**Emerging Identities: Southeast Asian Scholarship and Visibility**

**Lead Instructors: Chanira Reang Sperry, M.ED and Linda Ando**

**1.  What is the significance of this course?**

Southeast Asian Americans are invisible in higher education.  They have been excluded from many educational and support programs on college and university campuses.  They are one of the groups that are most harmed by the model minority stereotype because of the drastic disparities in resources and educational opportunities that these populations face that often gets eclipsed by this stereotype.  This targeted course for Southeast Asian students brings visibility and validity to their voices and experiences, which needs to be heard and understood.  Educational institutions have a profound influence on shaping campus environments to include and engage all students in the learning process.

**2.  Why is this course needed?**

Southeast Asian Americans have unique histories and immigration patterns.  In the 1970's, the wars in Southeast Asia generated enormous displacement of families.  Many Southeast Asians were forced to leave their homeland and they found themselves separated from families during this tumultuous flight.  It is important to gain awareness and understanding of these histories and how they currently impact Southeast Asian students' academic dispositions. Studies have examined the impact of refugee experiences on the lives of Southeast Asian immigrants.  Much of the research regarding traumatic war experiences and Southeast Asians is associated with psychological distress.  In addition, developing an understanding of an individual's cultural value system is paramount in education.  Southeast Asian cultures emphasize the significant role of family, hence programs that focus on social support, family support systems, and ethnic communities should be developed in addressing Southeast Asian students' academic and social needs.  This course is needed because it provides a community for Southeast Asian students to learn and grow.  Their ethnic identities and cultural experiences matter and are validated in this class.  The sense of affirmation and validation increases confidence in students' thinking and learning.

**3.  How did this course come to be?**

The Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity saw a need to close the achievement gap for many underrepresented students at the UW.  Upon further examination of retention and graduation rates by disaggregating the Asian American category from UW OMA&D internal data, the Vice President and Vice Provost for OMA&D, Dr. Sheila Edwards Lange, brought folks together to help the university think about ways to support retention and graduation rates for Southeast Asian students.  The course was created out of a need to provide direct and targeted support to Southeast Asian students who are affiliated with OMA&D programs (i.e. Educational Opportunities Program, Student Support Services, Student Transition Programs, CAMP).

**4.  What were some challenges in developing the course?**

1.  The research literature on academic achievement for Southeast Asian students is sparse.  Trying to find existing models for a course such as this one was difficult, however there were courses such as the CAMP Freshman Retention Seminar:  Learning to Navigate Academic Life in a Research 1 Institution and the TRIO SSS Seminar:  Succeeding in STEM that were significant in providing guidance and course methods for the development of the course.

2.   Recruiting Southeast Asians students to enroll in the seminar was challenging.  The data did not reflect the number of students who identify as Southeast Asian students on the UW campus.  This is in part due to the students not self-identifying on their admissions application.  Students also had many conflicts with their class schedules as well as extracurricular activities that conflicted with the time of the class.

5.  Figuring out whether the course should be offered for freshmen only or should the course be mixed in class standing.  In the end, we decided to go with mixed class standing as a result of Southeast Asian students learning from older siblings and peers.  The mixed class standing provides opportunities for juniors and seniors in the class to mentor and be role models for the freshmen and sophomores.

**6.  Tips for individuals who want to start a class similar to this one their campus.**

1.  Identify the purpose for the course.

2.  Research the student population.

3.  Develop course objectives and learning outcomes.

4.  Gather support from leadership and key partners.

5.  And the most important tip of all:  Plunge in!  You'll never be **completely** ready to roll out the course.  There is time to make adjustments to the course along the way.  Some of these times are the most fruitful and engaging learning moments.  Do not leave room for self-doubt.  This prevents the course from happening.  As my 12 year-old daughter eloquently states, "Not today fear.  Not today."