Education doctoral candidate committed to community service

Having already earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University, Sacramento State graduate student Chao Vang jokes about getting a “Made at Sac State” tattoo on his shoulder once he completes his doctorate in educational leadership. But the 25-year-old concedes that his parents, who emigrated from Thailand in 1979, would not approve.

Neither of Vang’s parents earned a college degree, but they value the importance of education. He is the fourth of his siblings to have graduated from Sacramento State. Factor in numerous cousins who are Hornet alums, and one can see why Vang considers this campus and the friends he has made to be his second family.

Vang was accepted by several competing doctoral programs but chose Sacramento State’s because he believes in the University’s core mission of teaching, learning and service.

His career goal is to work in some capacity at the University, preferably as a professor. He’s now a part-time lecturer in the Ethnic Studies Department and an intern in Admissions and Outreach, and he works with the Full Circle Project to increase graduation rates among Asian American and Pacific Islander students. He’s also assisting Professor Greg Yee Mark in compiling an archive to honor the late Professor Wayne Maeda, who taught at Sac State for 40 years and was a co-founder of the Ethnic Studies Program.

Community involvement has been Vang’s hallmark since coming to Sacramento in 2005. He organized the campus-based Hmong Heritage Week that begins Monday, April 21, to highlight the culture’s history, legacy and future. There are more than 26,000 Hmong in Sacramento, according to the University’s Office of Institutional Research, and the 900-plus Hmong students who attend Sac State represent one of the nation’s largest concentrations of such students.

In 2012, Vang spearheaded the Community Health and Wellness Fair sponsored by the Hmong Health Alliance. “I believe in connecting with the community,” says Vang,
who chaired the event. He takes seriously Sacramento State’s commitment to expand the University’s regional imprint.

Vang has tutored students, worked with young children with autism and did his student teaching at Hiram Johnson High School, part of the 65th Street Corridor Project, which focuses on an economically disadvantaged and diverse community served by Sacramento State.

Because a summer bridge program helped Vang make the successful transition to Sac State, he wants to serve as a role model in the same way ethnic studies Professor Tim Fong has for him. Vang says Hmong students seldom go to college, let alone get an advanced degree. “I’m the only one of my high school friends who went to college,” he says, “and many wish they had followed my example.”

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Alan Miller

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