

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Overview Statement

University: Hong Kong Baptist University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 37 Religious Studies

Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 10

(1) Context

Research in the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) covers four specialized areas, namely “philosophical studies”, “Christian studies and comparative religion”, “interdisciplinary study of religion”, and “ethics and society”. Supported by the Centre of Applied Ethics and the Centre of Sino-Christian Studies under the Faculty of Arts, the academic staff in our department are conducting a variety of research projects and research-led teaching on topics such as human rights in Confucianism and Christianity, religion and science, church-state relations, religion and social movements, comparative study of war ethics, ethics of life and death, religion and gender, and pedagogical practices in ethics education in Hong Kong. The Department’s academic staff are attentive to their research’s potential for bringing constructive changes or benefits to society and put effort into realizing such potential.

(2) Approach to impact

The department has been encouraging its academic staff to enhance the impact of their research beyond academia through the following means:

(a) Providing policy advice to government bodies: Professor Shun-hing CHAN, Dr. Ellen ZHANG, and Dr. William NG were invited by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) to give advice to the Subject Committee of Ethics and Religious Studies, and Professor CHAN was invited to scrutinize the examination questions for the panel of Ethics and Religious Studies. Professor CHAN was also an invited speaker of the Education Bureau’s (EDB) knowledge enrichment seminars on ethics and religious studies. Professor Ping-cheung LO was invited by the Hospital Authority and the Council on Human Reproductive Technology to provide expertise in bio/medical ethics to the policy-makers.

(b) Providing an in-service education programme for secondary school teachers and offering talks at secondary schools in Hong Kong: Prior to 2014, the programme “Master of Arts in Liberal Studies and Ethics” provided training for secondary teachers interested in teaching Liberal Studies in secondary education. In September 2014, the programme was changed to “Master of Arts in Ethics and Public Affairs” and attracted students from not only Hong Kong but also Mainland China. In 2019–2020, a total of 86 students were admitted to the programme. Professor Kai-man KWAN, Dr. Benedict CHAN, and other researchers have been giving talks to share their research findings on social and ethical issues including human rights, bioethics, sexuality, popular cultures and religion and science at a number of secondary schools.

(c) Developing networks with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, and churches: The Department provided moral support variously strengthening the underdeveloped social enterprise movement in Hong Kong. Dr. Wai-luen KWOK organized a “Social Enterprise Movement Bazaar” at HKBU in 2017, which was informed by his research on “common good.” The Department invited 31 social enterprises and recruited 200 volunteers from churches and schools to join the bazaar. This event, to which the Department provided administrative support, not only made sales amounting to HKD 300,000, but also built networks among academics, NGOs, churches and schools. Professor Stephen PALMQUIST founded the Hong Kong Philosophy Café in 1999. The café has become a network of philosophical discussion groups with several branches and over 800

members today. This initiative was informed by his research on “the public impact of free philosophical discourse.”

(3) Strategy and plans

The Department’s strategies for encouraging its academic staff to carry out research that is impactful in society include the following:

(a) Consolidating relationships with partners and beneficiaries through well-established research projects that have already demonstrated social impact, such as Professor CHAN’s project on pedagogical practices in ethics education. These projects have enabled Professor CHAN to maintain strong relationships with the EDB, the HKEAA, and the Hong Kong Association of Ethics and Religious Studies (HKAERS).

(b) Identifying and developing new research projects that have the potential to be impactful and building relationships with new partners and beneficiaries, such as Dr. Siu-fan LEE’s project entitled “The Philosophy of Pregnancy, Birth and Early Motherhood” and her proposed partnership with the Hong Kong Christian Service.

(c) Prioritizing old and new research projects that demonstrated varying degrees of impacts and giving due resources to support them.

(d) Organizing training seminars with the Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) at HKBU for the Department’s academic staff and postgraduate students to assist them in enhancing the social impact of their research. The Department invited Dr. Mike NG of the KTO to explain how to apply for the Knowledge Transfer Partnership Seed Fund (KTPSF) in two workshops to teaching staff and postgraduate students; he met with them on, respectively, 12 September 2018, and 24 September 2019.

The Department is implementing these strategies by:

(a) Encouraging academic staff to apply for the KTPSF provided by the KTO, of which Professor CHAN and Dr. George MAK were recipients in the academic year 2017–2018 and 2019–2020 respectively. The title of CHAN’s project was “Teaching Ethical Reasoning in Secondary Education in Hong Kong,” and the title of MAK’s project was “Promoting Understanding of the History of the Chinese Bible: A Docent Training Programme for the Hong Kong Bible Society’s Exhibition ‘Encountering the Word of God’.”

(b) Providing teaching relief for academic staff who are developing impactful projects, and a scheme of teaching relief was provided by the Research Committee at HKBU in the academic year 2018–2019.

(c) Including “impact” as an indicator in performance reviews, which was introduced in the academic year 2015–2016.

(d) Establishing an Impact Committee and encouraging exchanges among researchers who are developing similar impact case studies, and the committee was established in the academic year 2018–2019.

(4) Relationship to case studies

The case study “Nurturing Responsible Citizens: Pedagogical Practice in Teaching Ethical Reasoning” is a good example demonstrating the impact of an action research project on the secondary school curriculum in Hong Kong. The project is based on a long-standing collaborative relationship between Professor CHAN and the EDB. Professor CHAN’s research on the pedagogical practices in ethics education has resulted in an innovative programme teaching ethical reasoning in secondary education that is sensitive to the particular context of Hong Kong. This pedagogical approach has been adopted by the EDB, used by the HKEAA in its teachers’ training programme, positively received by the HKAERS, and praised by teachers and students themselves in Hong Kong’s secondary schools.