

## NETWORK NEWS

From the Executive Director

# An Inside Look at the Grant Selection Process

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I write this piece after having returned from my last trip to Hickory Ridge this winter, where I attended meetings to select the participants for the programs that we will continue to

run this summer and through the next academic year. Although those meetings were exhausting, I have always come back more energized and inspired, knowing that the study of Asia flourishes, especially in small liberal arts institutions. Allow me to give you a more intimate look at what happened during the selection meetings.

The selection committee of the Student-Faculty Fellows program, funded by the Freeman Foundation (board chair Richard Bohr, vice-chair Phyllis Larson, Project Director Van Symons and I), spent the whole month of January reading 40 applications for 12 or 13 available slots. The application packets were quite extensive and detailed; 36 of them had at least three students on the team and of these 36, 17 had five student members. Thus it took us anywhere from an hour and a half to two or more hours to read each application. I calculated that each one of us spent the equivalent of two working weeks just reading these applications.

Having directed this program since its inception in 1997, I am witness to the ever-increasing strength of the application pool each year—thus having 40 strong applications was both a welcome surprise (almost double that of previous years) and a challenge, knowing that we can only send around 60 individuals from among the more than 200 applicants. Of those 40 applications, 20 came from schools that have not received previous funding from this program—a testament to the

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continuing, and even increasing interest in the program. However, it should be stressed that when we read the applications, we focused on the strength of the proposed project and the capability of the research team to carry on the project without paying attention to the previous history of participation of the school and/or the mentor. Individually, we carefully noted the strengths of each application as well as the concerns we had and rated each application as either a “yes”, “maybe” or “no.”

When we got together at Hickory Ridge over the January 27-29 weekend, our initial task began almost as soon as we met for dinner on Friday evening, when we had conversations about the history of this program. Because Van and I had been with this program from the very beginning, we were able to offer Richard and Phyllis a historical perspective on the quality of the projects and the strength of the faculty mentors. Indeed, we have noted the increasing sophistication in the quality of the projects proposed by the students,

reflecting the increasing strength of Asian studies curricula in our member institutions.

In addition, we happily observed the increasing number of faculty mentors with graduate degrees in Asian studies and faculty mentors who had retooled themselves in order to apply their disciplinary expertise to the study of Asia. No wonder that we all had a challenging time rating the proposals.

When we met on Saturday morning, we compiled our ratings and ranked the teams according to our combined judgments; five teams rose to the top right away while three teams received “no” rating from all of us. Two applications came from institutions represented in the selection committee; the corresponding committee member abstained from rating that application and did not participate in the deliberation of the proposal.

Going over the 32 remaining proposals took up the rest of our meeting times. We went back to our notes, summarized the strengths that we noted, pointed out areas of concerns and weaknesses, and arrived at a decision with which we were all comfortable. It was an exhaustively thorough process and indeed a thoroughly exhausting experience. By 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, we had agreed upon funding 11 teams but our brains were already saturated, so we decided to give our brain cells some rest. We met again early on Sunday morning and finally decided to award two more teams.

We were able to fund 13 teams instead of the 12 specified in our proposal to the Freeman Foundation because most of the teams did not exhaust their allowable budgets, thus leaving enough money to fund one additional team. We spent the rest of the morning reviewing the budgets of the selected teams to ensure that the requested amount for each item

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was reasonable and offered alternative suggestions. We then went back to review our comments about the proposals that were not funded and agreed on the contents of the letters that were to be sent to each of these teams. As in the past, we did not want to simply write a form rejection letter but we wanted to indicate to these teams the strengths of their proposals and to offer suggestions for improvement, should they decide to re-apply next year.

In general, the teams that were selected were those that clearly showed evidence of the voice of the students and demonstrated the considerable amount of research the students had already completed to lay out the foundation for future research. The winning proposals were well-written; the importance of the research was well articulated, the research questions were well defined, the methodology clearly explained and the expected end products feasible and reasonable. Of the 13 teams selected, ten were from institutions that have not received this award in the past. While mentally draining for all of us, it was one of the most gratifying tasks we do at ASIANetwork. (Please see pages 6-8 for more details on the grantees and their projects.)

To maximize the work that can get done during our trip to Hickory Ridge, the Executive Committee returned on the weekend of February 10-12 to discuss applications for two other projects, the Vietnam Academic Exchange program and the Pearl River Delta Second Faculty Development Seminar. I also met with the Asian Arts in the Undergraduate Curriculum Steering Committee that weekend. The Executive Committee and Paul Nietupski met on Friday afternoon to select the host schools for the second year of the Luce Foundation-funded academic exchange with Vietnam that we run in partnership with ACLS/CEEVN. While there were only six applications for the four slots available, it still took us most of the afternoon to get our job done. Again, we exercised a high level of meticulous care and thorough discussion in selecting the schools that will host the next group of Vietnamese scholars.

In the end we chose the following four schools: Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin (Dr. Andrea Byrum, grant coordinator; Dr. Jinxing Chen, faculty

host), The University of Findlay, Findlay, Ohio (Dr. Hiroaki Kawamura, grant coordinator and faculty host); Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois (Dr. Jo Ellen Jacob, grant coordinator; Dr. Kevin Murphy, faculty host); and Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington (Dr. Brian R. Dott, grant coordinator and faculty host). We also spent some time on Friday afternoon discussing the challenges we encounter in running this program with ACLS/CEEVN and alternative strategies for the future should we mutually agree to apply for renewal of this program. Paul Nietupski has done a marvelous job coordinating the many different facets involved in this grant, never missing a beat in moving this project forward. He has written an essay about this program and about the schools and the scholars involved in the first year of this grant. (See pages 9 to 11.)

On Saturday, the Executive Committee met with Van Symons, Overall Program Director and Chia Ning, on-site Program Director of the Pearl River Delta Second Faculty Development Seminar. As was the case last year, although we would not know the fate of our application to the Fulbright-Hays Groups Study Abroad program until mid-March, we advertised this program and invited

applications for participation. Thus we also completed the selection of the participants ahead of time so that we would be able to send the notification to applicants as soon as we heard news from the Department of Education.

Thank you again to the careful reading and advance work of each member of the committee, the selection of the participants proceeded smoothly and efficiently. After selecting the 15 participants, we once again carefully assessed their background and level of preparation and decided to assign them to only four work groups instead of the

originally planned five. We ensured that each work group would have a balance of advanced scholars and novices in the field. At the end of our meeting, we discussed the challenges faced by the on-site director of the first seminar (Richard Bohr) and developed strategies to avoid similar problems for this second round. We adjourned, content in the knowledge that if we do receive funding from the federal government, we will again enable 15 ASIANetwork colleagues to enhance their understanding of this exciting and rich region of South China.

My last agenda item for that weekend was to meet with the Steering Committee of the Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum project. The five members of the committee (Karil Kucera, Stan Mickel, Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker, Paul Nietupski and Joan O'Mara) were meeting at another room to select the eight schools that will receive consultancy visits during the next academic year and match them with the art consultants or connoisseurs who were recruited for this project.

True to the way ASIANetwork operates, this five-member committee painstakingly reviewed each application, poring over the narratives, and looking at the art images that were sent (one school sent 600 images) to ensure that informed decisions

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were made. The schools chosen to receive consultancy visits and their corresponding consultants are: College of Wooster, James Godfrey (connoisseur); Fairfield University, Mary Beth Heston (College of Charleston); Luther College, Diana Chou (John Carroll University); Marietta College, Sun Yan

(Gettysburg College); Ohio Wesleyan University, Frank Chance (University of Pennsylvania); St. Lawrence University, Winston Kyan (Macalester College); Union College, Sandy Kita (Chatam College); Washington & Lee, (consultant still to be assigned).

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.