Purdue AAARCC: A Place Where Your Voice Is Heard

Respect those around you, understand your history, and own a voice that is yours. This is the motto that the AAARCC lives by for all that walk through their doors.

By Inez Wanamarta

It’s a late afternoon on Purdue’s campus, echoes of the bell tower in the distance. Renz Buenavista at a desk, working on his latest social media advertisement for their upcoming events. Laughter echoes through the walls and pop music starts to resonate through the building as he continues typing away at his laptop.

If you happen to take a stroll off of University Street and on to Fifth, you’ll find the six small stone steps leading up to a white door, the entrance to the Asian American and Asian Resource Cultural Center (AAARCC). Inside you’ll find a place that many students have identified as their home, various student organization members gathering together to simultaneously work and have a good time, people of all the different races mingling with one another.

To the random passerby, the name of the organization might evoke specific ideas related to the organization.

“It’s probably just for people who identify as Asian.”

“People who aren’t Asian don’t belong there.”

“It’s probably just a place for nerds, after all, isn’t what Asians are?”

But in reality, it’s not.

Pamela K. Sari, Ph.D. is the current director of the AAARCC and believes that the center acts as more than just a place for people to congregate.

“It’s a place where you learn, where you build networks and alliances, but most importantly it’s a place where you find the tools you need to get however far you want to in life, no matter the circumstances.”

The AAARCC is one of the five centers under Purdue’s efforts for diversity and inclusion on campus; along with the Black Cultural Center (BCC), the Latino Cultural Center (LCC), the
Native American Educational and Cultural Center (NAECC), and the LGBTQ Center all located around campus.

As a center that focuses on serving their local community, the AAARCC provides a space to individuals in the area, both students and locals alike, as a place to earn about the diversity found within the community.

Students like Renz find this little building on campus to be the best place to hang out.

“I didn’t know about the Asian population at Purdue and I was impressed.”

As a person born in the Philippines, Renz’s family immigrated to the United States when he was at the young age of seven. Growing up in northwest Indiana, he lived in a community where was considered to be the minority.

“Identity is something that people are looking for and here you can be comfortable with the person you are.”

The AAARCC fully believes that everyone has a valuable voice, something worth bringing to the table. Just like all of the other diversity and inclusion organizations associated with Purdue, the AAARCC is ready to serve anyone who walks through the white wooden door.

However, there is just one rule to be allowed into the premises: you must come with an open mind.

**Common Issues Americans and Asian Americans Face Today**

To many Asian American students who grew up in the Midwest, they were considered to be the minority. At the AAARCC, they are able to have an open dialogue about the various cultures, immigration histories and diversity issues.

For many minorities, stereotypes are their largest enemy.

The sad reality is that students who identify as Asian or Asian American often feel like they are constantly battling microaggressions from their peers, to the point where many choose to disassociate themselves from their physical appearance and choose not to identify as they are.

Commonly discussed issues are stereotyping, certain expectations set by their peers as to how these individuals are expected to act and perform due to their ancestral heritage. The scope of
racism translates into various fields; performance in class, socializing abilities, and the discussion of being a perpetual foreigner.

With the ongoing developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, students with Asian associated physical features have expressed multiple issues related to discrimination and racism. With the media often associating the pandemic with phrases like “the Chinese virus”, students have voiced issues of having the people around them behave in a weary manner, solely based on their physical appearance alone.

During times like these, the AAARCC makes it a priority to act on two main functions: to be an open platform and a resource. It is their priority that we are aware of how the AAARCC is a place where we can speak about such issues, and that they have resources to help each other through situations such as these.

**What the AAARCC Can Do For You**

Whether home might be on the other side of the globe or just across the river, the AAARCC strives to be a home away from home.

To many of the students who frequent, the AAARCC served as the access point when they first stepped on campus for the first time as freshmen. A sense of familiarity is always in the air where you can explore your identity, express yourself and own a voice that is yours.

We often come across topics or issues which we are curious about, but might not know who to speak to. Pitch it to Pam, Renz or another one of the employees in the building and they’ll do their best to help you out and even get a speaker to come in and talk about the topics you’re interested in.

With recent developments of COVID-19, the AAARCC still offers their resources digitally most days of the week.

Motivational Monday feature photos or videos of inspiring individuals who discuss issues, talk about their mission, and give advice.

Tea Tuesday invites a student to share a piece of poetry or work they’ve done. Sometimes, they feature Asian American authors and their works.
Wellness Wednesday prioritizes resources for mental, emotional, and physical health.

And then there’s coffee hours where the AAARCC partners with the ISS for a Q&A session.

**AAARCC Events**

The world is filled with inspiring individuals, those who have made a difference and stood out from the crowd.

The AAARCC chooses to capitalize on this and brings in speakers of various backgrounds and experiences to speak about their expertise. Past speakers for events include traditional Chinese painting artist Jiaping Zhao, Tibetan monks from the Drepung Gomang monastery, and US Olympic skater Mirai Nagasu.

However, the AAARCC also provides their space for events in the local community. On Sundays, the AAARCC utilizes their space for a local children’s Chinese language class.

Other events include the Lunch and Learn Series and events partnering with student organizations.

**AAARCC Initiatives for The Future**

Moving forward, the AAARCC is following along the footsteps of the institution. They hope to expand the organization into creating research projects which will both create a better sense of understanding within diversity of campus while also being a sustainable operation for generations to come.

The AAARCC is currently working with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to set up a research lab for two of their upcoming projects.

They hope their first project to be the ‘Oral History Project’ which will consist of two separate sections; the first being ‘The Founding Process of the AAARCC’ and the other ‘Immigration Stories from Students’.

The initial part of the project focuses on how the organization came about and inviting back individuals who were involved in the early stages of the AAARCC.

Pamela believes that the latter part of the project allows “the “opening of an intergenerational dialogue” which constitutes discussion which many often choose to not partake.”
Their second upcoming project is called ‘The Performance Initiative” which the AAARCC hopes to be a resource for students to be able to build skills at a smaller, closer scale. They hope to establish Purdue’s own Lion and Dragon dance team perform at various events while sharing diverse culture.

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So, if you’ve got some time to spend on campus and you’re looking for something new, take a stroll along University Street on to Fifth where you can find the six little steps leading up to the white door. Step inside and maybe you’ll just find a whole different world right before your eyes.

I would like to pitch this feature story to the Lafayette Journal & Courier, specifically to writer Dave Banger.

I think that he would be ideal for this story as he covers events and organizations in the local Lafayette and West Lafayette area.

Since the AAARCC provides resources for all students, faculty, staff, and local individuals, I believe that Dave would be able to write for his usual audience and writing style.