

Case Study Eight
High School Series

SAUNDERS HIGH SCHOOL:
CRITICAL MASS OF TEACHERS INCREASES
ASIAN STUDIES IN PRIVATE SCHOOL



INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

This school-based case study is one of 16 prepared by InSites, a nonprofit research organization. This case study is part of an evaluation of the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) and offers you an opportunity to study educators engaged in the work of promoting Asia in classrooms and schools. Understanding their experiences, impressions, and methods in teaching about Asia can help you determine how to foster attention to Asia in the context of your unique educational setting.

ABOUT THE NCTA EVALUATION

Launched in 1998, NCTA is funded by the Freeman Foundation whose major objective is to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the United States and the countries of East Asia through educational endeavors. NCTA deepens teachers' knowledge about the literature, cultures, history, and art of China, Japan, and Korea. Teachers are drawn to participate in NCTA by receiving resource materials, presentations by Asia experts, stipends, and opportunities to participate in study tours and other enrichment activities. Since 1998, more than 3,500 teachers in 42 states have participated in the seminars. For more information about NCTA, visit www.nctasia.org.

In 2002, NCTA and the Freeman Foundation asked InSites to evaluate its work. The case studies are one of several products in the evaluation. For more information about the evaluation, see www.insites.org/ncta.

BASIS FOR CASE STUDIES

As part of the evaluation, InSites gathered information from teachers participating in NCTA seminars. This information was gathered in the spring of 2003 and serves as the foundation for the case studies. The schools represented vary in geographic region, type of school and community, number of NCTA teachers in the school, and teacher subject areas. To disguise

identities, InSites replaced the names of people, places, and schools with pseudonyms and altered some peripheral facts. In addition, InSites edited some quotations for clarity and length.

USING THE CASE STUDIES

The case studies show teachers engaged in teaching about Asia and promoting the presence of Asian studies in their schools. Seminar leaders can use them to encourage NCTA participants to consider their role in fostering a sustained presence for Asian studies. However, even if you're an educator who hasn't been involved in NCTA, you can benefit from the case studies. Whether you're a teacher, an administrator, a professional development provider, or a policymaker interested in bringing knowledge of Asia to American students, the case studies can help you generate ideas for fostering a presence for Asian studies in classrooms and schools.

STRUCTURE OF THE CASE STUDIES

Each case study begins with a vignette that introduces the central characters and focus of the case study. The case study then presents information about the school, district, and/or state, and a brief description of the NCTA seminar. Impact of the NCTA Seminar details how NCTA participants have used what they learned in their classrooms and schools. Next Steps presents multiple views about promoting a sustained presence for Asian studies at the school. Discussion Questions focuses on key points in the case study and helps you consider how these issues relate to your own educational setting.

CROSS-CASE EXAMINATION

You can conduct a cross-site examination of features in these case studies by logging onto www.insites.org/ncta. Information is presented by school and organized into three categories: context, seminars, and NCTA teachers.

SAUNDERS HIGH SCHOOL: CRITICAL MASS OF TEACHERS INCREASES ASIAN STUDIES AT PRIVATE SCHOOL

VIGNETTE

*What process and what
elements are required
for a school to change its
curriculum?*

When history teacher **CELIA MERRILL** began teaching at Saunders High School, the curriculum covered Western civilization almost exclusively. In this elite private school, a department will only offer a class when enough teachers possess the requisite academic qualifications to teach it. For some time, Celia remained the only teacher with an academic background in Asian studies. Celia thought that the 30-hour seminar offered by the National Consortium for Teaching About Asia (NCTA) was the leverage she needed to add Asian studies to the required curriculum. Not only does NCTA provide academic content and Asian resources to the teachers who take the seminars, but NCTA also provides resources about Asia for the school at large. Celia promoted the seminar at Saunders and urged the NCTA seminar leader, **AUBREY JOHNSON**, to accept more than the typical one to two teachers from one school.

The seminar leader eventually admitted six Saunders teachers into seminars offered over a four-year period. Aubrey said that she chose to invest these resources in this private school because “almost a quarter of the students in this city go to private schools—double the national average. Also, I believe in free-market competition for positions and [Saunders] teachers have consistently been the most aggressive. Third, the students who graduate from Saunders will, in fact, be future leaders. Fourth, this school had a very traditional curriculum and it needed a change. I saw a potential for that to happen.”



**Saunders High
School**

Saunders High School is located in a university town. In this predominately Caucasian and African American city, the Asian population is small and the Asian resources are few. Approximately one-quarter of the student population attends one of the high-quality private schools in the area. There are no state standards or mandatory assessments for either public or private schools in the state.

After the Saunders teachers took the seminar, they began to work quietly and consistently to change the curriculum at Saunders to include more Asian content.

SAUNDERS HIGH SCHOOL

Saunders High School is a co-educational, nondenominational private school of 700 students, grades nine through twelve. The academically rigorous curriculum includes 19 Advanced Placement courses. Approximately 99 percent of the graduating student body attends college. According to the school's mission statement, the school's goal is to instill in each student "the moral seriousness and intellectual rigor to make a positive difference in the world."

About one-quarter of the students board at the school, including U.S. students from 18 states and international students from 12 countries. More than 70 percent of the teaching faculty hold advanced degrees, and faculty turnover is low. Class size averages 12 students.



**Aubrey
Johnson,
NCTA Seminar
Leader**

Aubrey Johnson, the seminar leader, says that NCTA participants are more likely to apply the material in their classroom if they have a mentor like history teacher Celia Merrill. In turn, Celia credits the NCTA seminars for sparking the changes in the curriculum at Saunders. From her observations, Aubrey expects about 25 percent of participants to extend the application of what they learned to classrooms outside of their own.

NCTA SEMINAR

AUBREY JOHNSON, a professor at the local university, teaches about one-half of the NCTA seminars and brings in guest speakers for the balance. Rather than choose academic speakers, she chooses guest speakers with deep expertise in Asian culture who are usually natives or professionals from Asia. She devotes about 75 percent of the course to content about Asia and the remainder to information about teaching resources. During each session, the seminar leader distributes copies of lesson plans and handouts on Web site resources. Each participant presents three lesson plans to the class. Aubrey provides feedback on the graded lesson plans at follow-up sessions. Some participants suggested that more time for teacher sharing would have helped them use the material: “We did this [sharing] out in the hall, but would like more time in the seminar for this activity.” Two NCTA participants from Saunders — history teachers **CELIA MERRILL** and **JANE TROMAN** — traveled to China, Japan, and Korea on an NCTA study tour.

IMPACT OF THE NCTA SEMINAR

“I always felt that when I was teaching the European History survey course that it was a shame not to mention Asia. For example, in the Bronze Age while the Trojan Wars were happening, what was happening in China? It sharpens the student’s perspective and understanding of the Western material.” —
history teacher

All the NCTA participants have used the Asian material in their own classes and have persevered in their efforts to change the curriculum to include more Asian content.

HISTORY DEPARTMENT

After CELIA MERRILL and four other history teachers took the NCTA seminar, they pushed for the inclusion of non-Western history courses in the history department. While TOM GRAHAM, the chair of the history department, agreed in theory with the idea, some in the department worried that adding Asia would weaken the teaching about Europe. Tom also wanted to ensure that the history department had a sufficient number of competent teachers to teach about Asia. He supported an incremental approach.

In keeping with this approach, Asian studies started at Saunders with Celia teaching one Asian history class. Five students took the elective the first year, and the number of enrollees has grown each year. Some students have described it as one of the highlights of their Saunders experience. As more teachers completed the seminars, the history department gradually expanded the curriculum to include two Asia-related electives and required sophomores to take one non-Western history course.

Celia helped two of the NCTA participants prepare to teach one of the Asia electives. One of those teachers, STEVEN JACOBSEN, was offered a new section in Asian history in addition to his regular U.S. history course. To prepare for his new assignment, Steven attended Celia’s Asian history class every day. Having no previous background in Asian studies, he’s been surprised by the amount of information he’s absorbed from the NCTA seminar. “You don’t realize it’s in there. Suddenly, when you’re teaching, it just starts pouring out of you,” he says.

“When I came here 90 percent of the talent in the department was in Western history areas. I knew it was crazy not to teach Eastern history because a majority of the world’s population is Eastern. But how could we find the manpower to teach these courses? How would we change the curriculum? It happened incrementally and participation of several of our teachers in NCTA was the big key.” — *history department chair*

JANE TROMAN, the other history teacher who sat in on Celia’s class, finds that the anecdotal material from the NCTA guest speakers sparks her students’ interest. Also, sharing her firsthand experiences that she gained from the NCTA study tour to Japan, Korea, and China has helped students in her Asian studies elective class get beyond stereotypes of the Chinese people.

NCTA participants who are not teaching the Asian electives have managed to incorporate content about Asia into their history courses. For example, in MONA ENRIGHT’s European history course, she contrasts China and the West at the time of Alexander the Great. She says that Asian content should be part of all courses because “it sharpens the student’s perspective and understanding of the Western material if they can step out and then look back from outside the zone.” In her European history class, TINA MORROW focuses on themes rather than a historical survey. This allows her to use some Asian material. For example, she asks students to compare Chinese philosophy with Greek philosophy, and to compare European medieval conditions with the social organization in China during the same time period.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

LUIS GONZALES, who teaches World Literature and British Literature at Saunders High School, says that NCTA gave him a “wealth of information” that helped him relate Asian literature within the context of its culture. “So I am not even looking forward to using an anthology. The dependence isn’t there anymore.” He suggests that the lack of a cultural context is “why kids come out of the World Literature class without really remembering what they read. [Without the context], it doesn’t reveal to them anything unique about China, Japan, or Korea.” In his British Literature class, he showed a video of Macbeth produced in a Japanese setting.



Key Points

- ❖ European-focused curriculum prior to participation of faculty in the NCTA seminars
- ❖ Critical mass of qualified teachers required before private school would change curriculum to incorporate Asian studies
- ❖ Strategic action of seminar leader admitted six Saunders teachers into NCTA seminars over four-year period
- ❖ Quiet leadership of Celia Merrill and her commitment to Asian studies encouraged infusion of Asia into the curriculum
- ❖ Changes in History curriculum added two Asian-based electives and required sophomores to take a semester of a non-Western History course

NEXT STEPS

TOM GRAHAM, the history department chair, hopes that the history and literature departments can further coordinate the literature and non-Western history electives. According to Tom, no one opposes the idea, but the school is waiting until enough teachers possess the non-Western background. He notes, “Teachers do not want to teach a course unless they ‘feel competent.’”

The three teachers who now teach the non-Western courses in the history department meet regularly. However, other teachers do not have the time or encouragement to do so. Teachers attribute the limited amount of cross-discipline sharing to time constraints and a lack of structure for joint planning. If joint planning happens, it happens incidentally.

Some NCTA participants say their ultimate goal includes the establishment of a department of Asian studies, similar to ones at other private schools. In support of that goal, they point to the positive student response to the new Asian electives. In the meantime, Celia is pleased that there is talk of starting a world history class and including some Asian content.

One of the top administrators is a fervent advocate of the school’s mission to “expand knowledge of the world” and sees Asian studies as an important element in this effort. She expects that pressure from college admissions will result in the implementation of the high school level World History course.

Recruitment of qualified faculty is implicit in the issues that the school faces. One of the NCTA participants is leaving the school, partly because she wants more opportunity to teach Asian studies. Because the school is relatively small, faculty must have multiple skills to be

“Travel like the study tour gives you an immediacy of knowledge that you don’t have from books. Books can tell you what street life is like in China but until you sit out there and smell it and touch it, you don’t really know. It makes you teach it a little bit better.”

— *history teacher*

most effective. Another NCTA participant has not been assigned an Asian elective because her skills at teaching other subjects are more highly prized.

Looking back on what has been accomplished since the first seminar four years ago, Celia comments, “What I find most exciting is an excitement about teaching Hinduism or Buddhism or Chinese culture. All of a sudden the students go, ‘Wow! There are perspectives other than the American perspective on things.’ That just changes your whole idea of the world.”



For more information about other seminars and participants, see www.insites.org/ncta.

Supporting Information

Two reports from the NCTA evaluation provide helpful information for addressing the discussion questions.

Teaching about Asia in American Schools: Keys to Success presents findings about the impact of NCTA seminars on teachers, classrooms, and schools. It also describes factors that affect the sustained presence of Asia in schools and classrooms.

Teaching about Asia in American Schools: Tips for Seminar Leaders provides information about how seminar leaders design seminars to both increase teachers' content knowledge and help them foster a sustained presence for Asia.

Both reports are available at www.nctasia.org and www.insites.org/ncta.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What evidence do you see that NCTA teachers at this school are getting serious content about Asia into their classrooms? How satisfied are you with the level of serious content about Asia that they are getting into their classrooms? What factors challenge their ability to infuse Asia into their classroom curriculum? What factors support it?
2. How are NCTA teachers sharing what they know about Asia with colleagues? What other formal and informal strategies would you encourage these NCTA teachers to use to bring greater attention to Asia in their school curriculum?
3. One of the goals of NCTA is fostering a sustained presence or permanent place for Asia in schools and classrooms. How successful have NCTA seminar participants been in reaching that goal in this school? (See **KEYS TO SUCCESS** — www.insites.org/ncta — for more information on factors that are necessary or make a contribution toward reaching this goal.)
4. What strategies for recruiting additional teachers for future NCTA seminars could be used in this school or area to help ensure a sustained presence for Asian studies? (See **TIPS FOR SEMINAR LEADERS** — www.insites.org/ncta — for some practical information relating to seminar activities, including recruitment.)
5. Consider the conditions for supporting a sustained presence for Asia in the curriculum of schools described in the **KEYS TO SUCCESS** report and this discussion of Saimders. To what extent do you think there is a sustained presence for Asia in your school?
6. What Asia-related initiatives and interests in your own community might enhance the teaching of Asian content in your school? (For example, is there a consulate, museum, business, university, community college, or organization of native Asians that could be engaged?)
7. What practical and feasible actions might you and your colleagues undertake to foster a greater long-term presence for Asia in your school and its curriculum?

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Case Study Eight – High School Series

Saunders High School: Critical Mass of Teachers Increases Asian Studies at Private School

About the Case Studies Series

This case study is one in a series of 16. The full set of case studies is listed below. You can access them at www.insites.org/ncta.

Middle School Case Studies

1. Baker Middle School: Media Specialist Promotes Asian Studies School Wide
2. Clemens Middle School: Seminars and Study Tours Help Foster Asian Studies
3. Emery Middle School: Team Plans to Use Asian Studies to Reform Curriculum at Low-Performing School
4. Hardin Middle School: Teachers Infuse Asia in Art, Geography, and History Classes
5. Hay Edwards Middle School: Teachers Bring Asian Studies to Rural School in Transition
6. Kaiser Middle School: Lone Teacher Mobilizes Interest in Asia
7. Wadsworth Middle School: Cross-Disciplinary Team Develops Strong Asian Curriculum

High School Case Studies

1. Alternative School: Teachers Organize School Year Around Asian Theme
2. Beye High School: Teachers Fit Asia into Standards-Driven Curriculum
3. Evans High School: China Exchange Program Stems from NCTA Seminar
4. Jefferson High School: On-Site Seminar Enriches Asian Content in High-Performing School
5. Lincoln High School: Interconnected Initiatives Expand Presence of Asia
6. Meridian High School: Teachers Implement Asian Studies in Multiple Disciplines
7. Montview High School: Teachers Include Asia in Revised English and Social Studies Curriculum
8. Saunders High School: Critical Mass of Teachers Increases Asian Studies at Private School
9. South Lake District High School: District Collaboration Magnifies NCTA's Presence

For further information about the NCTA evaluation, see www.insites.org/ncta.

For information about the NCTA program and the five national coordinating sites, see www.nctasia.org.