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Practitioner Essay

Serve the People! Asian American Studies at Fifty: Empowerment and Critical Community Service Learning at San Francisco State University

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Abstract

This essay reflects on five decades of growth of the nation's first Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University (SFSU AAS), focusing on its primary commitment to community empowerment and critical "community service learning" (CSL) and also highlighting past and present struggles, challenges, and innovations. This collectively written analysis summarizes SFSU AAS departmental approaches to CSL and community-based participatory research and highlights two case studies: (1) refugees from Burma community health needs research and advocacy in Oakland and (2) the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network. We conclude by describing how we are applying our model and building support for critical CSL and argue that AAS and ethnic studies must reclaim CSL from the dominant "charity-based" model or risk losing our social justice orientation and commitment to empowerment and self-determination for our communities.

Introduction

As Asian American Studies (AAS) faculty and graduate students at San Francisco State University (SFSU), it is often challenging to instill in our current undergraduate students an understanding of the spirit of what our department represents. It is particularly difficult to rekindle

those original sparks that some fifty years ago ignited on our campus—along with UC Berkeley and so many other campuses—a prairie fire of resistance to oppression. This "serve the community" fervor and long-term commitment to transformative struggle changed our educational system at SFSU and throughout the country, but may no longer seem relevant to students who have access to the AAS courses for which the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strikers once advocated.

In Spring 2018, a few of us organized a workshop at the APAHE (Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education Conference) in Oakland to share some experiences and challenges from our forty-nine-year history, and from these to generate dialogue on how to more effectively help empower our communities. When we asked the packed room of workshop participants who came from all over the country for "keywords" to describe their vision of AAS today, they responded: "DECOLONIZING, LIBERATORY, HEALING, STRUGGLE, HOPE for the FUTURE, EMPOWERMENT without OPPRESSION, RELEVANT EDUCATION, CONNECTING the PAST and PRESENT, and INTERDEPENDENT with COMMUNITY and SUSTAINABLE."

A takeaway from that workshop and others from the AAAS (Association for Asian American Studies) conference in San Francisco two weeks earlier is that we Asian Americans in higher education share so much in terms of our individual campus struggles. Even as we at SFSU feel "ownership" of the history of the San Francisco State Third World Strike of 1968 and the struggle to establish our department and the nation's first and only College of Ethnic Studies, we recognize that this history doesn't just belong to SFSU—*it belongs to all of us*. Every Asian American in higher education is connected to that history.

Thus, as many more campuses—especially those in rural and suburban areas—work to establish AAS classes, programs, or departments, they look to the well-established AAS departments for help and suggestions from our experiences. In the spirit of supporting the growth of AAS this practitioner essay describes our model of "critical CSL" through two case studies: one that engaged and empowered refugees from Burma through community health equity research and advocacy in Oakland and another, the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network (DVAN), that unites and nurtures Vietnamese artists, connecting them to their communities while strengthening their ties globally. We demonstrate how our model is grounded in our department's forty-nine years of "serve the community" empowerment and social justice focus while the mainstream campus "community service learning" (CSL) connects

students mostly to city agencies and nonprofit service organizations and sells itself to students by offering to help them "[b]oost your grad school application" and "[e]nhance your resume while exploring career opportunities" and "making a difference."

Reflecting on the AAS case studies and other projects we argue that AAS has reclaimed ownership of community-based critical CSL by challenging the dominant "charity-based" model while also strategically advancing our model within the neoliberal university system through working with our campus CSL office and other university organizational structures like our new Asian American and Pacific Islander Retention and Education (ASPIRE) program, a collaboration between our department and our Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (SAEM) office (Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith, 1971, 228–30; Smucker, 2017, 142–46).

Our AAS Department is now engaging with student and community leaders to assess our current status within the academy and the depth of our existing relationships with Asian American communities. We are also strategizing on how to improve our curriculum, methods of critical CSL, and "community-based participatory research" (CBPR) for the future.

A decade ago, Daniel Phil Gonzales and Malcolm Collier, AAS founders and former student leaders in the 1968–69 Third World Strike, reflected on the challenges of AAS from its inception in 1969 through the first two decades within an often elitist and hostile power structure at SF State. Drawing from the TWLF's vision of an "autonomous Third World College," the young faculty, student, and community allies created a consensus-based decision-making process and set up ethnic-specific decision-making units called "Area Planning Groups." These groups included faculty and community members. Collier and Gonzales attribute the key to the survival and stability of AAS in the first decades to these accountability structures and democratic governance processes (Collier and Gonzales, 2009, 53–56).

At 40: Asian American Studies @ San Francisco State: Self-Determination, Community, Student Service traces AAS and ethnic studies from student protest movements and community struggles, such as the battle to save the International Hotel, to becoming an established institution within the academy (Asian American Studies Department, San Francisco State University, 2009). For example, while the 1970s "Nine Unit Block" program that attempted to "establish a permanent link" between the AAS Department and community organizations did not continue be-

yond the decade because of a lack of funding, it nonetheless spawned a number of well-established community institutions like Kimochi Kai Senior Center, Chinatown Community Housing Corporation and Chinatown Resource Center (now the Chinatown Community Development Center), Westbay Pilipino Multi Service Center, and the Korean Community Service Center (Collier and Collier, 2009, 133–34; Jeung, 2009, 157). Others have pointed out some key political and theoretical shortcomings and challenges, especially in the research approach, faced by our department and other AAS programs throughout our histories (De La Cruz and Leung, 2003; Hirabayashi and Alquizola, 1994; Hirabayashi, 1995; Kagiwada, 1973; Kiang, 2008; Loo and Mar, 1985), such as weaknesses in theoretical grounding, essentialized or simplistic definitions of "community," and lack of systematic follow up.

Currently, AAS student learning objectives continue to emphasize "apply[ing] the skills and knowledge acquired toward the self-determination and empowerment of Asian American communities" and "develop[ing] values of social justice, equity, activism, and respect for differences." But with all our original AAS faculty members now retired and a new generation of faculty entering the academy, how will our department continue to address our founders' charge to *root* AAS in community social justice movements and in a critical pedagogy of social change?[1]

In 2003, the founding editors of *AAPI Nexus*'s inaugural issue challenged AAS departments and programs with two primary issues: (1) to critically evaluate the overall direction of AAS as an academic discipline; and (2) to assess our public policy work and methods of "partnering" with community-based organizations to address their needs. In particular, they identified the troubling transformation of AAS as an academic discipline becoming more oriented toward representational, intellectual discourses and less connected to Asian American communities:

> While not completely abandoning community service, Asian American Studies now devotes a smaller share of its growing resources to community-oriented and community-based courses than it did in its inception. This has exacerbated the divide between the university and the "on the ground" challenges faced by current APA communities. (De La Cruz and Leung, 2003, 48)

Along with the decreased focus on concrete, community needs, AAS programs that do serve the community have adopted a charity-oriented, service learning model that does little to challenge the status

quo. The editors conclude universities should continue to utilize their research to address policy issues. Universities are rich in resources and expertise, and academic research is influential in political and policy debates because its findings have legitimacy ... there is much to be said for bringing to bear the weight of solid research (Ong and Nakanishi, 2003, iii–v).

Fortunately, AAS has resisted the mainstream model. AAS Chair Russell Jeung at the 2018 AAAS conference presented a three-prong model of critical CSL and CBPR that he called "best practices in university-community collaborations for social justice":

- Social Justice Orientation—Partnering with Sites That Encourage Students to Critically Understand Social Issues Impacting Their Communities as Well as Their Chosen Field.
- Mutual Respect and Benefit—Collaborative Development of Learning Outcomes That Account for Both Organizational/Community Needs and Student Background, Interests, Attitudes, and Capacities.
- Critical Reflection—Intentional Opportunities for Students to Reflect and Synthesize Their Experiences with Academic Knowledge and Skills.

Others on the panel presented on the experiences from CSU Northridge, UCLA, University of Hawaii at Manoa, and University of Washington. Jeung further outlined some of the reasons for the survival and successes of our AAS programs by listing these four key institutional factors:

- Historical precedents that provide models and structures for community engagement;
- Supportive departmental policies that recognize community research has part of faculty's professional achievement;
- Networks and organizational ties to the community that facilitate long-term relationships; and
- Use of university resources to connect students to the community.

In this essay we describe, through two case studies, how our AAS-critical CSL and CBPR models operate at SFSU and in our regional communities. To contextualize these operations, we begin by discussing some of the institutional challenges facing many of our campuses, including SFSU, despite the four key institutional factors outlined by Jeung that have benefited SFSU.

Mainstream CSL vs. Critical CSL

The institutionalization and legitimization of CSL courses in AAS at SF State was a direct result of the organizing efforts of Third World students to "establish a permanent link between the college and the community agency personnel" (Jeung, 2009, 157). Importantly, students learned how to apply the concepts of "self-determination" and community development as they utilized those permanent links not only volunteering in but also transforming and building community institutions, for example, to meet the needs of Chinatown youth, or housing needs of immigrants and seniors throughout the decade-long battle to save the International Hotel in San Francisco's Chinatown/Manilatown communities (Chin, 2015, 37–48; Umemoto, 1989, 3–5, 10–19).

As a contrast to the AAS and ethnic studies approach to CSL, an increasingly dominant "institutionalized service learning" model has been imposed over the past thirty years on campuses like SF State through the Reagan-era establishment of the National Campus Compact (Stoecker, 2016, 25) and subsequent passage of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 that expanded "service learning" defined as a method "under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences." Mitchell and Coll (2017) emphasize that the focus on student learning through charitable work has resulted in a "depoliticized rendering of direct services to needy populations" that limits "possibilities for social transformation" (Mitchell and Coll, 2017, 188). Additionally, universities' consistent funding and promotion of their CSL offices have privileged them as the dominant and now hegemonic model where the watered-down purpose of "making a difference" through direct services and charity has become the "commonsense" narrative of CSL (Smucker, 2017, 144–45).

Today, many AAS programs face the dilemma of being pulled into participating in the mainstream neoliberal models of service learning that can undermine the original AAS vision of explicit commitment to a more just and equitable society through "a social change orientation, working to redistribute power, and developing authentic relationships" (Mitchell, 2008, 62). However, institutionalized service learning expresses a form of neoliberalism in the academy by promoting service to individuals rather than collectives and promoting individual success within the system rather than a collective challenge against it (Stoecker, 2016, 25–26).

This charity-oriented CSL model is promoted on the SFSU campus by our Institute for Civic and Community Engagement (ICCE). The

institute provides "opportunities for civic engagement and leadership development" and defines CSL as "a teaching method that allows students to develop knowledge and improve their academic skills by doing hands-on activities that address local community needs. Both community service learning and civic engagement involve active participation that is focused on the common good." ICCE's "Civic and Community Engagement Awards Celebration of Service" held every April highlights individual awardees and organizations that, in general, promote this now hegemonic definition of CSL and do not challenge systems of oppression and inequities and are not focused on broader social change and social justice.

In resistance to this institutionalized mainstream model of CSL, AAS practitioners have promoted a "critical service-learning pedagogy" model that focuses on goals of equity, changing institutional power relations, and fostering Freirean "critical consciousness" by allowing students to "combine action and reflection" (Dariotis, Daus-Magbual, and Yoo, 2018, 93–95; Daus-Magbual and Tintiangco-Cubales, 2016, 187-193). De La Cruz and Leung (2003) propose a hybrid community "service-learning research" model that can "combine research with service in a way that is meaningful to both the student in an academic environment and also to the practitioner in the community" and where "community needs inform academic research" allowing university students and faculty to use specific research skills in service to community organizations (53–55).

In addressing these issues, for nearly fifty years SF State AAS has been developing new and innovative approaches to CSL while also challenging and engaging with our CSL office and campus. For example, since 2001 Professor Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Associate Dean Arlene Daus-Magbual, and their students have built the powerful Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP), which applies the liberatory problem-posing educational model of Paulo Freire to the classroom and K–12 schools throughout the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and a number of community colleges (Dariotis, Daus-Magbual, and Yoo, 2018, 95; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2007, 3-6).

On the public policy level, Tintiangco-Cubales, the teachers, and students have led a grassroots campaign that has essentially institutionalized ethnic studies at the high school level throughout SFUSD. They also helped build the "Ethnic Studies Now" statewide coalition that has been successful in beginning implementation of ethnic studies course planning throughout California (Jeung, 2009, 159–61).

Two other projects from SF State AAS illustrate the department's continued focus on community-based teaching and research. Public policy and public health courses that have conducted needs assessment projects within refugee communities have learned from Southeast Asian refugee programs of the 1990s to challenge American policy approaches toward resettlement.

Case Study 1—Oakland Burma Refugee Community Health Needs

Early one spring Saturday morning in 2011, pairs of SF State AAS students lugged gigantic fifty-quart pots filled to the brim with curry, vegetables, and rice to a school courtyard in Oakland's San Antonio District. Along the perimeter, other students set up face painting and carnival games, including the classic "Ping Pong Toss," where winners receive a live goldfish. This community health fair, co-sponsored with Asian Health Services and Community Health for Asian Americans, was a major undertaking aimed at drawing refugees from Burma together and conducting a needs assessment. As ethnic minorities from the Karen and Karenni states of Burma, they were linguistically isolated and hard to access. The fair, it was hoped, would encourage the community to come out, receive free health checks, and be interviewed by students through translators.

By noon, the organizers declared the event already a success. More than 120 individuals—making up more than half of this refugee community—attended. The SF State students gained invaluable experience organizing a large-scale event, doing community outreach, and conducting a research survey in a cross-cultural situation. And the entire community was able to obtain needed information in their own languages and, more significantly, voice their concerns to listening ears. This section details how this event was organized, the community collaborations involved, and the significant results of SF State's partnership with refugee communities.

Entering Refugee Communities from Burma

In 2009, social workers from the Burma Refugee Families Network (BRFN) contacted Professor Russell Jeung for assistance with their strategic planning.[2] New refugees from Burma were arriving at increasing numbers to Oakland, and these social workers felt overwhelmed by the extent and enormity of their needs. Imagine how one family might require hours of linguistic assistance with finding housing, government

benefits, and schooling. Add to these needs the difficulty of the adults finding work when they lacked formal education and English proficiency. When an individual required medical attention, navigation of the complex healthcare system exacerbated the health problem. Multiply these cases a hundredfold, and one can understand the difficulty of resettling a community into a crime-filled urban environment in the midst of the Great Recession.

Taxed to their limits, BRFN members wanted to determine how to best serve their community effectively and efficiently. They wanted a comprehensive survey of the community, which documented the refugees' needs and their assets.

Data Collection: Survey Development and Community Outreach

Professor Jeung collaborated with BRFN in developing the survey questionnaire, which included both closed- and open-ended questions. BRFN provided the cultural and linguistic expertise to make the survey relevant and understandable to the refugees. For instance, the mental health section of the survey posed particular difficulty, especially because many Asian cultures have no concept for "mental health." The survey designers reworked a common question about depression to ask simply, "Which of the following impairs your ability to work or take care of your family?" BRFN members noted that one expression of depression among refugees was "heaviness," as they attributed this feeling to spirits sitting on a sleeping individual. Given the opportunity to specify how they felt, more than one in five refugees mentioned that this factor affected their ability to take care of themselves.

Gathering the survey data was also difficult to obtain because of linguistic barriers, mistrust of authorities, and physical isolation. To overcome these issues, BRFN and the community collaborators sought to gather the community where a team of volunteer translators could be on hand. The coalition decided to host a health fair, where individuals could get free health checks while their children could play games, watch cultural performances, and get free lunches.

The class of fifty students from SF State's "Asian Americans and Public Policy" course took on a host of tasks through forming committees: (1) outreach and publicity, (2) decorations and registration, (3) games and cultural performances, (4) food and drinks, and (5) community surveys through translators. Those who couldn't attend the weekend event inputted the data and created charts of key findings. Together, they learned not only how to collect and analyze research

data, but they experienced how a group could mobilize an entire community.

Survey Results

Over three years, a series of SF State classes, including "Asian Americans in Public Policy" and Professor Mai Nhung Le's "Asian American Community Health Issues" organized these fairs and collected more than 300 surveys. The findings starkly revealed the dire situations faced by refugees:

- English language acquisition was a top priority, as four out of ten refugees did not speak English.
- While almost all refugees had a doctor, 32 percent stated that language barriers prevented them from receiving healthcare.
- A staggering 63 percent of refugees were jobless, with 81 percent of the Karenni unemployed.[3]
- Nearly 60 percent of refugees lived under "extreme poverty."
- Seven out of ten refugees reported symptoms that impaired their ability to take care of themselves.

These findings, along with oral histories of individual refugees and photographs by SF State AAS students, became the basis of the report "From Crisis to Community Development: Needs and Assets of Oakland's Refugees from Burma."

Impacts of the Report

The report immediately made newspaper headlines (Chang, 2012; O'Brien, 2011; Shafer, 2011). Using its findings, BRFN and the East Bay Refugee Network advocated for and obtained increased funding for refugee employment services from the County of Alameda. With its data, Asian Health Services secured more than $600,000 in grants to provide translated, health navigation services for refugees in Burma. These services included interpretation during visits, as well as assistance with insurance, health education, and maternal training.

Other refugee and emerging communities, seeing the positive impact of these health fairs and the report, also requested research consultation from SF State AAS.[4] The Bhutanese Community of California devised a very unique way to disseminate its report. In a case of ethnic invention, they created a hybrid Dashain ritual where they honored

elected officials with scarves. This colorful celebration, which is not held in Bhutan, drew the mayor of Oakland, city council members, and the press to highlight the needs of this group (O'Brien, 2012). The AAS-critical CSL model allowed students and faculty to engage and support the Bhutanese refugee community; develop a hybrid organizing and advocacy tactic drawing from the mainstream attraction to the community's traditional scarves to build relationships with Oakland decision makers; advance the community organizing and advocacy agenda; and break through their invisibility to help establish a new voice and build political power for a newcomer refugee community.

SF State AAS continues its legacy of being grounded in the community to serve and empower the community. Even as the Asian American community diversifies and new ethnic groups emerge, the department remains dedicated to giving voice to the range of concerns and issues facing our myriad of communities.

Our SF State AAS CSL and CBPR approach in Oakland resulted in an action-based policy report that, combined with community organizing and advocacy, led to major policy impacts and a major change in local power relations for the Oakland Burma refugee community. The process that Professor Jeung, Professor Mai-Nhung Le, and their students used in their health equity advocacy also mirrors the social change–driven "critical service-learning pedagogy" model (Mitchell, 2008, 52–53). Further, they demonstrated how AAS students can work with emerging groups by adopting the perspective as learners and collaborators, rather than outsiders dispensing "charity." Through Jeung and Le's AAS teaching and guidance, their students' "service" also was much more culturally competent and based on a deeper understanding of the sometimes painful history, unique conditions, and cultural practices of the refugee communities.

With dramatic demographic shifts in the Asian American communities beginning in the 1980s, AAS has adjusted with new approaches to serving new and emerging communities. Our Vietnamese American Studies Center (VASC) was born more than two decades ago to address the growth and diversity of the Vietnamese American communities. Because of VASC's direct ties to grassroots community and arts organizations and an impressive range of class offerings, our students are strongly poised to help affect social change, empower people, and contribute to community improvements compared to the mainstream CSL students (Le and Ta, 2009, 91–95). Since its founding, VASC and AAS have organized major conferences, convened key national and global gatherings,

and created study tours to Vietnam. The next case study on the DVAN draws from our AAS Department's prior decades of work within the Vietnamese American and arts community.

Case Study 2—The Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network

Because of the Third World student activist origins of AAS, our faculty have always maintained a special closeness to our students. We seek their direct involvement and insights while also connecting them to community leaders inside and outside the classroom as we collectively develop new strategies to resolve community problems.[5] This approach to "resolving" problems is an integral part of our liberatory education model. Students in the process become active agents of social change. Many have found their "voice" through the DVAN established by Professor Isabelle Thuy Pelaud and Professor Viet Thanh Nguyen of the University of Southern California to bring the creative voices of Vietnamese Americans from the margin to the center.

Initially, the founders sought to create spaces where Vietnamese American writers could produce stories on their own terms. The writers were resisting pressures to comply with, or react to, the dominant need to resolve the Vietnam War experience and a community invested in national identity and authenticity. They believed that writers here would benefit from sharing stories and engaging in dialogues with other Vietnamese writers in the diaspora. In addition, they hoped that Vietnamese American students might become empowered and inspired upon seeing and hearing cultural producers express themselves freely, and participate in facilitating these acts of listening and visibility.

DVAN's mission continues to be simple and broad. For the first ten years, the network—with committed core members, volunteers, and students—promoted artists from the Vietnamese diaspora whose work in literature, visual art, film, and performance art enriches their communities and strengthens ties between Vietnamese across the globe. DVAN did this tirelessly on a volunteer basis by holding public readings and art exhibits;[6] hosting and sponsoring literary festivals,[7] international film festivals,[8] holiday receptions, and fundraisers; establishing the blog diaCRITICS; producing publications; and facilitating summer youth programs and writing retreats.

In 2016, DVAN co-director V. T. Nguyen won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his debut novel *The Sympathizer*. Nevertheless, publishers are still reluctant to publish stories about the Vietnam War that differ from the mainstream narrative, which, in V. T. Nguyen's words, is generally

constructed to "placate American audiences." He reminds us that thirteen of fourteen publishers rejected his book submission. Self-determination is thus a driving force of DVAN. V. T. Nguyen and Pelaud have gone against the grain by taking a diasporic approach. Because of their direct involvement in Vietnam, the United States, France, Australia, and Canada received the largest number of Vietnamese refugees after the war ended.[9] The international nature of the war meant that Vietnamese refugees often experienced the dispersal of their communities to different parts of the world, and had to maintain ties across national borders. Within this context, a diasporic framework is not only productive but also necessary.[10]

DVAN therefore encourages writers and artists to explore the multifaceted ways of being and becoming Vietnamese in the diaspora, with the understanding that identity is fluid, ever changing, and shaped by various axes of power (Strom, 2018). The difficulties in finding recognition and venues for works lead to a disconnect between artists and their intended audiences with profound consequences for both the artists' productivity and the community's capacity to rebuild their life in a new land. For instance, although Vietnamese American writers are some of the strongest voices in the Asian American literary scene today, less than fifty books and short story collections by and about Vietnamese Americans have been published by nationally recognized publishers. Filmmakers and visual artists also continue to be underrepresented. As V. T. Nguyen explains, "The challenge for us is that, as minorities, we always labor under the double burden of our specificity while attempting to prove our universality" (Strom, 2018).

DVAN plays an integral role in serving as a bridge between the classroom and the community and engages with students in the process of cultural production.[11] DVAN's bi-weekly blog diaCRITICS, for example, was initially managed by Estela Uribe—a student from Pelaud's class—who went on to graduate school. According to new Managing Editor Dao Strom, diaCRITICS now has a global reach with more than fifteen contributing writers and three to four current editors exploring Vietnamese culture in the diaspora, including topics and stories from the United States, France, Germany, Australia, Vietnam, and more. Additionally, *Troubling Borders: An Anthology of Literature and Art by Southeast Asian Women in the Diaspora* (2014) published by Washington University Press was an ambitious DVAN project.[12] The editors relied heavily on AAS graduate student Teraya Peramehta to keep track of all the seventy-four poems, short stories, and essays submissions, in addition to

the sixty-one color images of artwork by women of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, Thai, Indonesian, and Filipino ancestry, including minorities Hmong, Mien, and Cham.[13] Today, both the blog and the anthology serve as education tools nationwide.

DVAN's community work has also generated academic essays such as Lan Duong and Pelaud's (2012) "Vietnamese American Art and Community Politics: An Engaged Feminist Perspective," and DVAN academic core members serve as mentors to volunteers wanting to become academic activists. Undergraduate students have become educators by producing video interviews of Vietnamese American writers and artists—some of which are posted on the DVAN website—and submitting essays to diaCRITICS. Students Yuki Obayashi, Khoi Nguyen, and Anh Bui, who took leadership roles in the Southeast Asian Youth art program in the Tenderloin, all went on to graduate school.[14] In that program, they brought Vietnamese American writers and artists to work with underprivileged children and youth. Meanwhile, former AAS lecturer Anh Thang Dao's experience with grant writing for DVAN was instrumental in her obtaining a job as Senior Racial Equity and Policy Analyst at the SF Arts Commission.

Thanks to this collaborative effort, DVAN has reached a national and international reputation. The Smithsonian recruited DVAN to organize the Vietnamese American panels of writers and artists at their first Asian American Literature Festival last summer,[15] and offered space to conduct a writing retreat this summer at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program. DVAN is now looking to organize a writing retreat and readings in Vietnam.

This Spring 2018 semester at SF State, for the first time since the inclusion of courses centering the Vietnamese American experience in the mid-1990s, SF State AAS offers two sections of the Vietnamese American literature class. In these classes, students plan, organize, and participate at community events. Philip Nguyen, a graduate student in the AAS M.A. Program at SF State writes:

As a graduate teaching assistant for one of the only classes centered on Vietnamese American literature in the country, grounded in a curriculum intertwined with DVAN and the work that DVAN contributes to the diasporic Vietnamese community, I've seen firsthand how this community involvement [re]affirms students' commitments to their communities, families, and themselves—myself included.[16]

DVAN is now benefiting from a renewal of public interest in diasporic Vietnamese culture and identity and, with it, more opportunities

to pursue its goals. In accord with Yên Lê Espiritu (2006), group members use the term *refugee* to "critically call into question the relationship between war, race, and violence, then and now." DVAN exemplifies how scholarship, teaching, and community work go hand in hand. In *Race and Resistance* (2002), V. T. Nguyen calls Asian Americanists to be more reflective about the ways we interpret Asian American literature, for this can impact how texts are received and produced. In *This Is All I Choose to Tell* (2010), Pelaud argues that a dialectical relationship takes place between a majority audience in search of a resolution of the outcome of the Vietnam War and the stories produced by Vietnamese American writers. Together, they lead an organization with other scholar activists, community members, and students that support Vietnamese cultural producers to create stories and images on their own terms.

In the process of implementing theories into practice, they have encountered challenges that led to new scholarship. For instance, Lan Duong and Pelaud (2012) responded to the pressures from the community *and* from mainstream "liberals" upon Vietnamese American organizers to represent a specific perspective, with a feminist reworking of what it means to be a scholar activist. DVAN is not only committed to denouncing and making visible the legacies of colonialism, war, and racism but also to combating the excesses that emanated when intersecting with patriarchy and homophobia.

Finally, DVAN's newest subgroup, "She Who Has No Master(s)," is a collective of women and gender-nonconforming writers of the Vietnamese diaspora, formed around what they call "the need to express, explore, define, and redefine notions of the Vietnamese 'feminine.'" For the members of that group, creating this new space is—in Duong and Pelaud's words—a "complicated endeavor that requires courage, empathy, imagination, and collaboration." (Duong and Pelaud, 2012, 263). The collective's "fire" is fueled by their firm belief that by working together they can empower students and their community while also challenging dominant paradigms.

Our two case studies highlighting DVAN's work providing political and cultural space to aspiring artists and activist scholars and our AAS classes' empowerment of refugees from Burma within Oakland's city government provide unique examples of AAS's transformative role as a "counter-hegemonic center," operating as a democratic, antihierarchical entity where serving and empowering the community is a fundamental value (Liu, Geron, and Lai, 2008, 50). Hegemony, according to Antonio Gramsci, is the "predominant influence" exercised by

one class or group within a political sphere. Rulers exert their moral authority through "consent" of the governed (Gramsci et al., 1971, 12–13, 55–60). This consent is achieved by the rulers through their framing and "political construction" of what is "common sense" in a manner that "validates (and obfuscates) their power and privilege, while a *political challenger* has to redefine the common sense in ways that call the establishment's authority into question" (Smucker, 2017, 142–53; Gramsci et al., 1971, 275–76). Like PEP, which has politicized a new generation of ethnic studies [ETHS] teachers to not only practice a new liberatory education model but also challenge, through their praxis, the "common sense" of our mainstream K–12 educational system, DVAN has had a significant political impact in the arts community through the global reach of diaCRITICS and the cross-generational dialogues that are pushing back on the dominant narratives and challenging intersectional systems of oppression.

But given the rise of neoliberalism within the higher education system, the development and defense of "counterhegemonic" projects that challenge and call out the "common sense" of mainstream CSL and the policies of the neoliberal university are not enough. Changing and transforming oppressive systems and the long-term fight for "self-determination" of AAS and our communities requires us to engage within the terrain of these institutions by also reframing and fighting for our own "insurgent hegemony" sparked some fifty years ago from the spirit of our Third World student strikes but fueled today through our activist faculty, allies within the university system, and growing social movements outside the academy (Smucker, 2017, 145).

Conclusion

> We were seeking a change in the character and focus of the college, of academia in general. We wanted a connection between college and communities, believing, hoping, that such connections would be to the long-term benefit of the communities and, secondarily, the college. We wanted the college to serve the communities, not to remove or "rescue" students from their communities. (Collier and Gonzales, 2009, 15)

Even as AAS moves into the next half century in the context of rising repression, anti-immigrant scapegoating and raids, the specter of war, and the desecration of the environment, new vibrant movements are on the rise in our communities. The 1968–69 Third World student

strikers' demands and struggle for an "autonomous Third World College" and "change in [the] character and focus ... of academia in general" was bold and provocative. But what most either ignore or downplay are the AAS former students and leaders' years of strategizing, maneuvering, constructing, and, most of all, *struggling* for an "insurgent hegemony," our AAS curricula, programs, and pedagogy, within an often-hostile environment in the university (Asian American Studies Department, 2009, 63–74, 83–90, 133–36).

These two case studies illustrate how SF State has applied the three-pronged model articulated by Jeung of social justice, mutual respect and benefit, and critical reflection, and responded creatively to the emerging communities and changing identities of our populations. In working with refugees from Burma, we have developed partnerships that have challenged how policy makers respond to new populations, and have nurtured cultural humility among our students as they learn about the particular needs of individual families. Through the establishment of DVAN, we have moved past an Asian- or American-based identification to explore the diasporic connections that we each have.

Today, our AAS Department features fifty undergraduate courses and fifteen graduate courses. We have offered a major in AAS since 1997 and a Master of Arts since 1999. While more than 50 percent of our faculty are adjunct lecturers, practitioners with strong community experience, we now have sixteen tenured or tenure-track faculty. In addition to the four institutional support factors outlined by Jeung that have benefited our AAS Department, we do not want to downplay how fortunate our AAS Department has been to have been formed and developed historically alongside our sister departments *within* our College of Ethnic Studies. We have benefited also, especially in times of crisis such as the Spring 2016 Student Hunger Strike for Ethnic Studies, with the solidarity and support (and critical and constructive challenges too) from the many community organizations and social movements of the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Area region. In advancing our model of critical CSL, AAS has continued our tradition of "Third World" unity and advancing "self-determination" by uniting with the departments of Africana Studies, Latina/Latino Studies, American Indian Studies, and, the newest, Race and Resistance Studies.

On April 20, 2018, we leveraged support from our campus CSL office to host a daylong professional development training on April 20, 2018, "Learning by Doing: Fifty Years of Community Service Learning in the College of Ethnic Studies," promoting our unique models of CSL

that emerged from the Third World Strike and have developed as the conditions in our communities and society have changed. We utilized the training also to support and learn from a number of community-based organizations and partners and to connect more faculty with CSL skills to tie our critical pedagogy to community struggles and needs. The ETHS CSL workshop was extremely well attended and will likely result in future ETHS-driven critical CSL workshops in the future. Our joint workshop is an example of how AAS and ETHS departments are well poised to reclaim ownership of community-based critical CSL by working with, while also challenging, the dominant charity-based model and developing closer relationships with our campus CSL office and staff.

This year our AAS Chair Jeung was also the recipient of a major CSL grant by our campus CSL office. And, he has shared these funds by implementing new professional development opportunities, creating a CSL curriculum reevaluation process for our department, and employing graduate students to assist in the implementation. Several ETHS faculty also serve on the Community Advisory Council and struggle with and help guide our campus CSL office.

Though much of AAS's survival and development over our five decades can be attributed to the "collective grit," determination, and struggle of our faculty and student leaders, we have also been extremely strategic in how we have leveraged CSL support and other funds like our U.S. Department of Education Asian American & Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) grant. Under the leadership of Professor Grace Yoo and Assistant Dean Daus-Magbual, AAS creatively stretches these funds to provide a range of student learning support systems while also enhancing our CSL and CBPR model through professional development and developing student leadership and new learning communities to help expose our students even more to their changing communities. Daus-Magbual and Yoo also won "hard" funding from SFSU in support of new staff positions and commitments from the university to sustain the program after the federal grant ends.

In resistance to the rise of neoliberalism in higher education in our state, SF State's AAS and ETHS departments have been playing a key leadership role in the California State University Systemwide Ethnic Studies Council since 2011. We have supported other CSU programs under attack from their administrations, and guided emerging AAS and ETHS programs and departments. We are also strategically advancing statewide policies to improve student support, ETHS requirements, curriculum development, and "taking back ownership" of CSL from the

mainstream. Our department, along with AAS faculty from UC Davis and Sacramento State University, has been advocating for much stronger statewide support for AAS programs and our students through the Status of Asian American Studies in California Higher Education Senate Select Committee on Asian Pacific Islander Affairs and Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus.

FORWARD!

In envisioning our AAS Department and communities for the next fifty years we realize that the rapid demographic, political, technological, and global changes impacting Asian American communities require us to engage in new areas of theory and practice while also remaining active within the university's structures to effectively fulfill our social change mission as a department. The "long-term benefit" of our communities requires us to utilize new, more empowering models of critical CSL and CBPB, and to engage in new areas like green technology and work, social media and communications, sustainability and environmental justice, food and water security, and monitoring the impacts of globalization and transnationalism on our communities. For the coming decade, as we continue "seeking a change in the character and focus of the college, of academia in general" we draw strength and inspiration not only from our proud fifty-year history of struggle for AAS but also from the growing militancy and vibrancy of emerging youth movements searching for their voices and place in history.

Notes

[1] For more background on founding principles, practices and critiques, see Collier and Gonzales, 2009; Hirabayashi and Alquizola, 1994; Hirabayashi,1995; Kagiwada, 1973; Omatsu, 1994, 2016; Umemoto, 1989.
[2] A few years prior, SF State AAS Professor Russell Jeung already had one of his classes, "Asian Americans and Public Policy," work with the Burmese immigrant community when his students lobbied for an Oakland city resolution protesting human rights violations in Burma.
[3] Karenni are a linguistic group from the Karenni state. Unlike refugees from other states, such as the Karen State, the Karenni had no previous migrants who could translate for them.
[4] These groups include the Mongolian and Himalayan communities.
[5] Students served as writers and editors of diaCRITICS, and as assistants and volunteers for fundraising events for the anthology.
[6] Viet Le curated *Love In the Time of War* (SF Camerawork, September–October 2016).
[7] Aimee Phan and Anh Thang Dao directed the Fourth SF Vietnamese American Poetry (African American Art and Culture Complex, April 2014); Isabelle Pelaud directed the Third SF Vietnamese American Poetry and Art Festival (African American Art and Culture Complex, April 2012), the San Francisco Vietnamese Poetry & Art Festival (African American Art and Culture Complex, Spring 2011), Outspoken: Vietnamese Poets of the Diaspora II (Fort Mason Center, April 2010), and the First SF Vietnamese Poetry Festival of the Diaspora (Fort Mason Center, November 2008).
[8] Lan Duong directed the San Francisco Diaspora Vietnamese Film Festival (Coppola Theater, SFSU, April 2011); Julie Thi Underhill directed the SF Global Vietnamese Film Festival (Roxie Theater, April 2013); Viet Le directed the SF International Southeast Asian Film Festival (New Cinema, Fall 2015).
[9] An impetus for the United States to be militarily involved with Vietnam was to assist the French in maintaining its century-long colonial hold in Vietnam. Australia, although it was not officially at war with Vietnam, sent 60,000 military personnel there, resulting in national controversy that in part, led to a change of government. And although Canada was a safe haven for American draft resisters, about 30,000 Canadians volunteered to fight in Vietnam while the Canadian war industry sold $2.47 billion worth of war materials to the United States during the war, including ammunition, napalm, and Agent Orange.

[10] The United States remains the country with the largest Vietnamese diasporic population. The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau estimates that more than half of the total Vietnamese diaspora population across the world reside in the United States.
[11] Part of the Incubator Program at Intersection for the Arts.
[12] The anthology received the 2014 Choice Outstanding Academic title and the Bronze Book Award in 2015 from the Association for Borderlands Studies.
[13] These compelling representations trouble the borders of categorization and reflect the multilayered experiences of Southeast Asian women whose lives have been shaped by colonization, wars, globalization, and militarization.
[14] Khoi Nguyen and Anh Bui continue to manage the DVAN website.
[15] DVAN was also invited to organize a panel "Contemporary Vietnam and the Diaspora: Literature and Film" at an International Conference in Paris in 2013 and to close the conference Arts du Vietnam: Nouvelle Approaches also in Paris in 2014.
[16] Letter to DVAN; February 20, 2018.

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