



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE/JACL

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JACL CONCLUDES SUCCESSFUL COLLEGIATE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE



2011 Collegiate Conference participants pose in front of the Capitol Building.

Washington, D.C.— The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) held its third annual Collegiate Leadership Conference in the nation’s capital from Thursday, June 9 through Sunday, June 12. Fourteen Asian Pacific American campus leaders from colleges around the country attended an intensive three-day program that introduced them to legislative issues affecting the Asian Pacific American (APA) community and the role APA civil rights organizations play in affecting public policy.

On Thursday evening, participants met with Miya Saika Chen, the Advisor on Community Engagement for the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. During an intimate welcome reception, Chen spoke to the students about her own experiences and answered questions about the issues the Initiative is currently working on. Traci Ishigo, a conference participant from University of California, Irvine, said of the dinner, “She really set the tone for our conference. I felt really inspired by the work she is able to do in the White House Initiative.”

The following two days of the conference were packed with skills training and issue-based workshops intended to provide students with the tools to create positive social change on their own campuses. J.D. Hokoyama, CEO and founder of LEAP (Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics) led a leadership training workshop on Friday morning that connected APA cultural values, effective leadership behaviors and perceptions and stereotypes of APAs. In the afternoon, participants were given an overview of Asian Pacific American history and their own family stories during a workshop facilitated by Phil Nash; Michael Lieberman of the Anti-Defamation League spoke to students about hate crime legislation and bullying.

On Saturday, participants learned about issues ranging from multiracial identity, immigration reform, environmental justice, and educational policy. Representatives from the Asian American Justice Center, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Education Association, and the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund led engaging activities and workshops that connected participants directly with the issues being discussed. Monica Thammarath from the National Education Association led a powerful activity in which students received a set of playing cards that they had to use strategically to navigate the United State's primary and secondary education system. Joana Leonido, a rising junior at the University of California, Santa Cruz, commented that this workshop "opened my eyes about education and privilege [and] really inspired to invest in educational policy."

Participants also had the chance to explore D.C. in the evenings through various outings. Warren Minami provided a touching and personal tour of the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism. Priya Marathe, a rising senior at the University of Pennsylvania, said of the tour: "[Mr. Minami was] a really great, relatable guy and a [the memorial was] lovely and isn't one of the obvious ones you visit when you come to DC." A networking dinner on Friday evening had students engaging with the JAACL DC Chapter's Young Professionals group, to learn about the various progressive organizations in the DC area and opportunities available for college students.

On the final day of the conference, Olivia Chow from the Asian American Justice Center, Ivy Ngo from the South East Asian Resource and Action Center, and Angela Lam from the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Development led a workshop that encouraged participants to share their own personal stories and passions as tool for mobilizing campus organizations.

Throughout the conference, participants had the chance to use their own leadership skills and experience from their own campuses to develop a plan to raise awareness about critical APA issues in their own communities. Groups created project plans around immigration reform, environmental justice and educational policy, and presented their plans to the rest of the participants and the conference coordinators on Sunday.

This year's program was coordinated by Ford Program Fellow Christine Munteanu, Norman Y. Mineta Fellow Leslie Toy and Daniel K. Inouye Advocacy and Policy Coordinator Jean Shiraki. The conference would not be possible without the generous support of UPS and Southwest Airlines.

"The JAACL conference was inspirational on so many different levels. The different generations of activists brought together from all over the country for a shared cause made me realize how much hope and potential there is for change and that we are all agents for that change."

- Sue Yee Chen, Bryn Mawr College

"It was an honor to have the opportunity to attend the JAACL conference. The combination of the workshops, size, conference leaders and other college students honestly makes this program the most beneficial and motivational APIA conference that I have been to."

- Emma Kimata, Smith College

"The JAACL Collegiate Leadership Conference was an amazing experience. I gained knowledge and made connections that have empowered me to take these issues back to my campus community. I hope to continue to grow and learn while staying in contact with the connections made."

- Kevin Mori, University of California, Irvine

