

University of Massachusetts Boston  
Asian American Studies Program



Graduation Celebration  
2025-2026

26 May 2026

## Asian American Studies Program Core and Affiliated Faculty & Staff – May 2026

Ping-Ann Addo, Associate Professor and Chair, Anthropology  
Pratyush Bharati, Professor, Management Science and Information Systems, College of Management  
Elora Chowdhury, Professor and Chair, Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies  
Patrick Clarkin, Associate Professor, Anthropology  
Nia Duong, Co-Production and Student/Community Engagement Program Coordinator, Asian American Studies  
Christopher S. Fung, Senior Lecturer, Anthropology  
Richard Hung, Associate Professor, School for the Environment  
Peter Kiang, Professor and Director, Asian American Studies, School for Global Inclusion and Social Development, CEHD  
Pratna Kem, Lecturer, Asian American Studies  
Marlene Kim, Professor, Economics  
Son Ca Lâm, Assistant Professor, Asian American Studies, School for Global Inclusion and Social Development, CEHD  
Andrew Leong, Associate Professor, Philosophy and Law  
Myra Liwanag, Lecturer, Asian American Studies and Executive Director, Iskwelahang Pilipino (IP)  
Raymond Liu, Professor and Chair, Marketing, College of Management  
Lusa Lo, Professor, Special Education Program, Curriculum & Instruction, CEHD  
Rajini Srikanth, Professor, English; Dean of the Faculty  
Lakshmi Srinivas, Associate Professor, Asian American Studies, School for Global Inclusion and Social Development, CEHD  
Karen Suyemoto, Professor, Psychology & Asian American Studies  
Shirley Tang, Endowed Distinguished Professor for Asian American Studies  
Ammany Ty, Co-Production and Archive Program Coordinator, Asian American Studies  
Kim Soun Ty, Lecturer, Asian American Studies  
Linh-Phuong Vũ, Lecturer, Asian American Studies and Community Program Director, Boston Little Saigon  
Paul Watanabe, Professor, Political Science and Director, Institute for Asian American Studies  
Zong-Guo Xia, Professor, School for the Environment  
Lingling Zhang, Associate Professor and PhD Program Director, Nursing Department, CNHS

### The Program

For nearly 40 years, UMass Boston's Asian American Studies Program has offered intellectually-challenging, emotionally-engaging, culturally-responsive, culturally-sustaining instruction in the classroom with holistic, high-impact 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. The Program offers the most Asian American Studies courses, faculty, and community linkages of any university in New England. The Program's alumni include teachers, social workers, health care providers, business entrepreneurs, and leaders of local Asian American community organizations. By grounding our curriculum, teaching, and applied research in the realities of local Asian American communities and by respecting the knowledge and bilingual/bicultural skills that many UMass Boston students bring to the classroom, the AsAmSt Program creates powerful learning environments for all students to gain critical understandings about the historical experiences, voices, contemporary issues, and contributions of diverse Asian populations in the U.S. Graduate students from any area who have Asian American Studies interests can serve as teaching/research assistants, mentors to undergraduates, and special project developers for the Program. AANAPISI students from Bunker Hill Community College and those from partnering pre-collegiate and community youth programs are encouraged to access AsAmSt's learning opportunities. Community members and organizations as well as alumni participate in our activities in many short- and long-term ways. UMass Boston was the only AANAPISI research university in the U.S. continuously funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education from 2010 through 2026.

## Celebrating our 2025-2026 Graduates in Asian American Studies

We applaud Angel Wong (黄秀文) for completing ten AsAmSt courses and becoming the 25th student to graduate with an individual major in Asian American Studies at UMass Boston. We also cheer eight students from 2025-2026 who finished at least six courses that satisfy our AsAmSt program-of-study requirements: Feliz Angeline “Fasha” Natad Banson, Kyle Chear, Liam Crampton, Kim Thiên Định, Chantrea Sin, Caroline Nguyen, Holly Hồng Hạnh Nguyễn, and Kelly Trần. A total of 178 students has now graduated with AsAmSt concentrations since 2000. Finally, we commend Xi Oscar Chen (陈曦), our graduate student core staff who makes history as UMB’s first Master of Public Policy degree-holder.

Since 1987, our curricular and pedagogical contributions have effectively enabled many thousands of students to fulfill multiple undergraduate requirements in general education, diversity, and writing proficiency while providing longer-term skills, sensibilities, and practices to improve life for their families and communities as well as to inspire their own educational and professional advancement. We appreciate each cohort of graduating students who claim the added value of AsAmSt course experiences invested in their growing portfolios of cultural, educational, and inter-generational wealth.

## Renovation and Re-Modeling



Many transitions—some planned and others forced—have characterized the past academic year, including retirements, retrenchments, reversals, and reckonings. In August 2025, six offices used by AsAmSt core faculty and staff in the Corcoran Jennison Building were emptied with an administrative expectation that they be fully absorbed into our historic program space on the second floor of the Phillis Wheatley-Peters Building. This difficult physical displacement was part of an overall merging of the entire School for Global Inclusion & Social Development into existing campus buildings. Thus, we offered 23 courses for over 400 students during 2025-2026, despite most of our teaching materials being stored in boxes. From crisis to opportunity, we partnered purposefully with UMB-contracted architect, Steve Casentini (above right), to envision and design in detail a near-gut renovation of our program space to be completed before Fall 2026. Our two cover photos illustrate the regrettable downsizing-liquidation of 1,000 volumes from our once-excellent AsAmSt library, juxtaposed with one of many renovation plan iterations that we produced while still holding a core stance of being water by any means necessary.

# Individual Major in Asian American Studies

Angel Wong (黄秀文)



Born and raised in Boston, MA, I come from a small family that includes myself, my mom, dad, and brother. My parents immigrated from China in 2003 so their children could have more opportunities. Growing up, my brother and I received many chances that our parents never got, one being higher education which I am extremely grateful for. Graduating from Boston Latin Academy in 2022 and entering UMass Boston, I decided to major in Exercise & Health Science, wanting to pursue a career in Oncology in the future. Eventually, I decided to declare an individual major in Asian American Studies.

Entering my sophomore year, I was conflicted as to what courses to take in order to fulfill my requirements and I came across Asian American Studies on Wiser. I decided to take my chances and add the courses into my cart. Walking into my first day of classes, I didn't have much expectations. However, after taking two Asian American Studies courses that year, I felt heard, understood, and a sense of warmth. Gradually, I started to take more courses and eventually I decided to do a program-of-study. However, after completing the 6-course requirement, I felt so immersed in the curriculum that I decided to declare an individual major. I felt a sense of comfort from the different things we learned in the classes to the environment, the professors and the students. My involvement in AsAmSt has provided me with different perspectives and tools to start my own journey in finding my identity and understanding my parents' generation.

Looking into the future, I see myself working in the healthcare field, mainly in the oncology department, working mainly with children but not limited to them as I want to work with all populations. I want to make an impact. I plan on finding a field that combines my two degrees together, Exercise & Health Science with Asian American Studies, so I can continue staying involved with Asian American Studies work. This means I plan on finding health care careers that focus more on the Asian American population. Taking Asian American Studies has expanded my knowledge and perspective on healthcare and has helped me better understand the needs of Asian American communities. I hope to continue the meaningful connections I have built with the professors and fellow students in the AsAmSt Program after graduating.

# Program-of-Study in Asian American Studies

## Feliz Angeline “Fasha” Natad Banson

Hallo! My name is Feliz Angeline, but I go by Fasha. I am a second-generation Filipino American student born and raised in Weymouth, MA. I am graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing along with a program-of-study in Asian American Studies, which is a huge achievement for me, as I went through nursing school while my mom battled stage four colon cancer. Outside of school, I have been a dancer and artist for 20 years.



I grew up in a predominantly white town, navigating a K-12 public school education where my identity as a Filipina American was largely invisible. Upon entering college at UMass Boston, one of the most diverse schools in the nation, I was able to expand and explore my cultural identity for the first time in my life. I didn't even know I was considered "Asian American" or the meaning of this identity until I entered higher education!

I am finishing my time at UMB with many experiences under my belt. I have served as the Cultural Director for SMCA's Asian Student Center and as the President of UMass Boston's Filipinx Cultural Club, HOY! PINOY! (HI!P!) (2023–2025). Prior to that, I served as HI!P!'s Performance Coordinator starting my freshman year. I also led a service trip to the Bay Area, California, focused on Filipino American and Ethnic Studies in 2023–2024. This effort helped build momentum for UMass Boston's first Filipino American Studies academic course, in which I TA'd in Spring 2025. That same semester, I was also a recipient of an AsAmSt SJCCS Award. I am deeply passionate about advocating for underserved communities, like the AAPI community, to support those who feel unheard and unsupported. That was the reality I lived in for so long. I also knew that in order to contribute to others—whether in family, community, or career spaces—I needed to understand myself first from a personal, transnational, and historical perspective. Exploring this gap in my cultural identity was incredibly important to me. I've gained so much pride as an Asian American through this program. I have been reminded of who I am as a Filipino before we were told who we were. I continue to be curious about the heterogeneity of our Asian American realities. Currently, I serve the broader Filipino community as a Board Member of the Philippine American Mainstream Advocacy for Nonpartisan Associations, Inc. (PAMANA) and as a council member of the

Youth Advisory Council for the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS YAC). For my family, I would like to start documenting and collecting a written narrative of our family history to create a book. As an artist, I want to create art that addresses important social justice themes, educates others, and serves as a tool for civic engagement. I have a diverse range of passions and skill sets that I intend to bring into the workforce. Although I will start as an RN, I know I will explore from there. ASAMST has allowed me to understand myself in depth and has helped give me the confidence to see myself as a leader. Amidst my interests in healthcare, ethnic studies, and dance/movement lies a unifying thread: a commitment to leadership and community engagement. Regardless of the specific field I ultimately pursue, my aspiration is to foster inclusive, equitable, and empowered communities. And to enjoy life while I'm at it!

## Kyle Chear



Kyle Chear is a second-generation Cambodian American from Lynn, Massachusetts. He graduates with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Program-of-Study in Asian American Studies. He currently works as a Therapeutic mentor and In-Home Therapy Support Clinician at Children's Friend and Family Services. He plans to pursue a graduate-level psychology degree to continue to support marginalized youth in a mental health capacity.

Kyle's first Asian American Studies course was: AsAmSt 270: Cambodian American Culture & Community. Triumphant stories of bravery from his Khmer ancestors and elders left him inspired, sparking a desire to deepen his understanding of Asian American history and culture. Lessons of powerful Asian American activists emphasized community involvement and action which led to Kyle's involvement in on-campus activities. With the immense support and guidance from faculty affiliated with the Asian American Studies

Program, Kyle volunteered as a teaching assistant, peer mentor lead, undergraduate level research assistant, academic coach, and co-president for the Khmer Culture Association at UMass Boston. The Asian American Studies Program instilled confidence in Kyle and empowered him to pursue these opportunities to make the most of the program's powerful lessons. Kyle developed important leadership and community-oriented skills that will follow him through the rest his career and academic journey. He is incredibly grateful for his wonderful support system that was established with the help of the program.

Kyle plans to become one of the first members in his family to pursue graduate level education to continue to educate and mentor marginalized youth. He plans to contribute to meaningful psychological research to take part in uplifting Asian American voices. As he progresses in his career, Kyle aspires to serve as a mentor for upcoming Asian American students. He plans to support students by assisting with funding for the next generation of students. He dreams of establishing a community recreation center under his family name to serve as a site for community solidarity. He looks forward to continuing to build his relationship with the program by assisting with future events and educational initiatives. The program's lessons of advocacy guide him in his work and will always serve as motivation to fight for justice.

Kyle would like to give a thank you to all the incredible Asian American Studies professors that educated him during his time at UMass Boston. Thank you to Kim Soun Ty, Pratna Kem, Karen Suyemoto, Susan Tan, Shirley Tang, and Son Ca Lâm. The lessons from these amazing educators will follow him for the rest of his life. He'd like to give a special thank you to Kim Soun Ty and Pratna Kem. It was a truly special honor to be mentored by two Cambodian American educators during his time at UMass Boston. He'd like to give a final and very important thank you to all of the Asian American Studies Program faculty and volunteers that do the work behind the scenes including the organizing for this incredibly thoughtful graduation ceremony.

## Liam Crampton

I am a Filipino American undergraduate studying Communication, minoring in Professional New Media Writing, and taking a program-of-study in Asian American Studies. I grew up in Quincy, MA, the son of an immigrant mother and a white father. Despite Quincy's large Asian American population, there were few Filipinos, and my school, despite having a diverse student body, had a mostly white staff. My experience in that school environment gave me the impression that my Filipino side wasn't something of much value. I ended up leaning into the whiteness I thought was prized, which led me to fall into toxic crowds and overcompensate by performing for attention, a persona that harmed others and sent my mental health into a severe depression. It wasn't until high school, and more fully during the pandemic, that I realized no amount of performance would grant me acceptance into whiteness; when anti-Asian hate surged, I was grouped in as the enemy. That reckoning left me grappling with guilt over my actions, regret over the pain I had caused, and frustration that it took me being on the receiving end of hate for me to become conscious of my actions. Though I can't undo the past, I've chosen to move forward by committing myself to helping others, working to ensure no one endures the hurt I both inflicted and experienced myself.



After taking a journalism class in high school, the power of voice became very apparent to me, especially after years of suppressing my own. I decided to attend UMass Boston with the intention of pursuing a journalism career, but the specifics of that were still unclear to me. It was during my third semester that I took my first Asian American Studies course, AsAmSt 250G: Rise Up! Asian American Leadership and Social Change with Pratna Kem. It was primarily to fulfill a seminar requirement, but I did have an interest in activism in the Asian American community, a core foundation of the class. It was in this class that we created a ten-point program based on the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program. Mine focused on university accommodations for Asian Americans and their safety. This project was the first opportunity I

got to tell my story, something I was extremely nervous to do. But I was met with acceptance, praise, and validation from Pratna and my classmates. Shortly after, I became a TA for the class and eventually declared the Asian American Studies program-of-study. From there, Asian American Studies has shaped the bulk of my UMass Boston experience, from my sense of community with the many amazing people I've met, my involvement in the school's Filipino American student culture club, HOY! PINOY!, and my sense of identity and comfort in my own skin. As a writer for *The Mass Media* newspaper and an intern for the *Sampan* newspaper, I've been able to use my position to amplify the voices of communities and people who deserve to have their stories told.

Asian American Studies has expanded my concept of what a journalist can be and the role they can play for people. These Asian American Studies classes I've taken have really put into perspective how moving and important it can be for marginalized people to finally be seen--whether it is through the stories of the community's elders, or by establishing a class centered around an underrepresented group. I want to help others so they don't feel the pain that I both caused and experienced. I plan on doing so through my career as a writer, allowing people to be seen so they know that who they are is something of value to the world.

## Kim Thiên Định



I am a second-generation Vietnamese American and the youngest daughter of two Vietnamese refugees. I major in Biology with a program-of-study in Asian American Studies and balance three part time jobs. My academic journey had me starting out as a Music major, which switched to Philosophy and Public Policy, before I finally landed on Biology. In the same year, I found Asian American Studies and grew more interested after taking AsAmSt 250G: Rise up! Asian American Leadership and Social Change, taught by Professor Pratna Kem. It was after taking this class, and also being able to TA for it the next semester, where I really felt the impact of Asian American Studies on my journey to navigating identity and healing, and how I could use how it impacted me to support others.

I decided to include a focus on Asian American Studies because AsAmSt courses were never offered in my high school studies, and the parts that were, were not told through the lens of an Asian American. So, I wanted to learn more about history that I didn't learn much about before, and history where I felt represented, because I never knew that much about my Vietnamese background. I also struggled with my own identity, where I often felt as if I didn't fit in among my classmates who were mostly white, and also at home with my immediate and extended family. Subconsciously, maybe I had hoped that this would teach me a bit about myself and help me bridge some of the intergenerational gaps between my family and me.

As I got more involved with Asian American Studies through the classes and people I built connections with, I learned so much about my own identity, the importance of keeping my family's stories alive, and how to use the past as guidance for how we can change the future of our own communities. I felt the support of a different group with every class I took and, beyond that, it has inspired me to learn more about other people and be more involved in spaces close to home.

Beyond graduating, I carry a deeper sense of pride and purpose about my own identity. What I've learned from Asian American Studies about advocacy, cultural awareness, and empowerment has pushed me to show up more and become more present and intentional about the spaces that I'm part of. I hope to inspire others through my pride by staying involved with Asian American Studies and giving back by showing up and being involved with the work I do at the Institute for Asian American Studies and advocating for local community organizations. I plan to use what I've learned about the importance of community involvement to build more connections, documenting these spaces, and volunteering in different settings. Wherever I go, I always think of the lessons I've learned from Asian American Studies which shape the actions I choose every day. Thank you for helping me grow as a person and showing me the support that I need to become a peer leader.

## Chantrea Sin

I am a second-generation Cambodian American graduating with a major in Marketing and a program-of-study in Asian American Studies. I was raised in Lynn, Massachusetts, and spent much of my childhood near a local Khmer temple. As I grew older, I became increasingly disconnected from my cultural roots.

Enrolling in the AsAmSt 270 Cambodian American Culture and Community course with Kim Soun Ty provided an opportunity for me to reconnect with and deepen my understanding of my cultural heritage and history. Truthfully, I was nervous about taking my first AsAmSt course. I assumed it would be like a traditional history class. Then I took the course, and I felt compelled to participate, to listen, and to reflect, often finding pieces of my own family's story in the lessons we explored. For the first time, I felt empowered to share my personal experiences in an academic space. I decided to do a program-of-study in Asian American Studies because it gave me the tools to dig deeper into my family history, take pride in expressing my ideas, and share my stories, not only for myself, but for the younger generation who deserve to see their histories recognized and valued.



In 2024, I served as a Teaching Assistant for the same course. Having the opportunity to step into a leadership role within the program was truly meaningful to me and doing it in the same class that first opened the door to my personal self-journey felt like a full-circle moment. As a TA, I led the Lynn Public Schools (LPS) Oral History Project, where I worked closely with peers whom I once attended Lynn Classical High School with, to share our high school experiences with LPS staff. Using our lived experiences in training workshops with LPS teachers was incredibly powerful, especially knowing that this work could have real impact for younger generations.

The program taught me the power of lived experiences, listening deeply, and telling stories that are often overlooked. Whether I pursue a career in marketing or community-based work, I plan to carry these values into everything I do. I hope to stay involved in Asian American Studies by exploring my dream of creating a small clothing brand that creates space for younger generations to feel seen, heard, and proud of where they come from. AsAmSt gave me my voice, and moving forward, I intend to use it with purpose.

## Caroline Nguyen

My name is Caroline Nguyen and I am a senior majoring in Philosophy of Law and Ethics with minors in History and Asian American Studies. As a first generation, mixed Vietnamese and Black American college



student raised in the Boston area, my upbringing has been shaped by navigating multiple cultural identities and communities. Alongside my academic work, I am also a small business owner, running my own beauty studio, which has taught me discipline, independence, and the importance of connecting with diverse communities. These experiences have strengthened my resilience and deepened my understanding of responsibility and identity.

My journey into Asian American Studies began with the AsAmSt 250G seminar which led me to take the AsAmSt 294 Resources for Vietnamese Americans course. Through these courses, I began to understand my identity in a much deeper and more personal way, especially as a descendant of a Vietnamese Amerasian. Growing up as someone who is both Vietnamese and Black, this part of my identity was not something I always had the language or space to fully explore. Learning about the history of Vietnamese Amerasians, marked by war, displacement, and complicated belonging, helped me make sense of my own family history and where I fit within it. For the first time, I saw my experiences reflected in academic spaces, and it transformed how I understood myself. These classes did not just teach me history. They gave me clarity, validation, and a stronger sense of identity, which ultimately inspired me to pursue a program-of-study in Asian American Studies.

After graduating, I plan to attend law school and pursue a career in the legal field where I hope to advocate for underserved and marginalized communities. My background in Asian American Studies will continue to guide how I approach issues of justice, especially in recognizing how race, identity, and systemic inequalities intersect. As a first-generation student, I carry a strong sense of responsibility to create opportunities not only for myself, but for others who come from similarly complex and underrepresented backgrounds. I hope to use both my legal education and my lived experiences to uplift voices that are often overlooked. No matter where my path leads, I will remain connected to Asian American Studies by continuing to engage with and give back to the communities that shaped my growth.

## Holly Hồng Hạnh Nguyễn

I am a second-generation Vietnamese American daughter of two Vietnamese immigrants and the youngest of five children. I major in Psychology with a program-of-study in Asian American Studies.

I've experienced many forms of community and leadership work with the Vietnamese community on and off campus which has led to my interest in taking courses in the AsAmSt Program. The AsAmSt 228 Asian Women in the U.S. course and AsAmSt 294 Resources for Vietnamese Americans course led me to pursue a program-of-study in AsAmSt. There, I connected with many diverse students and learned more about my family and cultural history. Throughout my years attending UMass Boston, I have been involved with the Vietnamese Student Association and collaborated with other cultural organizations which have provided lessons in advocacy for our neighbors and our families, documenting and archiving history through oral/digital stories, as well as learning to grow with the support of the AsAmSt faculty and staff through cultural knowledge, exchanges and care.



The AsAmSt courses have made a great impact in my life and involvement on campus with personal connection, guidance and mentorship from faculty. I've learned the history of our Asian American communities around Boston and neighboring cities through class field trips to historical landmarks and community organizations. I've learned about my classmates through cooking assignments in class. And I've been able to find deeper meaning through my internship work, community organizations that I had never known of before. In AsAmSt 270 Cambodian American Culture and Community course, I collaborated with other classmates in a shadow puppet project. I shared a part of myself through the AsAmSt 397 Applied Research in AsAmSt course. And through my internship at the Mather Elementary School, I was able to reconnect with a previous church's school teacher.

The AsAmSt Program has played a big part in helping me explore and develop myself as a leader at school and in the community. Each course taught me how much effort goes into planning and executing a project. It showed me how interconnected the local Asian American community is and has led me to appreciate all the small gestures of care and love we exchange through the bonds we've created. I am still indecisive about my future plans, but I am continuing to learn and discover more stories of my family and friends. I hope to continue building upon the relationships I've fostered. I also want to stay grounded in the history, traditions and knowledge that our ancestors who came before us have set for us and apply them to my daily life. I hope that wherever I go, the Asian American Studies Program continues to grow and thrive in developing more rich stories and history for future generations!

## Kelly Trần



I am a second-generation Vietnamese American born and raised in Hartford, Connecticut. Transferring into UMass Boston, I was unsure about what I wanted to focus on or pursue in the future, but I quickly found myself drawn to courses that allowed me to explore my identity, community, and lived experiences. It was through these experiences that I decided to pursue a major in Sociology and complete a program-of-study in Asian American Studies.

I first discovered Asian American Studies by chance while browsing courses and came across the AsAmSt 294 Resources for Vietnamese American Studies course. It completely changed how I saw my education and my identity. For the first time, I found myself in a classroom with peers from similar backgrounds, where the questions I've had for years about my identity, my family's history, and what it means to be Vietnamese American were finally acknowledged. Being in a space like

this not only made me feel understood but also helped me grow academically and personally. Once I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in law, many of my professors connected me to resources that helped guide me in the right direction. Through those connections, I've met mentors and found opportunities to work with organizations like Boston Little Saigon, the 1975: A Vietnamese Diaspora Commemoration Initiative, Greater Boston Legal Services, and the Asian American Resource Workshop. Working with these organizations showed me how Asian American Studies can connect directly to policy, advocacy, and legal work.

After graduation, I plan to continue gaining experience in the legal field as I prepare for law school. My experiences in Asian American Studies have shaped how I understand the historical and political forces that contribute to present-day issues of justice and community, and they will continue to guide the work I do moving forward. I hope to stay involved in community-based work and continue supporting efforts that center Asian American voices, expand access to resources, and address the structural inequalities that impact marginalized communities. Ultimately, I know I want to be able to provide a voice for those the system often overlooks or fails to protect.

# Recognizing Graduate Student Contributions

## Xi Oscar Chen (陈曦), MPP, Public Policy

I grew up in Guangdong, China, where I was part of the majority culture in every sense. I came to the United States during high school and finished my bachelor's degree in economics at UMass Amherst in 2024. I was drawn to

economics because I wanted to understand why poverty persists and how inequality reproduces itself. The same curiosity brought me to the Master of Public Policy program at UMass Boston, where I wanted to look for practical solutions and see how institutional rules land in ordinary lives. Professor Peter Kiang welcomed me and showed me how that work landed in communities.



One of the most fruitful experiences I had with the Asian American Studies Program was watching strangers become a community inside those classrooms. We live in a lonely time, and connections like that are very much needed for us to stay united as an ethnicity and to increase understanding among each other. As a research assistant and archival staff in the program office, I got to see how the program built and sustained those connections. Moreover, Professor Peter Kiang guided my academic thinking and connected me with alumni who helped me think about my future. Professor Sơn Ca Lâm pushed me to engage with different fields of knowledge and helped me think about my research more broadly.

After graduation I want to work in research—at a think tank or in a policy-facing role—on questions I have been sitting with since I first picked up economics. I am interested in how institutions are designed and what incentives they create. Can specific incentives expand what kinds of work exist and make it harder to exploit the people doing the work. Education policy and labor economics are my two main fields of interest. Asian American Studies grounded that interest in something human, in communities where those questions are not theoretical but daily. The research questions I am carrying forward were shaped here, and I am grateful for that.

# AsAmSt Program Sampling from 2025-2026

## Re-Vitalizing Asian American Cultures & Health Practices



Re-energized by Prof. Lingling Zhang, Associate Professor of Nursing and Director of the Nursing PhD Program, we offered AsAmSt 345 Asian American Cultures & Health Practices for the first time since 2022.



Lingling's strong community connections, clinical expertise, and caring pedagogy engaged students who must manage health care complexities within their immigrant families as well as those seeking professional careers with cultural humility in the health fields. Guest lectures by practitioners such as AsAmSt alumna, Theresa Tran, from the Boston Public Health Commission grounded the course. With Oscar Chen's bilingual TA support, students were challenged to deliver community health presentations for children and elders at Quincy Asian Resources Inc (QARI)'s lunar new year festival and Rainbow Adult Day Care in Quincy.

## Re-Generations and Re-Tellings: Fifty Years after the Fall of Sài Gòn



The newly-published special issue (vol #12) of *CUNY Forum* published by the CUNY Asian American/Asian Studies Institute includes a bilingual, co-authored article by Linh-Phuong Vũ with behavioral health clinician, Thanh Phan, "My Child, Our Elders Used to Say... Nothing in the Pond is More Beautiful Than the Lotus - Con Oí, Ông Bà Ta Có Nói... Trong Đầm Gì Đẹp Bằng Sen," plus AsAmSt Program Director Peter Kiang's critical historical synthesis article, "Boston Anti-Asian Violence: Re-Manifesting Anh Mai's Legacy," and a poetic tour-de-force by Prof. Sơn Ca Lâm, "Biên | Biển | Biển: Out of (Im)Possible Places" which renowned journal editor, Russell Leong, calls "brilliant" and predicts "will become a classic in Vietnamese and Asian American literature".

## A Clear Bright Return to Mt. Hope

In April, Prof. Peter Kiang, shared three decades of work about Boston's historic Chinese burial grounds in Mt. Hope Cemetery to help open the 2026 Temple of Our Ancestral Dreams exhibition at the Pao Arts Center in Boston Chinatown. Peter's scholarship and pedagogical commitments at Mt. Hope through annual field trips with students in the AsAmSt 423 Boston's Asian American Communities course since 1993 are featured in a new nine-minute documentary about the community significance of the burial grounds produced by award-winning filmmaker, Kenneth Eng, which also premiered at the event.



## Learning from Myra Liwanag as Iskwelahang Pilipino Turns 50

Extending our commitment to expand Filipino American Studies at UMB, Myra Liwanag plus Liam Crampton as TA offered a local Filipino community-focused version of AsAmSt 200 Introduction to Asian American Studies in Spring 2026 with full enrollment and a wide range of guest presenters and participatory activities, including HOY! PINOY! student performances. Myra is the esteemed director of Iskwelahang Pilipino which celebrates its golden 50th anniversary in May. IP is the longest-running Filipino language and culture school in the US, having served local immigrant families for generations, including many children who later attended college at UMB.



## Exploring Asian American Studies Intelligence in the Story Data Lab

Through courses, ongoing projects, and the platform of her Endowed Distinguished Professorship, Shirley Tang continued to advance the agenda of the AsAmSt Program's Story Data Lab, particularly in relation to ideas of accuracy, authenticity, awareness, and accountability for Asian American Studies intelligence. By specifically exploring what is AsAmSt Intelligence, Shirley challenged her team as well as students in each of her AsAmSt courses to become more clear and competent in relation to "story data conception, (co)production, archiving, and use of Asian American Studies story data in this new age of A.I." Following her direction that "we need fresh, creative approaches to plant, grow, harvest and share original, authentic, algorithmically-independent intelligence," staff members of the 2025-26 Story Data Lab—Ammany Ty, Nía Duong, Kim Soun Ty, Arlene Vu, and Parmita Gurung—responded in a variety of ways through original creative work, project support and co-production in both introductory and advanced applied research courses, and experimentation with new formats of exhibition and public engagement. The Lab's first MasterClass Series with Paul Watanabe is also nearly completed.



To demonstrate examples of original, hand-crafted art-making, Arlene produced a plant-just-seeds block printing collection while Ammany welcomed the fire horse new year in watercolor. Similarly, seeking to engage in-person community audiences directly, Story Data Lab staff exhibited their original, pandemic-based, multilingual, illustrated children's book, *Hira Makes a Sound*, at the Lowell-based Cambodian American Literary Arts Association's first literary festival in March 2026.



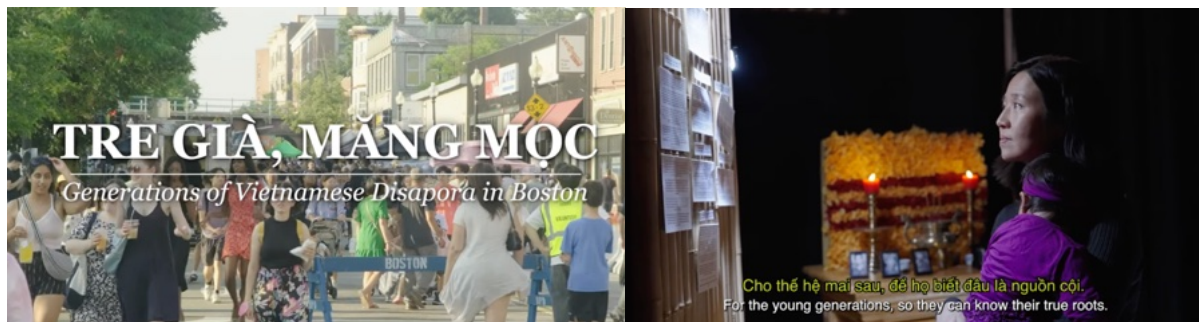
Culminating in May 2026, the Story Data Lab and AsAmSt 398 hosted "AsAmSt Intelligence: a Data Justice Student Collection" in the Venture Development Center space with premieres of 14 new student creative co-productions, including five rich, multilingual, personal narrative videos, a mixed-race identity visual novel, a bilingual poem collection, community-engaged research on Vietnamese language access in Quincy, art and sculpture installations dealing with sociocultural dynamics of race, beauty, family, and intergenerational understandings, a podcast sampling of local Khmer tales, a representation-based zine and fashion line, and a pop-up theater performance using original art and drama. Nearly 100 students, faculty, staff, friends, family members, and VDC tenants attended. Each project illustrates themes of data justice and expressively shows how and why AsAmSt intelligence is so authentically distinctive.



## Faculty-Student-Alumni-Community Synergies

Core doctoral students, Kim Soun Ty and Linh-Phuong Vũ, maintained their teaching excellence during 2025-2026, each with a unique modeling of community research, public education, and documentary care.

In addition to offering her signature AsAmSt 270 course, Cambodian American Culture and Community, for the ninth consecutive year, Kim also completed our third and final year of partnership with the Lynn Public Schools through the state-supported MA Genocide Education program. Culminating with a campus visit in May 2026, 22 Lynn high school youth and two high school teacher leaders participated in a workshop on cultural identities, followed by a class session in AsAmSt 223 Asians in the US with Kim guest-presenting on her dissertation research about Khmer refugee experiences of lead poisoning in Lynn during the 1980s-1990s.



While teaching AsAmSt 228L Asian Women in the US, Linh continued to lead a full agenda of cultural, educational, entrepreneurial, and civic activities from her platform as Community Program Director for Boston Little Saigon. Linh's creative vision and community dedication will be richly displayed in the new bilingual 90-minute documentary film, *Tre Già, Măng Mộc: Generations of Vietnamese Diaspora*, which premieres in June 2026. Drawing on her 1975 Oral Stories initiative which has documented local, inter-generational community histories across 50 years, the film includes voices and footage from some of Linh's AsAmSt students as well as scholarly analysis provided by Prof. Sơn Ca Lâm. The film [trailer](#) also shows Mayor Michelle Wu with baby Mira (above) experiencing the Fireflies Across Generations: 50 Years of Vietnamese Diaspora immersive exhibit designed by Linh with AsAmSt students in 2025.

Profs. Sơn Ca Lâm and Lakshmi Srinivas centered numerous community sites and voices in their AsAmSt courses as well. Notably, Sơn Ca redesigned AsAmSt 423 Boston's Asian American Communities in Fall 2025 to focus on diasporic food stories with visits by local Asian American chefs while Lakshmi also featured several guest speakers and scholars in her remote AsAmSt courses each semester.

## SJCCS Campus/Community Contributions

During 2025-26, sixteen AsAmSt students, including five immigrants and eleven US-born with immigrant or refugee parent origins from Cambodia, China, India (Gujarat), the Philippines, and Viet Nam as well as lineage from Barbados, received discretionary scholarship support through our heartfelt Stanley and Josephine Chen Community Scholars (SJCCS) program. Six students continued to receive a second year of SJCCS support, while ten were freshly selected. SJCCS scholarship support complements other financial aid assistance that students typically receive. Our added support enables some to reduce burdensome loans or work hours unrelated to their academic and career interests, in addition to directly reducing tuition and fee costs. In return, students assume varied leadership and service roles, including



internships in community settings such as the *Sampan* newspaper of the Asian American Civic Association (AACA) or as teaching assistants in high-enrolled AsAmSt courses linked to priority areas such as Cambodian American Studies or Filipino American Studies. In her staff role as Student/Community Engagement Coordinator, Nia Duong (left photo: Mel Taing), manages the orientation, communication, and assessment/reflection with our SJCCS scholarship recipients. In the coming year, we also intend to re-connect more directly with our alumni and community partners from the pre-COVID SCCS decade from 2010-2020.

## AANAPISI Federal Funding Ended; AANAPISI Designation Continues



With grants for all AANAPISIs terminated by the executive branch, the campus formally concluded sixteen years of AANAPISI-funded impacts from 2010 to 2026 through the Asian American Resource Office (AARO) and Asian American Student Success Program (AASSP). This ended the longest period of continuous AANAPISI Program funding by the US Department of Education for any college/university in the country. Numerous contributions of staff, faculty, alumni, community partners, and sister AANAPISIs in metro Boston have strengthened UMass Boston's capacities for "servingsness" that support Asian American student access and graduation, and we generated many innovative models and lessons for first-generation student development as well as urban, public student- and community-centered teaching, research, and advocacy. Importantly for the future, the AANAPISI designation continues to exist in law through the nation's Higher Education Act enacted by Congress, despite administratively-ordered halts to funded programs. For now, therefore, the campus ecosystem nourished by AsAmSt and IAAS for more than three decades through our "enclaves of excellence" capacities, must continue to maintain healthy visions and commitments, while also holding institutional memories of AASSP/AARO's impacts.

## Appreciating Professor Paul Yashihiko Watanabe

Professor Paul Watanabe—the guardian keeper of our urban public research university’s historic civil rights mission and one of the nation’s most influential voices regarding policy research and advocacy with Asian



American communities—has retired from his faculty role in UMB’s Political Science Department after a remarkable 46 years of dedicated teaching. Going forward, Paul still leads the Institute for Asian American Studies (IAAS) where he has served as director since its founding in 1993. As IAAS Director, Paul, served as a faculty co-Principal Investigator—

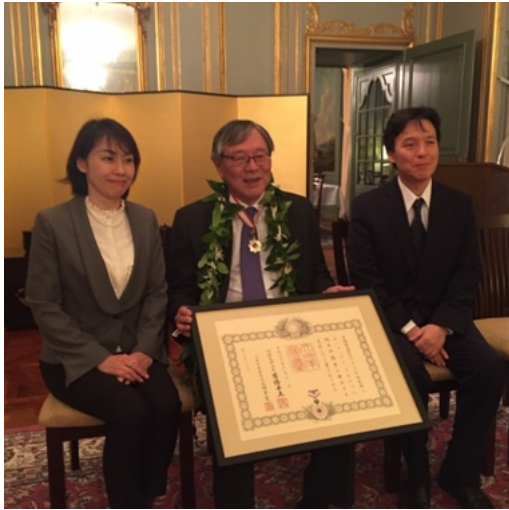
together with AsAmSt faculty Peter Kiang and Shirley Tang—in securing multi-year Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) grants which cumulatively totaled over \$10M from 2010 until 2026 when minority-serving grants programs under the US Department of Education were halted by the current administration. UMass Boston was the only school in the country with continuous AANAPISI funding to increase access and degree completion for low-income Asian American students throughout the past 16 years.

Paul’s most powerful long-term teaching contribution in Asian American Studies for the past 25 years has been his departmental and Honors-based offerings of PolSci/AsAmSt 265L World War II Internment of Japanese Americans which, when possible, included field-based experiences for students to visit the historic Los Angeles Little Tokyo community and the Manzanar National Historic Site in Southern California.



Paul’s original course field trip with UMB students to Manzanar in 2009 (above) and his culminating trip in 2025 (left) were each documented by Shirley Tang and her co-production team. Shirley’s Story Data Lab is currently in post-production for a video-based Asian American Studies MasterClass Series focusing on Paul’s teaching of the WWII Incarceration experience and its legacies. This inaugural MasterClass project featuring Paul should premiere in Fall 2026.

In 2013, based on the AsAmSt Program's nomination, Paul received the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Service—one of the three highest faculty honors possible at UMB. That same year, he was profiled in one of famed photojournalist Don West's portraits of local heroes.



Five years later, at a truly radiant *Ichi-go Ichi-e* (一期一会) once-in-a-lifetime moment In January 2018, then-Consul General of Japan, Rokurichiro Michii and his wife, hosted an official ceremony where—on behalf of the Japanese Emperor—Paul was formally conferred the *Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon*.

Marking the magnitude of Paul's profound contributions as a faculty member, we offer two added perspectives that share long-term admiration and appreciation—both personally and programmatically—from AsAmSt Prof. Son Ca Lâm and Lecturer, Pratna Kem (photos below from Pratna):

**Son Ca Lâm:** I have known Paul since I was an undergraduate student. At first, I was intimidated by him because of his reputation for academic rigor and for constantly challenging his students, so I never actually took a class with him— something I regret to this day. However, I made up for that by being involved in the IAAS throughout my graduate years as a research assistant, and eventually as a chaperone on Paul's legendary trip to Manzanar with his students. I saw a softer side of Paul on this trip. I watched how he shared his family's stories and how he drew from their experiences of being persecuted by their own government to fuel his unwavering advocacy for others facing injustice. I soon realized that this was different from any other academic field trip; it was a pilgrimage for us all, and a privilege for me to witness.

As I got to know Paul over the years, I came to truly admire his care for students. When I taught my first class at UMass Boston in 2013, Paul was the first guest lecturer I invited. I remember that talk in detail to this day. I always tell my students now that when they hear commentary on the radio or see quotes in the newspaper regarding Asian Americans in Massachusetts, Paul is usually the person behind them. Despite his many national platforms—including having served on President Obama's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders—he still generously agrees to speak to my classes. He continues to be my 'top' guest speaker. From my time as a student to now as a colleague, Paul has always kept it real with me. I have learned so much from his frank honesty, his integrity and sense of fairness, and his incredible intellectual breadth. I feel lucky to have access to him as a mentor on our humble UMass Boston campus for the people.

As the longest-serving employee at UMass Boston, Paul has seen this campus and the world shift and evolve. What strikes me most is that he continues to be deeply optimistic, which is a trait that I am inspired by. When I say that I want to be a 'lifer' here at UMass Boston, it is because of Paul and the commitment he has shown throughout his life and career to this collective mission.

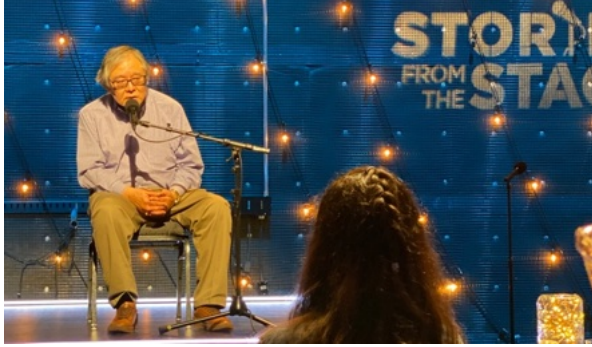


**Pratna Kem:** If you told me two decades ago, when I met Dr. Paul Watanabe in my first year as an undergraduate at UMass Boston, that we would be spending most of our days together lately at Fenway Park having an Italian sausage and a Coke—diet for Paul—I would've told you that I would never see him again after I graduated college.

Yet, here I am; absolutely privileged to be able to call Dr. Watanabe a teacher, a friend, the Big Guy. To know him is to be in awe of his intellect. Not only does he have an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution and foreign policy, but he also has a nearly encyclopedic knowledge of everything else, too, from football stats to Mormonism to Saratoga racehorses. I've never seen him unable to have a deep and thoughtful conversation about anything with anyone. Through him I have learned to always be a learner and not to constrain myself to a type of expert I think I should be.

To know him is to be in awe of his depth of care. He has achieved so much in his career, and yet, he demonstrated so much commitment to his mentorship of his students spanning multiple generations. After having the honor to go on the Manzanar pilgrimage with him twice now, I have seen that each time he is not simply guiding students on a tour of history, but giving us a deeply personal piece of himself to take along with us and carry forward for the generations after us—and I have been moved to tears each time that he tells us that he often wondered about the dreams his mother had before her internment and how he would fight like hell to make sure we realized our own dreams as young people.





To know him is to be in awe of his resilience and courage. He is the most incredible orator I have ever watched; not just because of how he speaks, but because of how the content of his words hold up the collective voice of communities despite often not being what people want to hear. He has also stood up for what he thinks is right and fair and honest, and that has always been a compass for me when I am unsure of what needs to be said.

I cherish every moment I spend in an Asian American Studies class because I know I did not have to fight for those classes myself. I know that it was the work of many like Dr. Watanabe to overcome barriers beyond what we could imagine; especially in the context of an Asian American Studies Program on the east coast. Dr. Watanabe is a giant in the fields of Political Science and Asian American Studies and has built a legacy for many of us, both locally and nationally, that I don't even think we can possibly or adequately comprehend. However, I will try because he means that much to our history as an Asian American Studies Program and community.



To my dear friend and mentor, Paul, thank you for inviting me into the most intimate parts of your life, if only for those few moments. I will forever cherish the big laughs, the awkwardness, the silence, and the love.



bottom photo: Natalie Nigito Photography, May 2026

## Hopeful Homeplace (Re/In)novations

As academic year 2025-26 ends, our AsAmSt Program offices are 100% contents-empty with greenlit UMB-contracted demo/reno plans to be completed before Fall 2026.

Utilized intensively and continuously by faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners since 1993, the multi-purpose, always-busy home space of AsAmSt in W-2-097 has been the three-decades-long site of: countless meetings, never-ending reflections, praxis presentations, proposal critiques, curriculum brainstorming, short/medium/long-term planning, faculty-student critical conversations, guest lectures, job talks, gallery displays, art exhibitions, t-shirt printing, canvas mural painting, textile sculpting, story salons, glam photo shoots, multi-station digital video post-production, story-chef cooking competitions, oral history interviews, daily pedagogical preparation, mixed methods data analysis, multilingual/multi-generational/multimedia archival preservation, library referencing, frequent eating, theater-of-the-oppressed rehearsing, CAPAY youth intervention, Bruce Lee appreciation, no whining clarification, storage limitation, arctic-like airflow, post-rain ceiling water leak mitigation, active shooter protocol huddling in darkness, candle-lit birthday celebrations, administrative file management, pre-deadline all-night editing, donor consultation, inter-generational wisdom-sharing, spirit world recognition, real blood, lots of sweat, plenty tears, and much more.



Here, AsAmSt alumni could always visit and re-visualize prior motivating memories of connection and growth in W-2-097. Some alumni have since crafted professional leadership trajectories on campus with their own generative office spaces nearby. But for most others returning from outside—especially those who visited this year and brought their children to show off where their first-generation college-going younger selves had loved school—the empty shelves and half-packed moving boxes triggered immediate concerns, questions, and threat-based hypervigilance. *What happened?!? What's going on?!?!? Can I do anything???*



In truth, the physical purging experience for our program—which began in summer 2025 and has continued throughout the entire academic year 2025-26—did not spark joy for any of us, though we still fulfilled all of our duties and responsibilities. Yet, we also witnessed the youngest generation—children of our alumni—finding their own ways to adapt creatively to our imposed physical chaos. Faced with a serious *shikataganai* situation, we have done our best to ensure a process of renovation for innovation, while regretfully knowing that many magical student/community-centered moments of our past will be far less likely when we return.

The Asian American Studies Program recognizes with appreciation:

- our continued physical presence for 33+ years within the Phillis Wheatley Peters Building where core AsAmSt faculty, staff, and students remain mission-centered, in part, through generous support from committed donors, alumni, community partners, and campus collaborators.
- remembrances of three impactful colleagues who joined their ancestor worlds during 2025-26: *Zelda (Zee) Gamson*—founder of UMB's Higher Education doctoral program where former AsAmSt affiliated faculty Mitch Chang and Sam Museus each held their initial tenure track positions and where UMB AANAPISI staff directors, Pat Neilson and Sara Hoang, each earned their PhD degrees. *Takeshi Kokubo*—teacher of UMB's Japanese language courses and advisor for the campus Japanese Student Club from the early 1980s until he retired in 2005. Sensei Kokubo helped ease the homesickness felt by many visa students from Japan who attended UMB in large numbers prior to the 2008 global recession. He also introduced Japanese language and culture fundamentals to many diverse students influenced by the worldwide commercial reach of manga, anime, and J-pop. *Esther Yae Iwanaga*—teacher of AsAmSt/ENGL L-221 Introduction to Asian American Writing course from 1997 until her retirement in 2010. Yae reached hundreds of immigrants and international students who also took her ESL courses, and she attracted serious student writers, such as Pratna Kem and Yasuhito Yamamoto. Prof. Rajini Srikanth and Yae co-edited the pathbreaking anthology, *Bold Words: A Century of Asian American Writing*, published by Rutgers University Press in 2001, in part, to inspire their students in AsAmSt/ENGL 221L.
- Honorable Vanna Howard, a Cambodian refugee student from Revere at UMB in 1987-90, who made history from Lowell in 2026 as the first Khmer American elected state senator in the US.
- Dr. Hongyan Yang, recently hired as Senior Research Associate for the IAAS.
- our retiring campus champion of undergraduate general education, Neal Bruss—one of the few who has truly “seen” us in AsAmSt and who supported our early growth as an academic unit while he served as CAS Dean in the 2000s and beyond.
- never-failing staff assistance by Sarah Paterson, Iris Martinez, Joe Corkery, John Carty, Steve Ward, Ivy Bui, Kinh Ha, Frances Chow, Paloma Britt, Gary Chan, Trieu Ly, Vivian Tran, Joe Ly, Molly Pedriali, Dee McNamee, Ryan McDonald, Jessica Holden, Jessica Snodgrass and others.

Please visit UMB's Asian American Studies Program [here](#).

For community news and fresh AsAmSt content creation, see: [IG](#) and [FB](#).

View AsAmSt graduation booklets from 2008 to current year [here](#).

Donate to the Asian American Studies Program Capacity Fund [here](#).

uncredited photographers inside include: Oscar Chen, Liam Crampton, Nia Duong, Parmita Gurung, Pratna Kem, Peter Kiang, Shirley Tang, and others.

AsAmSt Program



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