Project Title :	Enriching Senior Year Places Students' Learning Experience through Curricular and Co-curricular Activities in Hong Kong's Universities
Leading University :	The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Participating UGC-funded University(ies) :	City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Project Leader(s) :	Dr Kin CHEUNG, Associate Professor, School of Nursing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Summary of Proposal

Senior year places (SYP) in universities are UGC funded and allocated specifically for graduates of sub-degree programmes. SYP students will be admitted to the university based on a credit unit transfer system and complete their studies in two years. The SYP student population is growing rapidly, so their unique learning needs should be emphasized.

However, based on worldwide evidence-based studies and the local pilot study conducted by the project leader, SYP students are suffering from a "mismatch" between their learning needs and institutional offerings. This "mismatch" is affecting their learning experiences. Two significant factors underpin this "mismatch": (1) the imperfect programme alignment of subject credit transfers between sub-degree and degree programmes which leads to heavy study loads (some students take eight subjects per semester); and (2) the lack of adequate basic academic competency skills, psychological, career support and international exposure. Even though they are admitted to the third year, they are in fact first-year students in the new environment.

To fulfil the needs of SYP students, the specific objectives of this project are to: (1) meet the learning needs of SYP students before, during and after their transition into the degree programmes in the participating universities; and (2) enhance SYP students' learning experience by improving their academic competencies, future career preparations, library searching skills, individual well-being, and internationalized experience during their time at university. Accordingly, the three major deliverables will be: (1) a student-centred online support system with interactive multimedia

courseware shared initially among the four participating universities to administratively monitor, facilitate and advise SYP students from the first point of study interest all the way to graduation; and (2) a series of institutionally transferrable educational curricular and co-curricular activities enhancing students' transitions into degree programmes and subsequent learning experience that will tie in seamlessly with the online support system; and (3) institutional benchmarks and guidelines shared by participating universities concerning expectations of SYP students and the assessments of their achievements.

In addition to the anticipated positive impacts of the project on SYP students' learning experiences, this project will lead to a paradigm shift from competition to collaboration among sub-degree and degree programmes to provide flexible and diversified admissions. The online platform will facilitate the transparency of the subject alignment for credit transfers from sub-degree to degree programmes, while the courseware or other curricular and co-curricular activities will facilitate smooth transition processes and meet the learning needs of SYP students.

Summary of Final Report

The project aimed to identify the learning needs of senior year admitted (SYA) students, both academic and non-academic, in making the transition from sub-degree to degree study before, during and after admission to the degree programme; and to establish territory-wide support systems in response to the needs identified for the SYA students' transition into degree programmes and subsequent study success.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through campus-wide questionnaire surveys, focus group interviews, and institutional data to identify the unique needs of SYA students relating to their academic and social integration into university studies. The institutional data show that the SYA students' award GPAs were significantly higher than those of non-SYA students, while the proportions of SYA students on academic probation and dropping out were significantly lower. These results indicate that this alternative pathway from sub-degree to degree studies is viable, successful, and that it is worthwhile to promote/invest in this provision. However, the pathway can also be detrimental to SYA students' university experiences. The surveys and interviews revealed that the SYA students' learning environments are not conducive to active involvement in extra-curricular activities and other experiences that typically enrich university life. They have heavier study loads, more surface learning approaches, less social and university support, poorer adjustment, more inferior feelings, and more

mental health concerns than non-SYA students.

In response to their needs, an online Cross Institutional Credit-transfer Information System (CICIS) was launched to enhance the transparency of credit transfer and facilitate smooth transition of SYA students, with the credit transfer guidelines. Another student-centred online Resources Website was developed to facilitate and advise SYA students from the first point of showing interest in the study, all the way to graduation.

As well, an international Credit Transfer Conference and a series of local and overseas webinar sessions were organised to foster extensive collaboration within the tertiary education sector, and to promote transfer articulation and transparency. In addition, the project has organised a series of specialised curricular and co-curricular activities, with 26 events (111 sessions) and over 3 000 participants, including orientations, workshops, student gatherings and other student activities.

This project has increased awareness in the UGC/higher education sector regarding the unique needs of SYA students. The current one-size-fits-all practices do not necessarily address these needs. Hence, it is essential to promote a transfer-receptive culture and a cross-institutional cultural change by shifting from competition to collaboration for sharing credit transfer information and enhancing credit transfer transparency and transfer articulation.