

Project Title : Cross-institutional Capacity Building for Service-Learning in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions

Leading University : The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Participating UGC-funded University(ies) : Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, The Education University of Hong Kong

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We propose a cross-institutional project with the objective of supporting and promoting service-learning (SL) in Hong Kong universities, which has been found by research as a high-impact educational practice to nurture holistic student development, especially in the intangible aspects of social responsibility.

Although SL has been integrated into many Hong Kong universities to some degree (either in the form of a curricular graduation requirement or a community service hours requirement), there are still some major challenges in its implementation. Academic SL that integrates academic learning with community service is relatively new to most faculty and there is still much misunderstanding among staff about its nature and methodologies. Most of the teachers who are involved in SL have not received any systematic training in SL pedagogy. While Hong Kong undoubtedly has its “stars” in SL, this expertise is mainly confined to isolated pockets. There is limited collaboration or sharing of expertise among the institutions. This has a negative impact on student learning experience, which is especially serious in SL, since it incorporates experiential and reflective aspects that make teaching these courses a bigger challenge than conventional classroom-based teaching. Studies we have conducted suggest that ill-conceived and implemented SL programmes may cause harm, both to the service recipients as well as to the students.

We therefore propose a multifaceted approach that will fill in the gaps and build up

capacity in SL in Hong Kong universities. Our core deliverable is a mixed-mode staff development programme for teachers. To support teachers in offering SL classes, we propose to develop also an eLearning module for students, a bank of assessment tools, and a database of exemplars of good SL practices for reference. To share expertise among the institutions, and to promote further inter-institutional collaboration, we will initiate cross-institutional SL projects/subjects. To promote an evidence-based, critically reflective approach to teaching, we propose a programme to support colleagues in action research projects that will lead to improvement in their SL subjects. Finally, we will create a cross-institutional Community of Practice that will sustain and spread these efforts among colleagues, and foster increased inter-institutional collaboration.

We believe that this project will result in increased capacity in SL and increased inter-institutional collaboration in Hong Kong's higher education institutions, learning to more rigorous SL subjects or projects that will help develop our students into productive and socially responsible members of society. It will also help establish Hong Kong's emerging position as a leader in SL in Asia.