



News Release

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Century Student Blossoms as Leader

Jim Vang is a familiar figure at Century College, swooping through the hallways on his electric scooter.

A highly social person, Vang's leadership skills have blossomed at Century, where he has taken on roles such as president of the Asian Student Association, vice president of the Human Services Club and master of ceremonies at the annual Asian Student Association Recognition Dinner.

"Century is like an extended family for me," said Vang, 30, who started taking classes at Century in 2008.

Vang first tried attending a private college right out of high school, but found he was not prepared to buckle down and do the work. For three years after that, he worked long hours in his family's auto body shop and eventually realized he did not like cars enough to make them the center of his career.

Vang then went to work for a non-profit agency that services people with disabilities. Vang has a mild case of cerebral palsy and an arthritic hip that causes him to need the scooter for mobility. After three

years of working the front desk at the agency, Vang decided it was time to complete his higher education.

“At age 27, I was a little wiser and a little more focused,” said Vang with a grin.

At Century, Vang receives assistance from the Student Support Services TRIO program and works with academic tutors. When he completes his general education credits, he plans to finish his four-year degree at Metropolitan State University with a social work major. If all goes well, he will advance to graduate school to earn his master’s degree.

“I have gained so much self-awareness at Century,” said Vang. “I have come in contact with a wide and diverse group of people. And I have really been given the opportunity to develop my leadership and networking skills. The working world pays for leaders, not followers. Century is really a perfect training ground for leadership.”

Vang said to get his Asian Student Association executive group to grow as a team he introduced Brazilian jujitsu into the executive training. “We learned to be leaders,” said Vang. “We are sometimes put in uncomfortable, awkward and difficult situations, and we have to make the best decisions for the people we serve. So, we have to trust each other. You learn more about yourself when you are helping other people.”

In addition to his social skills, Vang is a font of knowledge about Hmong culture. Friends and fellow students often come to him with cultural questions involving Hmong traditions and etiquette.

“In Hmong culture, what is spoken is equally important with what is not spoken,” said Vang. “Body language is so important. The older generation is especially keen on this.”

Vang’s parents are old school Hmong, he said, and he grew up speaking Hmong at home. “I really enjoy talking with the elders in our community,” he said. “They have so much to teach us.”

Vang is a resident of St. Paul and he has an older sister and four younger brothers. All his siblings are working in professional jobs and his youngest brother is on track to become a surgeon after earning his

master's degree in biology. Vang's dad has given up his auto body shop and now works in the Century facilities maintenance department.

Vang said there are several Century professors who have been especially influential. They include Jill Cadwell in English and John Oughton in Science. "Jill Cadwell taught me that to be a good leader, you have to do everything with compassion for others," said Vang. "John Oughton taught me that leaders face adversity head-on and stay steady."

Reflecting on leadership, Vang said, "To use where you come from and what you have been through is just as important as where you want to go in the future."

Vang said there are three facets that are important to college success – education, networking and leadership development. "College students often have the education part down, but they forget about networking and leadership development," said Vang. "Those are facets they need to develop. Those things come back full circle. You will need all three things to be successful."

