

# EXPANDING LAWRENCE'S HORIZON

## Doeringer opened curricular doors to East Asia

By Rick Peterson

**D**uring his 35 years on the Lawrence University faculty, Franklin Doeringer not only taught history, he managed to make some along the way. Straddling two departments for much of his tenure, he assumed a leadership role in the transformation of one and the creation of another.

Doeringer, who joined the Lawrence faculty in 1972 as a member of the history department, retired in June as the Nathan M. Pusey Professor of East Asian Studies and professor of history. He was recognized *in absentia* at Commencement with professor emeritus status and an honorary Master of Arts degree.

A scholar of Chinese intellectual history and East Asian history, he found a curriculum steeped in western traditions when he arrived on the Lawrence campus from Columbia University. Few courses in any department, much less history, focused on Asia, Africa, or even Latin America. He soon went about the business of changing that, introducing courses on China and East Asia that helped create an emphasis on world and comparative history that hadn't previously existed.

He championed the introduction of Chuang Tzu's *Basic Writings* as a work suitable for inclusion in Freshman Studies, a controversial addition at the time that has since become a course staple. He also helped revamp the history department's western civilization introductory sequence into a world history sequence.

"It was a big change at the time. It broadened the department and provided more of a global perspective," says Doeringer, author of the book *The Peoples of East Asia* and the two-volume textbook *Discovering the Global Past*.

Paul Cohen, Doeringer's long-time history department colleague and the Patricia Hamar Boldt Professor of Liberal Studies, praised Doeringer for looking forward as much as studying the past.

"Frank became the campus's most committed 'globalist,'" Cohen says. "He was always ahead of the curve as a scholar

and historian, and he quietly pushed Lawrence to catch up."

### Defining Freshman Studies

Doeringer also played a defining role in the history of Freshman Studies. After President Nathan Pusey's seminal course had gone through several changes, including being replaced in the mid-1970s by a series of topics-style courses called Freshman Seminars, Doeringer chaired the committee that reintroduced Freshman Studies in its current — and original — two-term format. He also introduced special seminars to help bond faculty members who were teaching Freshman Studies. He even wrote the definitive history of the program.

"Not only did Frank help revive Freshman Studies," says Cohen, "he was instrumental in steering it from a largely humanities-based 'Great Books' course toward what it is now: a course that draws equally from the humanities, sciences, social sciences, fine arts, and music, attracting faculty members from every division of the college."

For his part, Doeringer says simply, in his understated style, "I did a lot of engagement with the program."

### Encountering Asia

Sensing a need to extend the study of China, Japan, and the rest of Asia beyond the boundaries of the history department, Doeringer became the driving force behind the creation, in 1989, of a wholly new department, the East Asian Languages and Cultures department, precursor to today's East Asian Studies program, an end result he called "a major effort of mine over the years."

Collaborating with colleagues in China, Doeringer made arrangements for professors from Manchuria's Heilongjiang University to come to Lawrence for a year and teach in the fledgling department. Heilongjiang was carefully selected, Doeringer pointed out wryly, in part because its winters were colder than Appleton's.

Over the next dozen years, he helped generate \$5 million

in support of the new department, including a \$1.5 million grant in 2001 from the Freeman Foundation that provided scores of firsthand study and travel opportunities for students and faculty in China and Japan.

“Those grants, and the recognition that came with them, helped pave the way and make the department a viable option,” said Doeringer, one of only seven Lawrence faculty members awarded both the college’s Young Teacher Award (1976) and its Award for Excellence in Teaching (1999).

Tara Shingle Buzash '99, of Hopewell, New Jersey, was one of many students who benefited from Doeringer’s teaching. She credits his East Asian history course with providing her with excellent preparation for her travels abroad.

“He was always very supportive, and he challenged me to think deeply about the concepts we studied,” says Buzash, who participated in the Associated Colleges in China Program as a senior and lived off and on in China for several years after graduating.

“Since I knew the background of the country and the region, I could place my daily experiences in context. He helped smooth my transition to Chinese life.”

Associate Professor of Chinese Jane Yang, who joined the new department two years after its founding, cites Doeringer as an invaluable resource on numerous faculty/student excursions to China and Japan.

“We could always call on him to give the group background on the historical sites we were visiting,” Yang says. “Frank is one of the few people I know who can speak extemporaneously in paragraphs. He would give us cogent, relevant information to make our site visits memorable. He was particularly in his element on the trips to Japan, where we visited such sites as the Hiroshima Peace Museum, kabuki and noh plays, the Edo Museum in Tokyo and, of course, wandered in the foothills of Kyoto past temple after temple along the ‘Path of Philosophy’ to the Silver Pavilion.”

### Coming to Appleton

Mother Nature nearly conspired to keep Doeringer from ever making the transition from the Big Apple to the little Apple(ton). A blizzard hit the area on the February day he flew in to interview for the position. When his much-delayed flight finally managed to land 25 miles to the south, in Oshkosh, he found the airport locked. A maintenance worker let him into the terminal, where he learned that his host, history professor Charles Bruening, would not be coming to meet him as planned because of the storm. A cab ride got Doeringer to a motel at 2:00 a.m. Bruening tracked him down the next morning with the help of the Oshkosh police.

“I wasn’t sure about the locale,” recalls Doeringer, who admits his once-fluent Chinese language skills “eroded a bit”

during his many years in Appleton. “It was a bit of a culture shock coming to Appleton from New York City, but the folks in the history department were warm and gracious, and that won out over the cold weather.”

Having recently relocated to the historically rich environs of Gloucester, Massachusetts, which includes the nearby



Doeringer

Peabody Essex Museum and its world-class collection of Chinese artifacts, Doeringer says he won’t miss Wisconsin’s winters. The same can’t be said, though, for working with students. He was especially fond of watching the transformations they underwent during their years at Lawrence.

“It was always very rewarding seeing students, especially those who came from small towns and who were exposed to the larger world for the first time, go on to great success. I’m going to miss those contacts and relationships — a lot.” ■