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Anna Popp
Seattle University

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Graduating Members of Culture Clubs on Campus Have to Settle for Virtual Goodbyes

Anna Popp, News Editor

For the past three years, graduating students and members of various culture clubs on campus have seen fourth-year students celebrated and honored for their accomplishments at events throughout the month of May, leading up to graduation.

Clubs such as the United Filipino Club (UFC), Hui O Nani Hawai'i Club and the Seattle U Vietnamese Student Association (SUVSA) hold events in the springtime, where hundreds of families, friends and community members gather to celebrate their cultures, dance and pay tribute to the graduating club members. However, as a result of the current climate of the COVID-19 pandemic, these events and festivals have been canceled, leaving senior members grappling with the abrupt changes.

Barrio Fiesta is an annual event hosted by UFC and was slated to be held on March 14. The festival features a skit surrounding a social justice issue and this year's skit was going to be about the experience of Filipino-Americans who are undocumented. The event also holds a donation to the Foundation for Philippine Progress, dinner cooked by the students, performances, and a senior slideshow and dance.

Liza Saldares, president of UFC, and Michelle Soledad, vice president of UFC, are both fourth-year students graduating next month. Soledad and Saldares had been looking forward to the senior dance at the Barrio Fiesta since their first year at Seattle U.

Now, with the event canceled, Soledad and Saldares are spending Spring Quarter keeping UFC in touch via Zoom, but also processing and accepting the sudden ending to their time at Seattle U and with the club that became their family.

"We just have to accept what we do have and rebuild our perception of what our senior year is going to be," Soledad said. "I'm still going through it and as the next couple weeks approach, there's still going to be feelings of 'this would be the time that we start saying goodbyes and look forward to the next chapters of our lives,' so I get emotional."

This year, UFC was awarded the Lasting Impact Award, given by the Center for Student Involvement in recognition of the club's impact and legacy at Seattle U and in the broader community. Saldares highlighted the excitement and sense of pride the first-years expressed in receiving the award.

Saldares also explained the importance of fourth-year students paving the way for first-year students so they can have a positive experience that extends to all four years at Seattle U and beyond.

"We still see people on our Instagram or Facebook that graduated 20 years ago, commenting on our stuff. I think that when we say 'lasting impact,' it really hits home because that's something that we really cherish, making sure that there is always space for anyone that wants to be a part of this community," Saldares said.



Michael Ollee

Another campus event that was cancelled due to COVID-19 was the Lū'au, hosted each year by the Hui O Nani Hawaii Club. Lū'au was set to occur April 25, after almost an entire year of planning. The theme this year was "He Ali'i Ka Āina, He Kauā Ke Kanaka" which translates to "the land is chief, we are its servants." The evening usually includes dances centered around the theme and dinner featuring beloved traditional Hawaiian dishes. There is also a senior dance that highlights the graduating members of Hui.

Amber Higashi, a fourth-year biology major and president of Hui, was looking forward to the senior dance at this year's Lū'au, which did not go online via Zoom or get rescheduled. Instead, Higashi and the other fourth-year girls got together on Zoom and performed their dance, which they sent to the artist of the song they performed to.

"Transitioning from Hawai'i to Seattle was not easy and Hui truly provided me with a home away from home," Higashi said in an email. "Even though the ending to our 2019-2020 club year didn't go as planned, I know that I will cherish the memories that I made in Hui for the rest of my life."

Club meetings for Seattle University's Vietnamese Student Association (SUVSA) have gone online and the annual Xuân Festival was turned into a website that keeps community members connected and where they can interact with the different aspects of the festival virtually.

Aspects of the festival typically include traditional Vietnamese clothing, food, donations to charity, a skit and a senior dance. The theme of this year's festival was A New Spring, A New Love. The skit was centered around a person's love for their passion and for their families which can sometimes create conflict, but also included resolutions. The skit was turned into a podcast-style project and is included on the festival website.

Peter Hoang, a fourth-year nursing major and president of SUVSA, maintains a positive outlook as he processes the cancelation of the Xuân Festival and in-person meetings with the club. He is trying to keep the club engaged online by hosting events such as movie nights, an end-of-year banquet and language lessons.

"It's difficult to not be able to celebrate in the same way that other senior classes have been able to, but I am grateful that my health is good, my friends and family are okay, and I have food and housing," Hoang said. "At the end of the day, I have the essentials."

Hoang expressed that while it's unfortunate to be missing out on the final moments and events of being in SUVSA, he is grateful for what he has in a time when many do not have the same privileges. SUVSA will continue holding meetings online and keeping members engaged for the remainder of the year. There will also be an online yearbook and senior panel to honor the club's seniors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has abruptly changed the way graduating club members envisioned their final moments at Seattle U. While they continue to cope and process, taking care of their clubs as the final weeks of the quarter approach has been a priority. The goodbyes are virtual now, but the memories they have made over the years will last forever.