelines as it simply abides by existing guidelines set forth by the institution. There may arise some dilemma in the Center in determining the role it will play in advocating for the establishment of additional resources for the Asian American community on campus. There is often a delicate balance in representing student needs and concerns with understanding the priorities and politics of the institution.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

The Center has conducted some assessment based on numbers of individuals that attend programs. In addition, the Asian American Undergraduate Student Survey served to provide some insights into the characteristics and perceptions of Asian American students. It is assumed that the Center will find a mechanism to evaluate how well it will meet its established goals and its impact through the programs and services it provides.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The adoption of the recommendations made will require the work of many individuals and multiple offices. The resources and accountability for the execution of any of these

recommendations needs to be determined by the Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

- Identify adequate space for the AARCC that includes, minimally, offices for the professional and student staff, a conference room, student computer area and programming space which will encourage regular student use. A larger center would encourage other departments and centers to use the space furthering the exposure of the AARCC. Ideally, it should be situated in proximity to the other cultural centers to encourage collaboration.

- Establish an Asian American Studies Program. Part of the AARCC's mission is "to support the growth of Asian American Studies at UIC", but it is not AARCC's sole responsibility. In concert with the UIC's Strategic Plan, Goal 1.6 "Develop academic programs that draw on the strength of the UIC's cultural diversity", establishment of an Asian American Studies Program benefits not only the 21% of enrolled Asian American students but the entire UIC student population.

- Establish an Asian American Students Support Services. In concert with the UIC's Strategic Plan, Goal 1.1 "Enable our students to succeed, from recruitment and enrollment to graduation and in their future careers", establishment of Asian American Student Support Services will help in the recruitment and retention of Asian American students. The Asian American Undergraduate Student Survey Final Report indicates the significant number of first-generation college bound students within the Asian American community. The establishment of Student Support Services would aid in the transition and success of these students.

- The Administration and other campus divisions need to support the AARCC staff and promote the AARCC and its programs. Since the AARCC is relatively new those Administrators and offices with knowledge of AARCC can play a pivotal role in the Center's promotion. The AARCC staff has reached out to many offices on campus to provide training and disseminate information about the Asian American community. This working relationships need to be reciprocal in philosophy and practice.

- Establish permanent funding for the AARCC including a larger budget for hiring undergraduate student staff, peer mentors, and graduate assistants. As the center's physical space changes and the programs increase, there will be a need to hire more student and/or professional staff to support the operation of the AARCC.

- The AARCC needs to concentrate on reaching out to students on the West Campus. Recognizing that difference of West Campus demographics, the AARCC outreach approach to the professional/graduate student population should be tailored to meet their needs. This will aid in the perception that the AARCC is geared only to undergraduate students.

- Intentional collaboration among the Cultural Centers needs to be fostered. An overwhelming theme among students, faculty, and staff is that diversity at UIC is reflected in the student demographic numbers, but not by actions that indicate an on-going commitment to program development that encourages, supports and celebrates differences. The Cultural Centers can be instrumental in changing that attitude by organizing joint initiatives and programs and thereby

- demonstrating and modeling what the commitment to diversity should be. Joint publications and links to each other's websites can be created to foster collaboration.
- Develop leadership workshops/classes for Asian American students to help with student assertiveness, community pride, and student engagement and involvement. Other workshops should focus on Asian American identity/Pan Asian identity designed to help student, faculty, and staff come to terms with their own identity. The same topic can also be presented to non-Asian faculty to help them understand Asian American identity.
 - Conduct focus groups with students to gather information about their perception of the Center, the mission and its programs. Do the same for faculty and staff.
 - Assist in the establishment of a formal Asian American Faculty & Staff Association thus identifying visible role models for students.
 - Work with Admissions, Orientation, and Trio Programs to assist with recruitment initiatives. This would also provide another avenue to disseminate information about the AARCC and its services to prospective students.
 - Partner with various departments to attract a diverse pool of graduate assistants to help with the initiatives of the AARCC. Partnerships could be with Psychology, Family Studies, Education, Sociology, etc. on a rotating basis. If resources are limited, create practicum opportunities for graduate students so that they can earn credit while working at the center.

- Since the outside communities are quite large and diverse, select one or two programs with which student volunteers can get involved. Train students to be outreach coordinators and grow the program with measured outcomes.

- The AARCC Advisory Board should also include external community members who can help with promoting the AARCC throughout the Chicago area (e.g. business executives, media, entrepreneurs, health care providers). Ideally these members can be instrumental with fundraising initiatives.

- Work with the Development Office in establishing an annual appeal for the AARCC. The appeal can coincide with Asian American Month and/or specific annual initiatives. Working with the Alumni Association, the Development Office should be able to identify an alumni base for the appeals.

APPENDIX A

Groups and individuals involved in External Review discussions with reviewers:

Clark Hulse, Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Center Staff:

Karen Su, Director, Corinne Maekawa Kodama, Associate Director, and Elvin Chan, Assistant to the Director

Cultural Center Directors:

Rodrigo Carraminana, Latino Cultural Center & Patrick Finnessy, Office of GLBT Concerns

Student Organizations:

Louis Fabicon (AARCC student staff) & Cuong Vu– Asian American Coalition Committee, Alexandra Nam – (AARCC student staff) LiNK, Marc Blancada and Charles Palafox – Asian American Students in Alliance, Allen Ng & Tri Trinh - Chi Sigma Tau, Vinne Goy – Alpha Kappa Delta Phi

Student Affairs:

Linda Deanna – Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs/Dean of Students
Clarke Douglas - Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs & Enrollment Mgmt
Robert Lees - Director, Counseling Center, Kelly McCray - Director, Student Development Services, Joey Hampton - Associate Director, Activities – Campus Programs, Katherine Battee-Freeman – Assistant Director of Recruitment, Career Services, Mark Martell – Student Employment

CCSAA:

Fred Kviz – Professor, Community Health Sciences, Christi Cumba – Graduate Assistant
Angela Ebreo, Assistant to the Director of Research, Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy

AARCC Advisory Board:

Jessica Canlas- Assistant to the University Librarian(CCSAA co-chair), Mo Yin Tam – Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Beth Powers- Director, Office of Special Scholarship Programs, Jod Taywaditep – Counseling Center (CCSAA member & liaison), Dave Shin, Heather DeGuia – Undergraduate students, John Park – Graduate student in English.

Faculty & Graduate Students:

Mark Chiang – Assistant Professor, English, Helen Jun – Assistant Professor, English & African American Studies, Surbhi Malik – Graduate student in English (AARCC Advisory Board member), Sandhya Krishnan – Graduate Student – Community Psychology (AARCC Graduate Assistant), Chris Deegan – Director, Study Abroad, Smita Das- Graduate student in English

Students at-large:

Shripaad Shukla(AARCC Advisory Board Member), Kasey Guanzon, & Kelly Park