

1996

Collective Vision: Activism in Many Voices

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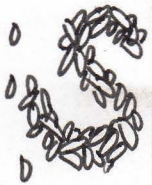
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COLLECTIVE VISION

activism in many voices



The Giving



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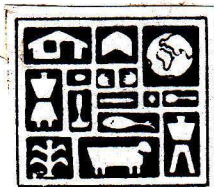
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Volume 1 - 1996

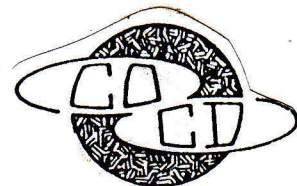
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A Message from the Heart

By Sally Habana-Hafner

Mother's Day 1996 was a time of celebration for the extended family of Amherst CIRCLE. A gathering at my house honored and recognized the leaders of different age, sex, color, and background who helped shape what Amherst CIRCLE is today. In particular, it was a special moment for a unique group of undergraduate students from the University of Massachusetts, Mount Holyoke, and Smith College. Being of Asian descent, they and I shared a common bond, all of us having experienced the marginalization, isolation, and cultural confusion as refugees, and immigrants, or as children of refugees and immigrants. It was no surprise to me that I have developed affinities to them.

In this preface, I would like to show my appreciation and pride for these unique students and for what they have become, to recognize their leadership of The Giving SEED program and to acknowledge their contributions to Amherst CIRCLE.

I will never forget the first group—Trinh, Mai, Thien, Rin, Heap, Hau, Anh, Lan—joining CIRCLE for the first time and how they struggled to work together as a group in reaching out to their communities. Later, the next wave from Mount Holyoke—Cristina, Thao Mee, Kristine, Reena—experienced similar challenges. Through the years, however, I watched them grow, individually finding strength from the group and collectively feeling confident of their actions. Seeing them become who they are now only reaffirmed my belief in finding opportunities for students to be heard and to explore their creativity. I have seen their spirits become full of cultural pride, integrity, and strength.

These students have been pioneers and builders. As members of the Student Advisory Council, they explored new terrains to discover the power of collective leadership for building communities. In reflective moments, we discussed the burden put on them as future leaders and community builders and the responsibility they shoulder in holding the seeds of their parents' dreams for tomorrow and the promises of their communities. Yet they knew taking small steps were better than no steps at all. Through CIRCLE, they also learned that collective action can bridge the divide of race, ethnicity, class, age, and gender, making them tomorrow's coalition builders.

The legacy they have left for future young leaders is The Giving SEED, a creation of their collective work. In creating this program, they demonstrated the ability to work with each other by allowing each person to do his/her best in contributing to the vision. By working together, they developed a sense of collective power and understanding, and an emotional and intellectual bonding took place.

I think mentoring the young and creative minds of these students is perhaps one of the greatest contributions of CIRCLE. Their passion for learning and activism has been inspiring. We became partners in exploring new ways of knowing, relating, and being. Together we helped each other learn, love, and question, and in the end, we developed meaningful and caring relationships fundamental to our own individual transformation. Working with staff mentors like Janna, Magda, and Michael also has given me rich satisfaction in being part of CIRCLE.

Friends for life we will always be. Forever, they hold a place in my heart.

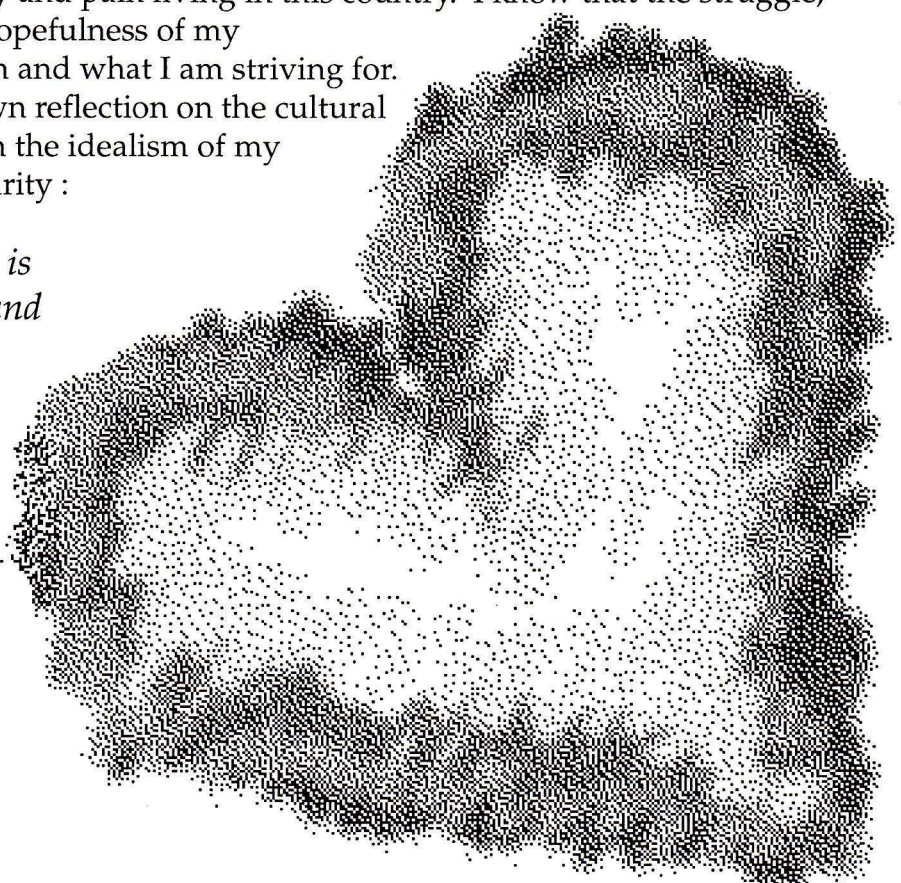
I know we walk on separate paths now. Yet, we hold the same dream of creating a future for our families and communities. Deep down, I feel each one will find a new road to walk and join other visionaries in pursuit of a new activism and transformation.

One last thought—I hear my own voice in these pages as an immigrant in the 60's and a new citizen in the 70's. It is amazing how setting down the experience of these students awakens my own memories of joy and pain living in this country. I know that the struggle, the pain, the optimism, and the hopefulness of my younger years made me who I am and what I am striving for. So I end this message with my own reflection on the cultural crisis of our times, springing from the idealism of my youth and the insight of my maturity :

*I feel the very fabric of our lives is
interwoven with our cultures and
identities*

*We unravel threads
of thoughts, emotions, and
passions ready to create a new
pattern of being and living,
each expressing our own
visions and stories and
actions*

*Together we weave a tapestry
of peace and justice
for all of us.*



Acknowledgements

The act of giving and sharing was at the heart of putting together “Collective Vision”. The booklet is a gift to be passed on to future SAC leaders who, in turn, will pass on the gift of their own voices to the next group. It is to the SAC founders that Amherst CIRCLE owes an immense gratitude. Their beliefs, thoughts, actions, and passions have resonated in both words and activism. Thanks to their vision, the Giving SEED program has planted its potential for change in many communities. Their dedication and commitment to learning and activism have inspired all of us.

A special appreciation goes to Cristina Natividad who, in countless ways, helped sustain her SAC fellows during their last semester before graduation in the many tasks involved with producing this collection—reviewing reflection papers, writing biographies and poems, etc. She single-handedly kept the project going over the summer while her friends had left for more fun things, glad to be done with college life. We are sure that fellow SAC classmates are eternally grateful to Cristina for getting this first volume off the ground.

We also thank all the youth and collective leaders from refugee and immigrant communities who shared their common expectations, frustrations, and experiences of being caught between two cultures with the SAC students. Likewise, SEED and SAC would not have evolved into what it is today without the caring guidance of staff mentors like Janna Shadduck, Magda Ahmed, and Michael Goldberg. *Thank you one and all!*

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Part One A Collective Vision

Visions are conceived in passion and actualized through work and dedication.

Part I describes how the Giving SEED program (Students for Education, Empowerment, and Development) evolved from the passion for community activism by a diverse group of college students. Today it is a vital, growing student-youth mentorship program bringing hope for the future to the newcomer communities it serves. Also introduced here is the Student Advisory Council (SAC), the founding body that created the SEED program.



The Giving SEED

Students for Empowerment, Education, and Development

Recorded in the following pages are the voices, hearts, and stories of refugee and immigrant undergraduate students and their experience with community building through their Student Advisory Council and a unique mentorship program, the Giving SEED.

Offered through the Center for Immigrant and Refugee Community Leadership and Empowerment (CIRCLE), the Giving SEED links newcomer youth to college undergraduates as a way to increase the youth's chances of educational success. Both the youth and their newcomer undergraduate mentors are trained to become bi-cultural, bi-lingual collective leaders who can mediate between their home culture and the mainstream world. The program strengthens vital connections between newcomer youth, college students, and older community members as they collaborate on community projects.

Since 1975, up to a million refugees have fled their war-torn homelands in search of freedom and a better way of life in the United States. Traumatized by war and loss, many refugees today continue the process of adjusting to American culture. The experience of immigrants to this country, although less severe, also has been a story of personal and cultural alienation. Newcomer children have had to contend with particularly confusing situations when they are expected to be American in school and Cambodian or Russian at home.

In addition, many newcomers come from rural backgrounds with little formal education, and their ability to negotiate an urban, technological environment is severely curtailed. Their children suffer in schools because of their lack of knowledge and skills to give the support expected by the schools and that other children have come to expect of their own parents. Students, teachers, and community alike view this lack of involvement as apathy. As a result, newcomer youth may receive little or no support from their families for attending college, which remains mysterious and unknown territory for them.

Newcomer students who have nonetheless broken through the higher education barrier and gone to college continue to face particular challenges because of their bi-cultural identity. Western ideals of democratic participation and community service are only meaningful to students with a high degree of acculturation to mainstream culture, yet newcomers often have difficulty simply sorting out their many lives. "At one point in my life I was able to balance my two cultures by separating them," says one participant. "I am so confused as to who I am," says another.

Participating in CIRCLE, the Student Advisory Council (see SAC, below), and the Giving SEED program has given these students a home and a safe place to be heard. Declares one: "I learned that there is so much to be done to lift ourselves and our communities out of the chaos of contemporary American life...I found that I had a role in my community—to be a leader.

At the core of the Giving SEED program are supportive youth circles of up to 20 members. Each group is mentored by 3-4 undergraduate mentors. The mentors include people from the same ethnic background as the youth, as well as students from other cultures. This past year, youth groups in the Cambodian and Vietnamese communities were formed, and discussions are well underway with members of the Russian community about establishing a third group.

Through workshops, the youth learn to be collective leaders who plan and initiate community projects while discovering the connection between solid educational training and effective community advocacy.

SAC

Student Advisory Council

The Giving SEED was the brain-child of a group of highly motivated Southeast Asian undergraduates engaged in leadership training and community service with CIRCLE. Known as the Student Advisory Council (SAC), this group has spearheaded community outreach projects

through collective leadership workshops and seminars combining academic study, hands-on community experience, and self-reflection.

SAC represents a three-college coalition that prepares students from Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and the University of Massachusetts for community service. Since SAC's inception in 1995, members have become an integral part of CIRCLE's mission and have developed into a tightly-knit group of friends and colleagues. SAC has been instrumental in creating and developing undergraduate courses that support the Giving SEED's community service component. The courses stress preparation, action, and reflection, and allow newcomer students to explore their own background in context of cultural identity, refugee and immigrant experience, and cross-cultural adaptation while learning and testing practical outreach skills.

SAC's ability to help newcomer youth participating in the Giving SEED come to terms with their bi-cultural existence depends on its ability to practice the collective leadership model it teaches and bridge the cultural differences among its own members. Hence, both the preparatory and reflection aspects of the courses provide avenues for personal and cultural exploration for the undergraduates. As older SAC members graduate, newer members must forge new coalitions and understandings about their common experience as refugees in America. In a safe environment, the group explores their feelings of being caught between the world of their parents and that of mainstream America.

During the active field experience, academic course work deepens SAC members' understanding of newcomer communities. The courses are uniquely self-modifying: as SAC members improve leadership and community-building skills through hands-on experience in the Giving SEED program, they continually shape course content to reflect their new knowledge. At the same time, working with the youth groups and communities drive home lessons on collaboration and leadership skills. The undergraduates learn the influence and responsibility they wield as leaders, both as role models to the youth and as emerging bi-cultural mediators in their community.

SAC Projects and Activities

The Giving SEED Associated Projects:

New World Theater Community Outreach Project

The New World Theater Outreach Project offers newcomer youth the chance to explore cultural identity through dance and community theater. SAC students helped coordinate and implement this activity, including inviting four guest artists to conduct workshops with community youth. Afterwards, SAC members helped choose one of the guest artists to work with the youth groups during the summer. The project culminated in a performance by eleven Vietnamese-American youth for their community, sharing their life in Vietnam and their experiences in America. The Cambodian youth group also performed for their community, combining traditional Khmer arts and modern American theater to express themselves, their families, and their communities. SAC students participated in the workshops and were active in behind-the-scenes organizing, mentoring the youth, and modeling CIRCLE's collective leadership philosophy.

Youth Leadership Retreat

SAC members organized a workshop to lay the foundation for interethnic youth collaboration. The one-day event brought together the Cambodian youth, SAC members, and CIRCLE community leaders with the hope of including Russian and Vietnamese youth in the future. The youth learned about each other, shared games, food, and common aspirations for the Giving SEED. Potential involvement of SAC in other interethnic coalitions are also being explored, including collaborating with a program through UMass Cooperative Extension that focuses on leadership building in the African-American and Latino/a communities.

Youth Field Trips and Fundraisers

SAC members worked to develop group cohesion and cultural pride among the Cambodian youth group by helping them produce a booklet of Cambodian games. Guided by the undergraduates, the youth interviewed parents, created text and drawings, and sold the booklets during their community's New Year's celebration as a fund raiser. Monies raised from this and from a food sale helped fund field trips to a New York City art museum and to Angkor Plaza in Fall River, Massachusetts. The New York trip was also funded in part by CIRCLE in response to a mini-proposal written by the youth under the direction of SAC mentors.

Community Forum

SAC members organized a one-day forum to begin forging connections between old and young community leaders and between university and community. SAC members, community leaders, CIRCLE staff, and one youth group came together in an exploration of newcomer issues common to all. The multi-lingual discussion was facilitated by the SAC members, with help from community leaders and CIRCLE.

ESL Tutoring and Community Development

SAC students planned, organized, and taught ESL lessons to the Springfield Vietnamese community through CIRCLE's existing community language program. After receiving community orientation, ESL training, and curriculum development, five SAC students volunteered for weekly tutoring at various language levels. They also initiated a transportation service for members of the community who could not otherwise get to the classes. The community nature of the program helped SAC students develop lessons around the voiced needs of the participants, modeling CIRCLE's collective leadership principles.

Citizenship Day

SAC students volunteered in a one-day regional event spearheaded by Lutheran Services helping almost 250 immigrants and refugees from Southeast Asia, the Russian republics, the Caribbean, and other regions receive American citizenship. The event required a great deal of preparation including public relations, interviewing candidates, and developing materials. SAC members recruited volunteers to help process paperwork and coordinated transportation for them. During the event, paperwork and services for potential citizens were mass-processed, including xeroxing, photographing, fingerprinting, and law consultations. The event provided some measure of assistance to newcomers applying for citizenship and gave SAC members and CIRCLE staff a better understanding of the complexities of the citizenship process.

"The SAC group has been an inspiration—to see how this group of students despite their other responsibilities have put so much time into community development. They have really dedicated a lot of time and energy."

-Janna Shaddock

SAC Scrapbook 1994 - 96



*Janna Shaddock
Video-taping a SAC Activity*



New World Theater Community Outreach Project



*Food Fest at the
Community Forum!*



Community Leadership Seminar



Youth Leadership Retreat at Camp Bement



*SAC Members
at Leadership Retreat*



Youth Leadership Retreat at Camp Bement



Leadership Training Workshop



End of the Year Celebration at Sally's

"Thoughts, emotions, beliefs, culture, identity form our passions. Our introspection and reflection with respect to and in spite of the things around us, transform these passions into activism with words and service. And it is such activism, guided by our passions, that makes us eloquent.

In CIRCLE, we are encouraged to constantly reflect and evaluate ourselves and the communities we work with, our experiences, and the work we have done and have yet to do. These self-reflections allow us to express ourselves while furthering our learning and knowledge of our CIRCLE/SAC work and ourselves and others."

Front Row [left to right]:

Trinh Nguyen, Heap Sin, Hau Le, Rin Moeun, Saramai Nguyen

Middle Row [left to right]:

Kristine Woolery, Reena Mathew, Lan Truong, ThaoMee Xiong, Cristina Natividad

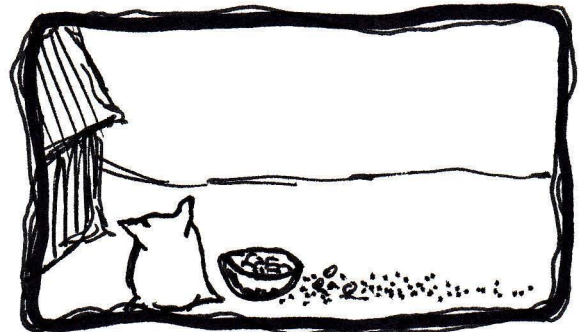
Back Row [left to right]:

Anh Ly, Thien Tran

Part Two Activism in Many Voices

Fundamental to the Giving SEED's philosophy is uncovering the hidden power within the self, articulating it in words, and transforming it in collective activism.

In Part II, SAC leaders present their stories about participating in CIRCLE, their journey of self-discovery, and their reflections on cultural identity and community activism. Woven throughout the fabric of newcomer cultures, families, and communities are the learning, validation, and affirmation of these voices.



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IDENTITY CLAIMS

Anh H. Ly - May 1996

Anh Ly, a Vietnamese American student at the University of Massachusetts, has been an ardent activist in local Asian American and Vietnamese communities. Through CIRCLE, she has worked on an ESL volunteer project, a festival project, a project focused on Amerasian women, and one organizing local Asian American college students. The recipient of awards for scholarship, leadership, and human rights, Anh played a key role in founding the Asian American Studies coalition, among other accomplishments, and has published stories in two literary magazines.

When I came to UMass, I was a person of multiple consciousnesses trapped inside the body of a Vietnamese woman. I wanted to know who I was, where I belonged, what I wanted to do with my life. All of these difficult and complex questions have begun to be revealed to me since I have joined CIRCLE. I have met collective leaders, mentors, and friends who have taught me to be true to my many selves and to be courageous in my future endeavors. I have learned invaluable things about myself, my family, my communities, and what it means to empower ourselves.

Being multi-lingual and bi-cultural, I am constantly posed with the dilemma of sorting out what parts of me are Vietnamese, American-born, or Vietnamese American. There are not many places at the University to explore issues of identity and multi-culturalism. Going to a university where the population of students of color is very small, I was constantly seeing myself as "other," and different from everyone else. When I took my first CIRCLE course in the spring of 1995, I felt as if a mirror were being put up before me to allow me to see things I had never seen before. I met other Vietnamese, as well as other immigrant and refugee undergraduates and graduates who had had similar experiences to mine. I had

the opportunity to visit the local Vietnamese community in western Massachusetts. I met peers who were open-minded in learning about their own communities and how to overcome problems and difficulties. I learned that there is so much that needs to be done to lift ourselves and our communities out of the chaos that is contemporary American life. Most importantly, I found that I had a role in my community—to be a leader.

Being multi-lingual and bi-cultural, I am constantly posed with the dilemma of sorting out what parts of me are Vietnamese, American-born, or Vietnamese American.

As I reflect now on my CIRCLE experience, I realize how as a collective, as individuals who have had a chance to find one another, we are incredibly powerful. CIRCLE allowed me to feel like more than just an individual. I have joined a global collective whose philosophies are to start from the ground, the roots: me. As I plant my feet down here, I will stretch and grow toward new skies, defying boundaries and challenging the forces that can blow us down. I hope that we can all grow together, feet side by side, our roots and hearts intertwined within the experience that CIRCLE has provided us.

A Contradiction in Terms

ThaoMee Xiong - May 1996

ThaoMee Xiong combines her community work with Asian and Asian American communities with her academic work at Mount Holyoke College. The Hmong student participates in a world theater project through CIRCLE, is a member of the Student Advisory Council, and is involved in numerous campus initiatives promoting awareness of minority issues, combating racism, and providing support for minority students. ThaoMee hopes one day to work in the field of public policy.

Living in this multi-cultural, politically correct society, people often ask me what I prefer to be called. I am assuming they expect a simple answer but I can only offer, "Well I'm from Wisconsin but I was born in Laos. I'm not Laotian though, I'm Hmong." It is obvious from my answer there is no clear-cut definition of who I am, or how I define myself. It would be easier if I could say, "I'm Asian - American," or "I'm a Wisconsinite," but none of these paint a picture of who I really am.

the best possible expression of my cultural identity was "a walking contradiction in terms."

Like the Tai Chi symbol which represents two contrasting forces in complete harmony with one another, I was a Hmong-American constantly changing between two worlds with conflicting ideologies. The Hmong culture highly values the Yin qualities in a woman—femaleness, coolness, darkness, and the moon. At a young age, I was brought up to play the role of the traditional woman: cooking,

assertiveness. In high school I was extremely active in advocating for social justice. As one of the few students of color, I had to take on the responsibility of educating my peers about the Hmong community and other negative stereotypes about the Hmong. Like the sun, I am not afraid to speak my mind in an environment of white Americans.

Indeed, I have struggled to find my identity and a balance to the apparent contradiction of my personality, hoping to assimilate or blend better

both at home and in school. I have learned to accept the inevitable role of being double-imaged in a

... I can only offer, "Well I'm from Wisconsin but I was born in Laos."

At one point of my life I was able to balance my two cultures by separating them. It was fairly easy for me to model my behavior on my white counterparts at school and by the time I was in high school, this pattern was so well established that neither my American friends nor parents were able to comprehend my place in the other's existence. As the fifth child out of nine, I did not have those strong ties with the Hmong culture that my older brothers and sisters shared, nor did I have strong ties to the American culture that my younger sisters had. I was left without a dominant cultural identity. In many ways I felt the Tai-Chi symbol was representative of me in that I've been able to emulate both societies' cultural values. As a matter of fact in my college essay I felt that

cleaning, and sewing. In an environment of Hmong people, I wore a mask of passivity and subservience. I followed the traditional expectations that a Hmong woman is always second to a Hmong man, like the moon is second to the sun in their cycle of light.

Unlike the Yin, the Yang represents the qualities of maleness, brightness, and the sun. While conforming to my role as a Hmong woman at home, I also learned to be an individual at school. I appeared to my teachers as a typical "American" student. In elementary school I was very aggressive while playing with the boys. As I grew older my aggressiveness turned into

bicultural, bilingual world. I am proud of my Hmong heritage but also greatly appreciate individualism and freedom espoused in the American society. My acceptance of this

"I'm not Laotian though, I'm Hmong."

realization was a source of comfort and contentment for me; however, my life away from home has generated new questions about my identity. The phrase, "you are a contradiction in terms," no longer applies adequately. Even though it was not always easy to live in a contradictory manner, I had come to enjoy the routine and security blanket it provided. What used to be dictated by simple geography (i.e.

white=school, hmong=home), was no longer available to me, as school and home are now one, both of them being predominantly white. Although most first-year students have to deal with the new environment, I had to deal with the added stress of not only losing the daily familial connections, but also the cultural tie that they provided. Without the constant reminders of my heritage, I started to question how Hmong I really was or how much I ever knew about my roots. Suddenly, I felt as though I

strong will. To her, success was only associated with the men. The women were only ornaments for the men and if they were lucky they would catch themselves a good wealthy husband. I, however, was different. I had the strength and courage to stand on my own and didn't have to wait for a man to make me somebody. I have always heard her say this to me but I never took it seriously until I came there. I thought I understood my culture and my role in it.

But once I entered the gates of

welcoming atmosphere that provided a comfortable space for me to gather with other Asian Americans and discuss my issues. Not only was it a support system, CIRCLE instilled important community organizing skills in me, skills that will help me re-connect with my Hmong culture. CIRCLE's positive and nurturing philosophy has contributed to my intellectual and emotional growth.

Understanding one's bi-cultural identity and place in society is a process. My Hmong culture can not

Not only was it a support system, CIRCLE instilled important community organizing skills in me.

were turning into my younger sisters, who I had always pitied because they never had the bond with the Hmong culture that I had and so valued.

Mount Holyoke, I could no longer identify with the Tai-chi symbol. Since I no longer had my parents' strong influence over me, I did not

just be a shadow in my life. Identifying myself as a Hmong woman is a vital part of my existence; it has defined who I am today and who I

will become tomorrow. I have only begun to understand myself and explore where I fit in this society; however, in order for me to evolve and develop, I must confront my internalized pain. I must be

Skills that will help me re-connect with my Hmong culture.

My mom often told me, in her fractured English, how lucky I was. When I got accepted to Mount Holyoke, she was so proud of me for being the first woman in my clan to attend college. I remember how she would tell my sisters and me how her father never gave her the opportunity to receive an education just because she was a girl. Whenever she told us stories of her past, I could see in her tired pale face how much she wanted us to have all the things she was never allowed as a Hmong woman. I knew she saw herself in me. She gave me all the necessary tools to get a good education and be able to pursue an higher education. My mom always told me I would succeed because I had so many characters of a man—assertiveness, aggressiveness, and

recognize myself. Without my family and Hmong community, my traditional culture was in the shadows of my American culture. Being away from home made me see myself more objectively as a Hmong woman. I started to question my "Hmongness." I struggled with whether or not I ever really knew what being a Hmong person was and if I could regain that bond I had with my culture even without my family. Being away at school, I felt extremely disconnected from my Hmong community and the Asian community in general, until I discovered CIRCLE (Center for Immigrant and Refugee Leadership and Empowerment).

During a time of confusion and isolation, CIRCLE became my support system. It was a warm and

honest with myself and change my ways if they are contradictory to who I want to be. This journey to unmasking my identity is and will be a painful and emotional process. Luckily with the support and guidance of CIRCLE, this process will be less painful and lonely.

I have experienced life as a Hmong woman in America but now it is necessary for me to explore myself as a Hmong woman in my homeland. I want to travel to Thailand to see how the Hmong people there live, act and respond to me as a Hmong-American. Will they reject me, accept me or treat me just like another tourist that they can not relate to? Only until then can I truly find out who I am and where my home is.

Community Work 101

Reena Mathew - May 1996

Reena Mathew, a student at Mount Holyoke College, balances her interest in politics with a desire to work for her communities. With CIRCLE, she has participated in the Student Advisory Committee undergraduate training. Reena was an intern with Lutheran Social Services in 1996 and is currently involved in the Asian American Sisters in Action, the Church Choir, and Youth League. The Indian student received recognition as part of the Pennsylvania Governor's School for International Studies and has appeared in Who's Who in American High Schools.

Communities form the core of our society. Enabling these communities to realize their own potential and to develop methods with which to solve communal problems in small scale is the aim of all involved in the process of community development. Knowing one's political rights and responsibility is one important part of this process, through which the community can empower itself by learning how to tap into a preexisting power structure and resources by making their voices heard. This can be done with the power of the vote. That power within the American context allows the individual the ability to vote a say in their nation. It allows them to express their discontent and displeasure with the system, as well as express their approval. One receives this power by being a citizen. To become a citizen in the United States, one can either be born in the United States or go through the gruelling process of Naturalization. It is through this process that many immigrant and refugee communities face problems.

The materials needed are: the N-400 citizenship application form, (a document in my opinion that condenses all the "isms" of the world into four pages), fingerprints and photographs. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is very particular about this process, and often the way it phrases questions can create enormous amounts of confusion with the applicants, especially if they are immigrants and refugees and have English as their second language.

To help people having to deal with the INS, I volunteered with the Lutheran Social Services of West Springfield (LSS), with their Citizenship Project. Working with the Citizenship Project helped me help immigrants who wanted to be U.S. citizens, enabling them to wield the power of their vote, to finally gain a voice in the American system. Through volunteering, not only did I learn more about the naturalization project but also the basic skills in organizing, i.e. recruiting. These were core lessons that emerged as I got more involved in the process. The particular project I was involved with was the Citizenship Day.

The Citizenship Day was organized to help 250 immigrants and refugees from the Springfield area fill out their Naturalization forms(N-400). With the help of volunteers, LSS would help them in getting together all the requirements, such as fingerprints and photographs, as well as in finding free legal advice in case of complications. I worked under the direction of Joanna Messing, the Project Coordinator. I aided her in putting together folders, both for volunteers and participants, contacting participants, contacting volunteers, recruiting volunteers, copying, making signs, data entry, and some coordinating on the actual Citizenship Day, which occurred on April 27, 1996 at Springfield Technical Community College.

I also attempted to act as a liaison between LSS and CIRCLE, coordinating rides for the volunteers from Mount Holyoke College to attend the training sessions and on the actual day. For a person who had no prior experience in organizing, it was a very stressful, infuriating and daunting task. I made my share of errors about coordinating rides and contacting people, learned a lot about clearly transmitting messages and about the art of persistent pestering of people, who said they were interested. I found it extremely enjoyable to recruit volunteers for Citizenship Day. I loved the look of interest and loved transferring my enthusiasm to my fellow peers.

The method of recruiting that I used was to announce the project in my classes, to post flyers around campus, and personally to go and talk to people that I thought would be interested. I was also greatly helped by ThaoMee and Cristina; I am eternally grateful to both for all the help they gave me. Oftentimes, my biggest problems were with people who made a commitment by word and then later vacillated between coming or not, and finally decided they weren't able to.

Another major problem I faced was transportation. LSS is located in West Springfield, and there is no easy way I can get into Springfield without wasting a whole day. This, along with matching Joanna's and my schedules so that we could meet, caused a lot of initial problems. The transportation problem was solved when my roommate, who has a car, expressed an interest in my project. We would both go into Springfield and work for several hours helping Joanna. We helped Joanna in putting together the final and little pieces of the Citizenship Project, which initially might not have seemed very important but gained in importance and value because some were necessary and vital to make the Citizenship Day run smoother. I wish that I had been able to meet up with Joanna earlier so that I could be more involved with the project, but transportation and my academic load stopped me from doing so. Also, I felt that even though I was helping Joanna, my time constraints made it difficult for me to play the role of a liaison very well, even though I tried. Working with a structured project didn't allow me to contribute that much on a large scale, but I was able to contribute in the small ways that made Citizenship Day special and run as smoothly as it did. These setbacks and problems taught me some of the most valuable lessons I have learned in organizing and working with the community. I have learned about the level of commitment and the amount of perseverance one needs to make a project that works with a community successful.

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Another CIRCLE project I have been involved with this semester is the New World Theater Project. I have been only able to attend one meeting so far. I plan to attend one of the upcoming workshops. The workshop I attended was with Hung Nguyen from the Club O'Noodles Theater. It was an interesting experience that I really enjoyed. He used dance meditation techniques that I found very calming and soothing to my soul. Though the workshop was for Khmer youth and none attended, we still had an excellent time and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. I learned a new way of looking at and appreciating art, especially dancing.

Due to time constraints and some miscommunication on transportation, I have not been able to participate in as many activities as I wished to. I did enjoy working with Lutheran Social Services and Joanna Messing. I like to work with my energies concentrated on one project, and I was able to do that and enjoyed it. This has been a very educational semester. I have truly learned what it means to be involved in participatory learning, making the cliches "Experience is the best teacher" and "Practice makes perfect" very true for me. Though at times it was extremely nerve racking and almost reduced me to tears, I enjoyed it thoroughly and had a wonderful time learning. It is only in retrospect that I realize all the important lessons I learned from this experience.

Personal Discoveries

Saramai Nguyen - Spring 1995

Saramai Nguyen was born in Gia Dinh, Vietnam, and arrived in the United States five years later, in 1975. Political Science, German, and premed major, this versatile student at the University of Massachusetts has a rigorous academic load. Through CIRCLE, she is involved in the Vietnamese Group, the Vietnamese ESL Program, is a member of the Student Advisory Council, and helped organize an Amerasian community forum. Mai, the recipient of several awards for scholarship, hopes to become a doctor and return to Vietnam.

STUDENT FACILITATING FOR THE CIRCLE STUDENT LEADERSHIP SEMINAR (EDUC 229) FALL 1995

To say the least, the dual role of being student and facilitator was a great personal challenge. As one of the facilitators for Educ. 229, it was a great responsibility to have to plan a two-hour seminar. Not only did I have to get the students to learn some new concepts about the world and themselves, we had to do it in a manner where the learning experience would be an enjoyable one. This was a great challenge! After all, these were our peers! Thus, to say the least, not only did I feel pressure to present a concept in an enjoyable manner but also to make it seem like I knew what the heck I was doing in front of my classmates.

Yet at the same time, it was interesting to feel that, somehow, one had graduated from the CIRCLE school and therefore, one was no longer an equal, in a sense, to the other students. At times, I felt a little different from the other undergraduate students. Because of this, I think I took on a more caring and mature role in the eyes of the other students who were primarily first year students. I realize now that at times I was patronizing. The one incident where I attended the UMASS fundraising strategy meeting really was a learning experience to me. I was later told by a student that I had said too much and had wasted their time in

finalizing their fundraising project. I was really shocked when he told me this, for I thought I was being helpful. My defenses started to rise and so I had to make a conscious effort to keep myself from being outright rude and angry. The matter was taken up in the SAC meeting and some interesting things were said. Afterwards I was able to claim that I was responsible for lecturing. At the same time I was able to voice that my intentions had been good. I simply wanted this group of students to succeed. Ironically, my efforts were a bit too much, and I had to learn to let the students live and learn. Thereafter, I took more of an observant role and tried to give suggestions only when it really seemed needed.

I must say that it was a really wonderful experience to have an opportunity work with the Educ. 229 students. I can say for a fact that I know a few more Vietnamese students on campus than I did before. The students' enthusiasm and delight to do things like role-playing showed me exactly how much potential talent exists within what one normally considers "ordinary people." Some of the students who were normally quiet and shy simply burst open with such passion and grace while doing role-plays. This illustrated to me that there really does exist an enormous need for students and youths to use theater as a mode to communicate ideas that they may have about themselves and the world in

which they live. I feel so lucky and am so grateful to have had the opportunity to make a change by taking part in the Educ. 229 class as a facilitator. I truly believe that all those students left that classroom learning a lot more about themselves and each other than when they first stepped into the world of CIRCLE. And it is also through being

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directly involved with the curriculum development and the 229 class, that I myself have a better understanding of what CIRCLE is about. Let's just say that I'm more experienced at walking into a room, putting my bag on the floor, taking out my notebook, and taking notes. I'm not used to having to be the one who does the lecturing or facilitating.

Although I liked being a part of a student advisory group, there was something missing, that is, the direct community outreach. One of the things that I thoroughly enjoyed the two previous semesters was meeting people in our Vietnamese community. So it felt funny to speak about

community in a theoretical way and not have contacts with it. Yes, there is a community out there, somewhere. I think I would have enjoyed this semester much more had we just done some outreach to maintain the contacts that we had made. I heard from some other students that they felt like they weren't doing anything this semester. This is not to say that students aren't learning. No, that is not the case at all. What it does mean is that the entire, holistic learning experience was simply lacking. Thus, I think we should work to get students more involved with community from the onset of the semester instead of waiting until the semester is half through. This will require an enormous amount of planning on CIRCLE's part. But in order to make ourselves effective, we must spend some time planning the experience for the upcoming students. We have all been through the primary process; let's take the time to make the learning process much more enjoyable and enlightening for those who will follow our footsteps.

*FINDING MY "VIETNAMESE-NESS"
SPRING 1995*

For me, the past semester in CIRCLE has been nothing less than a semester filled with personal discoveries about who I am and what I am. It perhaps would be a great understatement if I simply state that by taking the CIRCLE seminar my life has changed. There are simply no words to describe exactly what happened to me in the time span of four emotionally charged months. Nevertheless I will attempt to convey my experience as best as I can in this self-reflection paper.

One of the things that I experienced in the CIRCLE seminar was being accepted and comfortable with a group of immi-

grants. Despite my twenty years of living in America, I have never felt completely at ease around Americans. Normal questions concerning one's birth and life experience were things that I felt uncomfortable discussing with other Americans simply because I felt they wouldn't understand the depth of my experience nor my pain. My life story of losing my entire family and coming to another country always blew away other Americans. This was not the case at all in

Vietnam that I felt safe.

Another thing that the CIRCLE seminar did for me was to help me develop more self-esteem and self-worth. For most of my life, I have suffered from low self-esteem and self-worth. However, the fact that I felt everyone respected my ideas in the group discussions greatly altered my way of thinking of myself. Yes, Saramai did actually know what she was talking about. The

knowledge that I shared did not come from books but simply from my life experiences. Dropping the intellectual agenda, I discovered I still knew so much—basically I still had substance

In this group I was not an exception. I was simply with an exceptional group. Rather than feeling alienated and isolated by my life experiences, for the first time I was able to contribute to conversations that focused on experiences like mine.

the seminar. In this group I was not an exception. I was simply with an exceptional group. Rather than feeling alienated and isolated by my life experiences, for the first time I was able to contribute to conversations that focused on experiences like mine.

The fact that I felt so completely accepted helped me resolve some of my identity problems of being half Vietnamese and half African-American. No one questioned the extent of my "Vietnamese-ness." Everyone in the seminar viewed me seriously as a Vietnamese despite my dark skin, my coarse hair and my obvious African features. I say "seriously" because, at the time, I was not certain if I was really Vietnamese. The fact that everyone believed me convinced me that I was truly an Amerasian and a Vietnamese. After a lifetime of yearning for acceptance of myself as an Amerasian, it was an enormous relief to find some shelter in this group from the ever-discriminating world. Interestingly, this was the first time since I left my mother in

without academia. Although on some level I have always known that I was a "substance" person versus an intellectual, it felt great to be able to utilize life experiences to create new experiences.

The creation of new experiences culminated in the the forum attended by Vietnamese Elders and by Amerasians. Feeling as if I was surrounded by the Great Unknown, I was petrified by the prospect of making fools of us all. It wasn't really our folly that I was really concerned with, but rather the idea that we couldn't help the Elders or the Amerasians because we were unskilled. I cursed the idea that we students were expected to put on a forum in order to receive credit. What an arm twister! Academically I had never been so challenged by such a course requirement. My frustrations and fears stemmed from my own insecurity. I simply overestimated the challenge and underestimated my ability to help put on a forum. It was interesting to discover just how fearful I was of the Unknown.

Nevertheless the forum turned out to be a great success. I, for the most part, bawled my way through most of it. I was unprepared by the sights of the Amerasians. It felt like losing one's tribe and meeting them twenty years later completely out of context--that is, in a community college. After having taken many different roads throughout our lives, we met "again" at a Forum to discuss our lives as social and political outcasts in Vietnam and America.

Those who really affected me were the Amerasians who had African fathers. The mixed features of Vietnamese and American in the group made me finally realize that I wasn't "abnormal." On the contrary, *mon frère*, I was not alone for being born looking like the man I never met. Having grown up in predominantly White communities, I had only been exposed to one other Amerasian since I came to America. He, like I, was adopted by White Americans. Besides we weren't considered Vietnamese by either of our parents. Thus, I felt my existence was finally validated when I saw that I was not the only one who was half Asian and didn't look like it!

By meeting Amerasians who had strong American features, but considered themselves Vietnamese, prompted me to explore the question of "What and who is Vietnamese?" For so many years I judged how Vietnamese I was by my appearance. Without fair skin and fine hair, I always lost the contest that I held in my head of who was Vietnamese and who wasn't. It seemed that White people even had a better chance

than I did, and I was one-half Vietnamese!

It is fair to say that I was an unmerciful and ruthless judge when it came to race. Taking what I learned in Vietnam and since in America, I simply did not know any better. Thus, it was a great experience for me to see African-looking people speaking Vietnamese!! Furthermore, this revelation halted the racial contests I had in my head, because I no longer had to prove to anyone who I was. I exist, therefore, I am.

Although everyone deserves lots of credit for the seminar, there was one important element that strongly effected the relationship that I established with the other Vietnamese students. My fellow students like Thuy-Nga, Trinh and Thien helped me especially during the forum. The forum was an incredibly emotional time trip for me that I simply couldn't have survived the journey if it wasn't for their compassion and understanding.

... I felt my existence was finally validated when I saw that I was not the only one who was half Asian and didn't look like it!

Without being asked, my newly acquired friends and colleagues translated and comforted me at the forum. Their sense of loyalty and friendship has been gratefully accepted by one who always

felt she had no friends or place in this world.

In many ways, people like Trinh and Thuy-Nga have spiritually guided me back "home." Because of this I have embarked onto another life journey of discovering the world and myself. This time I do not travel alone, for I have many fine friends to accompany me.

The Basics: Appreciating Human Exchange

Cristina B. Natividad - May 1996

Christina Natividad is Filipina-American and a "Women and Development in the Third World" special major at Mount Holyoke College. A participant in human justice work with several organizations, at CIRCLE she is involved in Student Leadership training and world theater workshops. She has studied at the Institute for Central American Development Studies in Costa Rica and was a Weed Ford-Mellon Summer Research Scholar in 1995. She is now relearning Tagalog, her mother tongue, and hopes always to advocate for the rights of women and Asian/Asian-American communities.

Brought up in an oddly traditional academic discipline, yet ingrained with a healthy and essential dose of liberal, open-minded, multi-ethnic, and humanitarian beliefs, I am still astounded by the work, the ideas, the peoples and communities that are connected to CIRCLE. Affiliated with CIRCLE as an undergraduate student through the SAC (Student Advisory Council) I was exposed to theater workshops, immigrant and refugee community organizations, skills building classes and powerful youth groups. These CIRCLE affiliated experiences intersect with my own personal exposure to various bits and pieces of this world. It is at these intersections, at individual and group levels, where there is an opportunity for exchange and connection. Depending on the dynamics and the various factors involved, these exchanges may contribute a new or adapted perspective and foster greater understanding. It has been these connections that have facilitated challenges, growth, and empowerment.

Given this self-reflection, I must necessarily begin with where I am coming from. I do this to give a context for my reflections. While it leaves me open to assumptions and stereotypes, I choose to sacrifice vulnerability so as to paint complexity. This pertains to me, Cristina Pia Baltazar Natividad, but I am neither limited to nor completely a representation of those identities I have been given and choose. I am a Filipina American(a) born in Manila, Philippines. I moved to the United States when I was six years old and have grown up in New Jersey (Jersey City Heights and Carteret) most of my 22-odd years. I lived in Beijing, China for my 7th and 8th grades, experiencing the latter stages of adolescence in a very foreign place. Now, I am a Mount Holyoke student, class of 1996, "Women and Development in the Third World" major, and an active member of AASIA (Asian American Sisters In Action). At Mount Holyoke I have tapped into and nurtured many of my identities. It is certain that I have had many of these identities before and it is also certain that many were forming even before I knew Mount Holyoke existed. But

it is here that I have learned to articulate my identities. I tell myself and I tell you, I am Cristina Pia Baltazar Natividad, Filipina American, Woman of Color, Queer, Politically Liberal, Humanitarian, and whatever else seems to suit me at the time. I am consistently all of the above and then some. My connections begin here.

As individuals, we make connections on a human level that reflect and are part and parcel of our larger systems of organization. As part of larger systems, connections at this basic, human level should not be minimized. Ideally, exchanges on a fundamental level reflect and recognize the individual person in all their identities. Exchanges constrained by pre-existing relationships often impose a pre-set hierarchy which devalues certain groups and individuals on the basis of their status. Interaction on a human fundamental level minimizes the sole dependence on pre-set hierarchies. Minimizing a pre-ordained hierarchy and stressing connections that value knowledge from all sides allow for greater exchanges on a human, fundamental level. Thus, this type of interaction combats devaluation of a group or individual on the basis of their identity/ies.

CIRCLE emphasizes this egalitarian value system and in doing so reaches more communities. Cross-cultural

The basic, human exchange facilitates the complex, egalitarian intersection of cultures and groups that could not be possible in a hierarchal setup. Intersection connotes a common ground that is unlikely in a hierarchical interaction.

exchanges, especially among more marginalized communities, are valued. While one cannot downplay the relevance of power dynamics, the minimized dependence

on larger structures allows for greater equalization as persons of different backgrounds. There is an awareness that peoples and individuals have been affected disproportionately. The basic, human exchange facilitates the complex, egalitarian intersection of cultures and individuals that could not be possible in a hierarchal setup. Intersection connotes a common ground that is unlikely in a hierarchical interaction.

Take me in a CIRCLE situation, a theater workshop with the VYA (Vietnamese Youth Advocates). Being college-educated, middle class, and having grown up in America, I would probably be more listened to than most of the Vietnamese youth (even accounting for the age difference) in mainstream U.S. society. However, in the theater workshops, status was downplayed. More important, the artists emphasized that we just be ourselves. The workshop exercises stressed group participation. Most of us were not used to these odd exercises. They told us to make a bodily gesture while saying our names? He told us to run around the room and leap to be lifted by semi-strangers?! I never had to do this in my classes. We all had to put down our guard and act silly. Often the exercises took us momentarily out of our various set identities and just demanded of us to be persons. This took away a lot of the shyness and worry over embarrassing oneself in front of older college kids or in front of younger high school kids. It did not ignore or disregard our larger identities (as Khmer, as Vietnamese, as women, as adolescents, etc.) but rather placed greater emphasis on our connections as persons to allow us to value each other's identities. The exercises get us beyond the hierarchy of identities to truly value each person and her or his identity. I did the theater exercises and so did the other SAC folks and so did the Vietnamese and Khmer youth. Some of the kids know me by name now and I know some of them by name. I have a mole in the same place on my face as one guy, and I found out that there were refugee camps in the Philippines (Bataan). I know I would never have figured that stuff out on my own, and I never thought I'd learn that info as a college senior talking to a high school kid. Funny, I can't think of my mole and refugee camps in the same way now. All that without a history or facial anatomy lesson.

At the same time, I have learned the vulnerability and weaknesses of human connections and their organic process. CIRCLE's greatest strength can be its greatest weakness. This organic process leaves much open to

spontaneity and is highly dependent on these personal interactions and group dynamics. And, because each person contributes and affects these exchanges, mood swings, personal initiative, and personal dynamics are more likely to affect these interactions. CIRCLE does not have the structure and hierarchy of most organizations and operations nowadays (especially in our modern, Westernized, capitalized efficiency). There is often conflicting agendas and goals. Being a product of the hegemonic, modern, Westernized, capitalistic world, I have at times been frustrated with this organic process. And being that there is constant pressure for CIRCLE-type philosophies to

be sucked into the mechanistic, production-oriented processes, there is also a threat of CIRCLE not being able to withstand this constant pressure. I have often worried about the continuity and growth of CIRCLE, and in particular its SAC and youth projects, in the face of institutional negativity to CIRCLE's alternative processes. However, without this organic process I doubt CIRCLE would be as innovative and ideologically

revolutionary as it is now.

As dominant, Western, capitalist, sexist ideology continues to be oppressive, alternative forms continue to be shut out, "other" knowledge negated. It becomes more and more crucial and necessary for disempowered individuals and communities to survive. Thus, the connections we make with each other at this basic, fundamental level become part of a larger ideological and political and social struggle. Valuing certain, historically unrecognized forms challenges larger structures which continually attempt to erase threatening alternative ideas, practices, and cultures. Immigrants and refugees, historically marginalized in America, continue to be the scapegoats in discriminatory U.S. policies. CIRCLE, thus, is not only about the ideological and emotional. Because CIRCLE necessitates respect and value for all communities and identities, immigrant and refugee communities are recognized in their own right. The immigrant and refugee communities empower themselves and are given the tools to climb past their marginalization.

So you see, CIRCLE is not some gift from the gods and it is not some magical place that does everything for everyone who needs help. In fact, the dearest thing I hold about CIRCLE is that it creates a space where, with the support of others like ourselves, people can do their own magic and are valued and accepted for it.

Funny, I can't think of my mole and refugee camps in the same way now. All that without a history or facial anatomy lesson.

I . D . N e g o t i a t i o n s

Kristine R. Woolery - December 1995

Kris Woolery, a women's studies major at Mount Holyoke College is a member of CIRCLE's Student Advisory Council and has participated in CIRCLE's Student Leadership Training class. Active in many community projects, she interned with a local Cambodian American association and participated with the Asian American Sisters in Action and the AASIA Journal at Mount Holyoke. Other accomplishments include a field service internship with the PFFLAG National Office, recognition in Who's Who Among American Colleges and Universities, and a leadership and community service award.

My life has been occupied for the past four years processing information in order to figure out who I am. My journey started much earlier in my life, but it wasn't until college that I had the space to really reflect on who I am and who I want to be. I learned that I have multiple identities. I am constantly re-evaluating my identity construction, trying to create a better fit. Sometimes I am forced to negotiate parts of my identity in order to survive. My survival is about choice. It's about choosing the definitions that best construct who I am. This process, although empowering, is extremely exhausting but a necessity for my survival.

Coming into CIRCLE, I was aware of my insecurities concerning how I *fit/don't fit* into an Asian American community. Being at Mount Holyoke College, my identity is rarely questioned. But at the same time being in academia...no one will challenge my identity construction. People are threatened by identity politics. So, moving into new territory, joining CIRCLE became a personal challenge to find space for me and I knew that some of it would entail demarcating space for my identity. In order for me to find a place in CIRCLE I had to make a connection with students, the program, Sally, and members of the newcomer communities. Although I haven't created secure ties yet, there has been initial

contact. In fact it grows weekly. I hope that my continued commitment to CIRCLE will lead to closer relationships and a secure sense of space/place in a new Asian American community.

The team building workshop was an exhaustive process that really helped me to feel closer to the group of new CIRCLE students. It wasn't until this work-

of security about being an active participant.

One of my most memorable CIRCLE experiences is the forum that I attended in Boston. It was an awesome experience to see the ethnic and cultural diversity of the statewide program. It benefited me to see so many Empowered People of Color working with their communities as well as their

It benefited me to see so many Empowered People of Color working with their communities as well as their neighboring communities.

shop that I heard the voices of half of class. I enjoyed the interactive learning process. By the end of the day, I knew everyone's name and I felt more comfortable as a part of CIRCLE. Both weekend workshops provided a place for me to become more involved with my peers and to gain a better understanding of CIRCLE's philosophy. In many ways, I feel like I should have taken the risk and attended the Training for Trainers, because I was previously familiar with many of the concepts that we covered in the workshops. On the other hand, attending these workshops helped me to establish comraderie with other students in CIRCLE. I needed a gradual introduction into the program in order to gain a sense

neighboring communities. Cristina and I made a networking connection with a woman from Hawaii. The experience helped me to realize the numerous resources within the CIRCLE program and the necessity of using them.

In retrospect, I realize that my participation was not centralized in my academic requirements for the course. I am forcing my memory to re-collect information that I have processed but never wrote down. I should have started Day 1 with a plan for organizing my thoughts. I am excited to continue with CIRCLE next semester, and I hope to grow closer to the newcomer communities and participants of CIRCLE.

WORKING IN MY COMMUNITY

Rin Moeun

Rin Moeun is a Health Education major at the University of Massachusetts and works extensively in her own Cambodian community. At CIRCLE, Rin works with a Cambodian youth support group aimed at community empowerment, awareness, and leadership. In addition, she is a member of the Student Advisory Council and participates in world theater workshops. In her Cambodian community, Rin teaches Khmer as well as volunteering time as an organizer and translator. She hopes one day to work as an educator in family planning and disease control.

Starting a new program was not as easy as I thought, even though I am a community member and I know what youth within my community really need. No matter how much work, time and effort we put into it, people always remembered our mistakes.

Nevertheless, I was very glad I finally put my and other collective leaders' ideas into action. I hope the students found our support group helpful and that they learned as much from us as I've learned from them. I am looking forward to continue working with them during winter session and year to come.

We had a very successful and challenging semester for all of us as members despite the fact that we had to struggle so hard to get to where we are right now. We started late in a long process but are doing well now. It is very hard to start our

own support group for youth when they do not know who or where or how can they trust us when they have never heard about our program. As members, some of us felt that it was very difficult to even see our own vision and where we would stand and how far. It was even harder for us to see the students' perspectives or vice versa. How would they view or respect us? Would they respect us as students, as their role models, or as big sisters and brothers?

By working together, doing activities, and evaluating our process, we had overcome our barrier and started to trust each other. Being facilitators we had learned to compromise both within our group and with the students. We learned to satisfy not only our own interest but also our team members' interests, so that we all could participate and our program

would be successful.

As Amherst community members and former Amherst Regional students we feel that there is a great need to have a support group for Cambodian students at Amherst. Most of the students are at a confusing time in their life and in the stage of choosing their identities. Some teens who have support and high self-esteem will more likely do well academically and interact well within their social group. However, students who have low self-esteem and less support both from their peers and families will more likely have a harder transition time. Some will drop out and others will not do well in school.

Our support group is to guide them in the right direction and give resources. Finally, we try to encourage and help them the best we can to meet their needs.

Working as a team is never easy at the beginning, but as time came we learned to collaborate and pull together our ideas into one piece. Our original goal had no ending or any form of activities that would connect the facilitator and the students. We had our own fixed plans for the students. We never knew that the CIRCLE staff could play a big role and be so powerful in helping us connect with the school.

We planned the project stage by stage. Our ideas were not fully planned for the future since we did not know if our program was working or not. If our program succeeded we would think of our next plan. Otherwise, we would keep it as it was for now. Our idea was to teach the students by

lecture. Our support group provided the high school Cambodian Students Club and their members with resources. For instance, we would tell them how to raise money for

their club and where to apply for this money. We would also connect them with university students and provide counseling if they needed any. We would connect high school students with the university students on a one-to-one basis, so that they would already be familiar with the university environment when they were ready to apply for college. We would take them to the university and visit administration offices. For high school seniors, we would help them with their college and financial aid applications and anything else that would help them with their

We want them to know that we decide to work with them, not for the credits, but because we are their community and we want to help our younger generation get what they need for their future.

college process. Finally, in order for us to engage in any activities, we met with them weekly in an open CIRCLE discussion.

However, after Heap and I

met with the graduate student advisor, she suggested that we should make some changes so that it would both fulfill our roles and meet the students' needs. Also, she reminded us that we should not have fixed plans since we are working with and for the students. Otherwise, they would feel that we are working just for our benefit. The three of us decided to do some revision, so that our ideas would combine for the better of the program. Our goal is still the same, but we just added some activities and our Phase One plan during the first semester. We decided

not to give the students too much pressure since it is only the beginning process. Before we started anything, we must create trust between them and us.

Before we met with the students, Heap and I met with some community leaders. We felt that we needed their help and asked them to help us in spreading the news about our program.

We explained to them our goal and reasons why we think that the Cambodian students can benefit from our support group.

Then we met formally for the first time with the Cambodian Students Club. We decided to go to their club meeting. We did so because we wanted to find out the students' goal and their expectation of us. We also wanted to inform them about ours as well. Most importantly, we wanted to know if they were willing to work with us or not. The students showed interest in working with our support group.

The Cambodian Youth Support Group began to meet regularly in October 1995. We informed them of our goal and let them know that we are there for them. We wanted them to know that we decided to work with them, not for the credits, but because we are their community and we want to help our younger generation get what they need for their future.

We had accomplished our Phase One plan from October until now, and we had done some activities too. Our first activity was the one-day trip to Fall River with some of the graduated students. Only two

high school students attended, whereas other students had to go to their dance practice.

They met with the director of the Angkor Plaza and they had lunch at the Cambodian restaurant which was located there. Despite the long trip and long lecture about the plaza history, they did enjoy getting away, and the scenery. They had a great time most of all.

Our final accomplishment was the students' proposal for CIRCLE: requesting funding to visit a museum. They all had worked together so hard for three weeks in order for them to hand it in before the semester's end. Their proposal was excellent, and they did more than what we asked them to do. Now their next step is to wait for their money, so that they can go to a New York museum during January 21, 1996.

Despite some conflicts of interest which arose during Phase One of our plan, we will continue meeting with the students over the winter session since we all will be in Amherst. Some of us will be participating with the New York trip in the mid-January as well, while we continue trying to recruit more students to get involved with

our program. Our next plan is to start preparing ourselves for Phase Two plans.

We understand that with any kind of community events or programs that we do for our community, we cannot plan our projects alone. And we must do community assessment. In order for the team members to do what we need, we must meet and discuss with community members the plans and goals during the meeting. Finally we must understand that everything will be hard work at first, but that does not mean that we should give up or that they do not want to work with us. We all need to get familiar with and get to know and trust each other first before we take the next step.

**We understand that
with any kind of
community events or
programs that we do
for our community,
we cannot plan our
projects alone.**

How Does One Go About Empowering a Community?

Lan Truong

Smith College economics major Lan Truong has had a full plate while going to college. Among other CIRCLE projects, she participated in SAC, the New World Theater Outreach Project, Citizenship Day, and ESL teaching. Lan, a Vietnamese American, was awarded the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, and is currently studying Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University. She hopes to see CIRCLE philosophy incorporated into her work on immigrant and refugee issues

Reflecting on the past three months working with CIRCLE at UMASS, the experience had a profound effect on every aspect of my life. As with any class, I expected to gain academic knowledge about different refugee/immigrant communities, but the end results surpassed all expectations. Most importantly, the course increased my awareness of my cultural identity.

Empowering students is the main goal of the class. In the classroom, open discussions, learning through others, and role playing were alternative forms of informal education. Outside of class, my empowerment experience came from working with the Vietnamese community in Springfield. Years of westernized influence had diluted my eastern identity. The exposure to the Vietnamese community forced me to ask questions about my identity and role as a Vietnamese American. The acceptance and support from the community and team members helped me to find out the answers I have been searching for and bridge the gap between my Vietnamese and American identity.

The Vietnamese refugee community in Springfield has grown dramatically in the past few years. This represents a community in desperate need of services such as translation and ESL classes. The basic unfamiliarity with American traditions forces them to accept mainstream services that fail to meet the needs of the people and lack cultural sensitivity.

The Vietnamese community does interact with other minorities but only in formal events sponsored by organizations such as BayState Medical Center. Barriers such as language restricts association between different minority communities in Springfield. The best

outreach strategies use informal means such as home visits and word of mouth.

In accordance with CIRCLE's philosophy, the community must learn to help itself. For us, as CIRCLE students, to provide direct assistance with the Vietnamese community was logical in context of the situation. By providing help, the student group had many advantages over service providers: student providers establish trust in the community, the participants are themselves Vietnamese, and there is no involvement with money.

In the beginning, there was a meeting scheduled at the Vietnamese American Civic Association (VACA) but no participants came. After a discussion with the team and the collective volunteer from the community, we realized the failure originated from our westernized approach towards outreach. VACA represents a formal setting while the Vietnamese community feels comfortable in an informal environment. Along these lines, it was important during home visits for a team member to speak Vietnamese to facilitate open discussions. From observations, during the home visits, everyone knew each other and felt comfortable enough to verbalize their thoughts. Those at the VACA health day were quiet and tense. Learning from this experience, our methods for outreach now incorporated cultural sensitivity.

For the Vietnamese student group, the outreach plans for the semester faced many challenges. First, internal problems such as individual personalities, lack of familiarity between the members, and confusion plagued the group. The three-hour class discussion about team work did not have a positive influence on the situation. I have learned that

there is a difference between learning something and applying it to the actual situation. Second, we were confused about the vagueness of students' roles in the project, including the role of CIRCLE staff working within the team. Are they a resource base or active participants? A set of instructions and guidelines did not exist to help the team plan its outreach. Last semester, the class had a specific goal—a community forum. Yet this semester's goal was much more general. How does one go about empowering a community? Third, the team came to realize its limitations, caused by cultural difference, language barriers, and lack of community work experience. It is precisely these challenges that forced the team to slowly shape its purpose and goal.

As university students entering the Springfield Vietnamese community we gained

Education is highly valued in Vietnamese society; as college students, the community distinguished us as educated individuals. The team members came to represent the path for success through education many hope to achieve for the future.

immense knowledge from the outreach experience. Culture encompasses different aspects of a society ranging from its social structure (social, gender, and socioeconomic differences), language, tradition, belief, and ideology. Our exposure to a culture undiluted by western assimilation enhanced our cultural awareness and sensitivity, and was the first step in the trust building phase for community development.

Geographically, our team was a diverse group of individuals from Los Angeles, Germany, Worcester, Amherst, and Boston. The similar experience of the members—growing up outside of Vietnam at an early age—eased communication and fostered understanding

within the team. The group's Westernized perspective influenced our outreach plans; for example, our lack of cultural knowledge and language proficiency, made us rely on others (Chi Hong, Chi Van, and Thien) who had these skills.

Cultural differences between the team and the community created many obstacles. The biggest cultural barrier was language constraints. Our lack of fluency inhibited the transmission and feedback of original ideas, opinions, and thoughts with community members, and using a translator disrupted the natural flow of discussion.

In addition, inter-generational conflict was a problem posed with the elder group. Respectful behavior and manner are crucial when socializing with elders. We had to ask ourselves, "What is an interesting topic for discussion taking into account the language barrier?" Gender complicated the cultural issue further since the team consisted of mainly women. In Vietnamese culture, males are the leaders while females are the care takers. When dealing with elders, the skill of observing and listening outweighs communication.

Within the community, an established social structure exists between its members which creates factions and underlying networks. At the top of the hierarchy are the males, foremost are the elders. At the lower level are the Amerasians who lack the opportunities for education, respect, and acceptance.

Nonetheless, education is highly valued in Vietnamese society; as college students, the community distinguished us as educated individuals. The team members came to represent the path for success through education many hope to achieve for the future.

SELF REFLECTION: Building Unity in Community and Group

Thien Tran

A chemistry/biochemistry major at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Thien Tran wants to know what life after CIRCLE will be like. As part of CIRCLE, the Vietnamese American has been an active participant in SAC and the New World Theater Outreach Project. In addition, he has been involved in the campus Vietnamese Student Association, and has received numerous awards including the Amherst Rotary Club, University Woman, Frank Hart, and Talented Minority scholarships.

During CIRCLE's community outreach work, I learned both about working with the community and working with our group. I learned that group work requires more than just getting all the tasks done. To build an effective team, we all needed to be interested and enthusiastic about what we were doing — self motivated and feeling we wanted to be there. This required all members of the CIRCLE group to be honest with each other, have an open mind, respect one another, trust one another, have a sense of safety in the group, practice open communication, solve conflicts in open, not take things too personally, and be flexible in pursuit of a set goal. Of the above, trust building was the most important. When we lacked trust, we were unwilling to expose ourselves and put ourselves in a position to risk ourselves at the hands of another. Some of the people who naturally didn't fear that they might say something foolish in the group, took the initiative to make the first step toward others. But that wasn't the case for others. We learned

that community members have trouble trusting their own leaders, as well as people from various service agencies, due to bad experiences in their country and in this new culture. I could understand why it was very hard to develop trust with community members who came from this particular situation. For them, to trust is to endanger themselves.

Many of us, though also immigrants and refugees, spent most of our life in the United States, and we didn't really go through the same experiences as the recent immigrants and

canized, many of us experienced rejection from the Vietnamese. People, like myself, felt that they did not belong in the Vietnamese community or the mainstream American community. I felt so isolated from the Vietnamese community during the outreach. This problem made it harder for us to reveal what we believed. Through the seminar, we learned more about ourselves and about relating to others. In the process, we somewhat overcame obstacles of feeling insecure.

Strong teams involve active

I learned that group work requires more than just getting all the tasks done. To build an effective team, we all needed to be interested and enthusiastic about what we were doing . . .

refugees. Nevertheless, the process of going through the group for us was painful. Many of us experienced identity crises. Having been Ameri-

participation. It seems to be a simple equation, but by the middle of the semester, most of the group did not feel included and did not actively participate.

Did we have a team then? Everyone in the group knew that we didn't have a team, but we didn't know how to make the best of it. It was a somewhat uncomfortable environment; we felt lost in what we were doing.

The problems were that we didn't know our role as students and staff, and new participants were not clear about the mission of CIRCLE. For example, the new members felt they were left out of the group because they didn't have the background, yet the old participants were confused about their new role and most of us were struggling with the "collective leader" and PAR theories. Reflecting at the semester's end, we learned that our group needed to focus on and evaluate both the activities with the community and our expecta-

tions from the group. When none of the Amerasians showed up for a March 4th event, we reflected on what strategies would work next time. However, when we had conflicts and lack of interest among our own group members, we let it go by. We needed to balance both. It is of equal importance to accomplish the goal we pursue and to keep our group going with a strong interest. The group needed to go through an emotional awareness process, the way I found an emerging awareness for me about the community.

I think the result from the forum changed my thoughts about the Vietnamese community and kept me with the class until the end. I found myself being part of a project that helped the Vietnamese commu-

nity to move in somewhat of a right direction. Although the unity problems common to all communities might never be resolved, it is a responsibility for me to make an effort to change the conditions in the Vietnamese community. For me, going through the forum enabled me to build my character. I now acknowledge that there is a unity problem in the Vietnamese community and I have learned that it is OK to accept the fact that we have this problem. The important note to myself is that if I see there is a problem to try to fix it, not to run away from it.

It is of equal importance to accomplish the goal we pursue and to keep our group going with a strong interest.

Re-Rooting With My Community

Trinh Nguyen

Trinh Nguyen, an economics and politics major at Mount Holyoke College, has directed much of her energy and vision toward activism in communities of color, especially Asian communities and her own Vietnamese American community. At CIRCLE she was instrumental in creating the Giving SEED program, helped develop course curriculum, and organized community forums and health and economic development conferences—not to mention a wide range of other campus and community activities. Trinh currently works with the AFL-CIO in Toronto on labor issues.

Growing up in the U.S. as a South East Asian refugee, my life has always been dictated and defined outside forces. Because of the need to assimilate and acculturate into the Western society as a mean of survival, I have lost a large part of my Vietnamese culture, language and identity. Due to these uncontrollable circumstances, I was isolated from my own communities. I was always trapped between two worlds, never allowed to be Vietnamese nor American.

It was not until I attended college that I began to question my identity and my parents' experiences as refugees. My involvement with CIRCLE has helped me better understand and link the triumphs and traumas of my past, the realities of the present, and the vision for the future to my own communities. CIRCLE has created a safe environment for me to share my experiences and to support other South East Asian undergraduate students with similar backgrounds.

My field work with the Vietnamese community also provided me with an opportunity to get re-rooted with my community as well as to relearn my language and culture. During my first year with CIRCLE, I was involved in a number of workshops such as group dynamics, conflict resolution, group facilitation, and community outreach. At the same time, I was working in the Vietnamese community with a group of

undergraduate and graduate students.

We put together a community forum to assess the needs of the newcomers in areas of Springfield. For the Vietnamese community we held two focus groups with the Amerasians and the Vietnamese elders. We decided to separate into smaller groups: one group developed an ESL program to teach English to the Amerasians. My group designed a health support group for the Vietnamese elders, which was held every other weekend at an elder's home. We wanted to create a safe comfortable environment for elders to socialize in, to share their concerns about health, family, and other factors, and to support each other in these matters.

Now I am learning the skills and methods to teach others what I have learned, including how to assess and meet learners' needs, how to facilitate groups, how to initiate group resolution, and team building. As part of SAC, I have helped develop courses and facilitate leadership workshops for the new CIRCLE students. Our role is to provide support and resources including structure, voluntarism, internships, employment opportunities and proposal writing. We also network and build coalitions with University-affiliated agencies working with refugees and immigrants.

I want to use my skills and knowledge learned both personally and professionally to help South East Asian youth such as myself within the larger framework of community organizing. Other SAC members and I have the satisfaction of seeing this begin to happen through our efforts: the vision for The Giving SEED program stems directly from our collective professional and personal experiences. The Giving SEED has created a network for young people and college students coming together to share their experiences and concerns with the other South East Asian peers. I find it very exciting that these dialogues and connections encourage undergraduate students and youths to address issues concerning them and their communities.

"When I first started at Mt. Holyoke College, I was a very confused person. Just growing up in the U.S. you're always being pulled to many sides not knowing who you are and where you fit in... I stumbled upon CIRCLE somehow and this is the place. I hope it continues because there needs to be more places like this for people like us [bicultural persons], like me to support one another and I've made wonderful friends that I know I'm going to have for a lifetime."

The Student Advisory Council members take on many roles in CIRCLE:

- undergraduates
- peers
- youth mentors
- community activists
- immigrants
- refugees
- writers
- students
- etc.

These profiles reflect us and the activities we have done within and outside of CIRCLE/SAC.

HAU T. LE
UMass @ Amherst; '96
Economics major
Vietnamese
Lawrence, MA
joined CIRCLE 1/95

Hau, originally from Lawrence, MA, is a student at the University of Massachusetts. Aside from his academic work focusing on economics, Hau is involved in activities and projects that work with the Vietnamese immigrant and refugee community. Through CIRCLE, Hau is a member of the Student Advisory Council and has taught ESL classes for Vietnamese in Springfield. He was also the public relations officer (95-96) for the Vietnamese Student Association at UMass. Hau hopes to eventually study foreign policy, teach and plans on getting more involved in political activities.

ANH LY
UMass @ Amherst; '96
Contemp. American Lit and Asian
American Studies major
Vietnamese American
Norwood, MA
joined CIRCLE 9/94

Anh, a student at the University of Massachusetts, is an ardent activist in ALANA, Asian-American, and Vietnamese communities. With CIRCLE, Anh has been involved in many projects including: Amerasian women in Spring '95 & ESL Volunteer Project in Spring '96; the American Festival Project; students organizing in the 5-college Asian American communities; and political organizing toward Asian American Studies. She has also done community fundraising for a Buddhist Temple in the Boston area. Anh also enjoys creative writing in poetry and fiction, canoeing and hiking, playing the piano, flute, and oboe, listening to good music and cooking and eating good food with good friends and family. Anh has received the Talented Minority Scholarship, Senior Leadership Award Nomination, the Grant of the Chancellor's

Commission on Human Rights Relations & Civility and is a member of the ALANA Honor Society. Her other accomplishments include: facilitator of Asian American women's support group (Everywoman's Center); co-founder of Asian American Studies Coalition; Student Government Association-ALANA Caucus; Vice-Chair; Asian American Studies Association; co-creator of RealizAsian; and published short stories in Jabberwocky and Spectrum, two literary magazines. Anh hopes to continue her work in Asian American Studies, community organizing, pioneering the field of Vietnamese American Studies, and authoring a book or two.

REENA MATHEW
Mount Holyoke College; '98
Politics major
Indian
Philadelphia, PA
joined CIRCLE 9/95

Reena, a student at Mount Holyoke College, combines her interest in politics with her desire to work for her communities. With CIRCLE, she has been involved in the SAC undergraduate training and other SAC activities. Reena was most recently an intern with the Lutheran Social Services Citizenship Project this spring 1996. In addition, Reena is also involved with Asian American Sisters In Action (AASIA), Church Choir (member and secretary) and Youth League (member and secretary) and was Dorm Treasurer. She has received recognition through the Pennsylvania Governor's School for International Studies, the Xerox Award for the Humanities, and Who's Who in American High Schools. In the future, Reena plans on attending graduate school for a Masters and a Doctorate degree in either Business Administration or Public Policy focusing on Third World Development.

RIN MOEUN
UMass@Amherst; '97
Health Education major
Cambodian
Amherst, MA
joined CIRCLE 1/95

Rin, a resident of the Amherst, MA area, works extensively in her own Cambodian community. Rin is a student at the Univ. of Massachusetts, Amherst majoring in Health Education. Through CIRCLE, Rin has been working with the *Cambodian Youth Support Group* which facilitates education in community empowerment, awareness, and leadership through projects and activities. She also is a member of the Student Advisory Council and participates in the New World Theater workshops with the *Khmer Organizing Project*. In addition to involvement in CIRCLE, Rin also works with the Cambodian community teaching Khmer (reading and writing) in the Easthampton community through *HCAC* and as an organizer and volunteer translator for the Cambodian community in Western Massachusetts. Rin hopes to eventually work in the health education field with a job in family planning and disease control.

CRISTINA NATIVIDAD
Mount Holyoke College; '96
"Women and Development" major
Filipina-American
Carteret, NJ;
joined CIRCLE 9/95

Cristina, a "Women and Development in the Third World" special major at Mount Holyoke College, has participated in the human justice work of a number of organizations. At CIRCLE, she has participated in the Student Leadership training, the New World Theater workshops, Citizenship Day. She is also a member of the Student Advisory Council and has worked on SAC as work-study. Cristina has also worked for The Association of Women for Community Work and Development of Paraiso, Cartago, the SouthWest Organizing Project, and ARISE for Social Justice. She is involved in Asian American Sisters In Action (AASIA) at Mount Holyoke College and was co-editor of the AASIA Journal 1996. Cristina was fortunate to have studied abroad at the Institute for Central American Development Studies in San Jose, Costa Rica. She was a Weed Ford-Mellon Summer Research Scholar '95. She is now trying to relearn her mother tongue, Tagalog and hopes to always be a political and creative advocate for human rights, especially those of women and Asian/Asian-American communities.

(SARA)MAI NGUYEN
UMass @ Amherst; '97
Political Science/German major
and Pre-Med
Vietnamese(Amerasian)
Springfield, MA
joined CIRCLE 9/94

Mai was born in Gia Dinh, Vietnam (1/1/70) and arrived in the U.S.A. (4/26/75) five years later. She is a resident of Springfield, Massachusetts. As a Political Science and German major and a Pre-Med student at the Univ. of Massachusetts, Mai takes on a rigorous academic load with her. Through CIRCLE, Mai is involved in the Vietnamese Group, the Vietnamese ESL Program, and as a member of the Student Advisory Council. She also helped organize the Community Forum with an Amerasian Group. Mai has also tutored at the Westside Community School in Pittsfield, MA. Mai also enjoys music, learning about the history of Vietnam, travelling, reading, singing and gardening. She also works with a group to produce a photo essay on Amerasians. She has received the Talented Minority Scholarship (1995) and the U.A.L.R.C. Achievement Award (1996). Mai hopes to become a doctor and return to Vietnam to practice medicine in rural areas with Amerasians. Eventually, she would like to teach "multicultural medicine" to university students.

"[Sally has] been very instrumental in recognizing the potential in all of us--some potential that we never even knew existed. [We] want to thank her for helping us self-discover, self-reflect, self-evaluate. For helping us find ourselves and make ourselves whole."

-Saramai Nguyen

TRINH NGUYEN
Mount Holyoke College; '96
Economics and Politics major
Vietnamese American
Worcester, MA
joined CIRCLE 1/94

Trinh channels much of her energy and passion into work and activism for communities of color and specifically Asian and Asian American communities. As an economics and politics major, Trinh has geared her academic career towards such work with classes in community development, race relations, immigration policy, and urban political economy. Through CIRCLE, she has assisted with curriculum development of leadership workshops and facilitated group dynamics sessions. In addition, she has organized community forums, health, and economic development conferences. She has participated in the Asian Theater Project, the Training of Trainers, and Citizenship Day among others. In addition, Trinh has also worked for the South East Asia Health Coalition, the Vietnamese American Civic Association, and the South East Asia Resource Action Center. Her other activities include Asian American Sisters In Action, The Coalition, Passages, The Network, The Student Government Association, and the Multiracial Committee. She has received recognition through the 1996 Mount Holyoke Community Service Award and the Mount Holyoke February Forum Honorary. Trinh now works with the AFL-CIO in Toronto on labor union campaigns.

LIKE MIKE

(for Hoeun, Sokna, Sokny, Sophoeun, and Rin, who equally deserve the ball)

(for Bunthoeun, Choum, Damnak, Nas, Sopheap, and Heap)

(and for Butch)

Like Mike
if I could be
phat moves, I fakecrossoverlefthooktothebasketwish.
dance
I can slip by you just coz youre bigger
yea I can fly
so I dont have to be as tall as you
jump I will
pass' you
and all your monkey jokes
monkeys fly
and yourebeat
if you think
I cant be
Like Mike

-cristina natividad

THIEN TRAN
UMass @ Amherst; '97
Chemistry/Biochemistry major
Vietnamese American
Amherst, MA
joined CIRCLE 9/94

Thien, a student at the Univ. of Mass, Amherst is a chemistry/biochemistry major. Thien is a member of the Student Advisory Council and participates in New World Theater's Asian Theater Workshops. In addition, Thien is involved with the UMass Vietnamese Students Association and was a former member of SEA. He also spends time reflecting what exactly is life after CIRCLE. He has received numerous awards and scholarships: Amherst Rotary Club Scholarship; University Woman Scholarship; Grian Mario Feta Award; Frank Hart Scholarship; I Have a Dream Award; Talented Minority Scholarship and the WHH Award.

LAN TRUONG
Smith College; '96
Economics major
Vietnamese American
Camarillo, CA
joined CIRCLE 9/94

Lan, a student at Smith College, is an economics major who has been active in many CIRCLE activities. With CIRCLE, Lan is member of the Student Advisory Council, has participated in the New World Theater's Asian Theater Workshops, Citizenship Day, and ESL teaching in Springfield. She has received the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. She also enjoys tennis, travelling, and cooking. In the fall, Lan will be studying Public Policy at the graduate level at Carnegie Mellon University. She hopes to incorporate CIRCLE philosophy and focus into graduate work on issues affecting immigrants and refugees.

KRISTINE R. WOOLERY
Mount Holyoke College; '96
Women's Studies major
Biracial Chinese American
Tennessee
joined CIRCLE 9/95

Kris, a women's studies major at Mount Holyoke College, has worked on a number of different projects working with different communities. Kris is a member of the Student Advisory Council and participated in the Student Leadership Training class when she joined CIRCLE. She also interned with the Cambodian American Association of Western Massachusetts in the spring of 1996. She has also been involved with Asian American Sisters in Action (AASIA) and the AASIA Journal at Mount Holyoke College. Previously, Kris was a field services intern with PFFLAG, National Office. She has received recognition in the Who's Who Among American Colleges and Universities and the MHC Student Leadership and Community Service Award. She also considers living through four years of New England weather-winters an accomplishment! In the fall of 1996, Kris will be working towards an M.S. in community development at University of California, Davis.

THAOMEE XIONG
Mount Holyoke College; '98
(undecided) major
Hmong
Appleton, WI
joined CIRCLE 9/95

ThaoMee, a student at Mount Holyoke College, has combined her community work within Asian and Asian American communities with her academic work and co-curricular activities. Through CIRCLE, ThaoMee is involved with the *New World Theater Project* and *Citizenship Day*. She is a member of the Student Advisory Council and has gone to several conferences as a SAC representative. Prior to CIRCLE, she was involved with the Laos/Hmong Association in her local area. At Mount Holyoke College, ThaoMee is also greatly involved in ALANA and AASIA activities dedicated to promoting awareness of minority issues, combating racism and providing support of minority students, specifically Asian Americans on her campus. ThaoMee has received the First Year English Award (1995) and was a Finalist for the Karen Snyder Sullivan Award (1995). ThaoMee hopes to one day work in the field of public policy.

HEAP SIN
UMass @ Amherst; '97
Cambodian
Amherst, MA
joined CIRCLE 1/94

Heap, a senior at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst is a Computer Science major. In the states since 1988, Heap lives with his sister and is very active with the Cambodian community of Amherst. His fluency in Khmer and English have been an asset in his work with the CIRCLE.

**There's something inside
that makes you go on.
Though the road is rough
And things go wrong.
There's something that lifts...**

Thien Tran

thank you

"They are our psychotherapists."

-Thien Tran on Sally Habana-Hafner's and Janna Shadduck's roles as moral and emotional support in addition to our SAC advisors.

respek

by cristina natividad

dear prends, pamily, beluved
parents,

I klaim you and your
relijons por my tongue. I
abstrak your werds to suit my
ideolodjies. I do so becaws de
mutt, de smut, de pancit ob my
soul(s), de boices peeking out
prom behind my strate blak hair
kempel me to. I respek de in-
tegrity ob your langwedge. and
I kan only do jestic by you in
de mimik ob your aksents and
palates and shadows. I am de
longebity you hab.

salamat

salamat po, ito si tin

"CIRCLE has been the most memorable and inspirational experience for me @ UMass. The incredible friends I have found in CIRCLE have taught me ways to be true to what I believe in and to love what I am doing. Thanks for the collective strength—to all the CIRCLE souls and spirits."

-Anh Ly

"I want to thank CIRCLE because it has brought a different aspect into community development into my life as far as what it means to work for a community organization and a non-profit organization. And I really think it's going to benefit me in my future work."

-Kris Woolery

"To Janna, for all the little work that a lot of us don't want to do but needs to get done. And to Sally. She taught me how to dance the Tinikling. And just because she's pleasant, don't let her fool you. She is a powerhouse. And she creates little powerhouses in all of us."

-cristina natividad

*Personal Message
from Janna*

WE

*Locked in an embrace that has shaped our vision
We move as silhouettes across the horizon.
Trembling with hope and struggling with questions
We glide through clouds, thick and moist
Peering at each other through the brilliance and grey.
We understand something as never before
Clutching each other to never loose sight.
We dance to the tune of a turbulent storm
Seeking a melody that combines all our notes.
We walk on moonbeams cloaked in our dreams
Challenging the sky and demanding the sun.
We speak in a language that rings of our vision.*

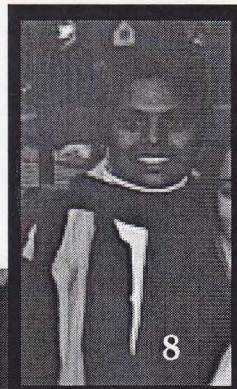
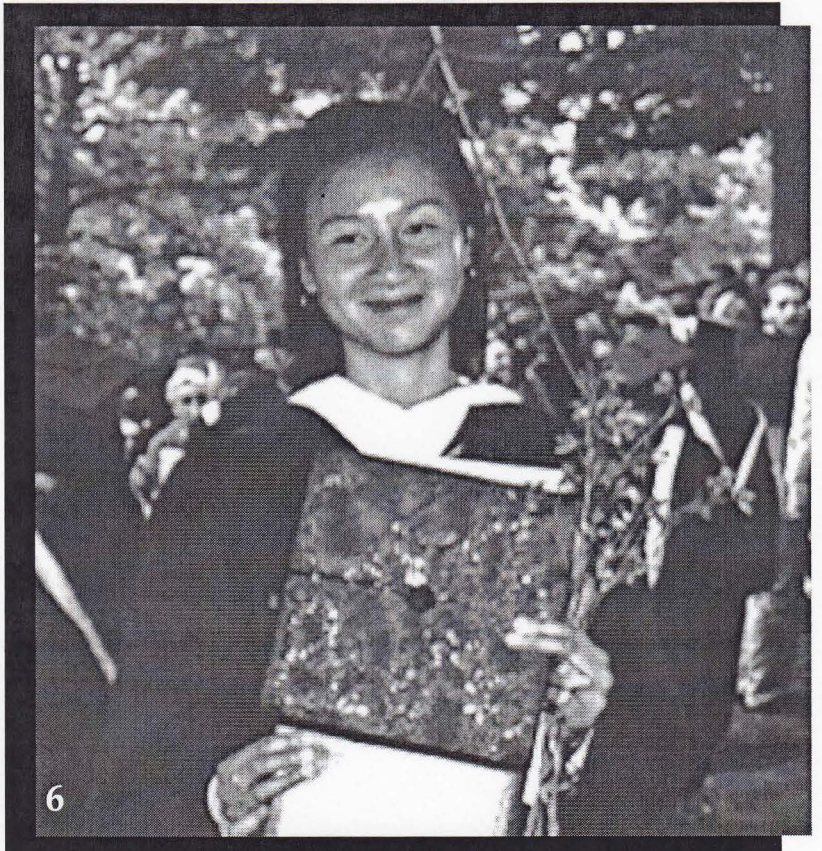
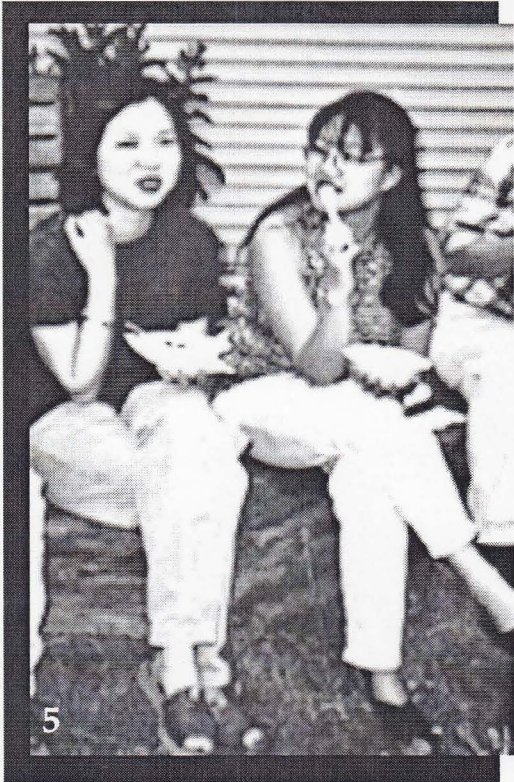
Janna Shadduck

Student Advisory Council - 1994 - 96



SAC Leaders

- 1 • [L to R] Cristina Natividad, Trinh Nguyen, and Saramai Nguyen
- 2 • Hau Le
- 3 • Thien Tran
- 4 • Anh Ly
- 5 • Lan Truong, ThaoMee Xiong
- 6 • Trinh Nguyen
- 7 • Kristine Woolery
- 8 • Reena Mathew
- 9 • Rin Moeun
- 10 • Heap Sin



C I R C L E

The Center for Immigrant & Refugee Community Leadership & Empowerment at UMass - Amherst

CIRCLE: A Statewide Partnership

CIRCLE is a statewide partnership between newcomer communities, the University of Massachusetts system, and the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants. Its mission is reflected in its name: to empower the refugee and immigrant communities using informal, democratic, and highly participatory study circles that help members understand and make choices around important issues in their communities.

In western Massachusetts, CIRCLE is headquartered at the Center for Organizational and Community Development within the Center for International Education, School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and is committed to grassroots collective leadership and community development. Cambodian, Vietnamese, Tibetan, and Russian communities in the area participate in its educational training programs.

CIRCLE: A Model for Collective Leadership

Since its inception, CIRCLE at UMass Amherst has provided a model of collective leadership to newcomer members who have then gone on to organize projects in their own communities. Using a problem-solving method involving repeated action and reflection, leaders have collaborated on initiatives benefiting the larger community. Learning has occurred through their shared vision and action of community building, as well as through an increased sense of responsibility, pride, and cultural identity.

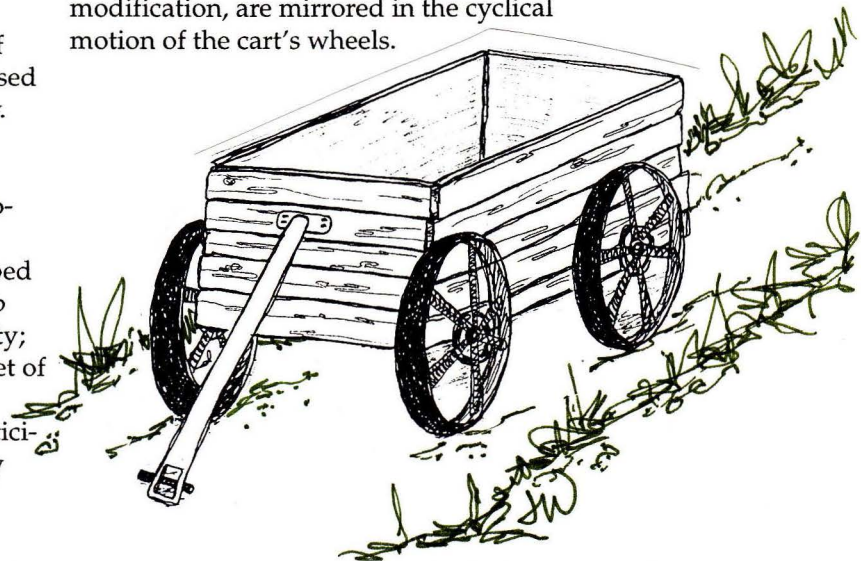
For example, in western Massachusetts, Russian leaders established a community service and advocacy organization, in addition to sponsoring a children's festival; Vietnamese volunteers developed a community-based ESL program; a Tibetan group produced a video documentary of their community; and a Cambodian youth group published a booklet of Khmer games. These successes have reinforced CIRCLE's central beliefs in the importance of participatory and collaborative leadership to community development.

CIRCLE: An Organic Approach to Building Communities

Our work at UMass Amherst is guided by the concept of *making the road as we walk*, a metaphor that captures the organic process behind building leaders and communities. If the road to leadership and empowerment is built by, with, in, and for the community, the ground on which it is laid will be firm, and it will become a solid medium for community development. We do not see the road as a straight path to a specified destination. Rather, we envision it as a winding course with trails to explore and obstacles to overcome, all of which present opportunities for learning and growth.

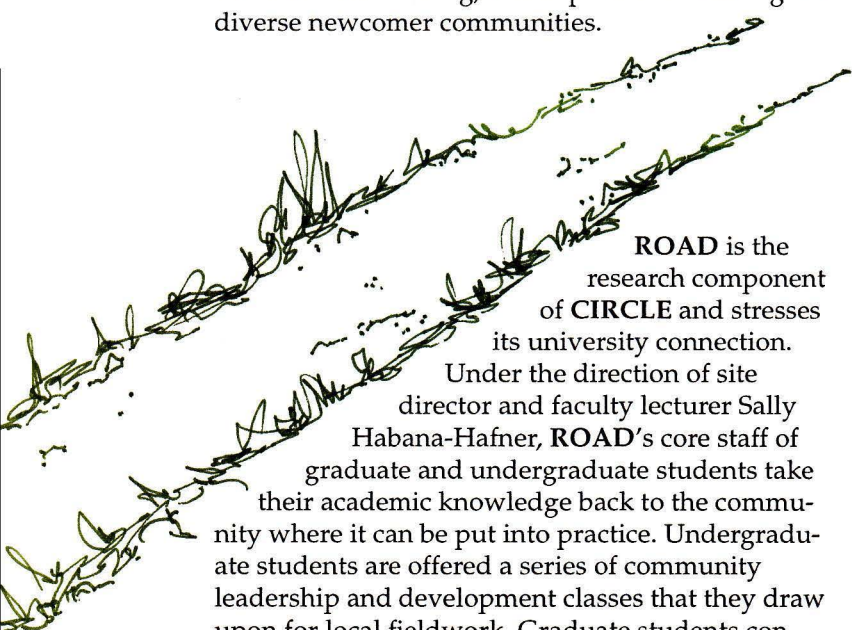
We at Amherst CIRCLE have adopted three other metaphors to describe the three main components of CIRCLE: *the learning cart*, *the helping road*, and *the giving seed*. The first component focuses on established community leaders; the second is a research-based collaboration between the community and academia; and the third connects newcomer youth with UMass undergraduate students in a mentoring relationship.

The Learning CART (Communities Acting and Reflecting Together) carries the knowledge of collective leaders who have shared voices and worked together to mobilize their communities. The cycles of action and reflection, feedback and modification, are mirrored in the cyclical motion of the cart's wheels.



In the newcomer communities of western Massachusetts, groups of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Tibetan, and Russian leaders pass on what they have learned from the collective leadership experience in the past year. Once learners guided by **CIRCLE** staff, they now facilitate the learning of the next group of leaders, and so the leadership model is spread on a grassroots level. **CIRCLE** staff remain available to all levels of this evolving leadership for formal and informal support. Coalition building between the leaders and the communities they represent is promoted through the Regional Council Network (RCN). RCN also sponsors cultural events, field trips, training sessions, and statewide meetings to encourage community participation in **CIRCLE** activities.

The Helping ROAD (Researchers and Organizers Assisting in Development) crosses the boundary between academic and newcomer worlds. **ROAD** facilitates the exchange of knowledge, with university facilitators sharing current research and theory, and community leaders responding with their practical experience. Both sides benefit from the collaborative learning, which promotes thriving and diverse newcomer communities.



ROAD is the research component of **CIRCLE** and stresses its university connection. Under the direction of site director and faculty lecturer Sally Habana-Hafner, **ROAD**'s core staff of graduate and undergraduate students take their academic knowledge back to the community where it can be put into practice. Undergraduate students are offered a series of community leadership and development classes that they draw upon for local fieldwork. Graduate students conduct field-based research, as well as participating in seminars and independent studies that both support, and are informed by, the students' involvement in the newcomer communities. **CIRCLE** also offers seminars bringing together community leaders and students in a discussion of community building. The knowledge gleaned from all these studies is made available to educators, practitioners, and the public through articles, training modules, and other written materials.

The Giving SEED (Students for Education, Empowerment, and Development) contains the potential of new young leaders who, having been nurtured by their community, give back to it in the form of advocacy at maturity. **SEED** cultivates indigenous knowledge and cultural identity as a way to promote community growth and change.

Focused on youth, this community service program links refugee and immigrant undergraduate students with local young newcomers. The students play a critical role in working with the youth to help them become effective community educators and leaders. In preparation for their mentoring role, students explore issues of cultural identity, community dynamics, training skills, and community activism through a series of undergraduate courses. Students also put into practice **CIRCLE**'s participatory and collaborative methods through the Student Advisory Council (SAC), a group active in developing the undergraduate courses, among other initiatives.



CIRCLE: Looking Ahead

CIRCLE is an exciting project with much promise for learning between the many cultures and communities involved. Part of our excitement stems from how successes and failures alike have served to spur new creativity, knowledge, and growth. Our central model of participatory action and collective leadership has taken root in several western Massachusetts communities and is spreading. **CIRCLE** has been an opportunity for newcomers to experience "making the road as we walk," or, to put it more simply, empowerment. Finally, **CIRCLE** represents a new collaboration between academia and the community, and a new bridge for practitioners between theory and practice.

Training Materials

Amherst
CIRCLE

Now Available!

The Center for Immigrant
and Refugee Community Leadership
and Empowerment at UMass Amherst
offers
two new training modules in the
Learning CART series entitled

Leaders as Enablers

Each of these training modules resulted from our work in partnership with refugees and immigrants to build capacities that enhance the quality of life in newcomer communities. Guided by participatory education and collective action, this series arose of the training and education program developed with leaders from newcomer communities. The problem-solving approach linked with action-reflection forms the basis of our training, and can be adapted to the sociocultural realities of individual participants and their communities.

Module 1- Group Process

This module addresses fundamental issues and dynamics in working as a group for collective action. It begins by familiarizing participants with key concepts of group need, function, role, and dynamic. By doing exercises which use metaphors and puzzles, participants learn that group building requires maintaining a team spirit while getting a task done. The second segment highlights two major topics in group dynamics: communication and conflict resolution.

Module 2- Community Outreach

This module seeks to sensitize participants to the complexities of doing effective outreach and to provide them with an understanding of the issues and skills important in initiating community work. Community mapping, outreach techniques, and participatory action research are some of the methods highlighted for implementing community development programs.

Leaders as Educators

Our Second Series currently in production features six additional training modules:

Module 1 - Assessing Adult Learning Needs

Module 2 - Learning Objectives & Educational Methods

Module 3 - Facilitation: Tools & Techniques

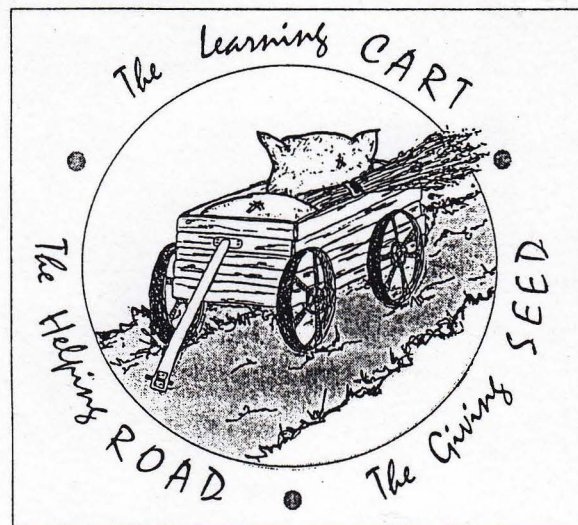
Module 4 - Problem Solving & Team Building

Module 5 - Bilingual/Bicultural Application

Module 6 - Evaluation

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