LEARNING THROUGH THE ASIANetwork FREEMAN 1998 COLLEGE IN ASIA SUMMER INSTITUTE

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Tinaz Pavri, Political Science, and Bernice J. deGannes Scott, Economics, represented Spelman College in the 1998 ASIANetwork Freeman College in Asia Summer Institute. Other participants included Stephen Zabor, Economics, and Lisa Safford, Associate Dean, Hiram College; Roger Purdy, History and Coordinator, East Asian Studies Program, and Nicky Baumgartner, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, John Carroll University; and Ronald Lee, English and Associate Dean, and Robert Entenmann, History, St. Olaf College.

The 1999 ASIANetwork Freeman College in Asia Summer Institute participants were Thomas Rotnem, Political Science and Director of International Studies, and James Southerland, Humanities and Communication Arts, Brenau University; Lloyd Chapin, Philosophy and Religion and Vice President and Dean of Faculty, and George Meese, Rhetoric and Director of the Writing Excellence Program, Eckerd College; Eleanor Dooley, Religious Studies, and John Freed, English and Dean of the College, Elms College; Alan Katz, Political Science and Associate Dean, and Eugene Murphy, Sociology and Anthropology and Director, Asian Studies Program, Fairfield University; and Shawn Hull, History, and David Schmidt, Japanese Language and Director, International Center, William Woods University.

Information about the 2000 ASIANetwork Freeman College in Asia Summer Institute may be obtained from Madeline Chu, ASIANetwork Freeman Programs Director, Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, MI 49006 (616/337-7325 or <chu@kzoo.edu>); or Norman Moline, ASIANetwork Freeman Summer Institute Director, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL 61201
The application deadline is November 30, 1999.

These reflections of Professor Pavri will be followed on page 4 by those of Professor Scott.

In June 1998, I traveled to Japan, China, and Hong Kong for three weeks. I was a member of the Spelman College faculty/administrator team selected by the ASIANetwork Freeman College in Asia program to learn about developing study terms in Asia for our undergraduate students. The faculty member on each team is the expert in her/his discipline who will teach courses on a study abroad program and who may be the primary visionary in conceptualizing the curriculum. The administrator will pursue the nuts and bolts associated with planning a program and will provide the necessary push within the administration to actually bring the program to fruition.

Creating a network

The College in Asia program gives the teams hands-on experience in the intricacies of setting up a study term in Asia. The primary goal is to enable terms in Asia, such as the well-established Augustana College term (the model for the program), to flourish across liberal arts campuses. The experiential transfer of knowledge to participating teams was more than amply achieved by the Augustana College program leaders, Norm Moline and Jim Winship. At every stop on our itinerary, we identified useful in-city contacts, educational resources, and appropriate and affordable living places for our students, the latter a no mean feat in Japan where housing can be expensive.

The program leaders enhanced the factual, on-site information with personal anecdotes of what had worked for them and what had not. These were unique and invaluable for they gave an intimate, insider’s tour of pitfalls and successes. It was eye-opening to hear about the possible situations involving students that can arise overseas – from missing crucial flights to sudden illness – that faculty must be prepared to deal with. It was also heartening to learn that Augustana College faculty have at one time or another, successfully dealt with almost all possible crises. At the same time, the program leaders were careful to stress that colleges must tailor their programs to fit their own needs and that the College in Asia program is not a one-size-fits all operation. Rather, the ASIANetwork Freeman program is designed to get the colleges to start thinking about

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how a term, such as Augustana’s, might be inaugurated.

It was clear on our travels that in addition to the incontestable historical and cultural wealth of Japan and China, these two countries are vital players in world relations and will continue to be so in the future. We found startling evidence in China’s cities of huge infusions of both Asian and Western investment. This was particularly true of cities like Guangzhou with its proximity to Hong Kong. The trip underlined the fact that our students cannot and must not ignore Asia; rather, as educators, we must strive to familiarize them with the tremendous potential that the continent holds for influencing the future course of the world.

Centrality of study in Asia

At the core of Augustana College’s term in Asia program is the belief that learning that students do about Asia solely on their campuses is limited and cannot begin to approximate the wealth of personal understanding, intellectual growth and awareness of a country that comes from living in it, talking to its people, and comprehending it from within. In addition, moving among countries on the continent helps students make social, economic, and political comparisons. Students will realize that although Japan and China are both in Asia, there is much that divides them; there is also much that unites, that makes them Asian. Hence, the continent provides both the most similar and the most different cases for comparative analysis, depending on the questions that a student asks.

Comparative learning is not limited to students. This faculty member who was born and brought up in India was reminded anew that Asia is not Asia is not Asia. Yet the uneven development in China brought about in the wake of economic reforms and the consequences thereof reminded me of India. In the end, students completing the term in Asia will be budding Asianists in their own right; they will have accomplished in one semester what years of learning in their own classrooms might not have occurred. They will have the fluency and familiarity that comes only from an on-site experience.

Building a program

Participants in the College in Asia program (even the Asianists among them) returned home with the enhanced understanding that the travel accomplished, eager to transmit their experiences in and outside of the classroom. They are in positions to contribute to the infusion of Asian Studies throughout a campus and curriculum and to create the momentum for building programs in Asia.

On a broader level, the College in Asia program makes participants think about how to design Asia terms. What courses would be most appropriate? What kinds of skills beside academic knowledge should faculty sharpen in order to serve the needs of students while in Asia? What size should a student group be? Should several countries be included, offering comparative experiences, or should only one country be chosen, at least initially? How long should the program last? Is a full term too ambitious to begin with, or is it better to start with a shorter summer course? How many courses would an abbreviated term include, and for how many credits?

Of course, the needs of each college will determine the answers to the questions. Those of us who are alumni of the first College in Asia Institute are determined to try to make a term in Asia possible for our students.

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PLEASE WELCOME

ANNE PRESCOTT AND BEN NEFZGER

ASIANetwork EXCHANGE CO-EDITORS

On September 1, 1999, when the ASIANetwork headquarters move to Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, Anne Prescott and Ben Nefzger of Augustana College will become the co-editors of the ASIANetwork Exchange. In fact, they have been busy this summer editing the fall issue of the newsletter which you will receive at about the same time as you receive this final issue emanating from Colorado College. You will find in this issue a cumulative index of of articles that appeared in the ASIANetwork Exchange from 1992-1999.

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