designing a web resource page on Chinese history. I also put together a humorous presentation on the sayings of Chairman Mao. At Goucher, I immediately put my students to work on similar projects. I also continued to develop my skills by attending workshops and have, for better or for worse, acquired a reputation as a big “technology user” on campus. While I had my initial reservations about spending time on computers in a seminar on China, my anxieties have since disappeared. Although the web still cannot replace books and journals, I discovered that there is material there of a different and often more exciting kind. My students love, for example, the site for Mao badges and caps. And being able to click and see pictures, hear music, and get the latest information on what’s happening in China has boosted the level of student enthusiasm in my courses.

Bold approaches

At the recent ASIANetwork conference in Chicago, there was an animated discussion in one of the sessions on whether these ongoing faculty development seminars (of which the China Seminar is one) produce people capable of teaching competently at the college level, or whether they produce dilettantes. Guru Rattan, my colleague in the China group, provided an appropriate reply: conventional approaches, she said, are no longer providing answers to the issues the world is facing today. New interdisciplinary perspectives and “bold approaches” from people who are not experts in the traditional sense are precisely what are needed to prepare our students for the world they will work in. There is therefore no harm, she correctly argued, in jumping into a field such as Chinese studies and experimenting with new ideas. That, I believe, is what we did last summer and what we will continue to do this July.

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BEING THERE: IMPROVING TEACHING THROUGH RESEARCH/RESIDENCY IN ASIA
1998 ASIANetwork CONFERENCE PANEL

Michael R. Drompp
History, Rhodes College

Michael Drompp, Panel Chair, teaches “Asian Societies: Past and Present,” “The Origins of Chinese Civilization,” and courses on Inner Asian history and Japan. His area of expertise is the history of China and Inner Asia from the sixth to the tenth centuries. Drompp is particularly interested in political and cultural interactions between the nomadic pastoral peoples of Inner Asia and the Chinese during this period.

The panel examined the question of how research and/or residency in Asia can play a role in teaching courses in Asian Studies. Our aim was to present some ideas in order to facilitate discussion which proved lively. The three panelists found that they shared similar thoughts, some of which are described here.

Diane Clayton, Library, Hamline University

Diane led a study-abroad program in India, which equipped her with fresher and more accurate information about circumstances and issues there through newspapers, journals, observation, and conversations with academics. Observing her students on-site, she identified those topics that were most appealing to them and also expanded her own areas of knowledge through the research that her students carried out. The excitement of student returnees who were guests in her classes at Hamline spurred enthusiasm in those who had not traveled to India, and showed the latter the impact of such experiences.

Authenticity was an important theme in Diane’s presentation. She argued that on-site experience provides one with an authentic voice — a “reality check” — that is not possible to acquire in any other way. Her experiences in India provided her with stories and illustrations to use in making important points, such as the need to combat essentializing tendencies through real experiences (in regard to the theme of Hindu-Muslim conflict, for example). Finally, time in India allowed her to improve her cooking skills for use when
hosting students in her home — yet another benefit of "being there" that can enrich teaching while enticing students.

**Karl Fields, Politics, University of Puget Sound**

Karl has done field research in Asia and has led students through several countries in East Asia, as well as lecturing on a cruise from Vladivostok to Hong Kong. He examined the benefits of these experiences and how best to maximize them in his teaching.

The benefits are many. Experience in Asia is a "refresher" in terms of language skills, experiences, examples, and impressions that provide one with both substantive and anecdotal information. He echoed Diane's theme of authenticity; study and travel in Asia add legitimacy to his courses. Time in Asia does not merely refresh his knowledge and teaching; however, it also refreshes him personally, reminding him of why he is in this profession in the first place. Even short research trips, of which he has taken several, can be beneficial. Since we teach about the importance of field research, actually doing such research adds force to that argument — the idea that we do indeed practice what we preach.

Karl's advice is to avail ourselves of the plethora of opportunities for funding research field work in Asia and, while in Asia, to think like our students, asking their questions and seeing through their eyes as much as possible. Upon our return to our home campus, we should share our observations with students who have not yet had the opportunity to travel in Asia.

**Michael Drompp, History, Rhodes College**

In addition to living in Asia while doing research, I have traveled with students in many parts of Asia. Teaching on-site offers a number of benefits; the site becomes a living laboratory with people, geography, food, and material culture all tangible to the students. Visits to sites along the Central Asian Silk Road, for example, provide a tactile understanding of the peoples and cultures of the region as well as the difficulties of travel, even today. Such visits also show students how historians must work with many tools: geography, ethnography, archaeology, and texts. Reading relevant texts on-site makes them come alive. The challenge is how to replicate this excitement and immediacy in the classroom after one has returned.

My experience with material culture while teaching on-site has encouraged me to include far more use of objects and slides of objects (along with slides of geographical formations and people) in my classroom teaching. Seeing objects/landscapes/faces causes an irrefutable return of that "on-site enthusiasm" that students respond to; accounts of my experiences in those places make students realize that this is not simply an academic exercise. In my course on the Silk Road, I recreate my itinerary, and use it to structure the class around a "journey" that the students themselves will take, if only in their imaginations.

Residency in Asia while doing research also provides a wealth of "hard" information, relevant anecdotes, and other materials for teaching purposes. My two-and-a-half years in Taipei not only allowed me to teach with more confidence about medieval China and its foreign relations, but also about modern Chinese culture, which I absorbed constantly while there. "Being there" does not automatically educate by osmosis, but does provide a depth of understanding that cannot be replicated through other means.

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**BLAKEMORE FOUNDATION GRANT OPPORTUNITY**

**Blakemore Foundation**

**Deadline:** January 15, 1999

The Blakemore Foundation will make up to twenty grants for the advanced study of modern Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian languages. The grants are intended for individuals successfully pursuing careers involving Asia who find that language study abroad at an advanced level is essential to realize their goals. The grants fund a year of language study at an institution in Asia selected by the applicant and approved by the foundation.

**Contact:** The Blakemore Foundation, 1201 Third Ave., 40th Floor, Seattle, WA 98101; Tel.: 206/583-8778; Fax: 206/583-8500; <blakemore@perkinscoie.com>