

# API Heritage Month

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## SPEAKERS

Simeon Man, Dulce Dorado, Nancy MacInsau, Lindsay Romasanta

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### **Lindsay Romasanta** 00:00

Welcome to Triton Tools and Tidbits. I'm your host Lindsay Romasanta and I'm with Dulce Dorado. This week's episode is about Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage Month and also the Asian American Pacific Islander minor. Let's go ahead and dive in. So, Nancy and Simeon, welcome to our podcast. We're so glad that you could join us today. Please tell us about yourself and your role on campus.

### **Nancy MacInsau** 00:15

Wow Lindsay, thank you. My name is Nancy MacInsau. I use she/her gender pronouns, and I oversee educational programs for students, staff, and faculty at the Cross Cultural Center. I also consult with students, staff, and faculty on matters relating to equity, diversity, inclusion, social justice matters, and representation. I've been at UCSD for about 25 years, and I've had the opportunity to teach students both at UCSD also Cal State University San Marcos where I got my master's in sociological practice. Then I had a teaching gig at Southwestern College in San Diego. I also identify as second-generation Pinay, or Filipina-American mother of two teenage children, and have lived in San Diego for most of my life. As a kid, I did move around a lot. My dad was in the Navy, and we've lived in Hawaii, Illinois, and California. Thanks for having me.

### **Lindsay Romasanta** 01:32

Thank you, Nancy. It's great to hear about all of your life experiences and your professional experiences. Simeon, it's so great to have you here with us.

### **Simeon Man** 01:41

Thank you so much for having me. So, I am a professor in the history department. I teach Asian American history. And I'm also the director of the Asian American and Pacific Islander studies program, which I know we will be talking about. I've only been at UCSD for five-ish, six years. Yeah, thank you so much for having me.

### **Dulce Dorado** 02:13

So great. Welcome again, Nancy and Simeon. You know, I'm really excited about the upcoming Asian and Pacific Islander American Heritage Month celebration. Nancy, I know you were instrumental in

kicking that off 15 years ago. Can you start by just telling us how it started at UC San Diego? And how did the committee land on the theme of empowering community through reflection and recognition?

**Nancy MacInsau 02:38**

Thanks, Dulce, for that question. 15 years ago, a student who is now staff - a former student of the Cross Cultural Center Joseph Allen Ruanto-Ramirez - wanted to amplify magnify the voices of Asian Pacific Islander Americans on campus, starting with student organizations. And Joseph also worked with faculty from departments like ethnic studies, and other departments, wanting to create a list of programs for the campus community. This was in 2006. So, you have to remember that social media wasn't as widespread as it is now. Facebook became popular later in 2006. And so what Joseph and I did - and at the time, I was working at the Cross Cultural Center, and also a member of the Pan-Asian Staff Association, still am - we resorted to making posters and paper calendars that we distributed to students, staff, and faculty. We also relied on the networks to get the word out. We did have a newsletter. It wasn't as fancy as it is now - we didn't have a lot of images - it literally was Microsoft Word and asterisks. That was the extent of it. And that project that Joseph worked on actually became the incentive, the impetus to create a yearly programming event called Asian and Pacific Islander American Heritage Celebration, which is what we know now. That's how it started. Joseph is still with us, and there's still a core of Pan-Asian Staff Association members that help to program activities every year with the campus community. What was the other part of that question Dulce?

**Dulce Dorado 04:35**

How did the committee land on the theme of empowering community through reflection and recognition?

**Nancy MacInsau 04:41**

Okay, so I have to let you know that over the years we've had different titles. But the common thread that brings everything together was really highlighting our stories. These are stories that are often either distorted, stories that are silent, voices that are silenced or suppressed. In the past, we've had themes such as exploring identities, building bridges, reading consciousness. And in reflecting this last year - especially with a pandemic, being in quarantine, having the uptick of aggressions and attacks and anti-Asian sentiments, compounded with other things that were happening in the community with police brutality, Black Lives Matter - we wanted to have a theme that really called for action and accountability to address the social climate. So, the part of the title that has reflection in it - we're empowering community reflection and recognition. Reflection means that we're critically thinking about things that are happening now, and how those things are related to the past. We have a context. Even though there's been a surge - I think I've seen this in reports - reports of hate crime, and extremism, and also stop AAPI hate, it surged by about 150% over the last year. So, the reflection piece is, again, taking pause, being aware of what's happening around us. And then the recognition piece is being able to name those injustices, because activating our agency or taking any kind of action begins with being aware of what's happening. So that's the recognition piece. It's also a nod to making visible the experiences of Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage, because we know, in history, that there has been a practice of systemic exclusion. A lot of this history is not taught. Oftentimes, it's the victors that get to write the histories, or get to write the dominant narrative that we've come to learn. But really, this is a way to create space to address some of those stories that have been hidden.

**Dulce Dorado 07:12**

That's great Nancy, thanks for sharing. Especially the story about you and Joseph in the very beginning. But I also think that this celebration is so timely right now, given the current discussion and discourse in our country. What would you like the campus community to know about the month-long events? And maybe - if you kind of highlight maybe a few events, or what the URL is for the for the celebration?

**Nancy MacInsau 07:36**

Oh, sure. So, you could actually look on UCSD link under Asian and Pacific Islander American Heritage celebration. It's a long title, but it's definitely worth it. I would like people to know that they can engage with our events, learn about opportunities to engage with other people, to share their knowledge. I know this last year has been really tough with what has been happening in our local and our national climate, with the transition and leadership, for example. That was a big part of this compounded grief that we've been experiencing. And I would want people to know who are still grieving that there's the community of support, that they're definitely not alone. There are moments when we can also celebrate - those moments of joy - and we can step it up and be better allies, and practice being allies. You know, that's lifelong work. That's an ongoing production process. So, I'm using allying as a verb here to signal that constantly learning - language is always evolving. And I would want people to also practice self-care and kindness, practice grace and compassion.

**Lindsay Romasanta 08:59**

Thank you so much for that Nancy. Simeon, we would love to hear more about the Asian American Pacific Islander minor. We understand that you're the Inaugural Faculty Director - so congratulations - and that this just launched last June. Tell us about the history of how it was founded. And why is it so important for UC San Diego students, staff and faculty to know that this academic offering is available for our campus community?

**Simeon Man 09:30**

I have to admit that I am still learning about the history of how it started, because hearing what Nancy just shared about the role that you all played in creating this AAPI Heritage celebration - that was something that I had no idea about - so I'm still learning. I will say that in when I came in in 2016, I was introduced to a group of students who called themselves Coalition for Critical Asian American Studies. This was led by primarily queer API students who - year after year in my first few years here - they held these mixers where they introduced and talked about the push, and their demand to create an Asian American Studies Minor. And so CCAAS—the Coalition for Critical Asian American Studies—in 2014, they issued an open letter in response to anti-Asian racism and anti-Asian violence that was happening elsewhere during that time. One of the things that they wanted to see was the creation of a program - in addition to other things, other ways that the university can support the API student population here. That's the history that I knew. But then, this past year, I've been really lucky to be in conversation and share the space with a number of students who were interested in learning more about the longer history. It was in this space where we started looking at archival materials from the UCSD library - where we learned that these efforts began in the 1980s with Professor James Lin, who is professor emeritus in mathematics, teaching the first Asian American studies course in 1986. And their efforts - student efforts and Professor Lin's efforts - to create a minor. That's to say that there's a really long legacy of student activism to create this program. And I think right now is an incredible time to have this

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program. I think it's important that students see their histories, and literatures, and communities reflected in the curriculum. And I'm really pleased that the API studies program can provide that. I also think it's really important that students feel seen at this institution in various ways. And I think having an academic program also helps with that. The last thing I'll say, too, is the timing of the program - starting in 2020 with everything that was going on, and everything that is going on now, with Black Lives Matter, with protests against police violence - all of that is also a really important reminder for us that API is a coalition of projects, that we have to continually uplift these other struggles that may not fall under the API category. I just want to say that

**Lindsay Romasanta 13:22**

thank you so much, Simeon. When I was an undergrad student, the first time that I ever had the experience of having an API professor was when I took an Asian American Studies class. I was born in the US, but it wasn't until college that I had an Asian-American faculty member. And we didn't have a minor - we had a certificate - but I took every single Asian American Studies certificate class, because it was so validating to hear of Asian American experiences. But it's such an injustice that I needed to wait until I was in college to hear about these untold histories, and the fact that we've been a part of the American fiber for so long. So, thank you so much, Simeon, for reminding us of that, and acquainting us with the history at UC San Diego. It's fascinating how both of you acknowledged student activism as being forefront in these pieces. And I think that's something that we also need to continuously celebrate. Thank you for reminding us of that.

**Dulce Dorado 14:24**

Yeah, thanks Lindsay, and thanks, Simeon, and Nancy. I think that was the other thing that stood out to me too - it's the student initiatives and student activism, you know? People can make a difference, and have done so. And I know, Nancy, earlier you talked a bit about this challenging year and trying time for the AAPI community in many ways. So, my question is - really to both of you - what are ways that you both continue to stay fueled to do the work of celebrating, acknowledging and educating our campus about the API experience?

**Nancy MacInsau 15:02**

I think for me is being able to share space with folks who are able to relate to what I'm going, whether that's, you know, grieving, talking about the violence that has happened in our communities thinking about our families, too, because people have been attacked, you know that like me and people that look like members of my family. I tried to stay grounded by doing other things such as you know, being out in nature, it's in for you've been in quarantine for the last year. But I think sharing space and being able to express, you know, our feelings and our strong emotions, and being in a space where we can be vulnerable, has been really helpful for me. And then also celebrating, and exercising gratitude for what we do have. So, it's the support, the love that we have, being able to communicate with other people helps feel me and my kids feel me thinking about their future, and also teaching them about social justice, equity, social inequities, has been a major motivating force for me. How about you, Simeon?

**Simeon Man 16:19**

Yeah, so this year has been incredibly challenging. And yet, I've also been surprised that I've actually found new friends, made new friendships, built new communities during the pandemic. And I'm

incredibly grateful for folks who I am able to share space with, and who are working together to try to make this a better place for our students. So, want to give my hat's off to a lot of the staff, actually. Nancy [?], API Programs and Services Manager, because I think this particular moment has taken a toll on many of us, but that a lot of the unseen labor of caring for students often fall to API staff, API faculty. I really want to give that shout-out and give that acknowledgement. I think it's also really important for us to recognize - and here I'm speaking as a faculty member who I think has also undergone a lot of learning this past year, in terms of realizing how I am, in some ways, perpetuating some of the harm and violence that Asian American students are experiencing - just by merely upholding certain standards in the classroom. So, I think it's really important for us to take our students' word when they say that they need something, instead of trying to ask, or guess, are they, or are they not in need of what they're asking? I think it's super important for us to compensate our students, compensate our faculty, compensate our staff - all of this extra emotional labor that we're called to do at this moment. We should recognize that.

**Nancy MacInsau 18:58**

I'd like to chime in to thanking someone for sharing. I was reflecting on what you were saying earlier, and then now about the unseen labor, the emotional labor that goes into caring for our members of our community. You talked about Jim Lin. Jim Lin was also one of the founding members of the Cross Cultural Center, so I appreciate that you mentioned Jim. And then you also talked about - Simeon - this long legacy of activism. And I wanted to bring that up again, because there has been a long legacy of activism involving Asian Pacific Islander Americans in the US, which has largely been ignored in the telling of our story. And Lindsey, when you get brought up being excited about getting that certificate, and having a Pinay, or Filipina professor, I totally resonate with that because I would get excited when I would see folks who look like me in the movies, in the film - and kind of dating myself here, but when I would watch musicals and think "Oh my gosh! Lea Salonga! She's Filipina." So, I get excited when I see people like me in popular culture, it's a thrill. And sometimes people around me who don't identify as myself don't get it. That's where privilege and representation come in. So, I definitely understand the importance of representation in higher education, and also in media. Positive representation. Oh, also, when Simeon was talking about the Coalition for Critical Asian American Studies, speaking of visibility or invisibility - because I think those two things are a bit of a conundrum when it comes to Asian Pacific Islander Americans. So, you have these exaggerated negative stereotypes about Asians that was not helped by our former president, who labeled and framed the virus and attached it to Chinese identity - different names, and I won't repeat here. But also, as part of that coalition, the students were calling and pushing for representation in counseling professions. So that goes for both counseling professions for students, and also Asian Pacific Islander American representation for staff. And that's actually an ongoing conversation that we're having now with the faculty. That's the program, and then also representation in the curriculum. While I appreciate ethnic studies, I actually think that if Asian Pacific Islander American Studies was something that was offered in "regular" history courses, rather than having to find a niche of ethnic studies, I think we would all be better off, and to start that education early on.

**Lindsay Romasanta 22:04**

Thank you so much Simeon and Nancy. I think it reminds me of a lot of the work and research that folks have done that looks at development of Asian American students. And so much about that is about

reflection and learning about your identities. It's really powerful to have both of you, and all the staff that you've acknowledged, and the students, who are recognizing how important that is for our UC San Diego students.

**Nancy MacInsau 22:34**

Thank you, Lindsay.

**Dulce Dorado 22:37**

Thank you, Simeon and Nancy. I think that what you shared, too, about what continues to allow you to stay fueled to do the work - what really stuck out to me is continuing to share that space with our colleagues, and providing gratitude, and being community. This is a continuous learning process for all of us, and for everyone here at UC San Diego. So, thank you.

**Lindsay Romasanta 23:05**

Okay, anything else - Simeon and Nancy - that you want to share?

**Nancy MacInsau 23:08**

Thank you again for the opportunity for us to share insights and perspectives. We're sort of feeding off of each other's stories. I would encourage everyone to check out, of course, the Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage celebration link that is on the UCSD website - if you search for those keywords - and to take care of yourselves. Take care of yourselves, especially during this time of political turmoil, and also celebrate the hope and activism.

**Simeon Man 23:46**

Yeah, I also just want to say thank you for hosting this conversation for having me and Nancy. Check out the API Studies program website. If you're a student, take our classes, declare a minor. We also have some upcoming events this month, so please be on the lookout. Thank you so much.

**Lindsay Romasanta 24:09**

Thank you, Nancy and Simeon.

**Nancy MacInsau 24:11**

Thank you.

**Dulce Dorado 24:13**

Thank you for joining us today on Triton Tools and Tidbits. I hope that you'll join us for the Asian and Pacific Islander American Heritage Month celebration, and also please check out the AAPI minor program. Join us next week on Triton Tools and Tidbits. Thank you.