

AsAmSt Alumni Voices — Continuing Contributions

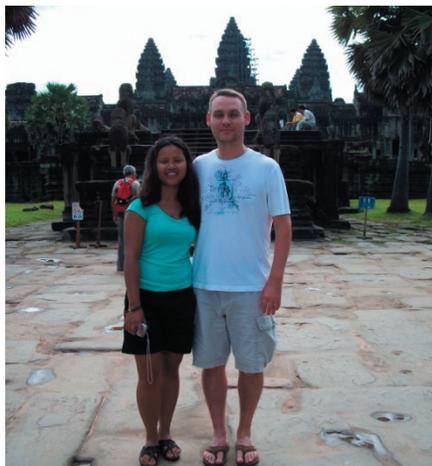
The Return Home

by Sophy Nun-Hoeger

I graduated in 2005 with a M.A. in Applied Sociology and a program-of-study in Asian American Studies. After I graduated, my husband Seth and I hoped to start a family, but this turned out not to be in the cards for us. After closing that chapter, my husband (who, like me, is bilingual in Khmer) and I decided it was time for a big change... I was born in Cambodia but left when I was very young due to the war. In August 2008, we took a trip to Cambodia, and during our time there, we fell in love with the people, the culture, and the way of life. After returning to Boston and following much discussion, we made the decision to drop everything and move to Cambodia. By November, we were already starting our new life. In April 2009, I began my career in Cambodia as an Account Director and head of market research for the largest advertising company in Southeast Asia. With my job hunt over, my focus has turned to how many countries can we visit...let the adventures continue! (contributed from Boston and Phnom Penh, April 2009)



*Sophy (left), Seth (center), and Buddhist Monk Sovanratana (right)
(Photo courtesy of Sophy Nun-Hoeger)*



*Sophy with her husband Seth
(Photo courtesy of Sophy Nun-Hoeger)*

Steven Kim

I am the Executive Officer of an Infantry Scout Company of 80 men. I am second in command and am in charge of all the supply, maintenance, and logistical considerations of the Company. Currently, I am transitioning all the equipment we are allotted to reflect the next upcoming deployment for Afghanistan. In short, I make sure everything runs smooth so we can break and kill stuff. For fun, I try to make 5k, 10k, and half marathon races on the weekends in the area. I have an apartment in Savannah, GA. Specific plans that I have are to get out of Savannah in about a year and get stationed in Korea. I'm still at a crossroads in whether I would make this a career. I still have a few years before I make a final decision though. A couple of goals of mine include refining my Korean and making my apartment a real home.

I have a real hard time tolerating B.S. and people making excuses. I really appreciate what a great country and time we live in, despite our drawbacks as a country. Believe me, the grass isn't any greener on the other side. In fact, there probably isn't any grass there at all. I think I really deserve to be in this country now. I went from being a son of immigrants to being a full-fledged American. The issue with this country is that many people want a hand-out instead of working hard from the start.

My favorite memory in AAS was when we decided to beautify the cemetery plots of the forgotten Chinese immigrants. It's important to honor and to not forget the past. It was a fitting homage to the pioneers. I apply everything I have ever learned in AAS in my life and work, whether it be in a subtle or an apparent way. Cultural sensitivity and understanding people from different backgrounds, religions, and regions enabled me to relate to my men on a deeper level and to the locals in other countries. It just made that personal connection so much easier, which in turn, made my job a lot easier. Moving frequently is also a necessity in my occupation, and my heightened awareness and sensitivity made my integration that much easier with each move.

Public service is a civic responsibility, if you decide to go along that path, the continue reading on... I want to thank the previous veterans that paved the way for people like us. I recognize that I am simply American, not Asian American, not Korean American, but American. For you future leaders who are considering public service: it's a long hard road, but look, step up as a leader, and realize it's not about you. It's about everyone else. Every decision you make should never be for your sole profit and pleasure. When it stops being about your guys, whether it be in the community or in public service, it's time for you to get out. I am taking for granted that all the leaders believe in this. I don't know much, but I do know that.

Steve graduated from UMB in 2006 when he also received his U.S. Army Officer's Commission, after which he was deployed to Iraq. One of his email messages during his deployment appears here with his permission.

From: Steven Kim
Date: Monday, 31 March 2008

Hey Professor, I have a few hours of downtime and we finally get pretty regular internet access here. How have you been? I haven't heard from you in awhile, I hope everything is going swimmingly! How is school? Courses are going well? Are you still mentoring the next generation that will spearhead the next alpha leaders of Asian America?

I was sifting through some old emails, and of course I had some that involved assignments for school. My life is so different now from when I was in Boston. So right now, I've been in Iraq since October 25. It's been quite the experience. I've had some good times, lots of terrifying times, and a few sobering experiences. I will never forget holding my friend's bloody possessions in a bag after he had been killed. I have literally driven and walked over several areas that had IEDs, but somehow, they never went off, but would go off and kill others. But I will also never forget the camaraderie and the shared misery that I have shared with my men. The sleepless nights on rooftops, the dryness of my mouth and cold sweat trickling down my back, hoping that we don't step on a mine. My first contact with the enemy was like a slow lethargic dream. I have helped rebuild the municipal governments in our areas, helped rebuild fish and chicken farms, then the same night go on a raid to capture Al Qaeda. I have participated in elections, clinic openings, and have even taken a child with cancer to a hospital in Baghdad. It's an interesting job to say the least, and it's very rewarding, but at the same time, I can't get rid of this sense of weariness that is omnipresent, despite any sleep that I get.

I was talking with my eyes and someone mentioned that I'd be mistaken for an 18 year old a few months ago, but now I'd still be mistaken for an 18 year old, until you see my eyes, they look old. You should see my hair, it's pretty long, and I'm going grey at an accelerated rate!

I don't know why I'm writing you an email now, I guess I'm just REALLY bored. It's rare that I have more than an hour off, but I seem to have a lot of spare time today. Hopefully you still use this email. If not, I'll see you when I see you. — Steve



(Photo courtesy of Steven Kim)

Leland Honda

I work at Simmons College as the 'Investment Accountant' where I am responsible for financial reporting (to both internal and external clients), communication with custodial banks and investment managers, and analysis of the College's investments and investment vehicles. I have two young children under 4 years old who are my main priority. I would like to take advantage of the current real estate market and look for a newer place in the metropolitan Boston area to call home.

Since graduating, I have tried to be more aware and appreciate other people's station in life — and to be less judgmental. I have found myself seeking out situations where I can socialize or interact with persons of color. Through my experience in being bi-racial and through living abroad, one can find oneself feeling like a foreigner both here in the United States and abroad; I do not feel that way as much when I see people who are different from me, and listen to them speak. But I have become increasingly intolerant of ignorance and bigotry that seems to surround our society. I miss the camaraderie that I felt when I was an undergraduate student and active in the Asian Center, and the Asian American Studies Program. They were hectic, but happy times. Favorite memory? It was the final presentation of our research project for one of the courses that Professor Kiang taught (I

think its title is now called *Asians in the United States*). The presentations were held on the top floor of the Healey Library, and I had asked my brother and father to attend. They said that I had done well in my presentation, but that the most striking thing was a Cambodian student whose poetry completely awed them. I too remember the poet and what he had said. I no longer remember the words, but I still remember feeling so proud of that student and how much it meant to me that I considered him to be a friend as well as a classmate. I am a better person thanks to the classes, the social gatherings and relations I had while studying and participating in Asian American Studies courses. I lived abroad both before and after my undergraduate studies. I am confident that I benefited from the classes I had taken, and was much better prepared to live abroad where I was perceived to be the 'foreigner'. Every person has a story to tell, and every person's story is worth listening to. The question is: are you good enough to listen. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn of others' experiences: they may help you to learn more about yourself and the community circles that you live in and within.

Leland graduated with his BA in the early 1990s and later returned to UMB to complete his MBA in 2004.



(Photo courtesy of Leland Honda)

Tracy Ciulla

Thank you for giving me the chance to publicly thank the Asian American Studies Program for the very many ways it has influenced, impacted, and informed my life. The AsAmSt program solidified my desire to teach. I currently work at Brockton High School, teaching freshmen and sophomores, all levels. I am also the Junior Class advisor and do some work with Student Council. Recently, I traveled to Cambodia and

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Vietnam, where I shared teaching strategies with teachers in those countries. I hope to go back to school in next few years. I would like to continue to be working in a high school setting, perhaps, in a counseling capacity. I am interested in issues surrounding resiliency.

When I think back over my time in the AsAmSt, it is difficult to choose one favorite memory, as this program is designed in such a way that every reading, every lesson, every activity, every field trip has enormous power. One of these memorable times was my field trip to Mt. Hope Cemetery. I was moved by its significant historical importance and also by the attitudes and reactions of my classmates. The day began with a short lecture about the cemetery and a serious, respectful visit to the gravesites. Later, there was dinner with the entire class. The dinner was a time to debrief and to get to know my peers in a different way than in a structured classroom setting. These courses and learning experiences have directly influenced what and how, I teach. The commitment by all of the instructors showed me what great teaching looks like. AsAmSt gave me goals to reach for as an educator. My style of teaching, my lessons, and my critical content have been modeled after UMB's Asian American Studies curriculum.

To All Asian American Studies current and former students: Wherever you are in your life... Remember the time spent taking Asian American Studies courses. Remember the people, the lessons, the readings, the trips, the connections. Each of these memories is still alive for you to use. They are here for you, still. They are here to share and to transform lives.

Tracy completed her AsAmSt program of study in 2004 and received her M.Ed. from UMB in 2006.



(Photo courtesy of Tracy Ciulla)

Chealyn Tim

I am in a new job as Youth Center Director at the Asian American Civic Association. My role is to develop a new youth center and offer after-school programs and services for our clients' children, family, and community members. Previously, I worked at the American Red Cross of Massachusetts Bay as the Program Manager for Volunteer Resource, the Youth Program, and International Service. In this capacity, I worked closely with volunteers: youth, adults, and community leaders, to carry out our mission. I truly believe in doing "good" and assisting others. In May 2009, I will have the opportunity to visit my parents' homeland, Cambodia. It has been years since I traveled back to Cambodia, and my first time as an adult, and without my family. This trip is very important to me, to learn more about and reconnect with my roots, and to help me rethink who I am as a person, about what being Khmer means to me. In a couple of years, I'd like to further my education after fulfilling my current commitment of establishing the youth center and providing for my siblings so they can finish college and pursue higher education.

I realize now that things can change for you in the blink of an eye. In these past few months, my life has changed dramatically, and I continue to cherish my family and friends, even more than before. I value every moment and continue to practice what I believe, that what we do makes a difference in the lives of others. After graduating I can say, I gained a lot of experience and knowledge and I have crossed paths with many people who touched my heart and made me the person I am



(Photo courtesy of Chealyn Tim)

now. There were late nights working for the Red Cross and everyday was an extraordinary day for me...

Resilience helped me through those times — it was very hard to have no money and to reach for your needs and dreams. But to those important people who played a significant role, I thank them and value their experience, knowledge, and realities. The rich diversity of each individual has contributed in ways that helped me make decisions and overcome the challenges past and forthcoming.

In order to complete my Asian American Studies certificate, I needed to complete Intro to Asian American Studies... I laugh because it was the last course I took to complete the requirement. I was exposed to other courses before the Intro class — the reverse of how things usually are. But the courses have helped my work in serving the underserved immigrant population, not just Asians but all groups... we work together... It's important and relevant to advocate for our rights, communities, and families.

Stepping foot into Asian American Studies courses has inspired me and helped me gain my confidence. The knowledge I gained and the experiences I had still shape my decision-making and are an important contribution in the active role I continue to have in our community. It doesn't matter what you do in life; just remember to give back in any way. The littlest thing does make a difference and it will pay off in the end.

Chealyn completed the Asian American Studies program of study in 2006.

Yen Phi Mach

I work for an Irish real estate development company in Shanghai, in charge of all marketing and communications and PR for our China business. I think I'm finally quite happy with my role at work, and hope to stay here for several more years. We don't know where the next "home" will be for us — it may be Australia or US. Since graduation from UMB, I've been out here in Shanghai, initially wanting to be here for only one year to learn Mandarin. During my coursework at UMB, I felt that my questions about being Asian American were answered, but the curiosities about China and where the ancestors came from, still remained of great personal interest. What I realized from living in modern China is so different from what I expected. The country changed so dramatically since the cultural revolution, through the '80s, into the '90s, and now has become one of the leaders of world economy — who would've thought. I don't think I have changed much in terms of values/commitments, but definitely my eyes have opened even wider with each moment of experience away from "home". How ironic it is that Asia was the ancestral home when I was in Boston, and now Boston is my home. I feel fortunate with my life experience in



Yen Phi Mach with husband Daniel Borin
(Photo courtesy of Yen Phi Mach)

that I have been able to live freely in so many places and can pick the values/mindset that I agree with most.

I was a bit lost when I first attended UMB. I transferred from UMass Amherst because I couldn't decide what to study and didn't have a very specific area of interest. In my first semester, I signed up for Asian Minorities in America [now AsAmSt 223L — Asians in the US] which was a complete eye-opener for me. For the first time in my school life, I was introduced to the history of Boston's Chinatown, learned about the history of waves of Asian immigrants, listened to first-hand accounts of immigrants, and heard voices and stories similar to my own. I felt like I stumbled upon something that I didn't even know I was missing. I was excited to attend every class and absorb all this new information that validated every doubt/issue that I had thought about in my personal development being an Asian American living in America. I felt strength and finally a sense of belonging to a real collective of individuals who cared about the struggles and successes of people similar to me and people I grew up with. In every class, questions were answered, issues were debated, and thoughts were challenged. What a great platform for a group of young minds! I absolutely found much inspiration from my professors and classmates during my time there.

The most influential part of my studies is that the knowledge gave me strength to explore new adventures like coming to Shanghai and living here as a "foreigner" all these years. I found inspiration from the stories that I've heard in every class about being "different in your surroundings" and "not part of the mainstream". I learned that you just need to have hope and perseverance to succeed in everything that you put your efforts into, and the obstacles will be overcome along the way. I realized that fitting in is not the key to happiness but being at peace with myself is. I think it is great that UMB has such an amazing program, and that it touches the hearts of everyone who has taken the courses. The lessons to be learned

are invaluable, and they impact more ways in your life than you can quantify. I occasionally relate a current experience with something that I learned from Asian American Studies professors and classmates.

Yen graduated in the late 1990s and was a core member of our initial Alumni Research Team that analyzed the long-term impact of Asian American Studies in our curriculum.

Cydney Dang

I coordinate monthly health seminars for Chinese Elderly in the community. I also provide community resources and advocate as needed. My goal for next year is to outreach to other Asian elderly in other communities like Quincy and Dorchester. I realize that there are not enough people in this field even though the number of immigrants increased over the years. My favorite memory from an AAS class is when we went to Lowell to help see a Cambodian person [Chanrithy Uong] try to get elected for a city council position. I also remember we went to the [Mt. Hope] graveyard to visit the tombstones of the early Chinese immigrants. That was very meaningful. I wouldn't have those experiences if I didn't take AAS classes. Learning the background of early immigrants and understanding their struggles make me realize the need of helping new immigrants today. I think I made the right decision by taking these courses because they were fun and meaningful. I took many courses in college but the Asian American Studies classes tend to stay in my memory.

Cydney graduated in 2000 and directs the education programs at South Cove Manor Nursing Home in Boston Chinatown.



Cydney Dang with her family
(Photo courtesy of Cydney Dang)

Student Awards

Amy Au honored with IAAS 2009 Anthony Chan Award



*Amy Au at a Chinatown parent education advocacy forum in April
(Photo credit: Peter Kiang)*

Graduating senior, Amy Cheng Yee Au, is the 2009 recipient of the Anthony Chan Award. The Chan Award is given each year by UMass Boston's Institute for Asian American Studies to recognize a student whose academic and community commitments related to Asian American Studies have been exemplary. Amy is completing her B.A. in sociology along with a program-of-study in Asian American Studies. Amy has worked tirelessly on behalf of student veterans at UMass Boston while also maintaining her involvement with a variety of Asian American community activities in Boston's Chinatown and Malden where she currently lives. Amy was admitted to all of the graduate school programs for which she applied, and she will begin her master's program in social work at Salem State College following graduation from UMB.

William Joiner Center's Grace Paley Award presented to Son Ca Lam

Noted poet and activist Carolyn Forché presented the first annual Grace Paley Award on behalf of the William Joiner Center to Son Ca Lam on April 15th. Established in 2009, the award honors a UMB student for social and political activism. Son Ca has served as a core member of Asian American Studies Outreach (AASO), the student-run arm of the Asian American Studies Program, and was instrumental in the drafting of Nine Issues of Concern, which framed an agenda of priority issues for Asian and Asian American students at UMB. Son Ca also co-organized all aspects of the 2008 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month activities on campus, and has performed at numerous cultural events on and off campus, including The Vagina Monologues. She is graduating with a major in Environmental Studies and a second individually designed major in Comparative Ethnic Studies with a focus on Asian American Studies. Combining her academic skills and her community commitments to full effect, Son Ca most recently used her GIS mapping skills to plot a profile of Vietnamese nail salons in metro Boston.



*Son Ca Lam with Grace Paley's husband, Bob Nichols,
and William Joiner Center director, Kevin Bowen
(Photo credit: Peter Kiang)*

AsAmSt Courses in 2009-2010 (tentative)

Matt Seto receives 2009 Beacon Student Leadership Award

College of Management and Asian American Studies student veteran, Matthew Seto, was one of a handful of UMass Boston students selected to receive the 2009 Beacon Student Leadership Award. Matt received the award from Chancellor J. Keith Motley and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Patrick Day at a ceremony on May 5, 2009. Matt's leadership within the Asian American Studies Program and with student veterans on campus, as well as with Asian American veterans in the Chinatown community, were recognized in particular. Graduating senior, Son Ca Lam was also honored as a nominee for this year's Beacon Student Leadership Award.



Matt Seto and Chancellor J. Keith Motley
(Photo credit: Peter Kiang)

Graduating Students

We congratulate the achievements of this year's graduating students, including Son Ca Lam who is completing an individual major in Comparative Ethnic Studies with a focus on Asian American Studies, plus Widad Al-Edanie, Amy Au, Frances K. Chow, Jane Lee, Ledra Sun, and Rich Truong, who are completing their undergraduate program-of-study in Asian American Studies, along with graduate students, Jon Iftikar (American Studies) and Kunthary Thai-Johnson (Education).

FALL 2009

AsAmSt 200 (Jon Iftikar)	Introduction to Asian American Studies TuTh 12:30-1:45pm
AsAmSt/Engl L-221 (Iwanaga)	Introduction to Asian American Writing TuTh 11:00am-12:15pm
AsAmSt/Anthro 227GL (Addo)	Multicultural Expression and Celebration TuTh 11:00am-12:15pm
AsAmSt 228L (Neilson)	Asian Women in the U.S. Tuesdays 4:00-6:45pm
AsAmSt 238L (Suyemoto)	Asian American Psychology TuTh 9:30am-10:45am
AsAmSt 355L (Leong)	Asian Americans and the Law Mondays 5:30-8pm
AsAmSt 397 (Tang)	Applied Research in Asian American Studies I MW 4:00-5:15pm
AsAmSt 420 (Giles Li)	Advanced Special Topics: Storytelling Production & Performance Wednesdays 4:00-6:45pm
AsAmS 423L (Kiang)	Boston's Asian American Communities MWF 2:00pm-2:50pm
AsAmSt 478 (Kiang - Section 1; Suyemoto - Section 2; Tang - Section 3)	Independent Study

SPRING 2010

AsAmSt 223L (Iftikar)	Asians in the U.S.
AsAmSt 225L (Kiang)	Southeast Asians in the U.S.
AsAmSt L-238 (Suyemoto)	Multiracial Experiences
AsAmSt 294 (Staff)	Resources for Vietnamese American Studies
AsAmSt 345 (Dr. Hae-ok Lee)	Asian American Cultures and Health Practices
AsAmSt 370 (Tang)	Asian American Media Literacy

Asian American Studies Program Graduation Celebration

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

12:30-4:00pm

Healey Library 11th Floor

Come celebrate the work of undergraduate AsAmSt majors and programs-of-study students and other graduating AsAmSt students who have made a difference.

“Feel the excitement, taste the culture, know who you are...” — Wyclef Jean

For more information, please contact: Peter.Kiang@umb.edu

RIPPLES

Asian American Studies Program Newsletter

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UMass Boston's Asian American Studies Program offers culturally-responsive instruction in the classroom with holistic practices of mentoring, community-building, service-learning, and advocacy to address the social and academic needs of students as well as the critical capacity-building needs of local Asian American communities. For more information, questions, comments on the program and/or newsletter, please contact us.



Grown (2009)
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