

Alumni profile: Trailblazing filmmaker Bobby Yan (TC '95)

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Bobby Yan (TC '95)

Bobby Yan (TC '95), an eight-time Emmy Award-winner with two new movies premiering next month, has built a successful career as a full-time filmmaker. But if he could offer advice to his 21-year-old self on the eve of graduating from Tulane, he'd tell himself to aim high and believe in his potential.

“Think of your highest goal — think big and go from there. Don't allow anyone to create doubt in your vision of who you are. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it, because if you do the work, and you're passionate and really believe in what you're doing, you can achieve it.”

It's advice he'd extend to anyone with dreams of their own. Yan's career traces back to his time at Tulane, where he first got hands-on experience at the Tulane television channel, TSTV. He joined the production team of *Hip Hop Half Hour*, a show popular not only on campus but throughout New Orleans. "I learned the ins and outs of television, and it became a home base for the four years of my time there," he reflects.

During his sophomore year, Yan founded AASU, the Asian American Student Union. As a second-generation Chinese American, he felt driven to create a community for students to share their experiences and build connections. "This became, for me, a passion to create a home base for us to really discuss our experiences on campus, and also to unify us as a whole and to have fun, ultimately," he shares.

Yan returned to campus in February as a sponsor of Black Alumni Weekend, recognizing how vital such events are for building community. "I think we all need to support each other," he says, recalling his own experience of arriving at Tulane and initially feeling alone. Finding support through the Office of Multicultural Affairs with Carolyn Barber-Pierre helped him find his footing. "Affinity groups are so important for support throughout your time at Tulane."

His time at Tulane is still influencing his work. As a communication major, Yan was profoundly influenced by the Communication of Prejudice course taught by Marsha Houston. "It really challenged me to use critical thinking, to think about the concept of racist ideology and how it's being transmitted," he reflects. "Years later the core principles of that course are as important as ever — in how I write and construct stories and in how we can use media as a tool for change to heal and combat negative ideologies and systems of oppression."

While Yan knew at age 21 that he was destined to be a filmmaker, he wasn't quite certain of the steps to get there. Torn between his passion for filmmaking and a possible career as a Broadway singer, he describes his early post-graduate years as "a time of discovery." "It took several years before I found my roots," he says. Eventually, his path became clear through directing music videos, which allowed him to blend his love for filmmaking with his deep connection to music.

The first work that Yan ever wrote and directed was a short film called *Marz*. The film is about a young rapper on the brink of success who faces big decisions after reconnecting with a childhood friend. It was his first foray from music videos into

narrative storytelling. “My goal is to tell stories that explore perspectives that are not usually highlighted,” says Yan.

Over time, Yan’s talent earned him eight Emmy Awards, the television industry’s highest honor for artistic and technical excellence. These awards recognized his contributions as an associate producer and online editor for the MLB Network.

Now, he has two projects coming out in fast succession. First, a thriller called *Sugar Mama* — which he describes as *Fatal Attraction* meets *Get Out* — will stream on TUBI beginning Jan 3, 2025.