

The Pacifica

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ODU Asian Pacific American Student Union (APASU)

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The One Who Started It All: Keith Chow



It was in 1998 when Keith Chow, a sophomore at Old Dominion University at the time, realized that the best way to make Asian American friends was to join a cultural organization on campus. The only problem, however, is that he didn't want to limit himself to one culture.

"During those times, Asian Americans were highly segregated amongst the individual ethnicities," said Chow. "If you went to a group of Chinese kids and asked them what they thought about Vietnamese people, you'd get an endless list of hateful words."

As a Chinese American himself, Chow grew up in a small town where all Asian people banded

together since there were so few of them overall. It wasn't until he started college that he was faced with what he calls "intraracism."

"I realized that if I joined a single-culture club, then I wouldn't be allowed to hang out with people that weren't of that culture," Chow explained.

So he did what no one wanted him to- he created an organization that celebrated all cultures. He named it the "Asian Pacific American Student Union" with the specific mission of celebrating every Asian culture instead of limiting himself to one.

"I specifically chose the word union because that's what I wanted to do- unite."

Now almost 20 years later, APASU is still thriving with over 50 official members and Chow has made a career out of bring Asian American representation to pop culture and mass media.

Chow has since been featured

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in the *New York Times*, *NBC News*, and multiple blogs about Asian representation in comic books. He has even been a special guest at San Diego's Comic Convention, one of the most popular gatherings for all things nerdy. Today, he mostly writes for his blog, *Nerds of Color*, about Hollywood's whitewashing of popular Asian characters.

When asked about what motivates him, Chow replied with, "I'm Asian and proud."

From Schoolmates to Soulmates

Chaulong Nguyen joined APASU as a freshman in 2011 after a friend convinced her to attend a meeting, and she instantly fell in love with the organization's purpose of celebrating all Asian cultures instead of focusing on just one.

Steven Nguyen was studying occupational and technical studies at the time as a non-traditional, older student while also working for his family business. He joined APASU as a way to meet new people with a similar cultural background as him and found out about the organization through a flyer posted on campus.



Neither of them expected to make life long relationships with members of the club, including each other.

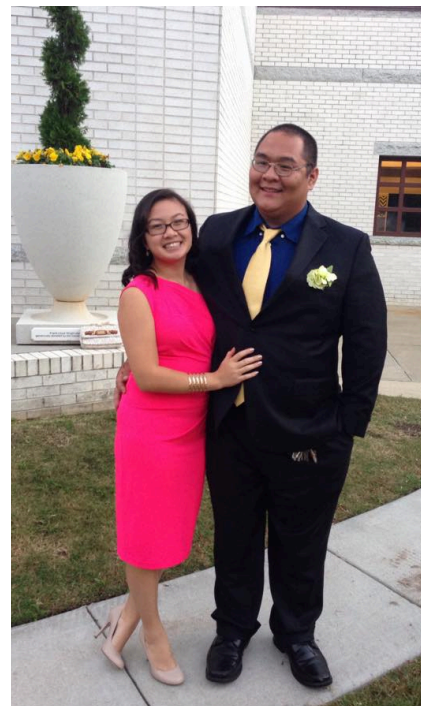
They were introduced to each other through a mutual friend, and they haven't been apart since.

"I met most of the people I know today through being involved in APASU," Chaulong admits.

Although Steven eventually left school to work full-time and Chaulong decided to transfer to another school to study surgical technology, they still stayed friends with the same people and stayed together through it all.



In February of 2017, Steven proposed exactly one week after their fifth anniversary and one week before Chaulong graduated from college. They haven't set a date yet, but they do know that most of the guests will be from the same club that first brought them together.



Street Food Workshop Brings Smiles to the Table

If you've ever been to an Asian country, then you know that some of the best foods come from the most casual places.

In Asia, street food vendors can be found almost anywhere you go. From the sizzling oil of the frying foods to the smells of the sugar, salt, and spice in the hot and humid air, street

food is a unique experience that can only be described as a theme park for food connoisseurs.

As such a prominent aspect of Asian culture, APASU created an entire workshop to bring a small part of the experience to its members. Volunteers signed up to bring in their favorite foods to share the different flavors

from around the world. Members brought in fried bananas, pancit noodles, dumplings, three-bean dessert soup, and egg rolls.



The Importance of Retreating

Even though members of APASU meet once or twice a month, how well does everyone *actually* get to know each other?

“Member retreats allow us to just hang out as friends. We don’t have to worry about an agenda, or who hasn’t signed in yet, or who hasn’t paid their dues- we just get to relax and have fun,” says Executive Board member, Tetsuya Sato.

This year, the chosen location was on the Eastern Shore,

approximately an hour’s drive away.

“One thing we do have to worry about before the trip is actually planning the rides, sleeping arrangements and food,” noted Sato. “But once everything is sorted, we can enjoy the trip.”

Around 30 members signed up for the two-day trip and spent their free time playing sports, participating in food challenges, and playing ice breaker games.

The members also had a large bonfire and roasted marshmallows while reminiscing on funny moments that had happened during meetings throughout the semester.

Sato further explains that the trip really cements the feeling of having a “tight knit family” when they return, something that APASU prides themselves in having.



What APASU Means to Me

By Hang Tran

Growing up, I was one of the few Asian students in all of my years throughout public school. I dreaded every first day because no one ever pronounced my name correctly because it was so unusual to them. The thought of having a foreign name made people so uncomfortable, that I considered legally changing it to something more American so that I could “fit in.” It wasn’t until I started college that I began to see more people who looked

like me. When I joined APASU, I didn’t know what to expect. I had grown up with such little interaction with Asians, that it took me a while to actually get used to it. For once, people understand the struggle of having parents you can’t always communicate with. They understand the frustration of being stereotyped as the math genius or the engineer. Most importantly, they understand how vital it is to remember where

you come from, where your parents come from, and so on. They understand that living in the United States can easily make you lose your culture. Joining APASU not only helps me feel less like an outsider, but it also helps me remember that my culture is the most important part of me, and that my roots are the foundation of who I have yet to become.

2017: Year of the Rooster



Chúc mừng năm mới! 新年快樂 ! Happy New Year! Lunar New Year, that is! Some east Asian countries such as China and Vietnam celebrate a lunar new year that is based on the cycles of the moon, whereas most western countries celebrate the new year based on the solar calendar. This holiday is one of the biggest festivals of the year, and is celebrated with firecrackers, rhythmic drumming, and a lion dance that is meant to ward away evil spirits. Each year at ODU, a Lunar New Year celebration is hosted by APASU and the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) and features performances by the Filipino American Student Association and Jow Ga Kung Fu Association. Here are some pictures from this year's event!

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