Full Circle Project: Three years and thriving

Sacramento State’s Full Circle Project was established three years ago to provide a strong academic support system for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students. The group now numbers 300 students, many of whom gathered recently in the University Union to hear an inspiring keynote address by Sac State alumna Dr. Sa Vang.

President Alexander Gonzalez welcomed the attendees and praised the project’s role in providing AAPI students a resource to enhance their college experience. As the first in his family to earn a college degree, Gonzalez was delighted to see so many diverse students determined to earn their degrees.

Vang, who was born in Laos and spent the first three years of her life in a refugee camp in Thailand after the Vietnam War, earned her bachelor’s degree from Sac State in 2000. She and nine other Hmong family members have either graduated from or are attending Sac State.

The eldest of 10 children, Vang was a surrogate parent to her younger siblings. She also had to overcome cultural barriers to become a physician.

Although Vang expressed an early interest in medicine, her mother cautioned her to concentrate on becoming a dutiful wife. Undeterred, she excelled in school, married, had a child and kept pursuing her dream.

That was the gist of her message to Sac State students as she implored them “to dream big” and keep striving no matter how difficult things become. “Overcome your fears,” she urged, “and don’t let others discourage you from succeeding.”


Her brother, Chao Vang, is pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership at Sac State. Community involvement has been his hallmark since coming to Sacramento in 2005. He organized the campus-based Hmong Heritage Week that highlights the culture’s history, legacy and future. There are more than 26,000 people of Hmong ancestry in Sacramento, according to the Office of Institutional Research.

Two years ago, Chao Vang spearheaded the Community Health and Wellness Fair sponsored by the Hmong Health Alliance. “I believe in connecting with the community,” he says. He takes seriously Sacramento State’s commitment to expand the University’s regional imprint. He has tutored students, worked with autistic children and did his student teaching at Hiram Johnson High School as part of the 65th Street Corridor project, which serves an economically disadvantaged and diverse community served by Sacramento State.
Chao and his sister reflect Full Circle’s core mission of student engagement on campus and in the community.

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