Necessity is the Mother of Invention: Conducting a Distance Learning Course for Students in China

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Today’s Session

- How course was conducted
- What interests Chinese students about U.S. philanthropy?
- Empirical evidence from the course
- Challenges faced and managed
- How to apply the lessons learned in the future
Learning Goals

• Understand one model of distance learning
• Appreciate Chinese cross-cultural issues
• Take away at least one method to apply to your own courses
Overview of the Course

• 10 weeks, 50 students enrolled

• General topics
  – Political system & Religion
  – Giving & Funding
  – Scope of Nonprofit Sector & Specific Organizations

• Grading based on
  – CN discussions
  – Paper & presentation with interim deliverables
  – Final Examination

• Adobe Connect and Course Networking (CN)
Innovations

- Sustainable, National, Small Donations
- Nationally-Coordinated Door-to-Door Drives
- Free Patient Care
- Celebrities
- Poster Child
Miao Guo, Understanding ... , beijing natural ...

Posted on Jan 10, 2013, Shown 277 times

Recently, we take a lesson about social enterprise. It represents that some enterprises aim to solve the social problem but not to make profits. Combining business methods to earn money as much as they can but not share out bonus. They pay attention to creation and record the development of individual. But I still have a question, nowadays some non-profit organizations more and more pay close attention to self-development and they advocate launching more services to earn money but also not to share out bonus. I think social enterprise are similar with some of non-profits, but I wanna get if there are some distinction between each other.

Peirong Wen, Beijing Normal ...

In my opinion, the social enterprises focus more on the social innovations, they made a new way to service people, especially the vulnerable group. In addition, they can solve problems of employment.

William Clevella, IUPUI

Many nonprofits have earned income. Of course, they cannot give profits to owners. However, some employees may have incentives built into their contracts that seem like bonuses. I am not sure, however, exactly what your question is. If you can rephrase it, I could answer it better.

Miao Guo, beijing natural ...

Maybe, my question is if social enterprise can replace nonprofit organizations for it can be more effective, and the same function with some nonprofit why there are also exist some same function nonprofit. Or if nonprofit and social enterprise can be transition together.
Practical Limitations

• Scarcity of qualified faculty to teach philanthropy, especially in China

• Overcoming time & distance

• Cultural and Language Differences
  – Understanding of philanthropy
  – Religion & democracy
  – No United Way & few Community Foundations
  – Course taught completely in English, only exams bilingual
Why do Chinese Students Need to Learn about U.S. Philanthropy?

• 493,000 registered nonprofits in China and increasing in number
• Many more nonprofits not registered
• Need to train leaders to build a civil society: students are demanding this
• Adapt ideas from the more institutionally mature U.S. nonprofit sector
Empirical Data

• Overall course grades
  – 46 of 50 students completed course, 42 passed

• Compare similar questions on pre-test & final exam
  – Students taking pre-test outperformed others on final
  – Final exam better performance than pre-test

• Survey at end of course: 44 of 46 responses

• Follow-up survey in June: 26 responses
Value of the Cross-Cultural Experience

• Improvement in English
• First experience of formal distance learning
• American-style course
• Appreciate differences and similarities between the U.S. and China
• Insight into another country’s nonprofit sector allows reflection on home country’s situation
Philanthropic Studies Concentrators, n=26

June Survey with 5-point Likert Scale

• Students supportive of topics covered in class
  – Of 16 topics, average rating ranged from 3.38-4.48
  – Social Entrepreneurship, Ethics, & Funding rate highest

• Applicability to China critical
  – 54% of responses specify personal benefit from course
  – Criteria for offering course in the future

• Future offerings of this course
  – 73% of responses would take course again
  – 81% think students should take it in the future
  – 69% think course should be required for concentrators
Did this Work? Student Feedback, n=44
Survey with 7-point Likert Scale

• Lecture slides with notes & draft paper comments: Avgs. 6.30 & 6.32
• Internet research about specific nonprofits & knowledge of organizations: Avgs. 5.45 & 5.56
• English skills, especially reading: Avg. 5.3
• CN for discussions: Avg. 5.07
• Students appreciate professionalism of instructor
Indispensable Course Elements

• Capable and responsible teaching assistants
• Reliable internet connection
• CN discussions
• Interim deliverables to keep each team’s course paper project on track
Challenges

• Distance learning problematic – 7 point Likert scale
  – Lectures rated 3.75
  – Instructor accessibility rated 3.96
  – Adobe Connect rated 4.11

Specific Comments
  – Speak too quickly, quality of sound
  – Screen images inadequate in classroom
  – Hard for some students to stay motivated

• Contractual arrangements
• Schedule changes
What to do Differently Next Time...

- Provide recorded lectures to students, not live
- Classes focus on student – instructor interaction
- Individual student access to Adobe Connect
- Schedule specific office hours
- Provide some of course online and some in person
- Coordinate course with formal English language class to help overcome language differences
- More documents in Chinese
Generalizable Lessons

• Language is a substantial issue
  – Written word is essential, speak slowly
  – Speak to students in pairs for translation help
  – Translate key documents
  – Engage outside resources
  – Prerequisites?

• Use class time to interact with students
  – Record lecture for pre-class review by students
  – Arrange assignments to draw students to technology
  – Keep students on track with interim deliverables
Summary

• Chinese students are eager to learn about U.S. Philanthropy and apply learning to China
• Distance learning effectively taught students
• Effective model can be improved
• Methods used can be applied elsewhere
Questions

• How can resources be leveraged to teach topics like philanthropy and nonprofit management?
• What advantages come to the classroom when two cultures meet there?
• What techniques used in this model can be applied at my own institution?

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