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ASIAN AMERICANS

Asian Sorority Takes Self-Defense Class Amid Anti-Asian Hate



StandStrong photo

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The increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in the news over the past few year spurred a sense of fear in Purdue University student Rachel Zhang, especially after hearing about incidents occurring on college campuses.

“I personally haven’t dealt with anything like that on-campus [and] I don’t know anybody who has. But just hearing about it is really scary

use college is supposed to feel more safe than if you’re just outside

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In response to this fear, Zhang said her roommate Sylvia Liu approached her in April with the idea of doing a self-defense class for Purdue alpha Kappa Delta Phi, an Asian-interest sorority that they joined. Purdue alpha Kappa Delta Phi held a virtual self-defense class taught by the nonprofit organization StandStrong, drawing in 15 sorority members and students from other on-campus Asian organizations.

Created in 2019, StandStrong is a global movement that aims to empower individuals and communities by providing effective self-defense skills at no cost. Co-founder Lior Ofir said that he created the organization because after 15 years of studying martial arts, he noticed that many people don't want to become black belts, but rather just want to gain a sense of safety.

"I said 'What can we do in a shorter amount of time to actually provide them this feeling that they are looking for?' Let's think [of] what most
▼ le will face in their life, what kind of threats or encounters they

However, with the abundance of hate and discrimination in the world, the organization has since expanded to reach and support more people across different communities. Ofir said that he has seen research that indicates if you have more self-defense training, you will be bullied less and be less violent yourself.

“The more you expand to others, the more you help everyone, you create this perfect harmony that we are trying to [create] in the world, and you leave a better place behind you. When you give those tools, when you give power to people, and they use it right, there is no better feeling in the world. And so for me, in particular, this [Purdue class] was all about actually building the bridges [and] actually helping people that need it,” said Ofir.

During the class, Zhang said that the instructors were very encouraging and placed an emphasis on confidence. Since they work with people of all different genders, ages, physical abilities, and experiences, Ofir said StandStrong uses a system called “praise, correct, and empower.” When teaching a technique, the instructors tell the student what they are doing right, and provide suggestions on how to improve.

“The empowerment that comes with that is basically, after you correct it, I tell you ‘See, you started with point A, but now you’re at point B. You are still not a black belt, but you are much better than before, so very good job. Keep doing it, because the more you will do it, the better progress you will have.’ This is the best way to make them feel more confident. I tell [people], ‘Listen, you’re not gonna be Bruce Lee or a black belt after this class. But you’re going to take at least one very valuable thing that you’ll be able to use in your way,” Ofir said.

g said she had never taken a self-defense class before, and that

“It’s just super helpful, especially on a college campus as an Asian American woman right now. [The fear] is still there, because it’s hard to completely go away. But [the class] minimized the amount of fear I have on-campus and [increased] the amount of confidence I have in my own safety, as well as the confidence I have if a situation occurs. I have a plan, I’m not going to just freeze there and not know what to do,” Zhang said.

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