

# The Asian Studies Program at Hofstra University: Challenges and Opportunities

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These are exciting times for the Asian Studies Program at Hofstra University. The program, one of the oldest interdisciplinary programs at Hofstra, has been invigorated in recent years through dynamic new faculty, expansion of Asia-related programs, and a \$500,000 grant for the expansion of undergraduate Asian Studies by the Freeman Foundation. This four-year initiative, launched in January 2002, has helped the Asian Studies Program come nearer to its central goal of offering students, faculty, and members of the community opportunities to extend and deepen their understanding and appreciation of Asia and Asian America. I am proud to be a member of such a dynamic and hard working group.

The Asian Studies Program was organized in the late 1960s by a group of faculty members, now retired, who saw the need to integrate Asia more fully into the curriculum. They designed an interdisciplinary program that successfully melded depth and breadth. Students combined a minor (or double major) in a traditional disciplinary area with substantial Asia-related course work in at least four different fields. This design helped prepare students for a wide array of career opportunities and served as a model for other interdisciplinary programs. Originally a China-focused program, the program's focus has expanded in recent years to include Japan, India, South, Southeast and Central Asia.

Full-time faculty affiliated with the Asian Studies Program number almost 16; adjunct faculty or other Hofstra University faculty with special interest

and expertise in Asian Studies teach additional courses. Since 1999 the Asian Studies Program faculty has seen considerable growth. The Department of Comparative Literature and Languages added two full-time lines: one in Chinese language and literature and one in Japanese language and literature. The Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies was added to the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies; while Art History, History, New College and Political Science each filled existing faculty lines with Asian Studies specialists. The Asian Studies Program has been further strengthened by the decision to institute minors in Chinese language and Japanese language. At the present time, Hofstra faculty teach approximately 20 Asian Studies courses to more than 1,000 students each semester. Asian Studies courses include offerings in Anthropology; Art History; Chinese; Comparative Literature and Languages; Economics and Geography; English; History; Japanese; Philosophy and Religious Studies; Political Science; and Business. The program also supports a number of study abroad programs and encourages students to study independently in Asia for credit toward the major.

Popular Asian Studies courses such as "Beauty and Sadness in Japanese Literature and Culture," "Introduction to Eastern Religious Traditions," and "Asian Politics and Government" regularly reach full enrollment while electives in the program also have solid enrollment figures. As the visibility of the program has increased, so have the number of majors, minors, and others interested in adding an Asia focus to

their course work. In response to the growing demand for Asian studies courses, Asian studies faculty members have developed a number of new courses. One of the most innovative is Dr. Alexandr Naymark's "Workshop in Art History: Asia in New York." This class, which was taught for the first time in the 2003 summer session, combines lectures and discussions at Hofstra University with gallery visits. "It was fun to watch the art come alive for the students," Dr. Naymark related, "This experience cannot be duplicated through books." Another innovative course currently being developed is Dr. Arvind Pal-Singh Mandair's "Politics of Devotion in South Asia," which explores the highly charged relationship between religion and politics in South Asia.

The Asian Studies Program has also been engaged in a major push to expand relevant resources at the University. Since the Asian Studies Initiative began in 2002 the program has actively sought to increase library holdings in areas related specifically to the undergraduate educational mission and in faculty research areas. The initiative has allowed the University to strengthen its collections in history, literature, political science and other areas. In addition, certain essential databases have been added to the collection of databases supported by the University. These include the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, an online subscription to the *Bibliography of Asian Studies*, and a database of Asian art and artifacts. In addition, Asia-related media holdings have been enhanced through the purchase of feature films and video, as well as numerous educational docu-

mentaries in various formats. These resources will enhance undergraduate and graduate study and faculty research for years to come.

The Asian Studies Initiative provides numerous opportunities for students and faculty alike. In 2003 the Asian Studies Program will award more than \$11,000 in scholarships to beginning and continuing Asian Studies students. The scholarships, which are based on need and merit, may be applied to Hofstra University tuition or other legitimate educational expenses, including study abroad programs. Last year, Asian Studies scholarships were awarded to Kamila Baghernejad, Vincent Colon-Roine '03, Yi Hua Fu, Kristen Koob, Brian McLoughlin, Vincent Morrone and Marney White '03. The program also sponsors an annual essay award competition. Students submit essays written for Asian Studies courses in the previous year, which are evaluated by a committee of Asian Studies Program faculty. Top prizes in the 2002 essay competition were awarded to Alexandre Charles, Catherine Geras and Naseem Kapdi. The following students also received recognition for their work: Yi Hua Fu, Christopher Moore, Marney White and Tole Zacharia. In addition, the Asian Studies Program can provide financial support for students with unpaid Asian studies-related internships. Internship stipends make it possible for students to accept valuable internships they might otherwise be unable to accept.

Funding opportunities through the Asian Studies Program are not limited to students. There are also a number of funding opportunities available for Hofstra University faculty members. Course Development Seed Grants provide limited funding for the development or substantial revision of Asian Studies courses. Last year, nearly 10 proposals were funded. Many of the courses that were developed with assistance from the Asian Studies Program have already been taught, or are soon to be taught on a provisional basis. Course Development

Seed Grants will be provided again this year in a competition that is open to all continuing Hofstra faculty members. In light of the mission of the Asian Studies Program, however, proposals that are interdisciplinary in nature and strengthen the program are preferred.

The Asian Studies Program is delighted to offer support for Hofstra in Japan: 2004, the University's first study abroad program in Japan. This program gives students the opportunity to earn three credits under the guidance of both Dr. Takashi Kanatsu and myself while enjoying the trip of a lifetime. During the program, two groundbreaking courses will be offered: PSC 154: "Walking Japanese Politics," and LIT 85: "Japanese Pop/Culture: Old and New." Both combine classroom lecture and discussions with interviews, field trips and cultural activities. The program will begin with a one-week orientation in Tokyo, followed by a journey westward through Fuji-Hakone, Nagoya, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Miyajima. Students will return to Tokyo for the final week of their adventure, ending with an overnight visit to Nikko before returning to New York. Students will experience the fullness of Japanese culture, from the traditional architecture and beauty of Kyoto and Miyajima, to the modern skyscrapers, neon signs and hustle and bustle of Tokyo. "I've been wanting to go to Japan for years," Patricia Bowden commented when she submitted her application. "Ever since I discovered *anime*, I've wanted to go. Now I can."

The Asian Studies Program also provides supplemental research funding to Hofstra University faculty members who are involved in research projects with a substantial Asia-related component. These supplemental funds are intended to minimize the gap between other Hofstra research funding, such as the Faculty Research and Development Grants and the Presidential Research Awards Program (PRAP), and actual research expenses in Asia. In 2003 nearly \$25,000 in supplemental research funding was awarded.

Grants ranged from \$1,000 to \$2,500. A number of truly exciting projects received supplemental funding, including Dr. Margaret Abraham and Dr. Susan Manning's joint project to explore outsourcing of telephone service centers to India. In addition to Drs. Abraham and Manning, supplemental research funding was awarded to Drs. Ron Janssen, Takashi Kanatsu, Sabine Loucif, Alexandr Naymark, Jin Shin, Yuki Terazawa and Zuyan Zhou. As was the case with the Course Development Seed Grants, supplemental research funding will once again be awarded in 2004. The application deadline has been set for mid-February 2004. I am confident that next year's proposals will be as exciting as the ones that received funding in the last cycle.

Since the Asian Studies Initiative began in 2002, the Asian Studies Program has been able to provide a full calendar of cultural events and opportunities. The Asian Studies Speaker Series has permitted a number of renowned scholars to discuss their work with the Hofstra University community. Last spring we were honored by a visit from Dr. Andrew Nathan of Columbia University, a leading political scientist who spoke about China's new rulers. The Asian Studies Speaker Series for fall 2003 included Dr. Christopher Robins of SUNY at New Paltz, who presented a talk titled, "Human Bombs and Bullets: Radical Confucianism: North Korea and Japanese Literature" on September 19, and Dr. Amanda Seaman of the University of Massachusetts whose presentation took place October 8. Dr. Seaman is the author of a book on Japanese detective fiction, which will be published in 2004.

One very special event that we scheduled for fall 2003 was a visit from Mr. José Watanabe, a leading Japanese-Peruvian poet who spent one week on campus as the first Visiting Scholar in Asian Studies. Mr. Watanabe read selections of his poetry, led class discussions, and met with students, faculty members and others. Mr. Watanabe, the child of Japanese immigrants in Peru, is a poet

who traces his poetic voice in part to the haiku esthetic of Basho. He is the author of numerous volumes of poetry, one of which, *A Walk Through the Canefields*, has been published in translation. The Asian Studies Program, with the assistance of the Department of Romance Languages and Literature and the Department of Comparative Literature and Languages, hosted Mr. Watanabe's visit to Hofstra University.

In spring 2004 the Asian Studies Program will host Dr. John Kuo Wei Tchen, Director of the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Center at New York University, and a leading Asian American historian, as our second Visiting Scholar in Asian Studies. Dr. Tchen, who has been studying the intricacies of interethnic and interracial relations of Asians and non-Asians since 1975, will present a workshop on Asian immigration in New York. He will present a public lecture for students, faculty members, and other members of the Hofstra University community, conduct a seminar session, and lead a field trip to New York's Chinatown. Students enrolled in Dr. Yuki Terazawa's history workshop for the spring semester will receive credit for active participation in Dr. Tchen's workshop activities. The Asian Studies Program will host other visiting scholars in the final two years of the initiative. We are delighted to have the opportunity to help bring these and other important visitors to Hofstra University.

In spring 2003 the Asian Studies Program began a continuing series of "interactive" workshops on the relationship between food and culture. This series, called "Food for Thought," featured collaboration between scholars and practitioners in the food industry. In our first installment, Dr. Robert Leonard, a linguist who is equally known for his work on food culture, spoke about the quality of balance in Thai cuisine. Dr. Leonard's lecture was followed by a brief discussion with Ms. Farida (Pam) Thaokoon of Blue Dash, Inc., who then served a delicious Thai

luncheon. Other installments in the series will include Chinese, Indian, Japanese and Korean food and culture. Other cultural events hosted by the Asian Studies Program include regular film series and occasional lectures.

As the capstone of the initiative, the Asian Studies Program is planning to hold a community-based interdisciplinary conference in spring 2006, in conjunction with Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Hofstra Cultural Center. The conference topic is "Asian Merchant Cultures at the Crossroads." Following the tradition of international scholarly conferences hosted by the Hofstra Cultural Center, the Merchant Cultures conference will combine the traditional conference format with an array of exhibitions, performances, and other cultural events. This conference will allow for true interdisciplinarity, and the exploration of linkages among Hofstra University, business and the community. Presenters will explore the many manifestations of merchant cultures in Asia from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. We anticipate considerable interest in this conference, as the topic supports inquiry from a variety of intellectual and critical perspectives. Keynote speakers will be drawn from the humanities, the social sciences, and the business world. We will be soliciting papers and panels on globalization, urban spaces, the Silk Road, merchant class identity, to name but a few productive topics, though we welcome panels and papers in any related areas.

The past two years have been a remarkable time for the Asian Studies Program at Hofstra. The Freeman Foundation Undergraduate Studies Initiative has helped support the research and teaching of our faculty, and enriched the educational experience of our students. For more information about any of the programs mentioned in this article, e-mail [patricia.welch@hofstra.edu](mailto:patricia.welch@hofstra.edu) or call (516) 463-6453.



Patricia M. Welch joined the Hofstra faculty in 1999 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and Languages. She also serves as Director of Hofstra University's Asian Studies Program. In the latter capacity, Dr. Welch acted as the primary investigator to secure a \$500,000 Freeman Foundation Grant in support of a four-year project to advance Asian Studies.

Prior to her appointment at Hofstra, she was a visiting scholar at Waseda University in Tokyo where she completed research for her dissertation, and held visiting appointments in Japanese literature, language and film at the University of Toronto, the University of Iowa and the University of California at Berkeley. Her background also includes positions as a teacher and curriculum developer at the Doshisha Girls' School in Kyoto, Japan, and as an editorial consultant with the Dictionary Division of the Kodansha Publishing Company based in Tokyo.

Dr. Welch's research areas of interest include modern Japanese literature and film, war literature, Japanese humor, and "rakugo," the Japanese comic-oral narrative form. She has contributed extensively to scholarly literature and conference proceedings and is a sought-after reviewer. She has lectured widely both in the United States and abroad. Currently Dr. Welch has two monographs in progress: one investigates the inscription of "traditional" dramatic forms in literary works of the late-19th and mid-20th centuries as a way of promoting cultural orthodoxy; the other explores rakugo as a way of promoting heterodoxy over cultural orthodoxy during those same time periods.

Dr. Welch has been the recipient of numerous grants, fellowships, and honors and is active in professional organizations. She earned a Ph.D. and A.M. at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor where she served as a graduate assistant in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures. She received an A.B. with a dual major in economics and religion from Smith College.