



CELEBRATE PURDUE WOMEN

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WHO IS A MENTOR (AND LEADER) THAT REALLY MADE AN IMPACT IN YOUR LIFE?

As a first-generation migrant woman navigating academic, professional, and personal lives in a new cultural environment, I sought and received wisdom of mentorship. Asking was not easy for me in the beginning - there was a barrier of language and the unfamiliarity with the education system. What I realized was that most of my academic and professional mentors were women leaders who, in their leadership, focused on both being present for individuals and changing the systemic contexts to provide more support to campus communities, especially students. In interacting with them, they showed me care while walking alongside me in understanding larger Purdue and higher education contexts - the mission, resources, challenges, and work for solutions. In professional work, now Associate Vice Provost Renee Thomas (then Director of the Black Cultural Center) has been a great role model to me. In the beginning of my student years, we did not yet have the AAARCC. I liked going to the BCC, joining their Martin Luther King, Jr. Day community choir. Every time AVP Thomas gave a speech, I remember being very motivated. As I began to teach a class, I would bring my class to the BCC to get a tour and meet with one of the staff members. AVP Thomas' leadership and Cultural Centers' work allowed everyone to learn, and I am grateful for that. Dr. Carolyn Johnson (at the time was Director of Diversity Resource Office and then AVP) was one of the mentors who saw me. I started as a volunteer, giving tours around Purdue to visiting scholars from other countries, and then Summer Graduate Assistant, assisting with event planning and implementation and the visiting scholars program.

Greetings! My name is Pamela K. Sari, Ph.D. and I work as the Director of the Asian American and Asian Resource and Cultural Center (AAARCC - pronounced 'ark') at Purdue University. I am an alumna who earned my Ph.D. degree in American Studies. Would you like to know a little fun fact? When I was a graduate student, I was part of the Asian Pacific American Caucus (APAC) and the Steering Committee that (continuing the work of several generations of Purdue students before us) proposed the founding of the AAARCC to the Purdue Administration.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY FROM YOUR EARLY-CAREER YEARS?

Purdue has many of the most creative, caring, and community-giving students. My office at the AAARCC is near the conference room and the computer lab, where students gather in between classes, often with their friends. It is amazing how much energy and motivation I get to continue the AAARCC work from just sitting in my office and hearing their conversation or listening to them telling me stories of life and friendship. Some days, a group will play music and practice dance movements with each other (or singing karaoke and playing video games). One day I hear several students are going to the store and get groceries for one friend who has been sick. Another day, a student told me that when their computer broke down, suddenly four of their friends offered to lend their extra device so that they could do schoolwork. Another day, a group of students were doing a practice interview because one of their friends was applying for a Resident Assistant (RA) position. They were giving this individual such open and honest feedback. A lot of the AAARCC programming came out from these everyday, quiet, non-spot-lighted moments of life-giving community. From concerns about access to food and enjoyable time of sharing diverse food, the AAARCC sought partnerships with ACE Campus Food Pantry and Purdue Student Farm to serve as one pop-up pantry location and to build indoor and outdoor gardens. A group of students responded with a desire to have an Asian and Asian American Gardening Club that meets weekly at the AAARCC to do gardening, cook together, and enjoy meals together. Seeing the needs for career preparation, we sought partnership from Center for Career Opportunities (CCO) to have a liaison program at the Center. We partnered with CAPS and CARE in a similar liaison program to continue addressing mental health, wellness, and relationship themes.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LIFE LESSON YOU HAVE LEARNED IN THE PAST YEAR?

My mom has been having health challenges in the past year, so I think of her a lot more. She teaches me one important Indonesian proverb, "*Dimana bumi dipijak, disitu langit dijunjung*." Where you step on earth, there you lift the sky. She said, "*Mbak* (a way of calling an eldest daughter in Javanese Indonesian culture), it means making your community where you live better." It is because of her that I do intercultural work. I realized that (as literature on immigrants and children of immigrants suggested), making communities where we live better sometimes means navigating balance, memories and trauma, and even a sense of loss about what I can and cannot do as a leader, a daughter, a community member. I am truly grateful I am surrounded by my Cultural Center colleagues, and Butler Center community who understand the complexity of leadership, and who continue discussing it through programming initiatives.

WHAT ADVICE OR ENCOURAGEMENT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE WITH FUTURE LEADERS IN ACADEMIA?

Learning in American Studies, Asian American Studies, Cultural Anthropology, and now Cultural Center contexts, the encouragement I got from these fields that I would like to share with others is to consider our own histories and cultural contexts, our meaningful journey of identities alongside professional and academic work and mission. I struggled in the first year of the Ph.D. program to build research, teaching, and engagement until I took classes from faculty members that incorporated pedagogical elements of service learning, archival theory and practice, and intersectional Asian/American materials. Through these faculty mentors, I learned to build, alongside others, a pathway that incorporates my identity as an American Studies Scholar with research interest in diversity of communities of beliefs/spirituality, teaching journey motivated by wanting to engage with future generations (inspired by my own journey as first-generation migrant woman raising two Indonesian American children), and engagement interests with historically underrepresented communities in academia. The journey of these identities still continues to evolve, and may yours, too, in fulfilling ways.