

The PolyU's Position on Learning and Teaching

The University's Philosophy on Learning and Teaching

As a higher education institution with a commitment to serve the community, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is always determined to provide excellent education via quality learning and teaching. Its vision is to become a “preferred university” offering “preferred programmes” and producing “preferred graduates”, and its mission is to help students to achieve “academic excellence in a professional context”. To achieve this, the University has developed its philosophy on learning and teaching, which is explicitly reflected in its Strategic Plan for 2001 to 2007.

To realize this philosophy the University aims to achieve two aspects of students' education. One, which is common for university education worldwide, is the promotion of the all-round development of students through the cultivation of desirable human values and intellectual attributes. The other, which is specific to the context of the PolyU, is the development of professional competence and excellence in the discipline. Under this guiding philosophy, the University strives to provide the best possible environment that is conducive to student learning.

Towards this end, the University believes that the major role of higher education is to promote learning and so it embraces the following values of education and associated strategies for learning and teaching:

1. The all-round development of students beyond the professional context

The University believes that the major function of higher education is to promote meaningful and relevant knowledge. In the process of university education, it is important for students to be encouraged to pursue general education crossing the domains of different disciplines and knowledge, enabling an appreciation of the relationships of science, culture and society. It is important that students are encouraged to make connections with and appreciate a broader context of learning including the historical, cultural, economic and political contexts within which communities develop.

In close parallel with this, in modern society, students should be educated so that they can become professionally competent. However, higher education should not just embrace the development of professional knowledge and skills, but must also encourage the cultivation of leadership and communication skills, the ability to make independent judgement, an inquiring and innovative attitude, the ability to make ethical and responsible decisions, the wisdom and the skills needed to assume civic responsibilities, and the potential for independent and lifelong learning.

2. Student-centred learning and a caring and supportive learning environment

The University aims to adopt student-centred learning strategies to facilitate communities of learners capable of innovative thought and problem solving abilities by creating the environment, and providing appropriate experiences for students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves in a climate of mutual respect and open communication in which ethical and personal beliefs can be examined without anxiety. The totality of the environment and experiences underpins the quality of learning, which the University will strive to bring about by continuously working to enhance the conditions that facilitate student learning.

3. The importance of good teaching

The University recognizes that students benefit from dedicated teachers who possess a strong knowledge base and effective teaching skills, and who are actively engaged in research and

scholarship, including scholarly inquiry into learning and teaching. It is also believed that the learning environment is further enriched by encouraging teachers' involvement with the broader economic, social, intellectual, and educational life of the community.

4. Technology as a tool for the enhancement of learning and teaching

The University believes that learning and teaching should be effectively enhanced by technologies that are up-to-date and likely to be the most effective in promoting valued learning outcomes. This includes professional specific technology as necessary and the appropriate use of IT in enhancing students' independent learning skills.

5. Partnership with professionals and the community

The University believes that learning and teaching should not be conceptualized as only a classroom-based activity. In collaboration with appropriate partners the University strives to establish learning environments that engage students to acquire experiences in a wide range of community, workplace, and professional settings. The University encourages partnership between teachers, students and related professional groups with the aim of meeting mutually agreed learning goals.

How the University's Philosophy on Learning and Teaching is Implemented

In practice, the University's philosophy on learning and teaching is realized through the design and implementation of both the formal and informal curricula. The following table gives some examples of the developments/activities already in place for the realization of the values and the achievement of our stated goals.

<i>Values/associated strategies</i>	<i>Examples of developments towards realizing stated values and in achieving the associated strategies</i>
1. All-round development of students beyond the professional context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for all-round student development in the programme curriculum design • Inclusion of General Education subjects, language enhancement components and professional skills development activities in the programme curriculum • Identification of desirable attributes of graduates, and inclusion of good practices in achieving these, through continuous curriculum improvement • Promoting the ability of "learning to learn" through teaching and learning development projects such as "Learning to Learn: Developing Students' Cognitive, Motivational and Interpersonal Strategies for Learning" • Developmental programmes organized by SAO, including the "Preferred Graduate" Development Programme (PGDP), "Leadership and Competence for Success (LCS)", Complementary Studies Programme (CSP) and the Physical Education Programme (PEP), etc. • Cultural activities and exhibitions organized by the Culture Promotion Committee • Overseas exchange programmes, visits, placements, etc. supported and/or organized by Faculties and/or departments/centres

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer courses in Beijing and Shanghai organized by SAO, GEC, CLC and AS
2. Student-centred learning strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of student-centred approaches in the teaching delivery methods via forums, seminars and workshops run for staff in general or within departments; examples of such approaches include problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning, case study methods, reflection in learning, peer tutoring and peer assessment, etc. • Funding allocated to support teaching and learning development projects that promote student-centred approaches
3. A caring and supportive learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms and activities to solicit feedback from past and present students at different levels and in different ways for the improvement of teaching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Programme reviews and improvement – Subject evaluations – Teaching evaluations – Surveys on graduates' learning experiences – Student-staff consultative meetings – Meetings between HoDs and students – Personal tutor system • Mechanisms to support students during their studies which include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – personal tutors – year tutors – mentors – mechanisms for access to teaching staff, programme leaders and HoDs
4. Importance of good teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A network of activities to enthuse staff to embrace the culture of all-round development of students as their own motivation • Acknowledging and rewarding good teaching by the University and departments through award schemes • Promoting and supporting the professional development of teaching staff via mandatory courses for new teachers and teaching assistants, and through on-going learning and teaching development workshops for all academic staff • Promotion and support of the sharing of good practices in learning and teaching via Faculty-based forums, seminars, and the setting up of the Learning and Teaching Resources Centre (LTRC)
5. Technology as a tool to enhance learning and teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of WebCT as the platform for web-based learning • Promotion and development of web-based learning through the MegaWeb project and the establishment of

	<p>the Online Programme Development Unit and CyberU</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis given to the pedagogical design in using technology to improve learning • University grants to support departments to maintain current technologies for professional development
6. Partnership with professionals and the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of structured learning experiences by incorporating practicum such as workplace placements and service learning in the curriculum • Professionals invited as guest lecturers or to participate in curriculum review and development • Mechanisms and activities to solicit feedback from employers for curriculum improvement

Assuring the Quality of Implementation

The implementation of Departmental Assessment is an important development in the University's quality assurance (QA) mechanism. Departmental Assessment is the process whereby the academic and management standards of an academic department are being assessed by a panel, comprising external experts and internal members, to ascertain whether it meets the required standards of performance. The assessment process includes an assessment of all major academic functions, i.e. learning and teaching, research, and services, the appropriateness of the academic programmes offered by the department concerned, resources management as well as validation/revalidation of programmes as considered appropriate. The department's QA system also forms an essential part of the assessment process. In order to ensure the appropriate implementation of the University's educational philosophy, QA mechanisms have been developed as a result of continuous discussions and reviews at different levels. At the institutional level, there is the Quality Assurance Committee to oversee the overall quality of departments and programmes. At the Faculty level, the Faculty Board and Faculty Dean are instrumental in maintaining the quality and standard of the full range of academic and related activities of constituent departments, mainly via Departmental Assessments and Dean's assessments of departmental annual review. Departments are encouraged to engage in continuous improvement of quality by evaluating their own performance through benchmarking against a set of performance indicators. At the programme level, there are, for example, course validation and re-validation procedures, annual programme reviews, and course/subject evaluations conducted, while at the departmental level, mechanisms include student-staff consultative meetings, Departmental Assessments, the annual business plans and quality assurance reports. Academic staff have their quality assessed via the Faculty-based SFQs and a range of other possible means that can include peer reviews and teaching portfolios.

The University recognizes that the effectiveness of the QA system calls for staff members' internalization of such values, and their whole-hearted support of the system. The development of the QA mechanisms through the years has implicitly addressed the importance attached to the devolvement of responsibilities and ownership to the Faculties, departments and frontline academics. The involvement of departments and staff members in the review of the SFQ system, and the subsequent move towards Faculty-based SFQs is a case in point. The University will continue its work in this area to develop a culture of quality owned by Faculties, departments and individual staff.

Conclusion

With its long tradition of, and commitment in, providing professional education to the community, the PolyU has developed its own philosophy on learning and teaching. Under this guiding philosophy, the University aims to help students achieve “academic excellence in a professional context” through all-round development. Both the formal and informal curricula have been, and will continue to be, refined and improved to help achieve this mission; and the University will continue to strive to bring about a culture of quality that is to be owned by all.