

## VAN SYMONS: WORKING TOWARD A COMMON END



I recall that one of the first things I did when asked to join the board of ASIANetwork was to open up a dictionary and look up the word "consortium." The definition given that most appealed to me simply stated that a consortium is "any association for a common end," and for ASIANetwork, the common end clearly was to promote Asian studies at liberal arts colleges. The goal is a lofty one, and I relished the chance to participate, still wondering exactly how this consortium would work, especially given the sometimes contentious nature of academics.

It did not take long for me to realize that ASIANetwork is an academic association unlike any other I have ever participated in or even heard about. This was especially manifested to me when I became chair of the board. A perfect example of the collegial way members of the board and other individuals work to promote a "common end" occurred early on in my chairpersonship.

At the spring board meeting in 1997, concern was expressed that despite the fact that almost 100 colleges were currently affiliated with ASIANetwork (up from 45 in 1992) that number needed to be increased in order to secure a portion of the revenue needed to run the consortium. Moreover, additional members were desired to insure that a strong pool of applicants would be available to take advantage of the newly-established programs being funded by the Luce, Ford, and Freeman Foundations. Consequently, a number of individuals volunteered to create a first-time-ever mailing to presidents of liberal arts colleges to encourage them to enroll their institutions in ASIANetwork. The mailing was to be prepared during the summer, when most faculty are involved in wide-ranging activities not always on their own college campuses, and sent out by the first week of September. It was to include a number of enclosures each prepared independently that would be sent to me for inclusion in the final packet.

What better test of the effectiveness of a consortium and the commitment of board and non-board members

to support it might there be? Let me explain what happened. The first task was to locate liberal arts colleges that might have an interest in ASIANetwork and to identify their college presidents. We were determined to cast a big net because the ASIANetwork board is committed to create an inclusive liberal arts consortium and not a small elitist organization. Tom Coburn (Vice-President and Academic Dean at St. Lawrence University) seemed well positioned to undertake such a task. He volunteered to do this, turning the responsibility over to his staff. By summer's end, they were ready to provide the names and addresses of 750 college presidents. These were sent to me at Augustana College via computer in a form that could be downloaded to produce mailing labels.

This done, the enclosures for the mailing needed to be generated. I was charged to write the cover letter and also work with Dorothy Borei (Guilford College), the coordinator of the Luce Foundation-supported ASIANetwork Consultancy Program, to create an announcement detailing a new ASIANetwork Consultancy Program and have 750 copies of it printed at Augustana College for inclusion in the mailing. A new ASIANetwork brochure was crafted, no small task, by Cathy Benton (Lake Forest College) with the able assistance of Marianna McJimsey (The Colorado College). It was printed by the print shop at Lake Forest and 750 copies were forwarded. Announcements of the Freeman Programs were prepared by its directors: Norm Moline (Augustana College) drafted copy of The College in Asia Summer Institute program while Teddy Amoloza (Illinois Wesleyan University) did the same for the Student-Faculty Fellows Program. Madeline Chu (Kalamazoo College), the overall director of Freeman programs, proofed copy and published announcements of both programs at Kalamazoo for mailing to me. Greg Guldin (Pacific Lutheran University), overall director of the Ford Faculty Curricular Development on Asia Programs, did the same thing. After conversing with Job Thomas (Davidson College) to formulate a flyer about the forthcoming South Asia Summer Seminar, and Rita Kipp (Kenyon College) and Leedom Lefferts (Drew University) about their upcoming Southeast Asia Summer Seminars, he printed flyers at Pacific Lutheran University for inclusion in the mailing. David Vikner and his associates at The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia also printed announcements of The Visiting Scholars Program for Asian Faculty to Conduct Research in an ASIANetwork Institution and The Visiting Professors Program for North American Faculty to Teach in China and sent them to me.

As the mailing was sent out on schedule the first week of September, I wished I had been able to convey to the college presidents who opened it what it truly represented for clearly, in and of itself, it was an embodiment of what our consortium is all about. Thirteen individuals, often assisted by secretaries and other colleagues, gave up part of a precious summer to contribute to this endeavor and for no compensation whatsoever. Moreover, they came from a dozen different institutions that represent a true cross sec-

tion of liberal arts campuses.

In the end, one cannot be certain of the impact this mailing had on the growth of institutional membership in ASIANetwork, but nevertheless, it was satisfying to note that when the board met again in May of 1998, the consortium had forty-four new member institutions. Moreover, despite the challenge in preparing fall mailings, the practice has continued with a mailing to liberal arts college deans being sent out in September 1998, and another scheduled for college presidents to be sent this November.

Another challenge met by the ASIANetwork board during the 1997-98 academic year was to utilize new resources made available to us through a second grant from the Henry Luce Foundation effectively. This grant provided funds for ASIANetwork to establish a website ([www.asianetwork.org](http://www.asianetwork.org)). After careful negotiations with St. Olaf College, this institution agreed to create and operate a website for ASIANetwork. Without the work of Tim Cheek (The Colorado College), Mark Unno (Carleton College) and Craig Rice, Pin Wan, and Richard Bodman (St. Olaf College) getting this impressive site up and running would have been a much more difficult task.

The Luce grant also facilitated work on the publication of a book entitled **Asia in the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Case for Asian Studies in Liberal Arts Education**. This work, co-edited by Suzanne Wilson Barnett (The University of Puget Sound) and Van J. Symons (Augustana College) is comprised of six chapters dealing with the history of Asian studies at liberal arts colleges (Sam Yamashita, Pomona College), Asian language instruction at small colleges (Stan Mickel, Wittenberg University), study abroad programs in Asia (Steve Nussbaum, Earlham College), and new theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of Asia (Rita Kipp, Kenyon College). In this book, Tom Coburn (St. Lawrence University) also persuasively argues for the inclusion of Asian studies in undergraduate curriculums, and Ainslie Embree (former president, the Association for Asian Studies and faculty emeritus, Columbia University) considers "where are we coming from, where are we going." This book will chronicle the development of Asian studies at small colleges and consider essential elements found in successful programs. Release by M.E. Sharpe publishers is set for the spring of 2000.

During the 1997-98 academic year, Luce Foundation support also helped defer costs for the thrice-annually published newsletter, *ASIANetwork Exchange*, wonderfully edited by Marianna McJimsey, and for the costs of running the annual conference held at Hickory Ridge Conference Center April 24-26, 1998. Sixteen workshops/panels were held at this conference, involving over sixty contributors. In addition, two fine keynote speakers gave presentations. Ezra Vogel (Harvard University) spoke on "The Challenge of the Rise of China" and Diana Eck engaged conference attendees by introducing her CD-ROM "On Common Ground: World Religions in America" and then discussing the rich religious diversity that can be found in the United States. The Hema Rajogopalan Dance Troupe also performed.

Nearly 200 people attended the conference.

As the end of the 1997-98 academic year drew near, it was satisfying to reflect on the numbers of individuals whose lives were being impacted by the consortium. Twenty were involved in Ford-supported summer seminars at Davidson and Kenyon Colleges, ten were in China with the St. Olaf College led Ford Foundation-supported Faculty Curricular Development Program, another twenty were travelling in Asia as part of the Freeman Faculty-Student Fellows Program, another eight were in Asia participating in the Augustana College led Freeman Foundation supported College in Asia program, ten recent college graduates from ASIANetwork institutions were in Asia under the auspices of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, again funded by the Freeman Foundation, to prepare themselves for year-long teaching assignments in Chinese universities, and ten individuals were in quiet retreat in Colorado Springs, supported by The Henry Luce Foundation, preparing to embark on the writing of a book on Asian studies at liberal arts colleges.

I believe past Chairs of ASIANetwork will agree that the year spent leading ASIANetwork was one of the busiest they ever had, but also one of the most satisfying. All, with the exception of Tom Benson, were blessed with the support of an incredibly competent and gracious, executive director, Marianna McJimsey. I was also blessed with a vice-chair who was willing to work and who I could hardly keep up with, Suzanne Barnett, and a board that was dynamic, willing to take on any task, and simply a joy to interact with.

**The 2000 College in Asia Institute is the last one funded in the current Freeman grant. If you don't know about this terrific opportunity, turn to page 6 for all the details. You won't want to miss this!**