

## From the Board Chair

### P. Richard Bohr



I have just returned from participating in the month-long, eye-opening Pearl River Delta Faculty Development Program, cosponsored by ASIANetwork and the Hong Kong-America Center. The program was funded with a \$65,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Group Study Abroad Program and approximately \$6,000 from the Li Ka Shing Foundation in Hong Kong. This remarkable study tour included 16 professors of anthropology, business, economics, history, management, political science, religion, and sociology, each affiliated with a separate ASIANetwork member school.

Throughout South China's Pearl River Delta, the world's fastest-growing economic region, our delegation attended over forty lectures and visited factories, government offices, planning agencies, transportation and communication facilities, universities, and NGOs as well as religious and cultural institutions. Our purpose was to assess the impact of rapid economic development on new business enterprises, migrant labor, traditional and popular culture, government leadership, regional planning strategies, and the environment. Our bottom-line question was, To what extent is the Pearl River Delta a portent for the rest of China?

I will publish a full report on this faculty development program in a forthcoming issue of *ASIANetwork Exchange*, but at this point I want to convey two observations. First, this

project exemplifies what the ASIANetwork does best: infuse Asian Studies into the liberal arts curriculum by bringing its member institutions together for interdisciplinary collaboration in faculty, curricular, and pedagogical developments to prepare our graduates for the newly-dawned "Asian Century."

Second, this Fulbright-Hays project heralds a new level of service to ASIANetwork member institutions.

Now home, my fellow delegates and I will re-enact a similar ASIANetwork routine: collaborate with our deans, faculty colleagues, and students as well as off-campus groups to disseminate what we have learned by revising existing or creating new courses and offering lectures, conference papers, publications, and community outreach. In addition, several of us are already working with our study abroad officers to plan experiential learning activities at some of the Chinese universities we encountered on the trip. Our member institutions, too, will benefit as we circulate our findings via the ASIANetwork website, the *ASIANetwork Exchange*, the indispensable teachers' journal *Education About Asia*, and as we offer panels and presentations at next spring's ASIANetwork conference to be held at Hickory Ridge Conference Center in Lisle, Illinois on April 21-23, 2006.

This successful knowledge-sharing formula builds on earlier ASIANetwork programs supported by generous grants

from the Ford, Luce, and Freeman Foundations as well as occasional grants from The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, The Japan Foundation, and The Korea Society that have strengthened Asian Studies among our member institutions. One such program is the Freeman-funded Student-

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Faculty Fellows Program, which, since 1998, has supported collaborative teacher-student field research in East and Southeast Asia and its dissemination throughout ASIANetwork institutions. By the time this newsletter goes to press, this Freeman-funded program will have sent close to 300 persons to Asia. The student-faculty fellows program, the just completed Pearl River Delta faculty development seminar, the U.S.-Vietnam faculty exchange program, and the Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum project are the ASIANetwork Initiatives mandated by the Board of Directors for implementation in 2004-05. We will continue to administer these programs next academic year. (Please see pages 8-9 for details.)

During the summer of 2005 ASIANetwork’s headquarters moved from Augustana College, where Van Symons, Executive Director during the past six years, and his colleagues rendered exemplary day-to-day administration, finance and project management, and newsletter production. The new headquarters is Illinois Wesleyan University, where Professor Teddy Amoloza has already assembled a first-rate team. As is abundantly clear from her first Executive Director’s column in this issue of the newsletter, Teddy is a time-honored veteran of ASIANetwork programs, having ably administered the Freeman-funded Student-Faculty Fellows Program since its inception. She is also an inspiring leader, a creative administrator, and is intimately acquainted with every nook and cranny of the ASIANetwork.

As Board Chair for 2005-06, I look forward to working with Teddy and her colleagues. I am also delighted that Professor Phyllis Larson, a Japan scholar at St. Olaf College, is the new ASIANetwork Vice-Chair and, therefore, Chair-designate. With broad experience as a department chair, Phyllis has also managed grants, served on numerous boards, and consulted widely on Asian Studies programs. Teddy and Phyllis will be ideal co-workers on the ASIANetwork Executive Committee.

Managing so many new projects will require even more wisdom, leadership, and energy from our traditional support base, beginning with our member institutions. ASIANetwork now has an unprecedented 167 member schools, a growth curve which testifies to its ever-increasing value to its constituents as well as the doggedness of the Board’s membership committee. Our new projects will provide even more opportunities for constituent services and opportunities for member institutions to collaborate and learn from one another.

In addition, ASIANetwork must now rely more than ever on its hard-working, nine-member Board of Directors, which Professor Joan O’Mara, immediate past Board chair, characterizes as being

endowed with a “can do” spirit. Through its various committees, the Board oversees all aspects of finance, administration, operations, and outreach. Because of a

recent Finance Committee innovation, ASIANetwork funds are growing nicely. And thanks to Professor Diane Clayton’s willingness to remain our website editor for an additional year beyond her board tenure, our outreach is more effective than ever. The Board’s effectiveness in these matters is greatly enhanced by the wise counsel of a devoted Council of Advisors.

The Board proposes and implements all major projects associated with ASIANetwork. The initiatives mentioned above, for example, are funded by long-time foundation supporters, who have contributed over \$4.5 million to ASIANetwork since its creation in 1993. The receipt of public funding, as evidenced in the above-described Fulbright-Hays project, needs to continue if ASIANetwork is to retain its not-for-profit status.

Our new projects also depend on the new institutional partnerships that are needed to undergird them. One example is our association with the Hong-Kong America Center. We are collaborating with this outreach arm of five Hong Kong-based universities on a second proposal to the Fulbright-Hays program for a study tour next summer that focuses on South China’s history and culture. ASIANetwork and the Hong Kong-America Center are also seeking support for an Asia-based seminar on Asian religions as well as a multi-summer project to study the Asian origins and the development of Asian-American communities in the U.S.

In addition to organizing a vibrant program for the annual conference in April, my goals as Board chair are to identify Board nominees with the gifts

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and talents to enable us to manage the next phase of our growth and to reach out to potential new institutional partners. To this end, I share the ASIANetwork founders’ conviction that a liberal arts approach to Asian Studies is the best way to prepare students intellectually to understand Asia. But I am also convinced that, as the global economy continues to concentrate on Asia, there will be increasing urgency to prepare our students to become professional “Asia Hands.” This will require our redoubled commitment to faculty development, interdisciplinary curricular depth, and pedagogical innovation as well as to locating expanded opportunities for study abroad, service learning, teaching, and internship experience in Asia. This can be accomplished only by developing a broad coalition of partners who will be able to help our students gain professional expertise and thereby insure America’s competitiveness in the Asian Century. I hope some of you will submit panel proposals along these lines for next April’s conference.



Phyllis Larson

We hope that the newsletter will provide both informative and provocative articles. We welcome responses in the form of letters or commentaries which we may publish to facilitate and enhance dialogue among our members.