

Case Examples from HKU



Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens (CCGL9001)

The teacher conducted a survey at the first class to understand students' background as well as their perceptions about Hong Kong cinema. It has been noted that students from other countries, for example, South Korea, Japan, India, and Malaysia, have already had some knowledge about Hong Kong cinema through their past exposures to films and movie stars from Hong Kong. The teacher makes use of the diversity in cultural and knowledge backgrounds among students so that it turns out to be an asset for the course. Especially during student group presentations, students can learn from others' presentations about how people from different cultures might undertake the topic of Hong Kong cinema. Students also fill in a feedback form to provide comments to the presenting group after their presentation. A challenge in teaching is related to students' lack of background knowledge and vocabulary in communicating effectively about filming. To tackle this challenge, the teacher engages students in learning disciplinary vocabulary that enables them to talk about the filmmaking industry as well as aesthetic and cultural elements.

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Governance and Democracy in the Age of Globalisation (CCGL9004)

One challenge of teaching the subject is related to students' insufficient knowledge of the outside world. It has also been observed that some students hesitated in asking questions and participating in class discussion. The teacher establishes clearly a set of ground rules at the beginning of the course, emphasising that it is students' responsibility to clarify concepts if they have difficulties in understanding them and that it is not a problem for students to interrupt the teacher when there is a question to ask. Another principle the teacher advocates is that students from a particular culture or nation should not be treated as the representatives from their culture or country. The teacher subsequently helps students understand that everyone has freedom to express opinions, which could be different from those of the majority.

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Poverty, Development, and the Next Generation: Challenges for a Global World (CCGL9005)

In this course, students examine poverty and development, a serious challenge for a global world. They not only investigate factors leading to poverty on a theoretical base, but also 'feel' it through a series of carefully designed experiential learning activities. One of them is to ask students to experiment with survival on spending only ten Hong Kong dollars. The experience helps students reflect on common perceptions of poor people as being lazy and thus develop empathy towards people in poverty. The knowledge and attitudes will help students be more prepared to thrive in the globalised world, in which power and resources are not shared equally and poverty is still a widespread issue.

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The Political Economy of Growth and Poverty in the World (CCGL9025)

Covering the political and economic situations in a range of countries, poor and rich, the course helps students see the commonality among countries, including how similar the situations are for poorer people in different countries and how different the situations are for richer and poorer ones in the same country. The awareness creates conversations among students from different parts of the world regarding how we can achieve an objective understanding of the sources of enlarging inequality happening in many regions around the world. Engaging in these conversations about improving the well-being of people prepares students to become global citizens, who are aware that they have a responsibility to create a better world for people in poverty. Another challenge of teaching is related to assigned readings that demand students' time and background knowledge. Students are expected to read newspaper articles, scholarly essays and books that illustrate economic principles lurking behind growth and poverty. To ensure that students see the big picture and follow the main argument conveyed by the authors, the teacher carefully selects good books with summaries produced by professionals. Students can pleasantly read about a topic with the assistance of these references. The readings also show students how to apply quantitative data to critically interpret an issue.

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Think Global, Act Local: You, Hong Kong, and the World (CCGL9026)

Considering that there are a number of essay-type assignments in the course, the teachers acknowledge potential difficulties facing students from science and engineering disciplines that do not intensively require essay writing. In order to bridge the gap, the teachers give class participants clear instructions on the main goals and essential components of the assignment and offer guidance and assistance regarding how to formulate and articulate arguments, both inside and outside the classroom. The teachers also recommend that students look at the issue from the perspective of their own discipline. For example, the teachers encourage engineering students to think about potential technological solutions to Hong Kong's environmental problems while asking those with social science backgrounds to explore existing political or other institutional constraints that may hinder the actual application of the solutions. Creating such a multidisciplinary environment promotes mutual learning among students with diverse backgrounds, which is increasingly important in understanding complex global and local problems and formulating potential solutions to them.

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The Evolution of Civilisation (CCGL9042)

With the observation that students often cluster with others in the same tutorial group or people similar to them, the teacher tries to design some assessment components that can encourage interaction among students in different groups and from different backgrounds. For example, the blog assignment is designed in a way that students can respond to and interact with others who are not in their assigned tutorial group. Any students can make an opening statement on the topic for discussion and react to others' comments. The online blog platform also enables students to participate at anytime from anywhere.

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Energy: Its Evolution and Environmental Impacts (CCST9016)

Though energy consumption and its environmental impacts is a global issue, the teacher acknowledges that students from different regions tend to show interest in different topics for their case study presentation. One pattern observed through an assignment is that local Hong Kong students tend to look at the situations within Hong Kong, for example, the energy consumption of travelling from HKU to Central. Students from other places in Asia tend to be more interested in issues in the region. Another cultural difference noted by the teacher is that many Asian students tend to agree with what has been said in the book or journal article. In order to bring a critical perspective to the course, the teacher intentionally divides a tutorial into four sub-groups, each reading one article about global warming. These articles contain contradictory opinions about what causes global warming. Students are then required to discuss with those in the other sub-groups about whether they agree or disagree with the perspectives presented in the articles. Flipped classroom is used as another strategy to prepare students for group discussion on renewable energy technologies.

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Dr Hui, S.C.M. (2015, Nov 20). CCST9016 Energy: Its Evolution and Environmental Impacts <http://www.mech.hku.hk/bse/CCST9016/>

The Oceans: Science and Society (CCST9023) & Understanding Climate Change (CCST9019)

The multiple active learning activities designed in these two courses have energised students working in their groups. It is observed that the fun, enjoyment and challenges embedded in these groupwork tasks (for example, a Black Box assignment, a marine pollution project, the role play of UN Climate Summit, and a field trip to a geopark) are the important elements that enable students from different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds to talk to each other and collaboratively explore the principles of science. The teacher also notices that the more diversified a student group is, the more dynamic and interesting approaches will emerge. Another observation is that the difference in students is not solely from cultural backgrounds, but disciplinary and personality factors. Leveraging the diversity can greatly benefit the class dynamics and learning atmosphere.

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Simplifying Complexity (CCST9048)

One challenge of teaching is to encourage students to explore alternatives or use an innovative way to solve problems because some students in Hong Kong or more generally from some Asian cultures are more interested in what the best practice is and how to apply it correctly. The tendency to conform may inhibit these students from critically analysing and evaluating multiple approaches while these abilities are regarded as important in the Common Core Curriculum. Recognising the need to adjust teaching for these students with such a tendency, the teacher tries to provide scaffolding by firstly showing some clear and simple examples, then presenting the unsolved problems, and finally asking students to think about why some of these problems still remain unsolved. A similar way is to show one obvious solution to the problem, tear it down with counter-arguments from other evidence, and challenge students to evaluate which side of the argument is more convincing.

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Making History: Engaging with the Powerful Past (CCHU9003)

The course uses active learning activities that help engender intercultural conversations. One example is the scavenger hunt, facilitated by an interactive, automated online programme. Students join groups, each with their own distinct itinerary to uncover and scrutinize historical artifacts in Central. At each of the sites they visit the programme prompts them to answer MCQ and text entry type questions. Accurate and creative answers unlock the next location on their itinerary. The excitement and challenge of the game taking place outside the classroom effectively breaks down boundaries between students from different cultural backgrounds, as they pore over the various challenges together. It is not uncommon for groups to complete all 16 sites in the game – the maximum number possible. Similarly, in lectures, the teacher encourages peer learning by interspersing content delivery with short interactive exercises, around every ten minutes or so, to reinforce key points being made. Another useful method enabling meaningful intercultural engagement involves short written responses during the class. Students are asked to write a very short answer to a provocative question posted by the teacher. One example is ‘what nation do you feel you belong to and why?’ Students’ answers are collected and become the focal point of a cross-cultural discussion in the following class. In such a way, different perspectives and values are solicited, acknowledged, and openly discussed.

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The Last Dance: Understanding Death and Dying (CCHU9024)

The course focuses on a heavy topic that some students initially feel uneasy to talk about. The matter related to death is also a sensitive topic in some cultures. During tutorials when students are more ready to speak up, the teacher encourages students to listen to and learn from the thoughts and experiences of other students regarding how they dealt with death and grief in their personal lives. When possible, the teacher also asks students not to group with friends so that they will have an opportunity to talk to people that they are not familiar with. A useful technique to encourage sharing of opinions during tutorials is to give students sufficient time to think about the topic (in this case, a 10-minute self-reflection) and then ask them to share their thoughts with a small group. The think time and a small group setting in tutorials help students build confidence in touching this sensitive topic. In addition to experiential learning activities and tutorial discussions, the course connects students to theories on death and dying from global and interdisciplinary perspectives. For example, students visit the oldest coffin in Hong Kong, and reflect on the values of life as well as the social and economic circumstances in the past century.

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Chinese Business Practice and Society: Past and Present (CCCH9021)

Students in this course learn to look at the effects of social and political institutions on business activities, and work with fellow students to consequently identify success factors to business in the global economy. A range of assessment components are devised, which allow students from different backgrounds to excel in at least some of them. First, students in groups are given the opportunity to freely choose a topic related to government-business relations for their group project. The presentation needs to be delivered through videos and students are encouraged to apply multimedia tools to enhance their storytelling. Another group project is a web library. Every student needs to use the Internet for research and create 5 to 10 annotated web links. Students also complete an individual essay with the topic at their own choice, which allows them to make use of their different cultural and geographical backgrounds to construct the arguments. In tutorials, the teacher tries to use international and local students as learning resources by encouraging them to share their feelings about business practices in their familiar cultural environment. The success of this strategy relies on trust built in the classroom.

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