Fostering Filipino graduate student community at UCI

Professors Maxx Arguilla and Herdeline Ardoña found a way to bring together Filipino graduate students at UCI.
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UCI Professors Maxx Arguilla and Herdeline "Digs" Ardoña host a Filipino graduate student dinner at the their home.

Picture Credit:
Maxx Arguilla

Last fall, Professors Maxx Arguilla of the UC Irvine Department of Chemistry and Herdeline “Digs” Ardoña of the UCI Samueli School of Engineering had a mission: find a way to foster community among Filipino graduate students at UCI.

How they might do that, though, wasn’t immediately clear.

But then they remembered something that unites Filipinos: food. Food is such a unifying force in the Philippines that, according to Arguilla, there’s more than one way the people there ask a Filipino how they’re doing. “Instead of asking ‘How are you?’” Arguilla said, “We customarily ask ‘Have you eaten?’ or ‘Are you hungry?’”

The pieces fell into place, and the two hosted about 10 UCI graduate students at their home last October where everyone dined and connected over traditional dishes like lechon, pancit bihon and sisig.

“Our motivation for organizing these gatherings is simple,” said Ardoña. “Having been Filipino graduate students ourselves – especially in places where there aren’t many – we envisioned these gatherings providing a venue that catalyzes community-building amongst our few UCI graduate students with Filipino heritage.”

The night was a hit: students from all corners of campus – including chemistry, chemical engineering, computer science, neuroscience, electrical engineering and cognitive sciences – connected in a way where “everyone felt as if they knew each other all along,” Ardoña said.

The next gathering is in June, and this time Arguilla and Ardoña expect about 15 students to attend, and they encourage those who may be interested in joining the gatherings to reach out to them directly. “We hope to continue these gatherings and to reach more graduate students with Filipino heritage at UCI,” said Arguilla.

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