

ASIANetwork Conference 2002

Lisle, Illinois

Throughout the year we will feature the keynote addresses and selected papers

from the ASIANetwork Conference 2002.

“Tenth Anniversary Reflections” Marianna McJimsey, Colorado College, Executive Director Emeritus

“Strategies for Learning About Korea: Making a Little Knowledge Go a Long Way” Linda Lewis, Chair; Stephen Smith, James Huffman, Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, Wittenberg University

“Asian Views of the United States” Zeng Jianbin, UBCHEA Visiting Scholar, Saint Mary’s College of Maryland; Arlinah Rahardjo, UBCHEA Visiting Scholar, Rutgers University; M.G. Santhakumari, UBCHEA Visiting Scholar, Luther College

Tenth Anniversary Reflections **Marianna McJimsey** **Colorado College** **Executive Director Emeritus**

On June 23, 2002, BBC Radio Four beamed a three-hour broadcast on the monsoon in India. Art, agriculture, music, literature, film, hydraulics, meteorology, religion, history, economics, and politics were interwoven as participants read from Tagore, described the rains in the film, *Lagaan*, interviewed farmers displaced by the Narmada Dam, or performed monsoon-appropriate ragas. The sounds of the rains in the Western Ghats, Rajasthan, and Calcutta were interspersed among the segments. No listener could have escaped the central impact of the monsoon on all aspects of Indian life. In fact, the BBC journalists created a compelling and unforgettable interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary program.

Two months earlier, April 19-21, 2002, curricular interdisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity were among the subjects discussed at the tenth annual ASIANetwork Conference at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center, Lisle, IL. Over the weekend, attendees reflected upon the first ASIANetwork decade, 1992-2002 and gave suggestions for the future direction of the organization. The panelists for one of the venues for the discussion, “10th Anniversary Reflections,” included David Vikner (Japan International Christian University Foundation), one of the founders of the ASIANetwork, and three former Board Chairs, Suzanne Barnett (University of Puget Sound), Jim Lochtefeld (Carthage College), and Stan Mickel (Wittenberg University). Marianna McJimsey (Colorado College), Executive Director Emeritus, chaired the plenary.

The ASIANetwork, an Associate Member of the Association for Asian Studies, has become a recognized and respected voice for undergraduate teaching about Asia. The annual conferences have included keynote scholar Roger

Ames’s careful parsing of Confucian philosophy, well-informed pedagogical discussions on “Asian Cinema in Asian Studies,” and guides for international study, such as “Orienting Students for Study Abroad.” The conferences, the *ASIANetwork EXCHANGE*, and the website foster what David Vikner characterized as a “rare intimacy” among teacher-scholars.

“Liberal arts teaching,” Suzanne Barnett emphasized, “is at the heart of the enterprise.” The founders’ “thinking big” vision of integrating Asian Studies into the liberal arts curriculum was implemented through a series of generous grants. The Ford Foundation Curricular Development program enabled faculty to create courses in areas outside of their disciplinary specialty in China, Japan, India, and Southeast Asia. The original Luce and current ASIANetwork Consultancy Programs provide colleges with “outside eyes” and expertise on their Asian Studies programs. The Freeman College in Asia Summer Travel Seminar offers a model for developing study abroad programs in Asia. The Freeman Faculty-Student Research Fellows Program promotes intensive summer in-country research opportunities in Asia. Finally, the United Board for Christian Higher Education Visiting Scholars Program placed Asian scholars for a year on college campuses, thereby enhancing opportunities for dialogue on Asia.

What co-founder Thomas Benson called a “passionate commitment to powerful undergraduate teaching” and the strong wish to talk together about teaching and scholarship have prompted the organization’s growth from forty to 126 North American institutions. In what directions should ASIANetwork move in the next decade? Stan Mickel asked the conferees to consider the future of ASIANetwork in terms of “momentum and change,” looking not only at our organization, but also at liberal arts education generally. Jim Lochtefeld spoke of the “fragility” of the idea of a liberal arts education, and a participant warned, “The fate of ASIANetwork mirrors that of liberal arts colleges.”

However, the positive concept of "future," rather than the somewhat ominous term, "fate," best characterizes the vision of the conferees whose discussions ranged from the intensely practical to the philosophical. Teaching and the emerging cohort of junior faculty, the ASIANetwork Conference, new "big ideas" in programs and funding, and the administration of the ASIANetwork were central topics, each of which will be summarized here.

Critical questions surround issues of teaching about Asia and the introduction of junior faculty to liberal arts college teaching. Vikner pointed out that the strengthening of Asian Studies has helped college curricula as a whole through the development of interdisciplinary courses. Mickel observed that junior faculty members are not well prepared for interdisciplinary teaching. Graduate education, he noted, prepares Ph.D. candidates for research on highly focused topics whereas liberal arts college Asian Studies programs ask a Chinese language instructor to teach a course on East Asian literature or an anthropologist of Indonesia to design a survey of Asia course. Liberal arts college teachers, Mickel asserted, must teach with a "global vision" that emphasizes global connections and crosses borders. As an example, he cited Susan Napier's keynote address on Japanese *anime*, an artistic and literary genre of immense international appeal.

ASIANetwork conferences have given assistance to the generalist demands of teaching through sessions such as "Books That Changed the Way I Teach," and "Strategies for Learning about Korea: Making a Little Knowledge Go a Long Way." A recommendation for the future is that ASIANetwork members, master teachers who have experience in interdisciplinary teaching, volunteer to be internet, telephone, and conference mentors for junior faculty, in their disciplines, at member colleges.

Barnett underlined the importance of nurturing junior faculty in building and sustaining programs in Asian studies. The Henry Luce Foundation's Luce Fund for Asian Studies, that has launched new Asian studies tenure-track junior faculty positions at liberal arts colleges, is an affirmation of the importance of the new generation of Asian studies teacher/scholars. Because the opportunities and funding available for junior faculty to attend the annual ASIANetwork conference may be limited, the ASIANetwork Development Committee should consider applying for grants for junior faculty to participate in the conference.

The ASIANetwork conferences have fostered the idea of education as an ongoing conversation. As the group discussed the future nature of the conferences, Charles Ess recalled the power of the conversations in which he engaged during his first ASIANetwork conference and the warmth of the hospitality and welcome he received, factors that have drawn him to the conferences ever since. The conference program must maintain a balance between curricular and program development and pedagogy (the "practical" arenas of teaching), on the one hand, and on the other hand, the scholarship and abstract ideas that form the foundations of our calling as teachers and scholars.

In addition to the content of the conferences, the

time and venue of the annual gathering elicited comment. Among suggestions were that the conference be held in October rather than April, the latter considered by some to be a very busy time of year to be away from the campus; that the conference be extended to three full days in order to nurture and assist junior faculty with specific panels directed at their needs; and that the conference be held in conjunction with the meetings of the Association for Asian Studies or of Asian language teachers associations.

ASIANetwork members have developed the ideas for innovative programs and have cooperatively written grants that have received the substantial support of foundations such as the Ford Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Freeman Foundation. An increased input from the ASIANetwork membership is needed to suggest new funding sources, such as for example, those of the Asian Diaspora groups in the United States.

The ideas for future programming reflect new directions in teaching and learning. The panelists and conferees proposed initiatives with immense potential. In order for the reader to peruse the ideas easily, the suggestions will be bulleted here, in random order.

- Service Learning is a growing component of many college courses. An ASIANetwork international service learning program would send American students to Asia and bring Asian students to the United States.
- ASIANetwork should sponsor international faculty-student summer workshops on timely issues, examined from broad perspectives, such as Aids, popular culture, poverty, water, and oil.
- ASIANetwork and all faculty should cooperate directly with local high schools to strengthen their Asian studies courses, thereby recruiting potential college students early to Asian studies.
- ASIANetwork should collaborate in programming with sister organizations such as the Asian Studies Development Program, the American Historical Association, the Academy of Religion, the Asian language teaching organizations, or the Association for Asian Studies.
- ASIANetwork should make available opportunities for college presidents and deans to travel to Asia, to visit Asian institutions, and talk with students and faculty about study abroad programs. College administrators will better understand the importance of Asia and administrative support for Asian studies will increase.
- ASIANetwork should organize workshops specifically for differing levels of collegiate Asian studies programs, i.e. for those with an established language and disciplinary base, those at mid-levels that need nurturing, and those in the early stages with very specific needs.
- ASIANetwork should foster electronic connections among American colleges, most of which now have

well-established networks, and Asian institutions that are fledglings in electronic communications.

- ASIANetwork should develop a summer certification program to teach English as a Second Language. Liberal arts college graduates are increasingly interested in teaching ESL abroad, but need instruction. David Vikner gave as an example, the Native English Speakers Teaching Program in Hong Kong.
- ASIANetwork should establish a “Master Teacher” award to invoke, annually, the principles at the heart of the enterprise. A recognized ASIANetwork Master Teacher might occasionally be a conference keynote speaker.
- ASIANetwork should continue to pursue one of its original goals; that of institutional cooperation among member colleges. The organization should encourage more interaction among regional ASIANetwork groups.

Rounding out the discussions was the topic of the ASIANetwork administrative structure. Jim Lochtefeld pointed out that the structure established at the birth of the small organization may no longer meet the needs of a much larger consortium. Perhaps the ASIANetwork has reached an optimum and manageable size. He asked whether ASIANetwork colleges will be willing to continue to host the organization on a rotation basis every six years as have Augustana College, currently, and Colorado College, initially. The office of Executive Director is a part-time position, and currently the Executive Director continues his/her teaching responsibilities, albeit on a reduced scale. The responsibilities of the Executive Director as scholar, teacher, and administrator are heavy. Lochtefeld suggested that ASIANetwork members should assume greater responsibility for given projects within the organization and that the Executive Committee not always be the grommet through which all ASIANetwork matters should pass.

Greg Guldin, an early chairman of the ASIANetwork Board, penned the descriptor of the ASIANetwork, “A Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges to Promote Asian Studies.” That promotion has included collegiality, conversation, and cooperation among teachers at member liberal arts colleges. These teachers, grounded in academic disciplines, are dedicated to undergraduate teaching about Asia, and always interested in exploring new avenues to enhance our ongoing engagement with Asia and the world. The ASIANetwork has supported that engagement through both self-help and outreach. The sentiment at the 10th annual ASIANetwork conference was that while the energy of the organization may and should take new forms appropriate for the academy of the 21st century, the basic commitment to liberal arts education and the place, both actual and potential, of the study of Asia in undergraduate liberal arts education will endure in the ASIANetwork.



Marianna McJimsey

The ASIANetwork Website
is located at

www.asianetwork.org

You can read past issues
of the newsletter,
keep up on current
activities of ASIANetwork,
and look for new
opportunities for continuing
development in Asian Studies.

Take a look **TODAY!**