

Asian Coalition of Tallahassee Interview *Questions and Answers*

On Monday, March 01, 2010 a student at School of Library and Information Studies at the FSU College of Communication and Information (www.slis.fsu.edu) interviewed me as part of his course requirement. The project involved interviewing a community leader about the needs of his/her community. Given below is a text of the interview questions and answers.

1. Could you please tell me about ACT and what it does for the Asian community in Tallahassee?

Asian Coalition of Tallahassee (ACT | www.iatlh.org) is an umbrella organization of about 15 associations and groups that aims to unite the Asian communities in the Tallahassee area for promoting and sharing the rich Asian culture and heritage with the citizens of Tallahassee through community involvement and cultural events. In addition, ACT aims to enhance the social, educational, and economic ties to the community at large and hopes to raise the awareness about the Asian culture among the locals and foster a better understanding. Some of the Asian communities are large (for example, Indian and Chinese) but many are small. The Coalition provides a voice and forum for everyone. Without ACT, it would be difficult for the smaller groups to organize cultural events and programs effectively and the larger groups will work by themselves and lose the connection to others.

2. How did you get involved with ACT? What you do within the organization?

India Association of Tallahassee (IATLH | www.iatlh.org) is one of the charter members of the Asian Coalition when it was formed in 2004 by then Chairman Dr Clyde Diao. I joined the Executive Committee of the India Association of Tallahassee about three years ago and started to represent India Association at the Asian Coalition. Soon I was elected as Director, media relations for ACT and became one of the Executive Committee members of ACT. Last year, I was elected as the Chair-Elect for 09-11 term.

As Director of media relations, I was involved in promoting ACT's activities through print, web, radio, and TV media. This meant communicating with news paper and magazine editors about our current and upcoming events, distributing Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to local TV and radio stations, as well as writing event articles and news stories for news papers and news magazines. Now as the Chair-Elect, I am more involved in the event planning and execution, expanding and promoting ACT and its activities.

3. What are the major needs, issues, and problems facing the Asian community in Tallahassee?

At the outset I want to make it clear that Tallahassee has been a wonderful place for me personally and for most of the Asian community. We feel the welcome, warmth, and acceptance of this community. Many of us have lived more than two decades in this town without any problems. Therefore the word 'major issues' doesn't really apply to the problems we face. The issues we face are more about expressing and preserving our cultural heritage. We want everyone to understand that despite the fact that we may look different, speak other languages, and wear different clothes, we cherish the same core values like everyone else: focus on family, good education, freedom to express our views, freedom of worship, and opportunities to advance in life. We also want to teach both our own and other members of the younger generation about our culture and heritage so that it can be preserved with pleasure and pride and perpetuated without ridicule or discomfort.

4. What kind of help do members of the Asian community need to have a better life in Tallahassee? How do these needs differ between members from different national/regional/ethnic backgrounds, or do they?

We touched upon this on the last question. Our needs are more modest. We want to teach both our own and other younger generation about our culture and heritage so that it can be preserved and perpetuated. For example, we want Asian Americans to be able to go back to their native countries and be comfortable among their own people. We want them to be able to preserve their language, traditions, religious practices. This means that everyone should feel welcome and comfortable in their own way of living rather than trying to fit into level that anything different is not acceptable. We also want the general public accept us as part of the local community and hear our voices and opinions.

Some of the notable differences among other immigrants/nationals of Western and African origins and Asians are: religion, family-centric upbringing, and the role of elders. Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism have fewer places of worship and have different take on the philosophical view of God and man. Many Asians grew up in big families and lived near even bigger extended families which they don't have here and miss its support. So they find it hard to adjust in this more person-centric society. This is especially true for those who have grown older, retired, or work in occupations with less contact with others. Thirdly, role of parents and grandparents and uncles and aunts play a larger role in Asian communities which is difficult to replicate here.

5. What services are available to provide any needed aid and what are their strengths and weaknesses?

Due to ever increasing interconnectivity of the world we live in, people are realizing that it is hard to be alone. But it is still ironic that even with availability of technologies and "Apps" people still are lonelier than they were before the new "inventions". So everyone is trying to learn about other cultures, study a foreign language, visit new and exotic places. The Internet and many modes of

communications in general have helped reduce the divide between Eastern and Western societies. For example, when I arrived two decades ago in the US, I could not send a telegram to my folks stating that I had safely arrived, since it was difficult to send a telegram from Boston, MA (the technology was obsolete in the US and was only way in rural India). Today, I can pick up the phone and call home or fire-up my Webcam and talk to my sister anytime I want. The Unicode font supported browsers, word processors, and e-mail clients allow me to communicate instantly with those I love and miss in my own native tongue.

The things I would like to see expand are places for elders to meet and do stuff together. More resources are needed for people who don't have technical skills to read, write and communicate in their native tongue. Expanded access is needed for books and magazines in their native languages.

6. What about library services? Are they adequate, or do you feel that they could be doing more to meet the needs of those you represent?

More resources for people, who don't have technical skills to read, write and communicate in their native tongue. Books and magazines in their native languages. Basic computer lessons to show how to send an e-mail in their native tongue read and write in their native tongue. Teach communication skills to those who are shy and don't realize how expressive this culture is. A way to meet with others and learn something new. Meeting rooms and programs that showcase talents of different ethnic groups.

7. Are there any other groups that ACT works with?

Other than the member organizations, we work with FSU International Center; we are partners with Census 2010, City of Tallahassee, Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, Business communities and others.

8. Is there anything else you would like to say about the Asian community in Tallahassee?

We are here to stay. We are happy to be here amongst you. As we learn more about the American culture, literature, arts, music, and habits we invite you to learn about us. Come to our programs and learn that we are just like you, and we even have good food to share.

9. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Why did you choose to study about Asian Coalition of Tallahassee? Do you have Asian friends or neighbors? Have you visited an Asian country or plan to visit one? Have you been to an Asian festival? Tasted an Asian dish? Share some of your opinions.

Thanks for asking me to speak about the Asian community. I welcome exchanges like this that expand both our knowledge.