

## From the Board Chair



# New Challenges for Asian Studies

P. Richard Bohr

College of Saint Benedict's & Saint John's University

This month's ASIANetwork conference in Lisle, Illinois marks our consortium's fourteenth year committed to "strengthen[ing] the role of Asian Studies within the framework of liberal arts education..." Even amidst tight campus budgets, ASIANetwork continues to pursue its mission through its development of Asianist and non-Asianist faculty, through its commitment to pedagogical and curricular design, its support of study abroad, and student-faculty research, as well as its collaborative efforts with programs, resources, and grants across the 160-member consortium.

While maintaining its original vision, ASIANetwork also strives to understand developments in the fast-moving "Asian Century." The April conference, for instance, underscores new themes in the deepening interdependence between Asia and America. Our keynote speakers will highlight pioneering U.S.-Asia interactions in art and environmentalism and the importance of promoting mutual understanding through global media. Plenary and panel sessions will explore novel ways to enhance teaching, faculty, student, and scholarly exchange, distance learning, and intercollegiate cooperation by discussing the latest developments in internet usage, web-exchange and telecommunications technology, as well as improvements in documentary film methodology.

Some panels will review recent reinterpretations of Korean-Japanese relations and the history of U.S.-East Asia interaction through Christian missions, while others will explore new pedagogical trends in illuminating various aspects of East Asian civilization through word and image, teaching about Vietnam and Mongolia (parts of Asia inaccessible to

U.S. colleges until now), and inserting environmental stewardship into the study of Asia, in addition to considering Asian Studies in a post-9/11 world, and the Asian American experience within the liberal arts curriculum. Panelists will also highlight the growing importance of experiential education in broadening study, travel, and student-teacher collaborative research in Asia on the one hand, and ensuring that students from Asia succeed in U.S. college classrooms on the other. In addition, two panels will focus on the lessons learned from last summer's Pearl River Delta study tour regarding the global consequences of South China's hyper-economic development. Finally, the pre-conference tour of Chicago and the performance of student *taiko* drummers will dramatize recent advances in the Asianization of America.

Teddy Amoloz's report highlights the increasing importance of ASIANetwork's programs and projects in fulfilling its mission. The popular Freeman-funded Student-Faculty Fellows Program, now in its eighth year, has helped create a new generation of competent U.S. "Asia Hands." Two Luce Foundation-funded programs are now in their second year. The Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum project reminds us that abundant pedagogical tools are available in our campus art galleries and storage closets. Moreover, the arts project will launch the first volume in our "Resources for Undergraduate Teaching" book series, a collaborative project with the Association for Asian Studies (AAS). The Vietnam-USA Exchange Program, in partnership with the Center for Educational Exchange with Vietnam and the American Council of Learned Societies, fosters faculty exchange to facilitate curriculum

development about newly-opened Vietnam.

A paramount obligation in these projects is to insure that ASIANetwork's Development Team secures sufficient project funding from private and public benefactors and develops workable relationship with project partners. To this end, the Board of Directors is crafting a set of "Principles of Partnership" guidelines for developing and managing these relationships.

ASIANetwork's mission statement emphasizes the "special opportunities and challenges in the development of Asian Studies." With respect to the opportunity side, our member schools have benefited hugely from ASIANetwork projects. But challenges, too, abound. President Bush's recent visit to Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan reminds us that Asia and our relationship to it are rapidly changing. There is no doubt that ASIANetwork colleges have prepared our students humanistically for a personal relationship with Asia. But have we given them the professional tools to compete successfully in the "Asian Century"?

At its meeting last October, the ASIANetwork Board of Directors approved the creation of the Past Chairs Advisory Council (PCAC), which includes previous Executive Directors as well, to informally advise the Board on financial, fundraising, and project matters. Phyllis Larson, current Board Vice-Chair, has wisely proposed that the PCAC also develop a 10-15 year strategic plan for ASIANetwork. As I prepare to pass the Chair's gavel to Phyllis at this April's conference, I would like to suggest three concerns which the PCAC might consider in its long-range planning.

(continued on page 11)

Marlboro is a small school in the stunning Green Mountains of Vermont, not far from a number of other colleges and universities, with which it has close contacts and exchanges—another factor which will serve this initiative well. The faculty-student ratio is very small, and Marlboro students enjoy a high degree of autonomy and flexibility. The culture of the school allows for interdisciplinary contact and interaction between students and teachers, a perfect place for a natural teacher and scholar like Prof. Dzung. Nearly half of Marlboro students study abroad, and recently many have studied in Vietnam. Marlboro's curriculum includes courses on Vietnam, and the school has hosted a Vietnamese film festival, sponsored a number of lectures on Vietnam, and encouraged student and faculty research in Vietnam. Prof. Seth Harter is the team leader, and has done extensive field research in Vietnam. Katrin Jellema and other colleagues contribute significantly to the effort to develop Vietnamese studies at Marlboro, whose program is more extensive

than many at much larger colleges and universities. Among the Marlboro faculty are scholars who bring fluent Vietnamese language skills, knowledge of Vietnamese literature, study of Vietnamese sociology and ethnography, knowledge of Southeast Asian biology and expertise in the region's flora and fauna, and appreciation of Vietnamese art. This is a dynamic environment.

And these initiatives reflect only the first year of the ASIANetwork Vietnam Faculty Exchange Program! It too is dynamic, and has required hard work and commitment on the part of the entire ASIANetwork Committee: Sandra Bradley at ACLS and Minh Kaufman at CEEVN. It goes without saying that this initiative would be impossible without the vision, generosity and commitment of the Henry Luce Foundation. The second year of the program is upon us. We all look forward to working together to enhance our understanding and contact with Vietnam and to using this pilot program as a foundation for development of Vietnamese studies in the ASIANetwork consortium.

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**From the Executive Director** (*continued from page 4*)

I joined their meeting on Saturday evening to discuss the new timeline and budget allocation as a consequence of the one-year extension that we worked out with the Luce Foundation. Again, I was very impressed with the level of care and foresight of the members of the group. A budget re-allocation was carefully considered and thoroughly discussed, and the timetable that was approved, although tight toward the end, is feasible. (Subsequently, both the budget re-allocation and timeline were sent to the Luce Foundation and were approved.) Stan Mickel, the Project Administrator, is doing a yeoman job coordinating the many facets of this complicated project. Although retiring in a year, he will see to the completion of this project, that will result in the publication of the first book in our book series project.

As you can see, the level of activity at ASIANetwork goes up several notches during the first part of the spring semester when we spend considerable amount of time reading applications

and selecting participants for the different programs we run. Of these funded programs, only two will continue beyond the current cycles; the Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum project, which will continue through the spring of 2009, and the Student-Faculty Fellow program funded by the Freeman Foundation, which still has one year left in this funding cycle (we are hopeful that we will again receive funding to continue this program when we apply for renewal).

The variety of the programs we operate is illustrative of the opportunities that ASIANetwork offers, and the success of these programs depends to a large extent on the interest and support of the membership. We welcome ideas for new programs and we encourage faculty colleagues at our member schools to share with us their visions and dreams for the consortium. By working together, we will ensure the continuing relevance and pivotal role of ASIANetwork, as we forge ahead in our mission to promote the study of Asia at small liberal arts institutions.

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**From the Board Chair** (*continued from page 5*)

1) *Enhancing College Language Instruction.* Asia is now the world's economic epicenter. Increasingly, American policy-makers realize that preparing U.S. students for the global economy begins with teaching them Asian languages. The White House-endorsed National Security Language Initiative seeks to expand Asian and Middle East language instruction to keep America globally competitive and secure. And the U.S.-China Cultural Engagement Act, now moving through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, proposes to spend \$1.3 billion over five years to make American kids proficient in Chinese (the world's most widely spoken language) by the fourth grade. Moreover, the Boston, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia public schools, along with a number of U.S. states, are cooperating with China's Ministry of Education to immerse American students in Chinese language and culture. These initiatives will multiply the 25,000

high school students currently taking Chinese in thirty U.S. states. But are ASIANetwork member schools—most of which offer nothing beyond second-year Japanese and Chinese—prepared to provide advanced language courses by the time these students enter college?

2) *Expanding the Geographical Scope of "Asian Studies."* East Asia has been the well-funded cornerstone of America's Asian Studies syllabus for the past century and a half. But the recent economic surge of India and its potential integration with China—many economists call this phenomenon "Chindia"—puts the spotlight on the need to develop a South Asian (along with Islamic) Studies component of Asian Studies. Few ASIANetwork schools have historic ties to South Asia, and there is little foundation support for South Asian Studies at present. However, for America to succeed in relating to the new Asia, we must now make this area a major priority.