Ninety Years of Asian Americans at Loyola

Thomas M. Haney
in the early 1920s, the new Loyola University Chicago-appointed regent of the School of Law, Frederic Siedenburg, S.J., opened the school to diversification of the student body. While women and African Americans responded to this new opportunity almost immediately, it took Asians and Asian Americans just a few years longer to participate. But by the middle of that decade a young man from Kiangsu, China, named Chung-Yi Miao had enrolled. In an era when undergraduate degrees were not necessary for admission, Miao entered with an AB degree from Alma White College in Zarephath, New Jersey. When Miao received his law degree in 1927, he was the first person of Asian heritage to do so—and he marked the beginning of increased Asians and Asian American student enrollment at the law school that has continued for the past 90 years.

The following year, a Filipino man, Venancio A. Frando, received his LLM degree at Loyola. After high school in the Philippines, he attended the “Chicago Law School at Omaha University,” according to the University yearbook that year. He was followed in 1929 by two more Filipinos receiving their first law degrees, Simeon B. Fernandez and Thomas T. Martinez. Both were said to come from the Philippines, although Martinez had studied at Northwestern before coming to law school at Loyola.

In the next decade, a Korean man, Kyu Hong Chyun, received his law degree in 1935. Chyun also entered Loyola with an AB degree. He had studied at both Chuo University in Tokyo and St. John’s College in Greeley, Colorado.

Repressive immigration laws limited enrollment. These small numbers of Asian students were impressive, given that Asian (particularly Chinese) immigration to the United States in this era was essentially precluded. Asian immigrants already here were subject to discrimination across the country, although Chicago seems to have been a relatively safe haven for them. It appears, however, that there were no more identifiable Asians or Asian Americans at the law school until the 1970s. The national origins quotas and bans in national immigration law were finally removed in 1965. At that time the enrollment of Asian Americans burgeoned. Enrollies included women as well as men—such as Rosemary C. Lee (JD ’76), Viwan Yegumpidi Cohen (JD ’81), Regina Kevin Peterson (JD ’83), Fei Ping Chen (JD ’81), Ys-Chih Ong Cho (JD ’85), Jinhee Kim Wilde (JD ’85), and Hilda Contreras (JD ’85).

Ethnic diversity within the Asian American student body also exploded. South Asians—with family roots not only in India but also Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh—joined the mix, led by Cyriac Kappil (JD ’79) and Sunil Deshmukh (JD ’80). Kappil was tragically shot to death by the relative of a client in 1994, a situation that made local headlines at the time. The 1980s brought students with family roots in most parts of Southeast Asia—Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. At the same time, students with family roots in West and Central Asia (Iran and several Arab countries) began arriving at the law school, adding further diversity to the law school community.

APALSA is born, Thomas Tang takes off

In 1988, Asian American students under the leadership of Martha Ha (JD ’90) organized a group now known as the Asian Pacific American Law Students Association (APALSA), which is affiliated with the Asian American Bar Association of Chicago. The organization, currently advised by Professor Cynthia Ho, continues to provide support for students as well as the entire law school community with its participation in Diversity Week, Hunger Week, a mentoring program for first-year students, and other initiatives. Sameer Chhabria (JD ’99) and Hannah Yoo (JD ’09) are among the Asian American students who have been elected to serve as the president of the Student Bar Association. Loyola began participating in the Thomas Tang Moot Court Competition in 1994–95, two years after this event, intended primarily for students of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, was established.
Jennifer Gong (JD ’96) and Jinah Kim Yun (JD ’96) won not only the regional competition that year but also the national competition, where they won the Best Brief Award; Gong received the competition’s Best Oralist award.

In the next 13 years, at least one of Loyola’s teams repeated that record by winning the national competition in a remarkable eight of those years. In most of those years, a Loyola team also won the National Best Brief award and often took the Best Oralist award. A student team returned that spotlight to Loyola this school year by sweeping the national and regional competitions, as well as receiving Best Oralist and Best Brief awards (see page 26).

Leaders at Loyola

Asian Americans have won student awards for academic excellence, been chosen to represent Loyola in trial competitions as Philip H. Corboy Fellows, and served as editors of various publications. Ray Chao (JD ’96) was editor-in-chief of the Loyola Consumer Law Review as well as the student newspaper Blacklaw. Both Samuel Park (JD ’00) and Rye Shah (JD ’05) served as editors-in-chief of the Children’s Legal Rights Journal.

In the 1990s, Asian American graduates also began taking their place in the leadership of the Law Alumni Association. Martha Ha, Michael Cho (JD ’93), and James Chandler (JD ’00) have received the St. Robert Bellarmine Award, bestowed annually on an alum who has been in practice for 15 or fewer years.

Asian American graduates have also been honored by the Law Alumni Association. Martha Ha, Michael Cho (JD ’93), and James Chandler (JD ’00) have received the St. Robert Bellarmine Award, bestowed annually on an alum who has been in practice for 15 or fewer years.

In 2003, APALSA established its own alumni award for service to the profession and to the school. The recipients of the award, now presented every two years, have included Michael Cho, Sanjay Tailor (JD ’91), an associate judge for the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, and Young B. Kim (JD ’91), a magistrate judge for the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois (also see page 28).

The law school continues to actively recruit, enroll, retain, and graduate students from a wide variety of races and ethnicities. The entire law school community benefits from the participation of diverse students in all of its academic, professional, and social activities.