

TEACHING & LEARNING

Newsletter for EF Students, Alumni, Teachers, and Friends

Department of Economics and Finance (EF), City University of Hong Kong

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My Learning Journey in Hong Kong and Beijing

Hong Kong

It was the 28th of August, 2008 when I landed in Hong Kong for the first time. Although I had never been Hong Kong before this, I decided nine months earlier that I would pursue my Bachelor Degree here. I sometimes wonder about how easy it was for me to make this decision, when I had never been here before. I believe that fate had something to do with it, and that might be why this important decision – one that would affect at least three years of my life – came so strong.



I remember the humidity more than anything else from my arrival in Hong Kong. However, I was coming from Shanghai where I spent a month improving my Mandarin, and it was humid there as well. Humid and hot. Oh yes, I'll never forget how I experienced Asia for the first time in my life.

Things in Hong Kong seemed to catch on really easily. I remember when my buddy

came to pick me up at the airport that first day. That was of an unimaginable value for me, since it made my transition to this new life of mine much easier, much smoother. The buddy system is one of the best initiatives I have ever seen, and I owe them a lot. Even



EF Orientation

though I was not an exchange student, I knew I wanted to meet all the exchange students as soon as possible, because we all knew nothing about the city, except for the things that we may have read on our guides. We had to experience Hong Kong together; I just knew we would all be very excited. Meeting them was the easiest thing ever. Exchange students had been in touch through Facebook for the whole summer, and I joined them talking

about the things we would do together to explore this new home of ours. I met them all that same night of my arrival. Everything seemed perfect, and it certainly has been for as long as I've been in Hong Kong.

Classes started soon after my arrival. I could see the difference between the course load of the exchange students and mine, but that didn't stop me going out almost as much as they did. This BBA Finance was not my first Bachelor's Degree. In fact, I graduated in Political Science and Public Administration back in my hometown, Barcelona. However, it took me some time to adapt to this new university. From my experience, every university is a completely different world. When pursuing my first Bachelor I went for as an exchange student to Paris, and I could see all the differences in that university as well. In a lot of ways CityU reminded me of the university in Paris, with all these presentations, and the grading system. In Barcelona, we always had OBTL-based results, and I believe it helped creating a better atmosphere where students didn't have to compete among themselves. I'm glad to observe that this is something CityU is starting to change about.

I'm not ashamed to say that Year 1 courses were not very appealing to me. I mostly found them boring, but I admit I didn't know the things we were learning, so I accepted that it was a necessary step in order to get more into Finance in the coming years. Indeed, Year 2 courses were far more interesting.

My first semester in Hong Kong was my best one with regards to my social life. I guess it is normal, since everything was new to me then, and I admit I spent a lot of time going out. My grades could have been better, I know that, but they weren't bad either, and all in all I was glad with this balance between studies and leisure, because there is no point in coming to a university in Hong Kong and then never leaving the campus. I once read in the blog of CityU's president, Prof. Way Kuo, an article intended for outgoing exchange students



International Exchange Festival

where he encouraged them to go and discover the world beyond the walls of their new university, because an exchange is definitely not only about the university itself. I applied this to my situation, and I couldn't help but agreeing with every single word. I had the chance of personally meeting the president later during my second year at CityU's annual banquet. I remember that MingPao Daily published an article the following day about the event, and the picture they chose was one of Prof. Kuo and I.



CityU Banquet 2009



With Prof. Way Kuo in CityU Banquet 2009

I made good friends among the locals as well. I kept seeing my buddy, and I especially



University Circle

started hanging out with a group of classmates both from Hong Kong and from the Mainland. These are friendships that I value a lot and hope will last a lifetime.



Hong Kong Disneyland

I have not yet answered the question about my choices. Indeed, question number one was why I chose Hong Kong for doing my Bachelor degree. As I said, it didn't take me long to decide, even though I had never been here before. I have always been passionate about China, its language, and its culture. I wanted to be in China but yet in the Mainland, Bachelor degrees are not offered in English. I therefore contemplated Hong Kong as my option number one, and I was very soon sure that Hong Kong would definitely be it.

Because I wanted to make full use of the fact that I'm studying here, I chose China Business as my minor. The idea of doing business in

China is deep in my mind. A sector which I really like is the hospitality industry, and in the long run I'd love to start some sort of hotel chain, starting in China. I am, however, aware of the fact that this is the last step of a long list of things to do, given the restrictions that come from the huge initial investment required for such an operation. I started taking Minor courses in Year 2, and I got very good grades because I really enjoyed learning everything about how to successfully do business in China.

There are several things that I love about Hong Kong. One of them is the fact that Hong Kong is the place where the West meets the East, and I think both westerners and people from other Asian countries can feel at home in Hong Kong. It is a city that brings people and cultures together, everything in an incomparably friendly atmosphere. I enjoy the fact that I can be in a city which has places as different as Central or MongKok, all coexisting together. I also enjoy shopping in Hong Kong very much; it certainly is a "shopping paradise", as some like to call it. I enjoy the life in this city, where there is no time for boredom whatsoever.

Beijing

I am in my room on the Tsinghua University campus as I write this article about my



Tsinghua University

experiences during these first two years of my BBA degree. I have been in Beijing for more than two months now, and could not be happier with my decision to come here as an

exchange student. Ever since I got here my Chinese skills have been improving at a speed that I did not think was possible. Indeed, I am enjoying every second in this huge city (even though I dislike the weather here very much!) I am also getting a real insight into the Chinese culture, which is to me of utmost importance, given my keen interest in China.



Great Wall

I have met some very interesting local students at Tsinghua who have a contagiously

overachieving personality. I am enjoying the classes in Tsinghua a lot; some of them are challenging, and push me to do my best at all times. I have also met some business people outside of campus, especially Spanish expatriates. I usually attend the social events organized by the Spanish Chamber of Commerce in Beijing and thus my connections – my *guanxi* (關係) grow stronger every day.

I know deep inside that my ultimate goal is to be an entrepreneur. Being in China is so inspiring for an aspiring entrepreneur like me. Opportunities are everywhere, in every corner! I have already come up with several business ideas which I keep carefully written down in a small notebook. Getting a BBA in CityU, and being an exchange student at Tsinghua are certainly becoming life-changing experiences for me!

Xènia Vives Cano (魏怡敏), from Spain
Year 3 student in BBA Finance (Cohort 2008)

My Choice to Study in Hong Kong



Many people have asked me the question, “Why did you come to CityU of Hong Kong for your bachelor degree?” Instead I wonder, why not? The school is prestigious, is in a good location, offers the degree that I wanted to do, and since there’s no harm gaining more exposure

by studying abroad, why not? Without realizing it, the most exciting part of my life had started when I first step foot into CityU. I have never looked back. This is by far the one decision that I’ve made that I am proudest of. CityU is nothing like an average university.



Cheung Chau Island

You may be put off by the compactness and the limited space of the university but that can also be a benefit. It brings students together, giving them a sense of closeness when they frequently bump into each other in between classes. That’s what I

enjoyed the most.

There has never been a dull moment in my life in Hong Kong. The “city that never sleeps” really amazed me with its simultaneous modernity and its traditional touch. From the

high-end shopping malls to the old fishing village in Cheung Chau, Hong Kong has never failed to impress me in either way.

Time passes really quickly and it is time for me to grasp ahold of myself and start planning for after graduation. I would like to become a successful risk analyst in the near future or be a part of any field related to my degree. Actions speak louder than words and to kick-start my dream I'm doing my exchange semester in the Copenhagen Business School and an internship during the summer period.

Studying abroad will open your eyes to new, exciting and fun things in life and when if your opportunity is here, grasp it well. There are no right choices that you should make, it all depends on how you make the most out of your choices to turn them into your best ones!

Kwok Huay Yi, from Malaysia
Year 3 student in BBA Quantitative Finance and Risk Management (Cohort 2008)

My Experience in Studying Abroad

My professors, fellow classmates and friends are often surprised when I tell them I am here at CityU as a full-time non-local student. In fact, I am still sometimes surprised by my decision to leave home to study in a foreign country for three years – especially a foreign country I have never been to before! My decision to come here was the result of much deliberation: I wanted a more professionally applicable education, and I wanted to learn economics with an international perspective.

I received a classical high school education from St. Ignatius College Prep, in my hometown of Chicago, IL; there, taught by the Jesuits, I took classes ranging from religious philosophy, to classical Latin and Greek, to Ancient Roman history. While noble pursuits, these subjects were just not applicable enough

for the direction I wanted to take with my career; it seemed to me that the teaching style in the United States was more theoretically-minded, as opposed to practical-minded.

After finishing high school, I decided to take a gap year and lived abroad in Paris, France, to learn the language and learn about the culture. It was there that I met a lot of international students who were studying in universities outside their home countries – much like what

I am doing now. It seemed to me like such a marvelous idea to expand one's horizons while still receiving a quality education – so I researched countless universities, placing differing priorities on the language of instruction, programme details, methods of



Brian (third from the right) with students

education, location, etc. My coming to City University of Hong Kong was the culmination of such efforts.

To be honest, I was quite nervous when I had decided to spend the next three years of my life in a city I had never been to before, but, as we say back home, worrying is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but in the end, you don't get anywhere. Needless to say,

my worries were completely unfounded, as I have loved every aspect of my life so far at CityU. I feel that the courses strike the perfect balance between theory and practical application, and I have indeed been learning with an international perspective.

Brian Isaacs, from United States
Year 2 student in BBA Business Economics
(Cohort 2009)

Love Transforms Our Lives

Yum cha with students, hiking, BBQ, attending CityU Banquet organized by Students Union, joining career sharing dinner with alumni... I did not expect there would become part of my life when I joined the Department of Economics and Finance in the 1980s. I was then preoccupied with a traditional concept of education, which suggests learning activity means no more than attending classes. However things change as time goes by. The



Luk Yu Tea House

social activities that I joined with students are now considered as part of their learning. I always reflect upon myself – what powers me to go beyond the classroom and get in touch with students? What makes me so involved in

their activities? I found that it is love that makes me care about them. It is love that transforms my academic life throughout these twenty years.



Hiking in Tai Po

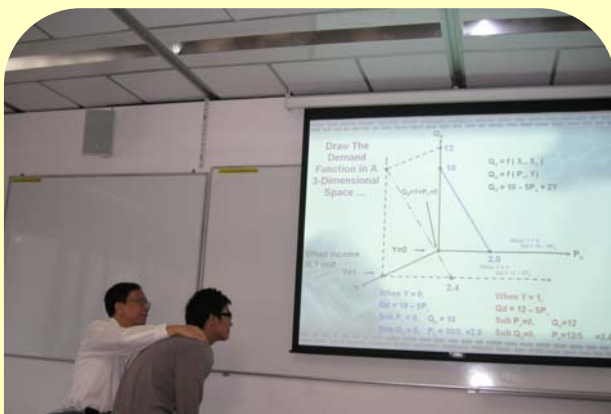
Embarking a Career in Education

All start from my endeavor for Economics. Ever since I first encountered with this subject in my undergraduate years, I have attached to it. The beauty of Economics lies in its power to explain the complexity of this world. Economists are trained to capture the essence of real world phenomenon to formulate simple but comprehensive models and theories. Such theories when interpreted by a trained mind can extricate complicated economic problems and give us insight into the way how people interact to channel resources with the purpose to satisfy their own needs.

Economics, being acclaimed as the queen of social science, is not only powerful in explaining human behavior, it does, I believe, also provide the training essential to a student's intellectual development no matter what his/her major is. They are required to have a thorough understanding of major economics concepts, be observant to the world around us, relate economics theories to real world phenomena formulate sound arguments on economic issues and present the arguments in a logical way. Students having undergone this systematic training will be academically competent and proficient in other generic skills. With my strong belief in the value of economics education, I decided to dedicate myself to nurturing young people. This inspired me a career in education.

Evolving my Pedagogical Approaches

Joining CityU is the first step to fulfill my ambition in education. My role as a teacher is to deliver knowledge and guide them to think like an economist. Every student is a unique individual. There is no single pedagogical approach suitable for all. Throughout the years, I have been evolving my teaching method so as to make learning most effective for majority of the students. I used to conduct my classes in a traditional mode – there was only lecturing which is a rather passive



Viewing shift in demand curve with student

learning approach for students. Later I found that two-way interaction between instructor and students can actually arouse their interest. I then tried to cultivate a lively learning environment by introducing some interesting real-life economic cases in my class, allowing

time for in-class discussion during lectures and getting them involved in other classroom activities.

I have also realized a difference in learning pattern between science and business students. Business students learn better with graphs and diagrams while science students are more prone to hard facts and equation. Having observed so, I redesigned my teaching materials for BBA classes. Beginners may find economic theories difficult to comprehend. I therefore included a lot of concept maps in my PowerPoint presentation to illustrate complicated economic models so as to “visualize” the abstract concepts. No single theory can explain the diversity in the market and Economics is characterized by a bundle of models. Such models are intertwined with each others. Economics training emphasizes the ability to consolidate these models and explain a particular market phenomenon with reference to an appropriate one. To guide students through this learning process, I have conglomerated major economic theories into one mind map, showing how different theories and models are related. This helps them synthesize what they have learnt throughout the whole course.

Experiential Learning

As our world becomes more dynamic, learning should not be confined to classroom.



Yanjing Beverage Group, Beijing

Students need to get more real life experience in order to prepare themselves for future

challenges. Therefore we launched co-curricular activities such as internship programmes and exchange programmes. I am currently overseeing our departmental co-curricular activities. Every year, we place students in both local and Mainland



Merlion, Singapore

companies. Previous interns have usually commented that the internship opportunity is a valuable experience. We also send students to overseas universities for one-semester exchange, arousing their cultural awareness, enhancing their language skills and broadening their international perspectives.

My care for students extends to their post-university life. It is my practice to keep contact with our alumni and I would like to hear their bitter and sweet stories. I always



Recent graduates

invite our alumni to share with our current students their life experience and advise our final year students over their career plans. I wish to build up a strong bonding among our alumni and current students so that our alumni

can keep informed about our recent development and, at the same time, our students learn from their seniors' experience.



Graduates in front of past campus of CityU in Mongkok

Education Research

One cannot make a good teacher without much understanding in the students. This is why I began to dive into education psychology and engage in teaching and learning research. It is interesting to know how deep learners, surface learners and achieving learners adopt different learning strategies in their study. Their learning motivation is a useful piece of information for



Student mentors

me to formulate my teaching plan. In recent years, CityU has introduced the Outcome

Based Teaching and Learning (OBTL). Therefore I am also conducting research on how students' learning approaches are affected under OBTL for evaluating the effectiveness of this new initiative.

Looking Ahead

In the past two decades, I have been going through different stages. I have abandoned the passive teaching approach and adopted a more interactive one. My initial position as a teacher had changed to student activities coordinator when I realized the importance of

these activities in students' development. I also found that education research can improve teaching and learning. What motivates me to go through these changes is my genuine concerns for my students. This is what I meant by "Love transforms our lives". Looking ahead, I embrace any changes and I anticipate that such changes will carry on throughout my career.

Dr. To Ming Ho, Associate Professor
Recipient of Teaching Excellence Award
1997

2nd Runner Up Prize in the HKSFA Competition



From Left to Right: Chan Kwun Wa, Ai Zhongcheng, Qin Xuelu, Lam Chun Yik, Dr. Lim Kok Chew (Director of Undergraduate Programs for EF department)

Our CityU team (in photo) comprising two Business Economics and two Finance Year-3 students won the 2nd runner up prize in the HKSFA (The Hong Kong Society of Financial Analysts) competition. Hong Kong Baptist University won the first prize, followed by The University of Hong Kong and CityU. The other teams were from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Lingnan University and Shue Yan University.

Recent Teaching and Learning Activities

Orientation:

- First Mentor-Mentee Meeting, 12 August 2009
- EF Departmental Student Orientation, 28 August 2009

Learning Support:

- Staff-Student Consultative Meetings, 29 September 2009 and 5 February 2010
- Programme Briefing and Dinner for Foundation Year Students, 13 October 2009
- Banquet in CityU (with EF Student Representatives and Non-Local Students), 21 October 2009
- Meeting with Guests from University of Victoria, Canada, 6 November 2009
- Departmental Outing for MSc Students, 24 January 2010
- EF-CCIV Study Tour 2010
- Student Exchange Programme 2009/2010
- Peer-Assisted Learning Scheme (PALSI) (FB2400, Semester A, 2009/10; and FB2401, Semester B, 2009/10)
- Undergraduate Mentoring Programme 2009/2010

Professional Support:

- Professional Mentoring Programme 2009/2010
- Business Elites Seminar Talk (BEST) 2009/2010
 1. Topic: “A Career in Private Equity” by Mr. Carleton Man, 26 September, 2009
 2. Topic: “Future of Hong Kong & Mainland China as Financial Centres” by Mr. Simon Ting, 10 October, 2009
 3. Topic: “Career Planning and the Bull and Bear Cycle” by Mr. Charles Lo, 7 November, 2009
 4. Topic: “Public Housing in Hong Kong - From Shelter to Home” by Ms. Cora Ho, 14 November, 2009
 5. Topic: “Prospects of Global Real Estate Markets and Securities” by Dr. Nelson Wong, 21 November, 2009
 6. Topic: “Valuation of Intangibles - Theory and Practice” by Mr. Brett Shadbolt, 30 January, 2010
 7. Topic: “Financial Crisis and Regulatory Response” by Mr. Keith Lui, 6 March, 2010
 8. Topic: “Ethics in Finance: more to it than meets the eye” by Mr. Karl Lung, 13 March, 2010
 9. Topic: “Alumni Career Experience - Sharing Forum” by Mr. Carles Fan, Mr. Carleton Man, Mr. Chris Tse and Mr. Thomas Kwan, 20 March, 2010
 10. Topic: “Derivative Products and Financial Crisis” by Mr. Kee C. Goh, 27 March, 2010
 11. Topic: “Structuring New Financial Engineering Products” by Mr. Carles Fan, 10 April, 2010

Career Preparation:

- Career Seminars/Workshops organized by External Affairs Unit
 1. CV + Interview Skills Workshop, 14 August 2009
 2. Job Opportunities in Asset Management, 22 September 2009
 3. Career Training Programme - Benchmarking Yourself to the Business Arena (3 days), 1, 10, 11 October 2009
 4. Development in Financial Planning, 23 October 2009
 5. Prudential "Elite MT Programme" Briefing Session, 23 November 2009
 6. Recruitment Talk by PPCG: Building a Career in the Financial Sector, 7 January 2010
 7. CV + Cover Letter Workshop, 8 January 2010
 8. CV + Cover Letter Workshop, 12 February 2010
 9. Recruitment Talk by CASH Financial Services Group Limited, 24 February 2010
 10. Recruitment Talk by Sun Hung Kai Financial, 30 March 2010
 11. Briefing Session: Apprenticeship Programme 2010, 18 May 2010
- Beijing/Chongqing Internship (Christmas 2009)
- Winter Internship – Money Concept Co., Winter Break 2009/2010
- Departmental Internship Programme 2009/2010 (including AIA, The Climate Group, Deloitte, DZ Bank, Guoco Group, Hang Seng Bank, Hong Kong Housing Society, Hong Kong Monetary Authority Placement Student Programme, Morgan Creek Capital Management, National Australia Bank, New York Life, Prudential, Shenyin Wanguo Securities (HK) Ltd., Wing Hang Bank, Wing On Departmental Store Ltd.) organized by EF External Affairs Unit.
- Internship Programmes organized by College of Business (FB3800) and Student Development Services (SDS).

(Details of the teaching and learning activities listed above can be found on the website “EF’s Co-curricular Learning Centre”, which is located at <http://www.cb.cityu.edu.hk/ef/learning/>)