

Initiative operated on a shoestring budget of \$25,000, the bulk of which went to transportation and honoraria for outside speakers, film rentals, and operational costs for the conference. Trinity colleagues devoted their time and energy pro bono.

To motivate students and to counteract their passivity to “top-down, one-way transmission of knowledge,” the Diaspora series sought to involve students in a number of ways. The most important was that all events were student-led. As event hosts, students had to research the topic, study the work of the speakers or guests, introduce and summarize issues for the audience, and lead discussions. Admittedly, the number of student-hosts was small relative to the college population of about 2,000 students. However, by their example these students presented to their peers models of engaged and active intellectual endeavors outside the classroom.

What is the role of Asian Studies in this multidisciplinary endeavor? Let me use my own involvement in the Diaspora series as an example. In the first semester I recommended the Hong Kong film “Tian Mi Mi” (Comrade, Almost a Love Story) to the film committee. I wrote a short synopsis of the film, which was placed on the Diaspora web site, and provided sources of information about the film to the student host (not an Asian Studies major) who was responsible for presenting the film. I did not attend the screening, but the discussion apparently went very well. Afterwards, I received e-mail inquiries about the film from students, many of whom, as far as I know, had not taken any class about Asia before.

In the second semester, I appeared on a panel with two colleagues. My topic was “Chinese Diasporic Memoirs in the U.S.” The other two papers, given by Michael Lestz and Vijay Prashad, were about the situation of indigenous peoples of South Taiwan in the face of influx of Mainland Chinese, and the 1913-1916 rebellion against indenture in the Indian diaspora, respectively. A student from my Chinese class assumed the role of host and moderator. Interestingly, most questions came from the non-Asian studies contingent among the audience, and discussion also continued electronically afterwards.

The third task that I performed for the Diaspora series was to direct two one-half credit independent study courses. One of these involved an English major who took my Chinese literature class in conjunction with the Diaspora series. What that meant was that in addition to following the course syllabus like other students, she did extra work, including an independent project that explored an issue of the Chinese diaspora. After consultation, we agreed that in order for her to earn that half credit, her assignments would include

- 1) attending at least nine events (about two-thirds of the total in the fall semester) of the Diaspora series
- 2) keeping a journal about the events she attended, with insights and questions
- 3) participating in on-line discussions with at least one lengthy entry a week

4) developing a teaching plan for the session on Chinese diaspora in my course, teach that class, and submit a report after the class.

That a student could anchor his/her participation in the Diaspora events to a course in the regular curriculum, I think, best exemplifies the strength of the Co-curricular Initiative. There were more than thirty such courses, and sixteen students took advantage of them. I referred earlier to the lukewarm attitude of students toward individual “events,” and we also understand that it is an uphill battle to convince a liberal arts college of the importance of integrating the teaching of Asia into the general curriculum. Perhaps, then, an arrangement such as Trinity’s Co-curricular Initiative, whereby Asianists join colleagues in other disciplines in a cluster of events focusing on a global issue, is another way of promoting Asian studies in the liberal arts setting.

NOTES

¹In *Teaching Matters: Essays on Liberal Education at the Millennium*, Hartford, CT: Trinity College, 1999.

Five Steps **Joan E. Ericson** **The Colorado College**

Integrating Asian Studies into the Liberal Arts curriculum at Colorado College is part of the process of “internationalization,” a principal goal for our institution identified by President Kathryn Mohrman. The mandate of internationalization has helped to facilitate the efforts of the Asian Studies program to build linkages and alliances across the curriculum. Our program has been quite successful, frankly, because we are opportunistic, flexible and practical: we sought to build on what was already in place, to always connect with interests and courses of other faculty across the disciplinary, and even divisional, divide. We’ve made a special effort to connect with colleagues in the natural sciences by supporting opportunities for them to travel, research and build their own networks through our Asia-partners program. Rather than rely on courses in areas of our own specialties, we’ve tried to bridge and facilitate, and often to underplay the claims of Asian exceptionalism, without losing what is exceptional, even uniquely so, among things Asian.

The focus of my remarks will be to outline “five steps” that I have used or proposed at Colorado College, steps that might be easily replicated in other institutional environments. I should confess that we have benefited from the mandate of “internationalization” as well as an enviable endowment (one that makes Asia-partners, among many other programs, possible). But our general strategy, to integrate Asian Studies into the liberal arts and avoid isolation or marginalization, requires not so much resources, however much these may help, but a willingness to embrace the college-wide directives and mandates—make the trend your friend—and make colleagues in other fields see the vitality

and utility of our concerns.

PLUG IN

Plugging into an existing course that already employs a comparative framework is perhaps the easiest means to bring issues in Asian Studies to the general liberal arts table. Standard survey courses in the social sciences cry out for Asian experiences and perspectives, and we have found most colleagues are more than welcoming for examples, readings, or assignments that they could adopt. Our “liberal arts Asianists”—colleagues with knowledge and interest in Asia, but without the specialist Ph.D. training in an Asian field—are often the most successful at integrating Asian examples or case studies into these introductory surveys, since they are often in the rotation to teach the course. Comparative literature similarly requires crossing the boundaries of language and culture, even if many introductory surveys in liberal arts institutions focus within the Western tradition. Adding the Japanese experience to a course on “The Novel,” as I proposed with a colleague in Romance languages, problematizes the master narrative derived from European experience, something my colleague warmly welcomed.

MERGE

I developed and taught an upper division seminar on “The Representation of Childhood in Japan”—the area of my on-going research that included material many students read in Japanese—and subsequently arranged to team-teach a new course with a historian of Medieval Europe who regularly teaches courses on “The History of the Family” in the West. This experiment, “Childhood, East and West,” was extremely successful. I found it helpful for my own research to review the discourse on European experience. And students found the material on Europe to be surprisingly unfamiliar, something that helped, I believe, to prepare them for readings about wholly unanticipated dynamics in Japan.

JOIN CAMPUS-WIDE INITIATIVES

Like many other colleges across the country, Colorado College has recently adopted a First Year Experience to provide students with an integrated thematic focus at the outset of their studies. Under the rubric of “Order and Chaos,” Asianists now have the opportunity to reach a somewhat broader spectrum of students who might not otherwise be enticed into our introductory courses.

The campus-wide symposium celebrating the 125th anniversary of the College in 1999 focused, in considerable measure, on a comparison of Confucian legacies in East Asia with the Western liberal tradition. Tu Wei-ming, Li Zehou and Roger Ames helped to formulate an Asianist challenge to claims of Western exceptionalism, if not superiority, put forward by Samuel Huntington, and to raise an awareness within the college as a whole of the depth and coherence of Asian traditions that merit serious consideration and emulation.

The willingness of the Asian Studies Committee to connect with these recent college-wide initiatives maintains

the visibility of our program for students and colleagues alike.

TEAM TEACH

One of the strategies for survival under the block plan (Colorado College’s approach to teach one course at a time, meeting daily, for three-and-a-half weeks) is to join forces with colleagues in topics of mutual interest. Team-teaching is recommended by senior faculty as a necessary prescription for sanity under the block plan, but the benefits are considerable, besides always having at least one other person who laughs at your jokes, and should be emulated elsewhere. Dialogues between faculty, in class and out, helps to cement good working relations and, usually, personal friendships among our Asian Studies peers. It is also a chance to get to know others outside one’s immediate departmental or programmatic circle, in an environment that’s far more pleasant and stimulating than campus-wide committees.

TEACH TO FACULTY

The intellectual culture at Colorado College among faculty is sustained, in part, by a series of seminars, most of which are targeted to cross-disciplinary interests, and at which most of us are asked to take a turn at the bat. For the Women’s Studies seminar on presenting new videos for teaching forms of feminism, I showed the Japanese documentary “Looking for Fumiko” and enjoyed presenting a periodization of the movement in Japan that departed in significant ways from the North American dynamics. The visibility of and differences among “International Feminisms” will be further explored in the Associated Colleges of the Midwest Women’s Studies Conference “Integrating Global Feminism into the Women’s Studies Curriculum,” hosted at Colorado College in February 2001, where our short-term Korean visiting faculty will address the particularities of and prospects for Asian Feminism.

ASIANetwork Conference
Cleveland
Sunday, April 22, 10:15-11:45
South Meeting Room
The Freeman Foundation
College-in-Asia Program
Come learn about this unique
summer experience and see if it’s
right for your school.