

Jefferson County, Texas unveils a plaque in honor of the Mayumi Family.

NATIONAL PAGE 4

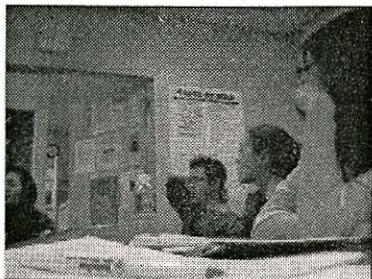
A Full-on CRAASH at Hunter College

CRAASH (Coalition for the Revitalization of Asian American Studies at Hunter) — their message is in their acronym.

By **CAROLINE AOYAGI-STOM**
Executive Editor

Olivia Lin, 20, is solidly grounded in her Chinese American identity. After all, she was born in New York's Chinatown to immigrant parents from Hong Kong and immersed in the Chinese culture. Yet it wasn't until her freshman year of college that she had her Asian American identity "aha!" moment.

Back in 2006, Lin enrolled in her first Asian American Studies program (AASP) course at City University of New York's (CUNY) Hunter College. It was the first time she heard about the brutal murder of



CRAASH members talk strategy.

Vincent Chin, the waves of AAs arriving in the United States, and the history of the Japanese American World War II internment.

What she learned inspired her to delve deeper into the issues, after all this was a part of her own personal history. So Lin, a media studies major, made up her mind to minor in AASP. But she soon learned she was out of luck: the minor had been frozen due to a lack of interest and

See CRAASH/Page 13

CRAASH

(Continued from page 1)

funding.

"How can there be no funding for an academic program? You offer a miserable minor and then you freeze that?" said Lin, recalling her anger and frustration.

Inspired by the activists she had read about in her AASP course, Lin began spreading the word about AASP's demise. Before long she was meeting in her dorm room with a core group of people determined to help rejuvenate Hunter's AASP.

The result of those early meetings was the formation of the Coalition for the Revitalization of Asian American Studies at Hunter (CRAASH) in April 2007.

"This has a lot to do with activism in the Asian American community," said Lin. "Someone says the N-word and the whole African American community is in your face. The same is done to the Asian American community and nothing happens.

"If you have Asian American Studies, you educate people to do something and speak out. This ties into so many things, that's why it's so important."

A Program in Turmoil

Lin soon learned that the frozen minor was just the tip of the iceberg when it came to AASP's woes. For several years now the program has not had a department director, there is no permanent office space and besides \$500 for supplies, the program has zero funds allocated in this year's budget.

How could this have happened to a program that was created in 1993 after students demanded the formation of an AASP? With an AA student population of 26 percent,

Hunter is still the only college within the CUNY system to offer AASP courses.

"We're one of the most diverse colleges in this country, we have a huge Asian American student population," said Jessica Lee, 21, of CRAASH and a political science major. "Asian Americans are rising but we are struggling to be heard and seen.

"This program is unique because it came out of student protests years ago. We want to revive that struggle."

CRAASH has spent the past three semesters rallying their fellow students together. So far they've gathered 1,000 petition signatures, created a popular Facebook.com group page, and started an ongoing e-mail campaign.

Hunter President Jennifer J. Raab has yet to respond to CRAASH's inquiries but some of the students met with Dean Shirley Scott last fall to air out their concerns. So far, the students say they've received only a lukewarm reception.

"It's been a really antagonistic response," said Chris Eng of CRAASH, a 19-year-old English Literature major. "From the very start we've tried to be very professional, courteous, and every single time they have been indifferent. They tell us it was only meant to be a program" not a full-scale department.

The students believe much of the problems stem from the administration's lack of knowledge of the differences between Asian Studies and AA Studies. They also believe the school's assertion that there is not enough interest in the AASP program is resoundingly false.

"Every single class is full to the brim; every chair is taken," said Lin.

"It's an endless cycle. The Asian American Studies Program has no budget so you can't offer any new courses. The program sucks so there is no student interest, no student interest so the program sucks."

President Raab did not respond to *Pacific Citizen's* requests for an interview. Dean Scott declined to answer questions and instead referred the *P.C.* to Hunter's media-relations department.

Small Steps

So far CRAASH's efforts seem to be having an impact, if only a small one. By 2007 Hunter students were once again able to minor in AASP.

"Nothing brings people together like a crisis," said Jennifer Hayashida, AASP's current part-time program coordinator and instructor.

She sees more interest now in the AASP and students have rallied around the efforts of CRAASH. More faculty members are also showing their support of the program, even attending some of the student group's meetings.

With zero dollars budgeted for AASP, Hayashida is looking for outside grants and funding but her limited hours have made it difficult. Although she has been able to organize some AASP events — including a Q&A with "Finishing the Game" Director Justin Lin last year — much more still needs to be done.

"I love my job but my hands are tied," she said. "We need to find new instructors. It's hard to build a program with a constantly changing faculty."

"The students are really motivated by the program; they get very little of their history from anywhere else," said Professor Margaret Chin who

See CRAASH/Page 16

CRAASH

(Continued from page 13)

supports the efforts of CRAASH. "Our campus is extremely diverse and many of the students feel they want to learn about the various groups in the U.S."

An East Coast–West Coast Dichotomy

When Jackie Fernandez, 20, decided to leave California State University, Northridge (CSUN) to attend Hunter she knew she would see fewer balmy days. What she didn't know was she would also be giving up her beloved Asian American

Studies courses.

"I went to CSUN and took so many Asian American Studies courses. Now I know it's something I took for granted. I never thought Asian American Studies would be so few and far between. It's a joke," said Fernandez, a film and media major.

"This is New York City, this is not Middle America, and we are fighting for Asian American Studies. We are fighting for the education we were promised."

AASPs on the West Coast flourished after the student strikes 40 years ago demanding ethnic studies. At colleges like the University of

California at Los Angeles, established AA Studies departments have a number of full-time faculty members with burgeoning budgets.

At Hunter there are currently no full-time AASP faculty members. Most of the teachers in the program are adjuncts or professors who also teach in other departments. Many of the AASP courses are also funded by the English department.

"It's the twilight zone. Most people from California don't believe me when I tell them what is happening here," said Hayashida, who is originally from the Bay Area and attended UC Berkeley.

CRAASH is now planning an April 16 conference at Hunter entitled: "Strengthening Education: Empowering Asian American Studies." A number of speakers have been invited and the group hopes to strengthen their current campaign.

"Our end goal is to see CRAASH die so the Asian American Studies Program can survive on its own," said Lin.



Olivia Lin (left) and Jackie Fernandez take CRAASH's message to the airwaves. The two members were recently interviewed by Falloutcentral.com to discuss Hunter College's AASP.

But until then, the students plan to keep on fighting.

"The administration hopes to hold off so they can wait until we graduate and then leave," said Fernandez. "But we are not going to stop." ■

The CRAASH conference will be held April 16 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Hunter College campus.

For more information, e-mail: HunterCRAASH@yahoo.com.