Opening new channels for better communication

Since assuming CityU’s presidency, Professor Way Kuo has been working hard to bolster communication with staff, students and the local community. In addition to meeting department and faculty heads, he has set up a web blog and arranged tea gatherings with staff to expand communication channels between management and the University community and to collect constructive opinions from colleagues.

Professor Kuo indicated that CityU is now ranked among the top 150 universities in the world, evidence of its outstanding achievements attained over the past years. There is, however, intense competition in the world, particularly from the Greater China Region. Mainland universities have made tremendous advancements in recent years and may surpass the rankings of local universities within a decade. Therefore, CityU must continuously look to improvement, perform rather than talk, utilise its strengths and explore new strategic academic areas. With this emphasis enforced, CityU would be capable of becoming one of the top 100 universities in the world.

(continued on next page)
In the face of new challenges, staff’s opinions for setting standards and targets for teaching, research and services will be sought. Also, a new five-year development plan is being formulated and organisational restructuring will be implemented to clearly define the roles and functions of each unit. The creation of the new position of Provost announced earlier, is aimed at fostering coordination and management of academic studies and enabling the University to enjoy a smooth transition to the new four-year undergraduate curriculum.

It is expected that the desired results can be achieved by setting up new communication channels, boosting internal communications and collecting feedback from all staff members.

“Staff tea gatherings will be held regularly and its format reviewed and modified to improve the efficiency of communication. It is only one of the communications innovations aimed at developing an harmonious communication culture and management transparency. Colleagues will benefit from this additional channel to help identify problems and suggest solutions in relation to the University’s development,” said Professor Kuo.

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**Dong-style wood bridges**

In the villages located on the borders between Guangxi and Hunan provinces, one can easily find wood-built bridges with covers. They are called Fengyu Qiao (or Wind and Rain Bridge for providing shelter against the elements) or Hua Qiao (Flower Bridge). Except the bridge piers that are built with rocks, the body of the bridges is mostly made of China fir. Their unique architectural style is typical of native Dong people, serving to complement the Dong drum towers. The most famous bridge is perhaps Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge in Sanjiang County, Guangxi Province. My interest in these Dong-style wood bridges started five years ago when I was compiling a book about historic and cultural treasures in China. Failing to source a photo of Huiqiang (Dragon Turning its Head) Bridge (name of such a bridge) in Tongdao County, Hunan Province, I finally decided to make a trip to the area and take some pictures myself. I went to Sanjiang via Guilin and hired a van locally which took a mountain path to Pingtan Village in Tongdao. The original bridge was said to be built in 1761.

— By Longgen Chen
Meals that may change your life

Can a lunch or dinner determine an individual’s fate? It seems like the premise of a movie or daydream but Mr Alex Tham Koi-siong, Teaching Fellow of the Department of Marketing, has a belief in this that is fixed firmly in the here and now. His appointments diary contains a lengthy list of lunch and dinner dates with students, through to the end of the year.

But the question remains – can a person’s life really be changed over the course of a meal?

“I have worked at CityU for 16 years and have found that many students become a little too relaxed once they enter university. They do not study seriously enough and have little sense of their future direction. They effectively waste some of the most valuable time in their life,” said Mr Tham, whose rapid-fire talking style is indicative of his vigorous approach to life and education.

To encourage students to improve their English and professional knowledge base, Mr Tham launched the Active Learning Score System in 2000, during his term as the programme leader of the Bachelor of Business Administration. The system awarded scores to students for participating in competitions, leader seminars and other activities, such as reading books and raising questions, as well as by submitting written reports for the above activities in English. “It reignites the fire within students, boosting their enthusiasm for study to how it might have been during their secondary school days as they strived to enter university.”

As the Active Learning Leader, Mr Tham aims to help students set up their position in life and discover new values.

“I set aside five hours to have lunch and dinner respectively with two students every day. With more than 450 students in the department, it will take more than a year to finish all the appointments. Those two hours are the best to conduct a conversation about life with a student,” said Mr Tham.

There will be a psychological test for students during the meeting, intended to:

- find out their personality from how they make choices;
- review the critical moments during their growth and clear up their confusions;
- identify success points and build up self-confidence, and
- determine their future path.

Mr Tham starts work at about 8am and leaves the office at 9pm every day. After work, he likes to stay at home, read some books and enjoy his family life.

A lunch or dinner may not create a miracle but it could serve to open up the world of possibility ahead of a student. With the additional help of a scientific learning system, students are sure to benefit from Mr Tham’s recipe for success.  

Mr Tham enjoys chatting with students about life over meals.

Mr Alex Tham Koi-siong
One precious hour

Eliza Lee

You may spend an hour per week getting a facial massage, or perhaps jogging in the park. But have you ever thought of using it to help students improve their English communication skills?

The English Language Centre (ELC) launched the English Language Mentoring Scheme (ELMS) in 1997 to help students develop their English communication skills in a social setting. “The ELMS is perhaps the only opportunity for students to practice English outside the classroom,” said Dr Hebe Wong Mei-ha, Lecturer of ELC and Coordinator of ELMS. “Feedback has shown that participants gain greater confidence to speak English and their English improves. They also make new friends from other departments,” she said.

Mentors are volunteer CityU staff members and exchange students who offer an hour each week to meet their students. Despite the busy schedule, 10 staff have signed up as mentors this semester, including Mr Joseph Chan Kai-nin, Director of Student Development Services, and Mr Hans Mahncke, Assistant Professor at the School of Law.

This is the third time Joseph has taken part in the scheme. “I enjoy getting along with students. This is the essence of student services. Seeing the improvement is my greatest reward,” said Joseph. He helps the students grasp the key elements to learning English.

“An hour a week cannot improve anyone’s English ability instantly but it can help to change someone’s attitude and strategy towards learning English,” said Joseph. He believes in the adage “Quality in, quality out”, so when he meets the students every Tuesday lunchtime he brings along for discussion good English prose, including poems, editorials, songs, games and articles on controversial topics.

Hans has twice signed up as a mentor and this time invited his colleague to join as well. “We should bear in mind that the students are volunteers as well and do not receive credits for their efforts. As role models, staff should also be encouraged to take part,” said Hans. He added that it presented a good opportunity to get to know students from other departments. “The ELMS students also give me a new perspective on different things,” he said. For example, one of Hans’ students is from Chongqing, and has provided insight into the socio-economic environment there.

Both Joseph and Hans said their work schedule was not adversely affected by the mentoring sessions. Hans said all credit belonged to ELC for organising the classes around the mentors’ availability and for handling the online enrolment of students.

The flexible nature of the ELMS programme means classes sometimes comprise activities such as dinner or other social outings.

There are 10% more groups this year compared to last year. “The demand from students is increasing but we always welcome more mentors,” Hebe said. “There is no limit; the more the better.”
Pressing all the right buttons

We are often oblivious to their contribution but when our lecture theatre microphones or LCD projectors are not working, we are all too aware of our need for their instant reaction. Yes, they are the University’s Audio Visual Services Unit (AV Unit).

A unit within the Facilities Management Office, the AV Unit is mainly responsible for technical support of AV facilities. Mr Franky Ng Siu-ki, who has worked in the team for more than 12 years, knows by heart every nook of the lecture theatres and classrooms on campus. “We will usually arrive on the scene within five minutes of notification to fix any AV equipment technical problems to prevent disruption to teaching,” said Franky.

As AV equipment is so important to modern educators, Mr Jimmy Ho Chun-yan, who has been at CityU for more than seven years, had some advice for staff. “If computers and LCD projectors in classrooms are left turned on for a long time, it causes serious wear and tear of light bulbs and their frequent replacement causes unnecessary wastage,” Jimmy said. It is worth bearing in mind that computers should be shut down when not in use as it is both environmentally-friendly and saves trouble for teachers, added Jimmy.

The University will soon hold the important CityU Banquet and Congregation, which will be the annual peak period for the AV Unit. During this period, they have to ensure all AV equipment is working properly, all AV networks are well connected and sharp pictures can be seen on TV screens. Both Franky and Jimmy said they would make the strenuous effort necessary to ensure these major events run smoothly and teachers, students and campus visitors do not miss any wonderful moments.

Mr Jimmy Ho Chun-yan (left) and Mr Franky Ng Siu-ki
Movement

1 August - 30 September 2008
2008年8月1日至9月30日

New Arrival 到任
Senior Staff 高級職員

School of Creative Media
創意媒體學院
Leung, Eddie, Hu-ming, 梁曉明, Senior Teaching Fellow
MS, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Department of Applied Social Studies
應用社會科學系
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MS, University of London, UK
Hui, Anna, Nana, 許娜娜, Assistant Professor
PhD, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Department of Building and Construction
建築系
Yang, Yeong-bin, 楊永斌, Professor (Chair)
PhD, Cornell University, US

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中國文化中心
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英文中心
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PGC, Ministry of Education, BC, Canada

Woo, David James, 王偉聰, Instructor I
PGD, University of Hong Kong

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