Asian Student Association should be more political

I have tried various methods to empower the Asian Student Association, and I do not know how much has come of it. Here is a final challenge: Stop being so afraid—a afraid of alienating (potential) members; afraid of offending the administration; afraid of being labeled political; afraid of taking action; afraid of passionately and unapologetically standing up for what is right.

Do not offer rationales of remaining neutral and waiting for people to make their own conclusions; of building a membership before mobilizing for causes; of prioritizing social and cultural activities above political ones (as demonstrated by the percentage of annual funds spent on these activities).

I would rather see defenses of misguided causes than no cause at all. At least then there can be an appropriate backlash against those causes.

Take a stand for Asian Americans. I encourage those who care to bypass ASA and form a new organization, one absolutely excited about and committed to taking up Asian-American causes. Get into action and fight for what is right.

STEVE CHU
Trinity '02

ASA should operate as cultural, not political group

The Asian Student Association should be praised for “prioritizing social and cultural activities above political ones.” Cultural events such as the Lunar New Year enrich the undergraduate experience of all Duke students. They entertain and promote beauty, diversity and cooperation.

Steve Chu’s Dec. 4 call for a politicized ASA represents the dark side of multiculturalism, the growth of divisive special interest groups on campus. Chu wanted to “empower the ASA [to] stop being so afraid... of alienating (potential) members.” Practitioners of identity politics tend to construe issues narrowly to energize their power base and press for special privileges. Last year’s David Lin harassment case should have motivated efforts to combat crime and increase student safety on campus, efforts in the interest of the entire student body. Instead, politically oriented members of the ASA such as Patricia Chen wanted to use it to “increase the number of Asian and Asian-American administrators in the Office of Student Affairs.”

Multiculturalism means true culture, not “cultural” groups that encourage elitist self-segregation and racial provincialism. “Standing up for what is right” entails uplifting the members of a community, not setting them against one another.

MIKE SIMMS
Trinity '03

for referenced letter, see http://www.chronicle.duke.edu/story.php?article_id=24547
Influencing ASA requires involvement, interaction

Steve Chu in his Dec. 4 criticism of the Asian Students Association has succeeded in doing two things. One is making some incredibly unsubstantiated claims. Chu proudly states that he has "tried various methods to empower the ASA." A word like "empower" begs for examples. He has also demanded ASA to "stop being so afraid" of taking political action. I can only laugh at the idea that ASA might be governed or ruled by fear. Chu makes a judgement that ASA does not care about political issues because we do not spend as much funds on political events. Do I really need to explain the flaw behind that logic? And his desire for us to stand for "misguided causes" simply so that we can be advocating for any cause speaks for itself.

Some have suggested to me that I should be diplomatic in my response and cite examples of ASA political action and events so that students not involved with ASA can also understand this discourse. However, as Chu has also succeeded in doing the second thing, which is once again avoiding the direct approach to finding a solution to his gripes, I'm getting a little tired of being diplomatic and being on the defensive. In past occasions, the ASA Executive Board has invited Chu to contact us directly and me in particular, so that we could have a serious discussion about how ASA can be more politically active, if such is the need. And as passionate about ASA's role on this campus as he is, Chu has never accepted that invitation.

So with this opportunity, I want to make clear that the core purpose of this letter is not about defending ASA with a list of accomplishments. I am proud of how far ASA has come from the days of my freshman year, and I am certainly proud of the members of my Executive Board. That is all I feel the need to say right now. Instead, this letter is a call to not only Chu but to others who have questions or concerns about ASA. Be proactive, bend my ear, meet the Executive Board, learn about how we function and work with us to address your concerns. If you refuse to be better informed and refuse to approach the board, then I am only left to question your true agenda.

JIN PARK
Trinity '02

The writer is president of ASA.

for referenced letter, see http://www.chronicle.duke.edu/story.php?article_id=24547

ASA leaders have not ignored political discussions

In his Dec. 4 letter, Steve Chu argues that the Asian Student Association should be "more political" just for the sake of being political. Although I applaud his effort to incite passion and interest in Asian-American political issues, I was disappointed that his letter did not identify which causes and issues ASA is ignoring because it is "afraid." His claim that ASA should take up the defense of any cause, even a misguided one, for the sake of being politically active is vague and irresponsible.

The Asian and Asian-American community is comprised of different nationalities with different cultural histories that give rise to diverse political and social interests. ASA, like other cultural organizations that represent a varied constituency, should be judicious in choosing which causes and issues to promote because the interests of its members are not homogeneous. Overuse of such a collective voice for the wrong causes will only serve to diminish its credibility.

ASA works to create community among its members and Duke at-large, which is important in identifying political issues and problems for the community. While ASA has been most successful in its social and cultural activities, it has not ignored political venues of conferences and forums. Each year, ASA has put on its own conference or forum, or it has advertised nearby area conferences for interested students. In February 2002, ASA is bringing the largest conference for Asian Pacifics and Asian-Pacific Americans on the east coast to Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The East Coast Asian Student Union serves as a forum and vehicle for education, empowerment and collaborative action on Asian-Pacific American issues. Obviously, the bid to bring ECASU here would not have happened if ASA was not interested in promoting political awareness and activism. Empowerment begins with students; we cannot expect ASA to be "more political" if students show no interest. Therefore, I challenge Chu and other members of the Duke community, Asian or non-Asian, to attend and learn about the issues they might be interested in fighting for.

ELAINE HO
Trinity '02

for referenced letter, see http://www.chronicle.duke.edu/story.php?article_id=24547