

A History of ASIANetwork

Since 1992, ASIANetwork has grown from the dream of two people to a thriving organization of over 135 liberal arts institutions throughout the United States, with affiliate member institutions in Asia as well as affiliate individual members. At this juncture in the organization's history, it is appropriate that we should look back at where we came from and how we have grown.

Tom Benson: The Birth and Early Years of ASIANetwork

Marianna McJimsey, Executive Director 1994-1999: ASIANetwork at the Millennium

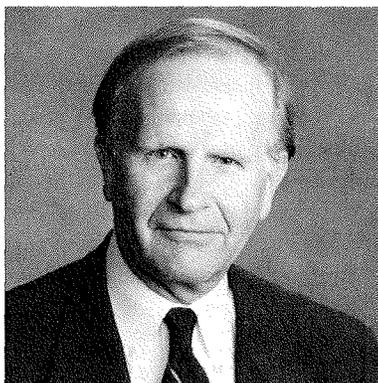
Greg Guldin, Board Chair 1994-1996: Bureaucratic Routinization--On the Beach and Throughout the Asian World

Madeline Chu, Board Chair 1996-1997: A Piece of History--Highlights of the ASIANetwork, 1996-1997

Van Symons, Board Chair 1997-1998: Working Toward a Common End

Suzanne Wilson Barnett, Board Chair 1998-1999: At a Turning Point

TOM BENSON: THE BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS OF ASIANetwork



An idea whose time has come almost always dawns in more than one mind. The ASIANetwork is no exception. In the early summer of 1991, David Vikner and I met for lunch at the Columbia University Faculty Club. Over coffee, I shared with him a vision of a national consortium of independent liberal arts colleges with Asian studies programs. To my surprise, David had entertained a similar thought. Different circumstances, however, had stimulated our dreams. As a liberal arts college dean, I was concerned about the fortunes of undergraduate Asian studies faculty working in the challenging environment of the small, independent liberal arts college. I believed that the unique teaching mission, scale, and resource limitations of the undergraduate liberal arts institutions presented both special problems and exciting opportunities that are too often overlooked in the meetings of the large, research-oriented professional associations. I also believed that a national consortium of liberal arts colleges with Asian studies programs would have a special appeal for a number of major foundations.

David Vikner viewed a national consortium as an ideal means for facilitating exchange between United Board partner institutions throughout Asia and North American liberal arts institutions. The distinctive heritage and values of the nation's liberal arts colleges reflected many of the core

purposes of the United Board and its Asian partners. Although its grants were restricted to qualifying Asian institutions, the United Board would be able to lend its good offices, name, and support to the organization of a network.

With David's encouragement, I began to plan a "consultation of liberal arts colleges with Asian studies programs" for spring 1992. At the time, I was serving as the Vice President for Academic Affairs at St. Andrews College in Laurinburg, North Carolina, so I chose the Holly Inn in nearby Pinehurst--one of the nation's premier resort communities--as the site of the gathering. In the fall of 1991, an invitation was sent to over one hundred liberal arts colleges across the nation inviting them to "the chartering conference of A.S.I.A.N"--an acronym for the "Arts and Sciences Institutions Asian Network"--to be held on April 25 and 26, 1992. While the main event of the conference was to be discussion and networking, there was also the lure of four outstanding speakers: Donald Keene, Julia Ching, William Gleysteen, and William Malm.

As I made follow-up telephone calls and mounted a national campaign of promotion and arm twisting, I discovered that Colorado College had hosted a conference in February of 1992, gathering partner institutions in the Associated Colleges of the Midwest and the Great Lakes Association for consultation on teaching Asian studies in the undergraduate curriculum. Several of the participants in the Colorado conference came to the Pinehurst meeting, and the success of the February gathering clearly played an important role in stimulating support for the idea of a national network.

The response to the Pinehurst invitations exceeded expectations. Forty-five institutions were represented at the conference. Throughout the weekend, the Holly Inn was full of lively conversations and avid networking. On Sunday morning, a general discussion was convened to explore the next steps. Although the invitation to the conference had anticipated the "chartering" of a new organization, something along the lines of a mandate was required from the conference participants, if there was to be a future for the

network. A few minutes into the discussion it was clear that the participants enthusiastically supported the idea of a continuing association. Much organizational work lay ahead, but as the conference adjourned on April 26, 1992, it was clear that ASIANetwork had been born.



Steering Committee

Front: Tom Benson, David Vikner, Dorothy Guyot
Back: Dick Killough, Larry Schultz, Dick Bodman, Greg Guldin
Not Pictured: Dorothy Borei

In the aftermath of the conference, in consultation with David Vikner, I pulled together a steering committee to begin the demanding business of organizing the network. The committee included: Greg Guldin, Larry Schulz, Dick Bodman, Dottie Borei, Dick Killough, and Dotty Guyot. I served as the chair, and David continued to provide advice and moral support. In August of 1992, the committee met in New York City to lay plans for a second conference, to be held in April of 1993 at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center, an attractive facility in suburban Chicago that had been recommended by Dotty Guyot. In January 1993, the steering committee met again, this time at Hickory Ridge. At this meeting, further plans for the fledging organization were developed, and a statement of purpose and set of by-laws were readied for review by the participants at the forthcoming conference.

The second meeting of the Network was held in late April 1993 at Hickory Ridge. Fifty-five institutions were represented at the gathering, together with a significant number of special guests, including the Asian trustees of the United Board. The conference was organized around a series of plenary sessions that balanced "bread and butter" professional concerns of the participants with segments focusing on "building the network." The featured speakers for the conference were Perry Link (substituting for Doak Barnett), Mary Brown Bullock, and Ainslie Embree. At a Sunday morning business meeting attended by most of the conference participants, the statement of purpose and by-laws for the Network were approved and the first Board of Directors was elected. The Board included the members of the Steer-

ing Committee selected at Pinehurst and Rita Kipp, Steve Nussbaum, and Madeline Chu. I was asked to serve as the Chair of the Board, and Greg Guldin was subsequently elected as the Vice Chair.

In early September 1993, the newly elected Board of Directors began the tradition of holding a fall weekend meeting at Hickory Ridge. That September and in subsequent years, the fall Board meetings would become occasions for intense work and memorable fellowship. In the fall of 1993, the agenda was ambitious, encompassing further work on the organizational structure, programs, and financial basis of the Network--and plans for the Spring 1994 Conference. At this meeting, the Board made plans for the publication of a brochure and decided to change the name of the organization from the somewhat awkward "A.S.I.A.N." to the ASIANetwork. I had invited Marianna McJimsey to attend the meeting to discuss the possibility of making the Asian studies publication she was editing at Colorado College the official publication of ASIANetwork. The Board enthusiastically endorsed the idea, and later in the year, under Marianna's dedicated direction the *ASIANetwork Exchange* was launched.

At the fall Board meeting in 1993, I also reported on discussions that I had held with Terry Lautz at the Henry Luce Foundation concerning a major grant for ASIANetwork. After a thoughtful review, the Board approved the draft of a grant proposal I had prepared for a three-year consultation program that would fund visits by specialists, primarily from ASIANetwork institutions, to colleges in ASIANetwork seeking assistance in developing or strengthening a particular dimension of their Asian studies work. The Luce grant was also designed to provide modest overhead support for the administrative costs of ASIANetwork. In the fall of 1993, ASIANetwork completed the process of incorporation in North Carolina as a 501(c)(3) organization, and in December, the Luce Foundation announced the awarding of a \$225,000 grant to ASIANetwork.

The good news from the Luce Foundation required quick action on the part of the Board, if the consultation program was to be announced at the April 1994 conference. In January 1994, a number of Board members met in New York City to develop plans for the implementation and publicizing of the Luce Consultation Program. Madeline Chu, Greg Guldin and Dottie Borei assumed responsibility for the coordination of the program, and special arrangements were made to announce the Luce program at the spring conference and to encourage applications.

The third meeting of ASIANetwork was held on April 22-24 at the Hilton Hotel in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with St. John's College serving as the site host. Representatives from sixty colleges participated in the conference. Once again, there were many special guests, including, for the first time, participants in the United Board's visiting Asian scholars program. Thanks to the substantial organizational work that had been accomplished at the first two conferences, the Santa Fe meeting provided conference participants with significantly greater opportunity for discussion of professional

issues. Concurrent panels and roundtables were held for the first time on a wide variety of topics, and three speakers--Doak Barnett, Linda Lim, and Joseph Lake--made presentations at plenary sessions. During the Sunday morning business meeting, three new Board members were elected: Jyoti Grewal, Eleanor Zelliott, and Gilbert Johnson.

At the fall 1994 meeting of the Board of Directors at Hickory Ridge, a plan of leadership succession was developed. Greg Guldin was appointed to follow me as the Chair of the Board, beginning in January 1995, and Greg was to be succeeded by Madeline Chu. Attention was also given to the future headquarters of ASIANetwork. I had left St. Andrews and begun my work at Green Mountain College, and Jerry Bron, my secretary at St. Andrews, who had provided stellar administrative service to ASIANetwork during its formative years, was moving to Presbyterian College. Temporarily homeless, the Board decided to accept an invitation to locate its home office at Colorado College. In addition, recognizing a significantly increased administrative work load for ASIANetwork, the Board decided to create the position of Executive Director and to invite Marianna McJimsey to add this role to her ongoing work as the Editor of the *ASIANetwork Exchange*. Marianna accepted the invitation to serve and began her years of highly effective service to ASIANetwork.

The Board understood that the move to Colorado College and the creation of the Executive Director position would require an expanded revenue base. With this need in mind, I was pleased to report at the fall 1994 Board meeting

that substantial progress was being made in the development of a major grant with the Ford Foundation--an initiative facilitated through David Vikner's contacts at the Foundation. I outlined for the Board the elements of a multi-year grant proposal that I had drafted and discussed with Sheila Biddle at Ford. The grant would provide a two-year development experience for faculty who had little or no background in Asian studies. The program would be by and for ASIANetwork institutions, and it would focus on four areas: China, Japan, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. As with the Luce grant, the Ford proposal would provide valuable overhead support for the Network's administrative costs. The Board made a number of important suggestions for improving the grant proposal and gave its approval to a revised draft.

The Ford grant was approved at the end of 1994 for \$435,000. With the programmatic and financial lift of this significant grant and with the establishment of a professionally organized headquarters at Colorado College under the leadership of an Executive Director, ASIANetwork had come of age. In accounting for the early success of ASIANetwork, one explanation was sufficient: a remarkable team of Board members--individuals with faith in an idea and the willingness to work hard for its realization. Many challenges lay ahead, but few of us doubted, as we looked toward the spring 1995 conference at Eckerd College, that the future of ASIANetwork was full of promise--a promise well beyond what David Vikner and I imagined at our luncheon meeting in the summer of 1991.

MARIANNA McJIMSEY: ASIANetwork AT THE MILLENNIUM



Expansion, enrichment, and extension, the three E's of Asian studies at undergraduate liberal arts colleges that propelled the establishment of ASIANetwork, were also characteristic of its early growth. (The three E's were introduced

by the author in an article about ASIANetwork in the February 1996 issue of *Education About Asia*.) Curricular expansion of Asian studies was built upon grants from the Henry Luce Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Freeman Foundation. Enrichment was woven with the hundreds of threads contributed by the annual conference attendees, the authors of articles published in the *ASIANetwork Exchange*, and the website, www.asianetwork.org. Extension was driven by the conviction that study and travel experience are at the core of the study of Asia, by the interaction between the visiting scholars from Asia of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia and ASIANetwork host institutions, and by facets of the Henry Luce, Ford, and Freeman foundations' grants.

In his discussions of education and of civil society and discourse, the English political philosopher, Michael Oakshott, illustrates, by his own example, his intimation that education is an ongoing conversation. Indeed, Oakshott's varied use of the word "intimation" suggests generous elasticity in the breadth of our understanding of education as conversation. For ASIANetwork, the conversations (of the sort perhaps envisioned by Oakshott), at the heart of education about Asia, have flourished. The informed, democratic, open, friendly, and inquiring nature of these conversations