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Madeline (<https://mainecampus.com/author/mgernhard/>)

I am a third year English Major at the University of Maine. In my free time I can be found playing rugby, working out, or enjoying a good book.

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On Monday, March 26 the University of Maine held a vigil to honor the lives lost in the Atlanta shooting on March 15. A group of students and Orono locals gathered in the Martin Luther King Plaza outside the North Pod of the Union at 4 p.m. in remembrance of the victims, and to show solidarity with the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities.

The UMaine Multicultural Student Center, who works to create an inclusive environment for multicultural students on campus at UMaine, hosted the event. It opened with remarks from Anila Karunakar, the director for diversity and inclusion at the Multicultural Student Center. She began by thanking those who came to support the event.

"We stand in solidarity with our community and our broader community against hate and oppression. Just this past week in light of what happened in Georgia we really want to highlight the fact that these incidents were not out of the ordinary," Karunakar said. "That this came at the tail end of a huge resurgence of hate against folks who are Asian across the United States since the beginning of the pandemic. So not only are we dealing with the pandemic, we also need to acknowledge that we are dealing with a racism pandemic as well, that marginalized folks are also dealing with."

Karunakar also wanted to call attention to the tendency for people to remove themselves from situations such as this, because they do not happen in the immediate community.

"Even though we assume or we think that things are happening out there, in the bigger cities or in those places... we have had incidents right here on our campus and in our community," Karunakar said. "I am really thankful that here we are, showing up in ways that can communicate to the rest of our campus and our community that we really care. That we want our students and our staff and our faculty and our broader community to be here. That they are valid, that their presence adds to our life, and that they bring joy to us, and that we are UMaine, together."

Karunakar then turned her thanks to the Asian Student Association, who also helped to organize the event. There were a few members of the association present, who led attendees in a moment of silence, as they read the names of the eight victims, six of those Asian American lost in the Atlanta shootings.

After a moment of silent reflection and acknowledgement, Karunakar once again thanked those in attendance for their show of support. She also took a moment to address some of the questions that people commonly have in the wake of tragedies such as this.

“One of the big questions that people tend to ask is ‘now what?’ or ‘now where do we go from here?’ and I think that even as we stand and absorb this moment and the realities of it, I think that people have heard so much about just checking in with friends,” Karunakar said, speaking to the importance of reaching out to those affected in our immediate community. “There are friends amongst us who are really afraid, and nervous. Folks are feeling very vulnerable right here, so if you have friends check in with them. See how you can be a source of support for them.”

Karunakar ended her remarks by suggesting that students take steps to break the cycle of ignorance, and to unlearn some of those biases and narratives which they have known in the past. She also advised that students educate themselves on the history of these biases, noting that AAPI has resources available to help teach people about how to get involved with putting a stop to hate against the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

Many of the students present at the vigil remarked on the importance of elevating the voices of these groups.

“Spaces and vigils like this are extremely important because healing can’t begin until the events have been addressed,” said Aurianne Fitz-Marquez, a second-year marine science student. “In the state of Maine and on the campus of UMaine it is more vital than ever to have these discussions.”

May is Asian American and Pacific Islander awareness month, and the UMaine Multicultural Student Center will be hosting events to continue these conversations around campus.

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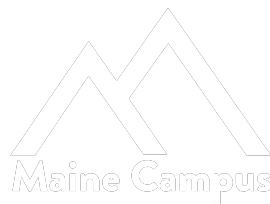
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