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**2010 ASAIHL Conference on
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Hong Kong Country Report**

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A Brief Review of Higher Education in Hong Kong

There are currently 12 degree-awarding higher education institutions in Hong Kong, eight of which are publicly funded through the University Grants Committee (UGC). These include the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), the City University of Hong Kong (CityU), Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), Lingnan University (LU) and the University of Hong Kong (HKU). While the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts (HKAPA) is also publicly-funded, the three remaining institutions, the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK), Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSYU) and the Chu Hai College of Higher Education (CHCHE), are self-financing.

The UGC is a non-statutory advisory body appointed by the Chief Executive to advise the Hong Kong Government on the development and funding of higher education. It administers public grants to the eight higher education institutions, especially in relation to quality assurance and the promotion of research. Nonetheless, the eight higher education institutions remain autonomous statutory bodies. Their structure includes a governing body, called either a council or court, and a body to regulate academic affairs, called either a senate or an academic board. Accordingly, the eight higher education institutions enjoy a high degree of academic and institutional autonomy in managing their own affairs.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, a total 55284 full-time undergraduates, 2596 taught postgraduates and 5743 research postgraduates were enrolled in higher education in Hong Kong. While the number of overseas students in Hong Kong was negligible ten years ago, it is now beginning to increase in particular with regards to students from mainland China. Non-local student enrolment during the 2008-2009 academic year comprised 4717 full-time undergraduates, 57 taught postgraduates and 3520 research postgraduates.

Overall expenditure on education has always constituted a significant portion of Hong Kong's annual expenditure. For the year 2009, the recurrent government expenditure on education was \$51.1 billion, equivalent to 23.8 per cent of all recurrent government expenditure.

Four recent developments in Hong Kong

Recently, there have been four major developments in higher education in Hong Kong:

- a. The introduction of a quality assurance mechanism through the Quality Assurance Council and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) in April 2007;
- b. The introduction of the Qualifications Framework (QF) in May 5 2008
- c. The implementation of the *New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education (3-3-4)* in September 2009
- d. The implementation of outcomes based approaches to teaching and learning (OBTL) in all higher education institutions

Quality Assurance

In April 2007 the UGC established a semi-autonomous Quality Assurance Council which supports to provide third party assurance of quality in higher education. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) validates courses and programmes offered by higher education institutions that are not self-accrediting. As a result, qualifications are quality assured by HKCAAVQ.

Qualifications Framework

The Qualifications Framework (QF) was officially implemented on May 5 2008. It aims to foster lifelong learning to continuously enhance the quality and competitiveness of Hong Kong's workforce. Strengthened by the quality assurance mechanism, the QF sets out a seven-level hierarchy for benchmarking different qualifications. The Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance took effect on May 5. It provides the legal capacity for implementing the QF. The HKCAAVQ is appointed under the Ordinance as the Accreditation Authority to develop and implement the QF's quality assurance mechanism and the accreditation of learning programs. Qualifications, learning programs and details of course providers recognized under the QF can be uploaded to a free Web-based database, the Qualifications Registry (QR). The HKCAAVQ is also appointed as the authority to maintain the QR.

In the other words, the Qualifications Framework represents a hierarchy of

qualifications. The QF clearly outlines what the holder of a qualification should know and what they should be capable of doing. It helps both learners and employers set targets for learning and training. It also provides pathways between qualifications to enable learners to reach their targets.

The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education

Another key change was the introduction of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education in Hong Kong, named '3-3-4' in September 2009. It covers three years of junior secondary education, three in senior secondary and four at university. This change from three year to four year undergraduate programs presents a number of implications for the sudden and significant increase in the number of undergraduate students, the challenges of maintaining teaching-learning quality and the support of student learning.

Outcomes Based Teaching and Learning (OBTL)

One of the major themes in higher education in Hong Kong has been the emphasis on modes of assessment that support and motivate student learning, especially, the Outcome-based Teaching and Learning initiative (OBTL). A learning outcome is what a person will be capable of doing as a result of a learning experience, such as being able to perform a specific task at a given level of competence under a certain situation.

When traditional learning is compared with the outcomes based approach, the focus turns from instructors' teaching to students' learning. For example, instead of asking "what content an instructor is going to teach", the question becomes one of "what an instructor intends students to be able to do after the teaching, and at what standard." Furthermore, instead of asking "what instructional methods should an instructor use," the outcomes based approach inquires "how an instructor devises learning activities that will help students achieve those outcomes."

The outcomes based approach focuses on functioning knowledge instead of declarative knowledge. Ultimately, it is about what is learned, instead of what is taught.

Major Challenges Ahead

These recent changes in Hong Kong higher education pose a number of major challenges:

- a. How does higher education in Hong Kong cope with the massive expansion in student numbers, especially in relation to the new 3-3-4 academic structure? How does higher education enhance teaching-learning quality or even maintain teaching-learning quality in such situation?
- b. What are the effective ways of developing student skills?
- c. How can the student support system help provide solutions to these challenges?

The attached account from the Department of Journalism & Communication at the Hong Kong Shue Yan University reports on the department's experience of implementing a student support system, HKNews, which utilizes Web-based Wiki technology. HKNews was found to be a cost-effective solution to the problem of providing a transparent platform for students to prove their learning through a continuous demonstration of learning outcomes. The support system offers students professional advice and the opportunity to interact with peers to develop a shared learning community. These various learning activities and learning experiences, enable students to show continuous improvement in developing their skills in professional journalistic processes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are still major challenges to engaging higher education in the knowledge economy. Hong Kong has focused on placing all its effort in enhancing teaching-learning quality through the establishment of three interlocking arrangements: (1) The Qualifications Framework; (2) Quality Assurance and Accountability, and (3) Outcomes-based Teaching and Learning. The shift from instructor's teaching to students' learning is enhanced by outcomes-based teaching and learning as students can demonstrate their learning through well-defined outcomes and assessment criteria. At the same time, higher education institutions have shown their enthusiasm by providing all kinds of Web-based teaching and learning facilities to maintain a cost-effective student support system for the massive expansion in higher education in Hong Kong.

HKNews at Hong Kong Shue Yan University

1. Introduction

The past decade has seen a rapid rise in the use of online learning environments for teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Although these environments are designed to facilitate interaction and knowledge sharing among individuals, the effectiveness of these platforms is often hindered by the ways they are used. Specifically, most online courses are designed to confine students within a particular course, where the only interaction is between the instructor and the class. The resulting homogeneity of learners constrains the capacity to solve complex problems. In addition, most online courses remove all students from the community at the end of the course in preparation for the new semester. This discontinuity of the online learning group breaks interpersonal relationships and trust among learners and hinders the accumulation of knowledge. Because online learning communities often attract very low rates of participation, many online support environments become limited to announcements or other administrative services, rather than enhancing learning.

In line with the higher education changes in Hong Kong, the top management at Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSYU) have been promoting and implementing institutional Outcomes-based Teaching and Learning (OBTL). To accomplish this OBTL initiative, the Department of Journalism and Communication has adjusted present practices and created new initiatives.

2. Background

The Department of Journalism and Communication has a long tradition of putting student learning theories into practice. Students in the department formed an Editorial Board and three operational branches to manage and organize a print newspaper called *Our Voice*; an online news website called *Shuo Online*; and an online radio station called *SYU Radio*. Junior students serve as reporters while the senior students are the editors. There are also executive committees for each endeavor to administer and to gate keep the media. To both widen the students' scope and bring real world experience into the department, the department invites industry leaders to speak at a weekly seminar. The department regards the students' written news reports on these seminars as a continuous learning practice for developing

journalistic writing skills. In what way could such practices be supported to enhance the quality of teaching and learning? In view of the outcomes-based initiative, how could the mode of learning is structured to enable students to prove their learning through the continuous assessment of learning outcomes?

3. Investigation

The department considered a number of issues in designing the teaching and learning format. First, the outcomes should be open, transparent and observable to both the instructor and the students. Second, students should be able to demonstrate their learning outcomes at any time, at any place and at their own accord with minimal technical support. Third, there should be provision for peer to peer interaction and best practices. Fourth, the design should not be affected by a student's course and year of study.

4. Design

Due to the rapid development of technology and Web 2.0 tools, there are a number of available platforms that may serve the department's needs, such as, weblogs, forums, and Wikis, etc. However, there are both advantages and limitations to these various kinds of platforms. In the end, the department chose the Wiki platform, utilizing the MediaWiki version as the student support system. As a result, students are able to post their journalism assignments at any time, at any place and at their own accord without additional technical support. Various media works include news reports (text), photojournalism (photograph), radio news (sound production and recording) and TV news (video production and recording). The platform is essentially open and helps foster a learning community. It provides a variety of learning experiences between instructors and learners and between learners and learners through the interactive designs available in the platform.

5. Planning

In designing the student support system, the department focused on three different roles. First, it created pages to allow the development of individual student profiles. Second, it created pages to list courses and programs for instructors to inspect. Third, it created pages for news topics that list links to the students' work. Finally, the department decided to name the student support system HKNews (<http://hknews.hksyu.edu/>). The project has a

number of distinct features implemented to enhance teaching and learning quality. First, all learners share the common learning goal of writing good news stories irrespective of their year of study. All written works are accessible to all learners, thus providing excellent models for all students of journalism across all years of study. Second, the community brings continuity to interpersonal relationships and builds trust among users which further enables the site to accumulate knowledge over time.

6. Implementation

Professional advice by experienced instructors: Students post news reports every Tuesday after each seminar. Students also post other media files as they complete their work. Two experienced instructors from the media were employed to read through all the news reports, to edit the students' work, and to organize debriefing workshops every Thursday morning to explain common errors.

Technical hiccups: At the beginning of each academic year, a number of technical hiccups appeared. For example, students had problems with the procedures for posting and linking up their news reports and other media files. Second, faculty members needed additional support to familiarize themselves with HKNews and encountered time problems with the additional platform. Third, students lost their logins, forgot to include their names on articles, and used a file-name system that was difficult to understand. Gradually, these problems were resolved and students became accustomed to HKNews after a few weeks. There were only minimal requests for support from individual learners.

Platform functionalities: At the same time, the system log showed that students fully utilized HKNews to support their learning, to demonstrate their learning, and to improve the quality of their learning on a continuous basis. First, the "Recent Changes" page, which displayed all the activities of HKNews, showed that students logged in and worked at all time intervals, from day to night and from night to day, during weekdays, weekends and public holidays. Second, the "History" page kept all the drafts of student's work, thereby allowing them to compare any two versions. A preliminary observation found that instructors' comments were useful and students were able to make improvements using those comments. This feedback was timely. Students learned every week and they were able to adjust their

work every week, bit by bit.

Summary statistics: Launched in 2005, HKNews had more than 2000 registered users by 2010 with 28,040 articles posted and 1684 media files uploaded to the site. Each article has been edited an average of 4.75 times after being posted online. There have been more than 22 million views in total. HKNews has been developed into an open and transparent platform for students to manage their own work.

7. Evaluation

The project has successfully created one of the largest online learning communities in Hong Kong higher education. Students report knowledge sharing behavior in annual reviews. There may still be issues to be solved, for example, faculty members still have problems reading students' work. However, HKNews has provided a solution to achieve most of the objectives in the OBTL initiative. Now, students are able to demonstrate their learning outcomes at their own accord through a centralized repository and without additional technical support. Second, students are able to demonstrate their improving learning outcomes by continuous checking and comparison of their ongoing work. Third, every student has a rich profile in HKNews and they are able to manage their learning through continuous reflection on their profile. HKNews has therefore provided a cost-effective platform for students to demonstrate their learning, to develop a shared learners' community and to receive professional advice.

8. Issues and Challenges

There is always debate over how to use HKNews to support student learning. First, not all student work is good. Therefore, listing the work of all students unavoidably exposes their immature work and weaknesses to the real world, which may pose a threat to a student's future career. Second, a Wiki has been designed for collaborative work to harness collective intelligence. This provision is a benefit and is no problem to the group project work. However, HKNews promotes individual work as well as joint efforts. To develop students' journalistic skills, the department favors the practice of employing instructors to edit students' work and for professional advice, instead of just promoting peer learning. This is believed to be a more effective way of attaining better performance. At the same time, every week, faculty members suggest a list of recommendations to promote best

practices. This will hopefully uplift benchmarking to continuously enhance teaching-learning quality. Further studies may extend the applicability to other disciplines and quantify the learning gains.

9. Conclusion

The Department of Journalism and Communication's HKNews project demonstrates the successful implementation of a format for achieving the OBTL initiative and is a model of experience sharing relevant to Hong Kong Shue Yan University as a whole. The department reviews its practices on a yearly basis to determine the best solutions for enhancing teaching and learning quality and to provide unique student learning experiences.