Asian L&L Welcomes New Chair, Professor Zev Handel

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The Department of Asian Languages and Literature is delighted to welcome our new chair, Professor Zev Handel. In the excerpt below, Professor Handel shares more about this transition in his own words.

The other day, I was talking with a friend of the department about my taking up the role of chair and stepping into the very large shoes of my predecessor, Paul Atkins. “So what exactly does the chair do?” he asked. The question, so fundamental, nevertheless gave me pause. The chairship is an administrative position, so one might think of the chair as a kind of boss or manager. But while it’s true that the position carries with it some degree of authority, the analogy fails; the chair does not, for example, dictate to faculty what to research or how to teach. One could instead answer the question by enumerating a list of administrative duties that the chair must undertake each year, such as holding faculty meetings, shepherding hires and promotions, approving teaching assignments, authorizing expenditures, writing reports to the deans. But this dry characterization doesn’t seem to capture what the role is really about.

So what is it, I thought, that I have agreed to do by taking on this role? After a moment’s reflection, I answered that the essence of the chair’s role is to facilitate the educational and research mission of our department. And that the best way to do this is by providing support and resources for our highly talented faculty, staff, and students within the department and by building connections to communities and networks outside of the department. In this way we can best realize our vision of serving our local and global community by teaching and researching Asian languages and literatures in a broad humanistic context.

The faculty, staff, and students wish him the best, and look forward to the Department thriving under his leadership!