

Passing the Torch: Student Leadership in the Asian and Pacific-Islander Speech-Language-Hearing Caucus

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As a former teacher, current doctoral student and Korean American, trying to find my footing in the field of speech, language, and hearing was overwhelming. Fortunately, I found my way to the Asian and Pacific Islander Speech-Language-Hearing Caucus (API Caucus).

The API Caucus, which serves not only API professionals in communication sciences and disorders (CSD), but also API communities benefiting from CSD services and CSD professionals overall, is at an exciting juncture. The caucus is currently strengthening its foundation while simultaneously developing onward and upward.

What this means for all ASHA members is the chance to increase cultural competency, and in doing so, to help advance the field. What this means for me, a graduate student, is the chance to develop leadership skills and to help advocate for the needs of API communities in CSD.

Revitalizing the API Caucus — student perspective

I joined the executive board of the API Caucus in spring 2016. I then attended my first meeting later that fall at the Los Angeles ASHA Convention. Despite having previously attended ASHA, I only learned about multicultural constituency groups (MCCGs) in 2015 through participating in ASHA's Minority Student Leadership Program.

At the API Caucus meeting, I quickly realized the vast amount of work to be done. The senior board members, led by President Dr. Betty Yu, walked us through the history of the API Caucus. What resonated with me as a student was the importance of understanding API roots within ASHA and continuing the grassroots work to ensure API voices have a seat at the table.

Immediate efforts included revitalization through creating and passing bylaws, documenting institutional memory and identifying how to best develop the organization. I had the chance to take a lead role on designing a survey to learn about individuals from Asian-Pacific Islander backgrounds within ASHA, as well as carrying out quantitative analysis. The goal of this ongoing survey is to learn how the API Caucus can support ASHA members, whether that means offering professional development resources or networking/service opportunities. Overall, these efforts contribute to the long-term goal of making the API Caucus sustainable.

API student engagement in the broader perspective

The efforts of the API Caucus to engage students are critical to developing a more inclusive organization that can best meet clients' needs. As of 2018, only 8.2% of ASHA members were minorities, and only 2.6% were Asian or Pacific Islanders (2.4% Asian and 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander). Additionally, just 6% of ASHA members identified as bilingual service providers. Yet we know that ASHA has a marked need for service providers who are not only culturally competent but also bilingual. This necessarily entails increasing the number of professionals from underrepresented communities within ASHA.

To build a more inclusive field, we need to recruit more diverse students into CSD. ASHA offers some general avenues supporting diversity, equity and inclusivity (e.g., the Multicultural Issues Board, the MCCGs and the Multicultural Concerns Collective). Critically, MCCGs such as the API Caucus offer consistent support and structure to folks who are either from underrepresented communities within ASHA or who are interested in learning how to better meet the needs of clients from those communities. The work of the API Caucus takes place year-round and falls largely outside of the annual convention: board meetings across multiple time zones (and continents), research and development, website design, and so on. It truly is a grassroots effort made possible by the sheer will of folks who realize the importance of making sure our voices in an overwhelmingly nondiverse organization are heard.

The future of the API Caucus

Overall, serving on the API Caucus board has been an invaluable experience. As a student, I get to be involved in hands-on development for a cause I very much care about — supporting API communities in my profession's organization. In the near future, we plan to:

- Host a panel presentation on updated survey findings at the 2019 ASHA Convention.
- Host our annual meeting at the 2019 ASHA Convention.
- Continue creating professional development resources in CSD professions.

In the long run, our strategic planning includes but is not limited to:

- To be connected with and to support API professionals in CSD professions.
- To be connected with and to support professionals supporting API communities in the CSD professions.
- To facilitate networking and the sharing of knowledge among members.
- To provide mentoring for students and faculty.
- To support research that advances speech, language, hearing and communicative wellness within API communities.

Not on these lists is the effort API Caucus senior officials, past and present, have made on passing the torch to students. They realize the importance of welcoming students, and of welcoming all ASHA members, to make the future of the API Caucus bright. To this end, please

join us at our annual meeting and become part of our organization. We welcome CSD students and professionals of all backgrounds who are interested in API communities!



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Teresa Girolamo, M.S., is a Ph.D. candidate in child language at the University of Kansas where she works on a longitudinal study of individuals with specific language impairment (PI: Dr. Mabel L. Rice). Additionally, Teresa is dedicated to improving equity and inclusion in CSD and higher education. She is interested in the language abilities of minority adolescents and young adults with ASD, serves as secretary of the Asian & Pacific Islander Speech-Language-Hearing Caucus, and is the president of the KU Human Development Student Equity & Inclusion Workgroup.