



# Tri-Co LIASE: Cross- and Intra-Institutional Collaboration to Build and Sustain Student-Focused Embedded Study in Asia

**HAILI KONG** 

**SHARON BAIN** 

**TANIA JOHNSON** 

**DAVID FOREMAN** 

**DAVID ELDRIDGE** 

*\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

## ARTICLE



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity  
Partner Network

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, Swarthmore College and Bryn Mawr College faculty and administrators share reflections on the Luce Initiative on Asian Studies and the Environment (LIASE) grants from the Henry Luce Foundation for the enhancement of curriculum on Asia and the environment and the cultivation of collaborations between US and Asian institutions. Supported by LIASE exploration grants in 2013 and a LIASE implementation grant awarded to the Tri-College Consortium of Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore Colleges in 2015, curricular innovations included the creation of courses with travel components and the introduction of topics on Asia and the environment across disciplines. Topics of discussion include fostering curricular innovation and interdisciplinarity across academic divisions; building effective and sustainable collaborations with local institutions in Asia; forging strategic partnerships with administrators in grants, advancement, and finance; leveraging institutional relationships to secure funding to pilot and sustain initiatives; and the importance of reciprocity in building long-term, cross-cultural exchanges.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**Tania Johnson**

Swarthmore College, US

[tjohnso2@swarthmore.edu](mailto:tjohnso2@swarthmore.edu)

## KEYWORDS:

Asian studies;  
environment; collaboration;  
interdisciplinarity; curriculum;  
administration

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

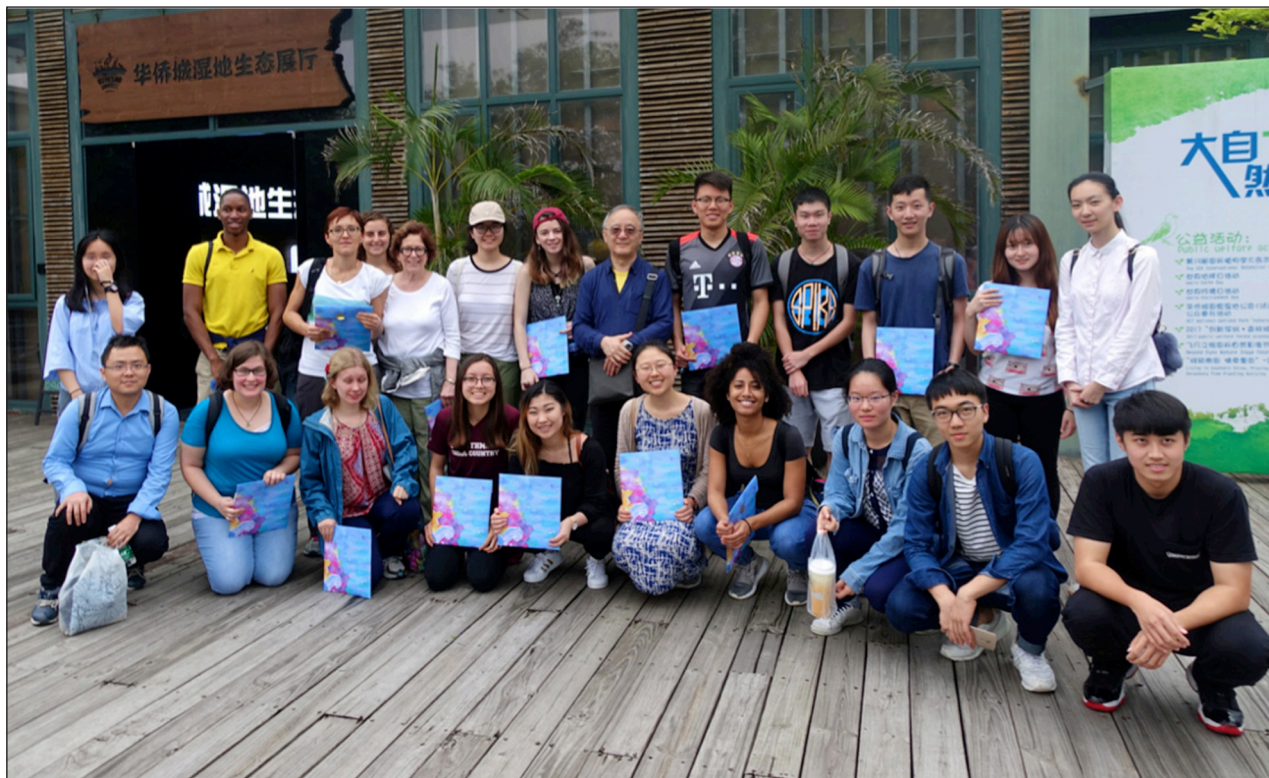
Kong, Haili, Sharon Bain, Tania Johnson, David Foreman, and David Eldridge. 2021. "Tri-Co LIASE: Cross- and Intra-Institutional Collaboration to Build and Sustain Student-Focused Embedded Study in Asia." *ASIANetwork Exchange* 27(2), pp. 43–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.304>

In 2015, the Henry Luce Foundation awarded a \$701,000 grant to the Tri-College Consortium (Tri-Co), consisting of Bryn Mawr College, Haverford College, and Swarthmore College (collectively, the Tri-Colleges). Tri-Co allows cross-institutional registration and provides transportation between the three campuses. The grant supported travel costs for course-based trips at Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore and a series of activities from pooled resources open to all three member institutions, including course development grants, a speaker series, and faculty development programs. The grant is managed by a committee of faculty from each college's departments of Asian or East Asian studies and environmental studies. Tri-Co's LIASE grant was the first consortial implementation grant awarded by Luce. This article<sup>1</sup> presents successes and lessons learned from the experience and proposes a model for intentional "third space," entrepreneurial work as a means to secure and expand innovative experiential course design. The combined perspective of Swarthmore Professor of Chinese Haili Kong, Bryn Mawr Director of Institutional Grants Sharon Bain, Swarthmore Director of Sponsored Programs Tania Johnson, Swarthmore Director of Institutional Relations David Foreman, and Swarthmore Associate Director of Individual Giving David Eldridge (Class of 1990) sheds light on this model.

For Swarthmore, LIASE provided an opportunity to create a robust program of course-based travel opportunities for students to study environmental and sustainability topics in Asia firsthand. During the grant

period, Swarthmore faculty members taught courses on tea (2015), governance (2016), water (2017), and food (2018), attracting over one hundred students. This series was distinctive from regular course offerings. Each course was co-taught by two faculty members representing different disciplines. For example, a faculty member in Chinese studies might co-teach with a colleague from chemistry, German, or political science (*Figure 1*). This made the courses appealing both to students majoring in the humanities and those majoring in the natural sciences.

The second distinguishing characteristic was the inclusion of an overseas travel component for students enrolled in each course. At the conclusion of each course in late spring, a subset of students traveled to Asia to visit sites discussed in the course and to meet with experts in relevant fields. For example, after the course on water, students visited a hydroelectric dam in Taiwan and visited protected wetland habitats in mainland China. The Tri-Co LIASE model—with its signature co-curricular experience bringing together our colleges' students with local students, faculty, experts, and alumni—fully matured during the 2017 water course and the 2018 food course. Specifically, these were the first classes with substantive impact on both sides; our partners learned from us as we shared with them our "risky," innovative model for teaching. Given the growing interest in the liberal arts model among Asian higher education institutions in general, bringing our



**Figure 1** Professors Liliya Yatsunyk (Chemistry & Biochemistry), Carol Nackenoff (Political Science), and Haili Kong (Chinese) with students in front of the auditorium of a wetland park near Hong Kong as part of the 2017 water course (second row; third, fourth, and seventh from the left, respectively).

multidimensional pedagogical approach right to their campuses was invaluable.<sup>2</sup>

For Bryn Mawr, the LIASE grant allowed the college to develop courses on the unifying theme of Asia and the environment under the auspices of the college's signature 360° program. The 360° program is an interdisciplinary experience designed to examine an issue or topic from multiple perspectives. As such, participating students take a cluster of courses focused on the history, economics, cultural intersections, or political impact of an era, decision, event, policy, or important scientific innovation. Learning outside the classroom is a core component of 360° clusters, as students interact with professionals and scholars, and travel to relevant sites to promote informed, big-picture thinking. LIASE funds were used to create recurring 360° course clusters on China and the environment, the role of sustainable living in Japanese contemplative traditions, and the study of pollution and environmental preservation along the Trans-Siberian railway in Mongolia.

For Haverford, the LIASE grant provided the college's faculty (along with all Tri-Co faculty) the resources to create new stand-alone courses and enhance existing courses with content about Asia and the environment. As a result, the LIASE grant resulted in eight new and 12 enhanced courses across the Tri-Co, making them available to all students in the consortium. This part of the LIASE program ensures that many students will benefit from the foundation's investment in this effort well after the formal conclusion of the grant by continuing to take these courses. New and revised courses were developed by faculty in anthropology, Asian studies, biology, chemistry, comparative literature, East Asian languages and cultures, economics, environmental studies, French and Francophone studies, geology, history of art, political science, and sociology.

Funding also helped in bringing eight speakers to Tri-Co campuses to share their knowledge of a variety of topics, including speakers from the fields of biology, film, law, literature, photography, and political science. Professors visited the Tri-Colleges from the Center for Weather Climate and Disaster Research in Taiwan, Harvard University, National Taiwan University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Zhejiang University Law School. Speakers also included independent film directors and photographers. Typically, speakers complemented courses in Asian studies and environmental studies, providing access to topics for a larger audience of students, faculty, staff, and community members. Speakers helped to broaden involvement with LIASE within the higher education community. For example, a member of the Swarthmore linguistics faculty hosted Dr. Linda Campbell—senior research fellow in aquatic ecosystem health at Saint Mary's University in Nova Scotia, Canada, and member of the board of trustees at Gallaudet University—for a talk about her research on mercury biomagnification in

fish food webs in China and Tibet. Professor Campbell delivered her lecture in sign language and attracted a large audience from Asian studies, biology, chemistry, linguistics, and the local deaf community.

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR LIASE

Each of these accomplishments grew out of initiatives and collaborations that began well over a decade ago at the individual Tri-Co institutions. In 2001, Swarthmore received a four-year, \$1,072,000 grant from the Freeman Foundation that helped build the college's Asian studies curriculum, including the expansion and institutionalization of Japanese studies and the hiring of a Chinese-language specialist to work in the college's Language Resource Center. The college secured additional funding from Freeman for student travel with a faculty member to Beijing (2007) and Shanxi (2011) to study the impact of globalization.

Swarthmore's Freeman Foundation grant resulted in many lessons learned by faculty and administrators regarding effective ways to collaborate with and learn from multiple stakeholders both within and outside of their home institution. For example, faculty learned from staff in the college's Business Office and in Advancement about the complexities of grant budget planning and management; they leveraged the snowball effect of establishing strong relationships with local experts and academics to plan exclusive, guided tours of historical and cultural sites to which they would not otherwise have had access (such as the well-preserved architecture of the Song dynasty [960–1279] in Shanxi Province); and they gained experience in the sophisticated logistical planning that is the foundation for successful faculty-led student research field studies in Asia. Moreover, they learned to collaborate with the Freeman Foundation as a partner, which meant openly sharing insights from a prior external review of their program and drawing from the foundation's own evaluations of best practices for sustainability among its grantees.

Following the Freeman grant, Swarthmore faculty in Asian studies collaborated with college advancement officers who helped match the philanthropic interests of Elizabeth Economy, Swarthmore Class of 1984 and current Board Manager, with the Asian Studies Program. Her contribution covered the cost of the student travel experience in connection with an interdisciplinary pilot course on governance and environmental issues in China offered by Haili Kong, professor of Chinese, and Tyrene White, professor of political science, in spring 2013. This team-taught course combined Chinese film and literature with instruction in Chinese politics and environmental issues. Of the 20 students enrolled in the course, five students who had completed at least two years of Chinese-language training participated in the summer field study



in Beijing. The students were hosted by the Beijing Center of Chinese Studies, University of International Business and Economics, which created a tailored experience that included an on-site colloquium, interviews with local experts, visits to field sites and organizations (such as China's Agriculture University, the Earthquake Memorial in Tangshan, Beijing Normal University, and the World Bank headquarters in Beijing). An intensive, three-day language program using local teachers centered on the specialized vocabulary of environmental studies. The support from Economy not only made this experience possible for students but also demonstrates the value of cultivating relationships with alumni who understand that these small projects can play large roles in curricular innovation and in securing future support.

In the decade prior to the LIASE grant, Bryn Mawr College significantly expanded interdisciplinary programs and experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates domestically and internationally. In light of those priorities, the college used the occasion of its 125th anniversary in 2010 to devote funds to establish the 360° program. Interdisciplinary and interactive, the 360° program stemmed from Bryn Mawr's desire to place learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom within a rigorous academic framework. The 360° program opened new avenues for faculty and students to explore a single theme from multiple perspectives and led to inventive combinations of courses within a 360° cluster, such as biology, history, and English, or mathematics, education, and the growth and structure of cities. While an exciting curricular innovation, the 360° program required that faculty spend more time in developing a cohesive set of courses and planning out the travel for each cluster. To that end, the Office of the Provost provided faculty with travel funds to set up the overseas components of their course clusters. Faculty also worked closely with Study Abroad staff, College Counsel, and the Controller's Office to plan budgets, discuss liability issues for off-campus activities, and work through international travel logistics. Cross collaborations with Haverford College began to emerge. Like their faculty colleagues at Swarthmore, faculty at Bryn Mawr relied on international alumni connections to serve as guest speakers or to facilitate introductions with overseas community and government organizations. Once the 360° program structure was in place, faculty in East Asian studies and environmental studies at Bryn Mawr began to collaborate with their Bi-College faculty counterparts at Haverford College to plan new course clusters that aligned with the new funding opportunity provided by LIASE.

## **LIASE EXPLORATION GRANTS TO SWARTHMORE AND BRYN MAWR**

In spring 2013, Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore each secured LIASE exploration grants. These grants allowed Bryn

Mawr and Swarthmore to draw on the resources of Bryn Mawr and Haverford's Bi-College Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and the new (at the time) Tri-College Environmental Studies Program to create connections between these two areas of the curriculum. Upon awarding LIASE exploration grants to Swarthmore and Bryn Mawr, the Luce Foundation recommended that the Tri-Co cooperate on a project together following the exploratory phase. This recommendation benefitted the LIASE exploration projects by drawing the attention of faculty to what colleagues across the Tri-Co were doing, freeing them to experiment with cross-institutional collaborations that would include both faculty and students participating in courses on one another's campuses.

With LIASE exploration grant funds, Swarthmore piloted a new comparative course on US and China water issues and water polices co-taught by Professors Carol Nackenoff (political science) and Lala Zuo (Chinese) in spring 2014. Swarthmore's international partners played an extensive role in shaping its summer travel course. Huang Ling, then associate professor of urban planning from Chongqing University, organized a series of lectures and activities in Shanghai, Chongqing, Yichang, and Chengdu (including Professor Huang's own lecture on engaging local communities in the planning of mixed-use urban design projects). Other activities included a tour organized by the Shanghai Research Institute of one of the most highly energy-efficient buildings in Shanghai and a trip to the Dujiangyan in Sichuan Province, the 2,200-year-old ancient irrigation and flood control system. The Luce Foundation's flexibility was essential, allowing Swarthmore to extend its exploration grant and prevent a disruption in preparations for our next course on tea while awaiting a decision on the pending Tri-Co LIASE implementation grant proposal. Course development funds were used for travel to Hangzhou and Taipei to firm up plans for activities including tea tasting, lectures on the chemical and botanical elements of tea, and a field trip to a tea farm in the East Mountain region in Suzhou. Careful planning was also required for distance-teaching modules with tea experts and tea merchants. The fall after the summer course on tea, Swarthmore was honored to reciprocate the contributions of Chongqing University by hosting Professor Huang for an on-campus visit and lecture, further strengthening our collaboration with this academic partner.

Bryn Mawr used its LIASE exploration grant to develop new course clusters offered through the 360° program and to cultivate academic collaborations with Haverford and Swarthmore to create additional stand-alone courses centered on Asia and the environment. To that end, Bryn Mawr faculty developed a new 360° course cluster on China and the environment that examined environmental problems in China and studied how China is dealing with them through the frameworks of

economics, history, and philosophy. Students and faculty traveled to China to observe the environmental problems firsthand and to meet with leading experts on these issues, both researchers and officials. One of the Bryn Mawr faculty members who developed this 360° cluster contacted the Environmental Science College at his *alma mater*, Fudan University, to help arrange visits with local experts in the field. He also leveraged existing connections at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou to arrange visits with a local paper mill and badminton racket factory, where students observed steps these factories take to assess and mitigate the environmental impact of production. As an outcome of the 360° cluster, Bryn Mawr forged strong relationships with several individuals and organizations, including representatives and researchers from the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Environmental Research Center at the National Development and Reform Commission, and Fudan University. These relationships opened doors to future exchanges, such as when Bryn Mawr invited scholars from Fudan University and Zhejiang University to visit the college to conduct research and deliver guest lectures for the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures.

With resources from the LIASE exploration grant, Bryn Mawr and Haverford faculty teamed up for a 360° course cluster on contemplative traditions, which brought together historical, cultural, psychological, biological, and religious perspectives on mindful and sustainable living as well as contemplative traditions and practice, and included a study-tour to Japan. The Japan study-tour enabled the students to explore traditional spaces of Zen, Yamabushi-style, and Shingon Buddhism in Kyoto, Kumano, and Koyasan, respectively, and to practice meditation with local teachers. Students also visited Kamikatsu, a rural community focused on maintaining intentionally simple and sustainable lifestyles and the home of the Zero Waste Academy, a leader in reducing garbage and environmental impact. While the 360° program was a Bryn Mawr initiative, LIASE grant resources made this Bi-Co collaboration possible and generated increased interest in the growing environmental studies program, which then existed in the form of a Tri-Co minor and has subsequently become a major.

The LIASE exploration grant also enhanced collaborations between faculty members from Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore, as well as among faculty from the Tri-Co environmental studies minor program, who created a 360° cluster entitled *Perspectives on Sustainability: Disasters and Rebuilding in Japan*, which took place in fall 2013. This course cluster grew out of an interest to examine Japan's responses to the 2011 earthquake and resulting tsunami, as well as earlier disasters in Japan such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in terms of their environmental and sustainability implications. As a study-tour to Japan was not feasible at the time, the culmination of the 360° cluster was a

student-curated exhibition in collaboration with the Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore libraries. Faculty solicited the help of a Bryn Mawr graduate student in history of art and a senior working on a major in the Department of Growth and Structure of Cities to guide undergraduate research in the Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore archives. Based on their primary research, students then prepared an exhibition with objects from the archives at the two colleges, led a public discussion on their research, and produced a timeline of the intersection between the three colleges and Japan at times of disaster. While the group was unable to travel to Japan to observe the post-tsunami decontamination and reconstruction efforts, Bryn Mawr was able to use its long-standing connections with faculty and administrators at Tsuda College in Tokyo, which was founded by Bryn Mawr alumna Umeko Tsuda in 1900, to arrange for an undergraduate student to spend the following summer at Tsuda researching Japan's energy policies regarding nuclear energy and renewable alternatives before and after the March 2011 tsunami.

Broadly speaking, the respective LIASE exploration projects helped strengthen and expand academic programming in East Asian studies and environmental studies. They also encouraged students with a diverse range of interests to study and experience travel abroad in Asia and paved the way for the future Tri-Co LIASE collaboration. As the Swarthmore travel courses and the Bryn Mawr 360° course clusters took shape, they began to exemplify the kinds of collaborations the LIASE grant intended to foster. Tri-Co faculty partnered with each other and with administrators, archivists, graduate students, and international partners to create learning experiences that combined innovative approaches to teaching and learning in line with LIASE's priority for expanding academic programming on Asia and the environment. The outcomes of the LIASE exploration project, which grew from collaborations within individual institutions to small cross-collaborations across the Tri-Co, played an instrumental role in the Tri-Co's continued partnership with the Luce Foundation through the subsequent LIASE implementation grant.

## LIASE AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEYOND THE TRI-CO

Over the course of the LIASE exploration and implementation grants, the Tri-Co and the Luce Foundation shared their experiences on a national level. In October 2015, Professor Kong and Director of Sponsored Programs Tania Johnson represented Swarthmore at the New York Conference on Asian Studies (NYCAS) at Vassar College. They were two of 11 participants in a roundtable discussion entitled "Promises and Challenges of Luce Initiatives on Asia and Environmental Studies," which

was organized by Vassar professors Yu Zhou and Fubing Su and included faculty from Bard College at Simon's Rock, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Mount Holyoke College, and Trinity College.

One of the major "promises" of the LIASE grant was the ability to leverage grant funds to promote alumni giving from individuals and to improve competitiveness for other sources of grant funding. Swarthmore's director of sponsored programs advocated for thinking broadly about faculty research opportunities, including Fulbright fellowships, National Science Foundation funding (programs such as Innovations at the Nexus of Food, Energy and Water Systems and Research Coordination Networks), and National Institutes of Health grants, which funds initiatives for improving global and environmental health. Successful strategies discussed by the group included connecting global and local learning. For instance, conference attendees learned about Trinity's success in developing a collaboration with the city of Hartford, located in a river region, and river cities in China; creating seed funding opportunities; and advocating for applying lessons learned through LIASE across the US.

Attendees also discussed major challenges the LIASE goals raised, such as the logistics of collaboration; coalition-building; getting sustained attention and commitment from faculty in the midst of competing priorities; language preparation for students involved in overseas activities; factors impeding the participation of scientists such as tenure and promotion systems; assessment; and ensuring reciprocity with in-country partners. However challenging the LIASE program goals appeared to be, the fact that academics and administrators devoted a session at NYCAS to exchanging experiences and offering advice was an important step in seeing new ways LIASE resources could be a boon to the study of Asia and the environment.

After the LIASE implementation grants were awarded in 2015, the Luce Foundation convened representatives from the twenty-three institutions funded by LIASE at a conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, in fall 2017 to discuss their progress and to cultivate connections between attendees. The conference comprised panels and working sessions that allowed attendees to share their successes, challenges, and even the failures they faced in various stages of their LIASE programs. The LIASE conference came at a critical point in the formation of the Bryn Mawr and Haverford Bi-College environmental studies major and academic department, which had just been created the previous spring and which would operate in cooperation with the existing Tri-Co environmental studies minor program. While there, faculty were able to connect with numerous colleagues from area studies and environmental programs across the country and learn from their experiences. Haverford professor Jonathan Wilson reported, "The conference demonstrated just how vibrant the study of the environment in Asia is, as

well as the centrality of Asia and Asian voices to any top-tier environmental program."

While faculty constituted the majority of attendees, the St. Paul conference also included senior administrators, providing an opportunity for academic leaders to offer their perspectives on creating and sustaining new internationally focused out-of-the-classroom learning experiences. A number of deans and chief academic officers from LIASE institutions engaged in discussions about the ways LIASE helps to advance institutional priorities, involve faculty outside of Asian studies, and enhance the study of Asia on their campuses. Hearing from senior staff at other institutions helped Tri-Co attendees understand better how to communicate and advocate for their own priorities, especially as all three institutions were in the midst of presidential transitions. As the new Tri-Co presidents were becoming oriented to their new environments and shaping their agendas for each college, which included goals to expand experiential learning and international programs, the LIASE grant and the collaborations that were taking place across the three colleges helped to bolster Asian studies and environmental studies as areas that aligned with the presidents' priorities.

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF LIASE PROJECT OUTCOMES**

As the Tri-Co approached the end of the LIASE implementation project, the grant steering committee began to think broadly about future directions they wished to take beyond the curricular development goals of the exploration and implementation grants. To that end, the committee re-allocated funds to the three Tri-Co provost's offices for faculty and staff members to propose exploratory trips to Asia to help establish relationships with partners overseas. The resulting mini-grants help awardees visit potential collaborators in Asia to create new internship, research, and embedded travel opportunities for students. Priority for these mini-grants was given to multidisciplinary collaborations.

At the three colleges, foundation grants and individual alumni donors continue to support experiential learning, international experiences, and professional development opportunities for students wishing to deepen their understanding of Asia and the study of the environment. For example, at Swarthmore, Professor Kong has worked with members of the college staff to secure additional support for LIASE to both supplement the grant-funded program and to extend the travel course program beyond the term of the grant. The collaborative framework, of course, is international as well: key to sustaining the courses is continued investment in the institutional partnerships LIASE funding helped facilitate. Zhejiang University's offer to

open their Chinese studies master's degree program to Tri-Co students serves as an excellent example. This fruitful partnership was strengthened by two visits from Swarthmore's now former provost Tom Stephenson in 2011 and 2014, and a visit by President Valerie Smith in 2017. As LIASE requires, we should at least maintain, if not further develop, this partnership along with the other local hosting institutions so vital to the LIASE projects' success.

Throughout the LIASE experience, there has been a dynamic and iterative relationship between funding from foundations, individuals, and provost's/president's offices; the professors designing and implementing innovative courses; and the host institutions in Asia upon which robust international learning depends. This body of work has placed the three colleges in strong positions to secure future resources to support the study of Asia and the environment. Further, this interdisciplinary style of collaboration has produced reciprocal impacts throughout the Tri-Co LIASE network. The three colleges' students and professors benefit from direct exposure to class content while the host institutions benefit from exposure to their visitors while partnering with American academics. Tri-Co professors receive funding for course development while institutional and individual funders see well-implemented curricular innovations and college leaders act on clearly formulated teaching strategies. Each set of LIASE partners have catalyzed their respective LIASE work to create a "virtuous cycle" oriented to long-term sustainability.

While it was the President's Office at Bryn Mawr that allocated the seed funds for the 360° program, Swarthmore's planted its pre-LIASE seeds using a quite different strategy that relied on individual giving. We described above the pivotal role that Elizabeth Economy's giving played in funding Professor Kong's exploratory trip to China with five students in 2013. Leading up to that first gift and during the time that Swarthmore's President's Office was writing its LIASE exploration grant, then college president Rebecca Chopp and an individual giving officer met with Economy to discuss her philanthropic priorities. Economy expressed interest in innovative programming related to her professional expertise both as the director of Asia studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and in environmentalism, a serendipitous match with the LIASE exploration grant application. We sent a copy of the pending application to her along with a request for funding the first exploratory pre-LIASE student trip, to which she was agreeable. Thus began Economy's long-time support of the LIASE curricula; her expanded support has subsequently allowed six more students to join the latest LIASE trip and has provided resources for future courses after the LIASE grant funding ends. The grant applications and requests for individual support were effectively synergized. Thus, the Tri-Co seeding

of what was to become the LIASE program represents both the top-down model funding from the President's Office at Bryn Mawr and the bottom-up model of close collaboration between faculty, administration, and individual donors at Swarthmore.

Swarthmore faculty, administrators, and donors have been able to achieve a similar synergy in current efforts to replicate the LIASE model by planting the seeds for a new course that culminates in a trip to Japan. Professor of Japanese William Gardner and two individual giving officers have discussed the Luce Foundation's hope that Swarthmore will expand the embedded travel course project beyond the original LIASE-funded courses. Central to this discussion were the philanthropic priorities of a dual alumni couple, Tsuyoshi and My Phuong Mitarai (both Swarthmore Class of 1998), who had previously helped endow a Japanese-language immersion summer experience intended to affect positive social change in Japan (Tsuyoshi had co-founded the first regular course of Japanese-language instruction at Swarthmore while he was a student). Similar to Kong's exploration of a beyond-the-classroom course set in China, Gardner had begun the same kind of exploration for a similarly modeled course in Japan. Discovering alignment between ongoing Luce Foundation priorities and those of the Japan studies program, the individual giving officers began planning how to test the Mitarais' potential interest in providing the kind of seed money that Economy had provided for the original LIASE course.

These discussions soon included Swarthmore's Director of Institutional Relations David Foreman and Denise Crossan, Eugene Lang Visiting Professor for Issues of Social Change, who had collaborated with one of the individual giving officers on a prior trip to Tokyo on what appeared to be a tangential project. When Gardner and Crossan compared notes they found a great deal of overlapping interests in their individual curricular goals, the partnerships Crossan was forming in Japan, and the Luce Foundation environmental priority. Gardner, Kong, and Crossan all participated in an exploratory trip to Japan, primarily funded by LIASE money, to explore a possible beyond-the-classroom course in Japan. The Mitarais helped organize a Swarthmore gathering in Tokyo during which Gardner spoke about the work Swarthmore was doing to lay the groundwork for a new course.

The Mitarais' interest in the venture continued to grow and they made a Swarthmore campaign commitment to provide the seed funding for the Japan beyond-the-classroom course. The combined networks of the Mitarai family in Japan (where Tsuyoshi is from), Swarthmore's alumni network, and the connections with potential course partners made by Crossan, Gardner, and Kong have the potential to provide the kind of resources necessary to fund a course taught every three years.



## THE “THIRD SPACE”: FORGING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION

According to Professor Kong, one of the keys to the success of Swarthmore’s LIASE initiatives has been the increased collaboration and communication between faculty and staff (Haili Kong, personal communication, December 20, 2018). He believes that everyone should be working together as an organic unit with “no one missing.” Moreover, he views professional staff as “the pulse of the college” and cautions that if faculty and staff do not know one another, “you won’t know that the pulse is missing.” Kong embodies a mindset evolved beyond having mere transactional relationships with staff to one based on visioning together to forge strategic partnerships between leadership, faculty, and professionals from across campus including offices of advancement (both for grants and individual giving), finance, and study abroad. The administration is often mysterious to faculty; strengthening communication can inspire parties to work together in new ways and to identify and remove obstacles to institutional success, which in turn yields a “harvest” for donors, faculty, and administrators alike.

Kong’s philosophy for working with higher education staff is aligned with the movement for “third space professionals.” The “third space” is the space between faculty and administration that is “a creative and innovative zone” that “extend[s] institutional intelligence” through “different ways of thinking and working” on “broadly based, extended projects across the university, which are no longer containable within firm boundaries, and have created new portfolios of activity” (Conway 2013, 568–9). According to Celia Whitchurch, the third space is occupied by teams (whether co-located or virtual) that work on short-term projects such as requests for external funding or longer-term projects. Behari-Leak and le Roux (2018, 37) cite Whitchurch’s taxonomy outlining four types of third space professionals: *bounded professionals* with traditional, structured jobs; *cross-boundary professionals* who “actively use boundaries for strategic advantage and institutional capacity building”; *unbounded professionals* who “focus on broadly-based projects and institutional development”; and *blended professionals* who “work across professional and academic boundaries” (Behari-Leak and le Roux 2018, 37). According to Celia Whitchurch and George Gordon (2010, 134), Dowd and Kaplan (2005) similarly use the dichotomy of “boundaryless” and “boundaried” careers and identities. Finally, these third space working relationships and networks are often described using “organic imagery” (Whitchurch 2008, 4), such as Kong’s “harvest” image.

Some studies have addressed the third space phenomenon in international collaborations, including in

the context of higher education in Asia. This is appropriate, as the third space concept was originally conceived by Homi Bhabha (1994) to describe “the space in which two cultures meet” (Behari-Leak and le Roux 2018, 33). David Law (2013, 4) discusses perspectives on the increasing presence of China and other Confucian-influenced countries in international education and their possibility of being well suited for these new kinds of partnerships. Veles, Carter, and Boon (2018, 1) discuss Welch (2011), who highlights the trend of transnational education in Asia and the Asia-Pacific region more broadly. Nemiro, Hanifah, and Wang (2005) discuss the structural and interpersonal factors that foster collaborations in Asian and non-Asian environments (2). Whether in Western or Asian countries, complex collaborations that are “cross-border, cross-cultural and cross-functional” are considered the “optimal way” of working in a “globalised, integrated and interconnected higher education context” (7). Benefits of these collaborations include finding new revenue streams, providing opportunities for students to develop cultural competence, and building research and other connections that benefit partnering institutions and their communities (7). In the third space, relationships are key and professionals in this in-between space are seen as the most equipped to assume the role of “catalysts or architects and leaders of collaborative initiatives” since they are often best positioned to see linkages between activities across an institution and to see where different parties may collaborate (Velas, Carter, and Boon, p. 2).

## CONCLUSION

LIASE funding catalyzed the curricular innovation already taking place within Swarthmore, Bryn Mawr, and Haverford Colleges, strengthening their Tri-College Consortium along the way.<sup>3</sup> The process was iterative, with initial groundwork leading to an exploratory grant application alongside the raising of funds from individual donors. The Luce Foundation’s decision to require full consortium involvement was vital to unlocking hidden potential within the existing Tri-Co structure. Similarly, national grant-making and international host institution networks expanded the resources available well beyond those within the three colleges.<sup>4</sup>

The risks that derive from innovation continue to be an important part of the Tri-Co’s efforts to sustain the coursework and its experiential and environmental character. We are simultaneously seeking ways to preserve LIASE-facilitated courses and expand the LIASE program by exploring replication, as with the development of the Japan beyond-the-classroom course. We are sure that there are many different possible strategies to effectively implement LIASE innovations, but we believe that each one can benefit from synergizing the work of faculty, staff, and leadership colleagues, especially as



they pursue funding necessary for startup and long-term sustainability from institutional and individual donors. Achieving innovative curricular design highlights an interdependence between these three types of higher education professionals that has always existed but that may have been less apparent. Necessity is not just the mother of invention but is also the mother of greater self-awareness.

## NOTES

1. This paper is dedicated to the late Alan J. Berkowitz, Susan W. Lippincott Professor of Modern and Classical Languages and Professor of Chinese at Swarthmore College, whose invaluable contributions to the LIASE project will endure.
2. It is worth noting that Asian host partners have expressed particular appreciation for the interdisciplinary character of our LIASE courses. For example, Paul Lam, executive vice president of City University of Hong Kong, appreciated that the curriculum was organized in such a way that students represented a wide range of backgrounds. As a chemist, he enjoyed how students from very different disciplines were able to engage with his course material in a sophisticated way.
3. On behalf of the Tri-College Consortium, we express our gratitude for the support of the Henry Luce Foundation in catalyzing this innovative collaboration. We also acknowledge past and current financial, in-kind, and programmatic contributions from the Freeman Foundation, the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, Elizabeth Economy, Tsuyoshi and My Phuong Mitarai, Professor Huang Ling, Professor Harold Yih-Chi Tan, the International Campus of Zhejiang University, City University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong (HKU), National Taiwan University, and countless other individuals and institutions who have shown us many kindnesses along our journey. We also acknowledge the vision, leadership, and support of the former and current Tri-Co presidents, provosts, professors, and staff members who have given of their time and intellect to develop the LIASE-supported courses and programs. Special thanks to John Donovan, head of research at Technological University Dublin, to whom we are indebted for sharing the concept of the “third space” during his 2018 European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA) master class in Brussels. Finally, we thank Chris Gaeta (Swarthmore Class of 2023) for his editorial assistance.
4. For more information about the Tri-College LIASE Program, visit <https://www.swarthmore.edu/tri-college-liase-program>.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

**Haili Kong**  [orcid.org/0000-0003-2526-4929](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2526-4929)  
Swarthmore College, US

**Sharon Bain**  [orcid.org/0000-0001-7806-7959](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7806-7959)  
Bryn Mawr College, US

**Tania Johnson**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-7160-8086](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7160-8086)  
Swarthmore College, US

**David Foreman**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-1251-5031](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1251-5031)  
Swarthmore College, US

**David Eldridge**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-7760-1336](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7760-1336)  
Swarthmore College, US

## REFERENCES

- Behari-Leak, Kasturi, and Natalie le Roux.** 2018. “Between a Rock and a Hard Place, Third Space Practitioners Exercise Agency.” *Perspectives in Education* 36(1): 30–43. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v36i1.2>
- Conway, Maree.** 2013. “Reconstructing Identities in Higher Education: The Rise of Third Space Professionals.” *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 35(5): 568–70. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2013.825399>
- Dowd, Karen O., and David M. Kaplan.** 2005. The career life of academics: Boundaried or boundaryless? *Human Relations* 58(6), 699–721. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705057156>
- Law, David.** 2013. “One, Two, Three – Jump! (... into the Third Space?)” *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* 17(1): 1–3.
- Nemiro, J., Shabrina Hanifah, and J. Wang.** 2005. “Striving for a New Ideal: A Work Environment to Energize Collaborative Capacity Across East and West Boundaries.” *Advances in Interdisciplinary Studies of Work Teams* 11: 115–159. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1572-0977\(05\)11005-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1572-0977(05)11005-X)
- Veles, Natalia, Margaret-Anne Carter, and Helen Boon.** 2018. “Complex Collaboration Champions: University Third Space Professionals Working Together across Borders.” *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* 23(2–3): 1–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2018.1428694>
- Welch, A.** 2011. “Higher Education in Southeast Asia: Blurring Borders, Changing Balance.” London: Taylor & Francis. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203828540>
- Whitchurch, Celia.** 2008. “Shifting Identities and Blurring Boundaries: The Emergence of Third Space Professionals in UK Higher Education.” *Higher Education Quarterly* 62(4) (October): 377–96. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00387.x>
- Whitchurch, Celia, and George Gordon.** 2010. “Diversifying Academic and Professional Identities in Higher Education: Some Management Challenges.” *Tertiary Education and Management* 16(2): 129–44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583881003757029>

---

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kong, Haili, Sharon Bain, Tania Johnson, David Foreman, and David Eldridge. 2021. "Tri-Co LIASE: Cross- and Intra-Institutional Collaboration to Build and Sustain Student-Focused Embedded Study in Asia." *ASIANetwork Exchange* 27(2), pp. 43–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.304>

Published: 22 April 2021

COPYRIGHT:

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

*ASIANetwork Exchange* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

