

A Meeting with University of Maryland President Wallace Loh

By Lillian Zhou, CAPA JRC reporter

A chilly Saturday morning on the 26 of January, the executive and Asian American Heritage Planning Team of the Chinese American Parents Association of Montgomery County (CAPA-MC) held a social gathering with the current President of the University of Maryland (UMD), Wallace Loh. They held discussions on several topics, ranging from the difficulties Asians Americans currently face in the workplace to the many improvements to UMD which Dr. Loh put in place as President.

Asian Americans in the United States

Firstly, Dr. Loh and the CAPA-MC members began with a discussion of how to establish more positive Chinese Americans role models in American society in light of current tensions between the two countries. An issue which was brought up was the lack of Chinese participation in giving back to the community. Dr. Loh encouraged all Chinese-Americans to be actively involved in their community, saying that “...democracy is not just voting. What makes democracy work is people working together.”



Attendees getting ready before the meeting

One question which Dr. Loh was asked- “What are your thoughts on encouraging Asian Americans to merge with the melting pot- what advice do you have for us to integrate?” To this, Dr. Loh replied that although a large percent of the excelling student body for many colleges identify as Asian American, there are only two Chinese-American university presidents in the entire country- “Me, and one in Santa Barbara [in California].” He addressed that the larger issue at hand were the stereotypes that Asians faced in the workplace, that Chinese are skilled in technology .or STEM-related jobs, but not fit for public or leadership ones.

Personal Journey

Dr. Loh then went over his personal journey to becoming President of UMD. Although he was born in Shanghai, his family brought him to Lima, Peru when he was only one year old. He grew up in Peru and left for the United States when he was 15. Although he didn’t speak much English, he studied hard and earned first a master's degree from Cornell, then a doctorate in psychology from the University of Michigan, and finally, a law degree from Yale. Joking about his upbringing, Dr. Loh added that Spanish is the only language he speaks without an accent. “I speak Chinese with a Spanish accent, and English with a mix of Chinese/Spanish accent.” He added that people were initially very confused when they met him, as he looked Asian but spoke fluent Spanish.



Chatting and waiting for the meeting to start

UMD College Park Development

Dr. Loh then discussed the actions he took to improve UMD at College Park. He said, “The major mission of a university is not just to educate people to get jobs- although that is a major part- but to teach people to be civilized, responsible citizens of society.” Dr. Loh described a civics education program he hoped would accomplish that goal and focus on unity and respectful discussion among students. Dr. Loh also described his vision for education in the future. “Typically in college, you have an auditorium with 100-200 students, and the teacher lectures- this is so obsolete.” Dr. Loh instead advocated for a more hands-on learning, with students downloading teacher’s lectures onto mobile devices instead of sitting passively for 60 minutes during class. Actual class time would then be spent working in small groups on projects applying the topics learned from each lecture, receiving active help from TAs and teachers. He described a new building which he planned for lectures of this kind, saying that students loved the teaching style, but that teachers were inexperienced in instructing in that fashion.



Dr. Loh and CAPA MC members discuss

Dr. Loh then recalled past experiences he had during his presidency at UMD. One main project he had was to improve the situation in College Park, which was victim to crime and violence. This operation began

