

13.

A Short History of Asian/AAPI Heritage Celebration at LaGuardia Community College

Tomonori Nagano

AAPI Heritage Month, or Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month, is an annual celebration of the history, culture, and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States. It is celebrated every May across the U.S.

The AAPI Heritage Month has its roots in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a group of AAPI activists, scholars, and community leaders sought to raise awareness about their communities' histories and struggles. The group lobbied Congress to recognize the contributions of the AAPI community. In 1977, Congress passed a joint resolution to establish Asian Pacific Heritage Week in early May. The resolution also noted the significant contributions of the AAPI community to the history and culture of the United States.

According to the record at the LaGuardia Library Archive, the first AAPI Heritage Month Celebration at LaGuardia Community College took place in 1991, following a CUNY-wide Asian Heritage Month celebration in 1990. The first celebration was originally called "Asian American Heritage Month," which was later renamed to "AAPI Heritage Month" in 2020 to better represent the diversity of Asian American faculty and students at LaGuardia Community College.

Terry Parker at the Library Media Services took videos of the AAPI Heritage Month in 1992 and 1993. According to these recordings, Kyoko Toyama and Harvard Lim led a faculty-student panel discussion on the diversity of Asian Americans in 1992. In 1993, a similar panel was held, followed by a fashion show of Asian traditional attires, a demonstration of Filipino sword fighting, and an introduction of the Chinese writing system.

Records between 1994 and 2001 as well as 2003, 2005, and 2009 are missing, but a number of long-term faculty and staff recollect that the AAPI Heritage Month continued to be celebrated during that period as well.

In 2002, the Korean Club sponsored an event on Wednesday, May 22, 2002, featuring traditional Korean music, dance, and martial arts. Korean food was sold and the food sale was donated to the surviving family of Alfred Vukosa, a LaGuardia student who died in the World Trade Center tragedy of 9/11, while working on his Coop Internship. "Gagaku Concert," sponsored by the Japanese Club, was also held at Little Theater on Wednesday, June 5, 2002.

The AAPI Heritage Month in 2004 stands out for the representation of elected-officials (or elected-officials-to-be) in the event. In addition to Virginia Fields, Manhattan Borough President, John Liu (future New York City Comptroller and NY State Senator) and Peter Koo (future NY City Councilmember) attended the event. Joyce Moy, Executive Director of Economic Development and future Director of Asian American / Asian Research Institute, chaired the planning committee and Gail Mellow, President of LaGuardia Community College, had a welcome remark. The program consisted of a series of reflections shared by faculty and student leaders of Asian-related clubs.

The 2006 events appeared to explore a new format of the celebration. Instead of a series of individual reflections, the 2006 celebration featured music performance and held the “Asian Rock Festival featuring Johnny Hi-Fi, Voodoo Soul, and Kevin So” on Saturday, May 6, 2006 in collaboration with the Laguardia Performing Arts Center (LPAC). A faculty-led panel on “Who is Asian Anyway? And What Does it Mean in America?” was also organized on Wednesday, May 17, 2006. The panelists included Joyce Moy, Kyoko Toyoma, Julio Chang & Kiman Thai (Students), Suma Kurien & Frank Wang (Faculty), and Reine Sarmiento & Robert Park (Staff). There were welcome remarks by President Gail Mellow.

The theme of the 2007 event was “Honoring Tradition - Taking On the New” and the AAPI Heritage Month continued to work with LPAC to host a month-long film screening event in May 2007. The AAPI cultural day was organized and featured both student and professional performers who demonstrated Asian music, dance, and performances on Wednesday, May 9, 2007. The performances were held at the Cobblestone Stage and this format of cultural celebration still continues today. A few Asian-based small businesses sponsored the cultural celebration and hosted a raffle event with prizes, including one round-trip domestic air ticket and pairs of NY Yankees game tickets. The library archive indicates that there is a recording of the event, but the recording itself is missing. Reine Sarmiento chaired the planning committee.

The format of the 2008 celebration largely followed the previous year. The events consisted of a faculty-led panel discussion (“Asian Americans Leading the Way” on Wednesday, May 7, 2008) and the cultural day at the Cobblestone Stage on Wednesday, May 14, 2008. The 2008 celebration took place in collaboration with the CUNY-wide conference on Asian American Women, which took place on Friday, May 16, 2008.

In 2010, the planning body of the AAPI Heritage Month became formalized and created a working committee. Reine Sarmiento, Assistant Dean of Enrollment Services (and current Interim Vice Chancellor of CUNY for Enrollment Management), and Ann Matsuuchi at Library took on the co-chairship of the Asian Heritage Working Committee. The AAPI Heritage Month events in 2010 included a panel discussion titled “Asian-Americans in Leadership Roles,” a table tennis tournament with Yanjun Gao, a LaGuardia student who was an international table tennis champion, and cultural celebration performances. The theme was “Asian Heritage Throughout the Diaspora: A Celebration of Our Contribution and Culture,” and all events took place on Wednesday, May 12, 2010. Buttons/Pins with a designed logo were created and distributed. Kyoko Toyama hosted a peace talk event with two Hibakusha (A-bomb survivors) on Wednesday, May 5, 2010. A recording of the events by Girard Tecson is available on his YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/hJy5VVZpr6I>).

In 2011, a series of educational and cultural programs were organized on different topics including career (exploring Asian Americans in a variety of health careers), community (promoting civic engagement and cultural diversity), culture (encouraging the exploration of Asian culture via film, poetry, music and literature), and philosophy (understanding cross-generational gaps in identities

and cultural expectations among 1st, 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian immigrant families). A recording of the events by Girard Tecson is available on his YouTube channel. A special charity auction event was also scheduled in 2011 to support the victims of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. The festival was preceded by the charity art auction for Japan, in which as many as 85 art works were contributed from the students and faculty of LaGuardia, local artists in New York, and some from overseas.

The 2012 AAPI Heritage Month was a month-long celebration from April to May of 2012 with a series of workshops and film screenings. The topics of these workshops/film screening included Vincent Chin, the Grace Lee Project, Asian art, Asian philosophy, and academic success among AAPI students at LaGuardia. The Ambassador of Japan came to LaGuardia to commemorate the 100th year anniversary of the gift of cherry trees from Japan to the U.S. and planted two cherry trees on campus. The main celebration took place on Wednesday, May 9, 2012. NY1 featured the celebration this year (<https://youtu.be/nIr37Lh9uUs>).

The AAPI Celebration in 2013 took place on Wednesday, May 8, 2013, featuring a welcome remark by NY Comptroller John Liu. A series of art events such as a conversation with Sin-ying Ho, who was featured in “Routes,” a 12-episode TV documentary series on the spiritual odyssey of 12 well-established Chinese American visual artists, and ceramic workshop by Sin-Ying took place as well.

The AAPI Celebration in 2014 was again a series of performances/panels from April to May 2014, including The New York Chinese Chorus on Tuesday, April 29, “Comics Studies Seminar: Alternative Manga Panel” on Tuesday, May 6, Monster Movie Panel (with Queens Poet Laureate Paolo Javier, Prof. Sigmund Shen, and independent film historian Karl Joseph Ufert) on Wednesday, May 7, and a panel discussion on social justice in Asia with panelists from Amnesty International on Tuesday, May 13, 2014. The main cultural celebration took place on Wednesday, May 7, 2014, with an opening remark by NY Comptroller John Liu. Two cherry tree saplings were donated to LaGuardia by the Japanese Consulate-General, which are still found in the courtyard. The college photographer started to take photos of the AAPI Celebration and posted them on the college’s Flickr site from this year.

The 2015 AAPI Celebration, chaired by Sandy Mao, probably had the largest number of workshops, each of which was organized by individual faculty members. The workshop included “Fresh Off the Boat Viewing Party & Panel Talk-back” (Ann Matsuuchi), “Indian Dance Lesson and History” (Payal Doctor), “Testimony of Hibakusha Wartime Survivors” (Kyoko Toyama), “Food and Japanese Popular Culture Presentation” (Robin Kietlinski), “Author Talk with Brandy Lien Worrall-Soriano on writing and survival” (Leah Richards), “Disasters and Japanese Popular Culture Panel” (Robin Kietlinski), “Taiko Drumming Workshop” (Kyoko Toyama), “Japanese Butoh Dance” (George Tsouris), and “STEM Career Panel for Asian and other Minority Students” (Shenglan Yuan). These workshops were held from March to May 2015. The main celebration took place on Wednesday, May 27, 2015 with an opening remark by Queens Borough President Melinda Katz. The New York Chinese Chorus performed again on Wednesday, May 20, 2015. SinoVision, a Chinese-language local news, featured the celebration (<https://youtu.be/3s0r9zRaBkc>).

The 2016 followed the same format as the previous year and organized a series of workshops from March to May in 2016. The workshops included “Myanmar Culture Workshop”, “Japanese Culture Presentation: Etegami”, “Kung Fu Workshop and Performance”, “Taiko Performances with Tamagawa University”, “Land of the Rising Sound: Bluegrass Music in Postwar Japan”, “Alternative

Sexualities in Manga”, “Film Screening: Asian American Mathematician”, “Screening of Tested (documentary) with Curtis Chin” and “Short Films by First Time Indian Women Directors.” The main celebration took place on May 25, 2016

Following the past few years’ format, a series of workshops from March to May in 2017. The workshops included “Asian Americans in Western Classical Music”, “‘Freedom isn’t Free’ by Kaoru Ikeda: the Japanese American experience in internment camps”, “Film screening: Slaying the Dragon Reloaded (2011)”, “STEM panel: Asian STEM Professionals”, “Is Buddhism a Religion? Student presentations on the Rubin Museum”, “Implementing Critical Asian American Studies across Disciplines”, “Kung Fu and Qi Gong performance in Shaolin tradition” and “Film screening of Brett Kodama’s One-Two-One-Seven: An Internment Story.” The main celebration took place on Wednesday, May 24, 2017 with opening remarks by President Gail Mellow and Joyce Moy.

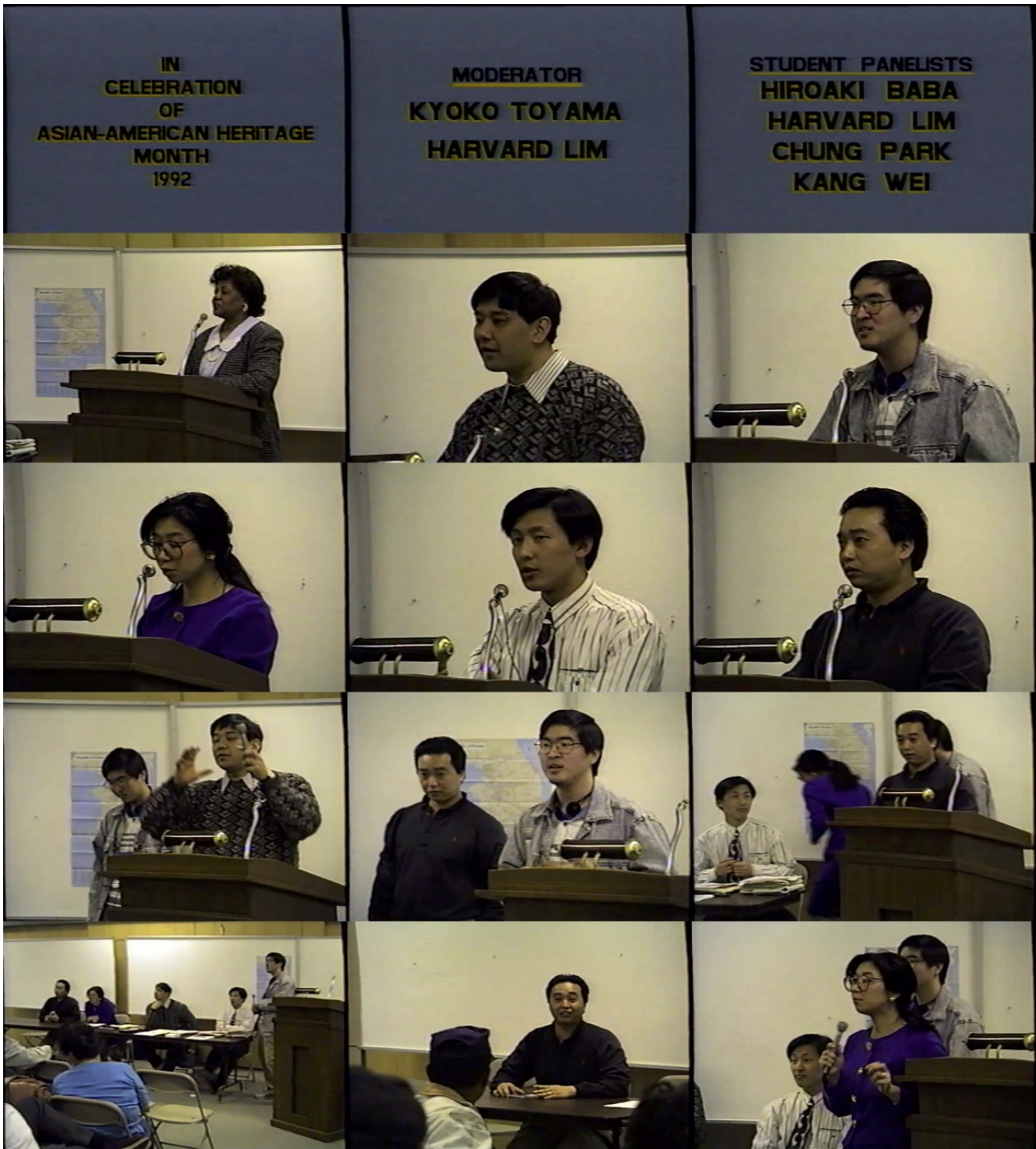
In 2018, the AAPI planning committee made a decision to host all workshops on one single day and organized a mini-conference rather than a series of month-long workshops. The workshops were organized on Friday, May 11, 2018, followed by the main cultural celebration on Wednesday, May 16, 2018, which was held in E-Atrium due to rain.

In 2019, the AAPI mini-conference took place on Thursday, May 9, 2019 and the AAPI cultural celebration was held on Wednesday, May 15, 2019. The mini-conference hosted a guest speaker from Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), who discussed immigrant justice for new Asian immigrants. The cultural performances included Afifa Hye’s Bangladeshi Traditional Dance, AKF Dance Studio: Chinese & Korean Hip-hop Dance, Japanese calligraphy performance by Koka, Indian Dance Performance by Anja Dance Company, Kung Fu and Tai Chi Performance, Saree to the New World, and several student performances (K-pop dance etc). The first issue of Asian American Voices, highlighting the talent and experiences of LaGuardia’s Asian and Asian American students, staff, and faculty was launched.

The AAPI Celebration in 2020 was scheduled on Thursday, May 7th, 2020 (mini-conference) and Wednesday, May 13, 2020 (cultural celebration), but both events were canceled due to COVID-19.

The AAPI Celebration in 2021 resumed online and focused on the anti-Asian hate and violence that became the central issue among the Asian American students, faculty, and staff during the pandemic. In collaboration with the Asian American Federation (AAF), the AAPI committee hosted several workshops on anti-Asian violence in May 2021. Carmelyn Malalis, Commissioner of NYC Commission on Human Rights, was the keynote speaker for the virtual mini-conference on Thursday, May 6, 2021. Other workshops included “I am not a Virus,” a virtual workshop by the Museum of Chinese American, and the COVID-19 Asian American Oral History Project.

The most recent AAPI Celebration took place in a mixed format of in-person and online in the first week of May of 2022. The mini-conference took place from Tuesday, May 3, 2022 to Thursday, May 5, 2022. The cultural celebration took place on Wednesday, May 25, 2022. Council Member Julie Won was the keynote speaker.





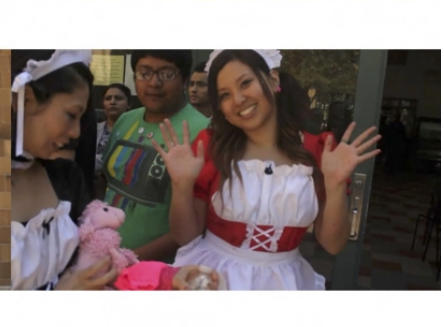
AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 12, 2010



AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 11, 2011



AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 9, 2012



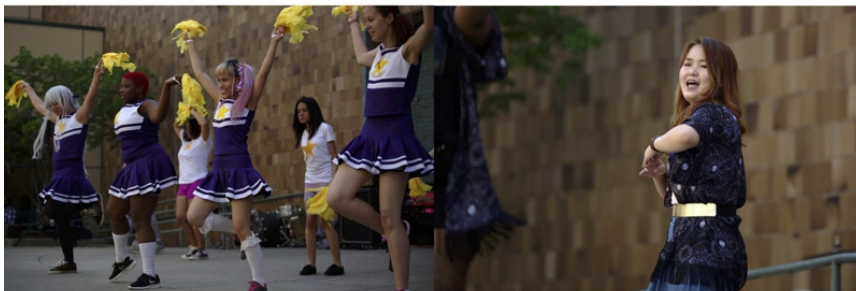
AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 7, 2014



AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 27, 2015



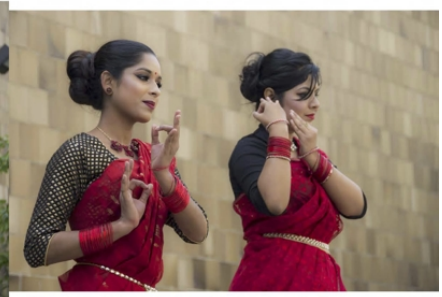
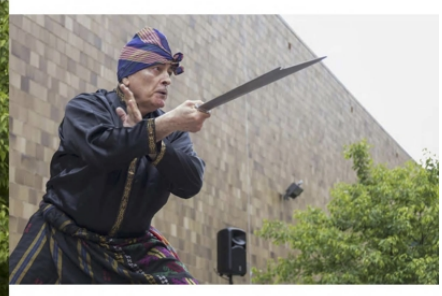
AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 25, 2016



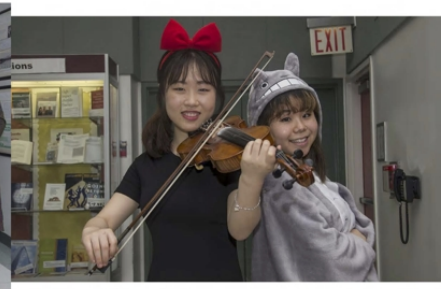
AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 24, 2017



AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 16, 2018



AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 15, 2019

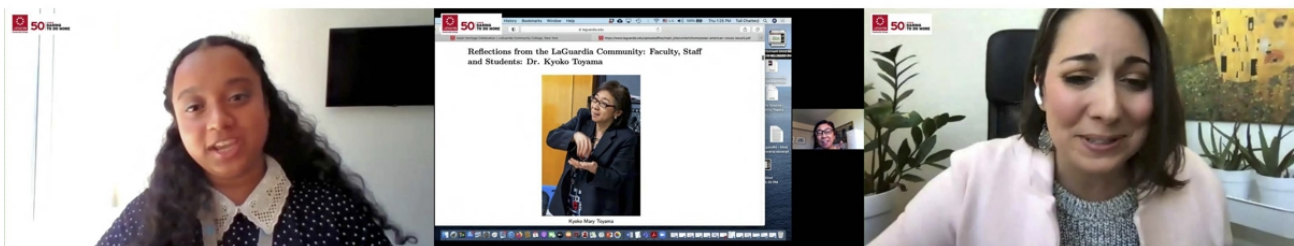
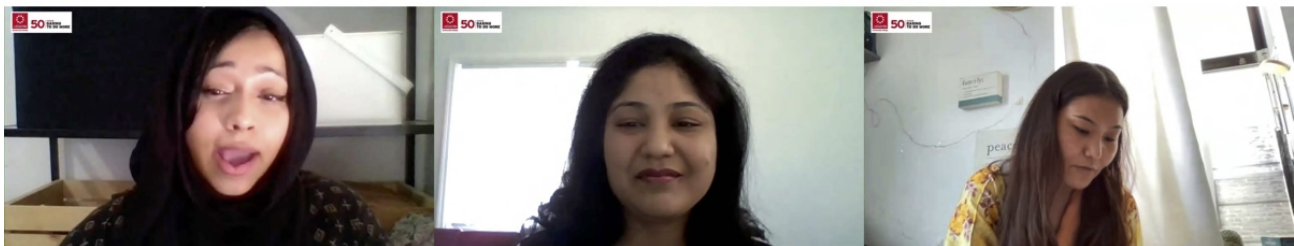
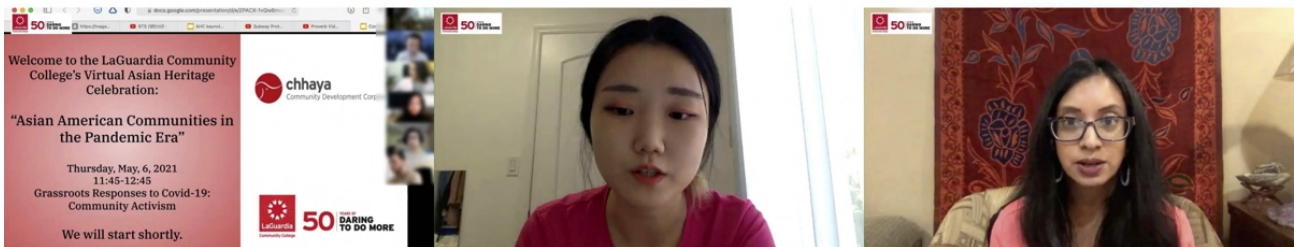
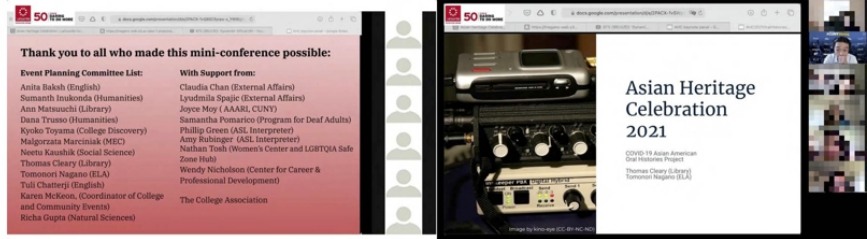


AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Thursday, May 7, 2020 (canceled)

AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Monday, April 26, 2021 & Tuesday, May 11, 2021



AAPI/Asian American Heritage Celebration

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

