In 1998-99, its seventh year, the ASIANetwork continued on a trajectory of increased visibility and responsibility as an advocate of excellence in undergraduate teaching and learning with a focus on Asia. The consortium advanced existing initiatives in curricular and program development and secured a modest but important grant from the Japan Foundation, in addition to setting up further grant applications in service to the ASIANetwork educational mission. The annual conference in Tacoma, Washington, was the largest ever but still was small enough for conversation about ideas leading to renewed intellectual exchange at and across ASIANetwork member institutions. The transition of the ASIANetwork Executive Directorship from Colorado College to Augustana College fell into place to the credit of the consortium’s activities, including the annual conference and grant-funded programs for which faculty and students from member institutions might apply.

THE TACOMA CONFERENCE

With over 215 registrants and over seventy colleagues from over fifty colleges and universities on the program, the Seventh Annual Conference at the Sheraton Tacoma Hotel set an ASIANetwork record. The conference initiated a pre-conference tour, in this case an effort to explore appropriate venues in the history of Asian Americans in the Pacific Northwest. Keynote speakers Leonard Andaya (University of Hawaii) and Gerald Larson (Indiana University) set a tone by examining how individual lives intertwine with cultural patterns and historical change across oceans and seas.

Among highlights of the conference was the plenary session convened by Timothy Cheek (Colorado College) on “Books That Change the Way We Teach,” which allowed its four participants to take ideas and arguments and follow out their pedagogical possibilities. Breakout panels, as usual, fell into different categories, including professional or curricular development along with intellectual and scholarly concerns that have implications for the classroom. One panel featured participants in the two-summer ASIANetwork Ford Faculty Curricular Development Seminar on China, and another featured the first ASIANetwork Freeman Student-Faculty Fellows reporting on the results of their work in Asia in summer 1998.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TRANSITION

At the Tacoma conference the Board officially approved and announced the planned transition of the ASIANetwork Executive Director from Marianna McJimsey...
(Colorado College), the pioneer holder of this important central position, to Van Symons (Augustana College) effective September 1999. Over a period of months early in 1999 the officers of the Board worked out this transition, and the smooth transfer revealed strengths of the consortium, its member institutions, and ASIANetwork faculty colleagues. Conference attendees expressed overwhelming admiration for Marianna McJimsey, who managed the increasing complexity and visibility of ASIANetwork with intelligence, grace, and style for more than six years. Conferes also expressed hearty welcome to Van Symons, well known in ASIANetwork as a former Board member and Chair. This transition spotlighted the contributions made by Colorado College to the growth and development of ASIANetwork and also the good will and organizational strength of Augustana College, where a team of faculty and staff will provide support for the new Executive Director.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

In 1997-98 Elizabeth Bentzel Buck (East-West Center, University of Hawaii) accepted the Board’s invitation to join the ASIANetwork Council of Advisors. The Board’s Executive Committee met as usual with Advisors during the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies.

The Japan Foundation grant will assure a prominent Japanese studies component at the ASIANetwork annual conference near Chicago in April 2000. Toward this objective, one of the two keynote speakers will be William LaFleur (University of Pennsylvania), a specialist in Japanese literature and religion.

Early in 1999 The Henry Luce Foundation announced the Luce Fund for Asian Studies, which over a four-year period will support the initiation of about 40 new junior faculty positions to strengthen Asian studies programs in selective liberal arts colleges. The dynamism of ASIANetwork was a factor in the emergence of this remarkable new program, and in turn the educational mission of the consortium stands to benefit from the contributions of colleagues at member institutions renewed and expanded by Luce-funded professorships in Asian studies.

CONCLUSION

The future of Asia in undergraduate liberal arts education is bright but never secure because academic strategies are subject to change depending on conditions at individual colleges. ASIANetwork may itself be like a small business, thriving but vulnerable. Whatever the turns of academic the consortium already is an indelible part of educational innovation and development with emphasis on the liberal arts. It also will exist forever as an arena of outstanding service and stewardship, often unseen, by both individuals and institutions.