

# **Learning and Teaching Statement**

## **Lingnan University**

### **Rationale and Objectives**

This statement of learning and teaching at Lingnan University is intended to assist in the ongoing journey towards developing a more comprehensive and complete framework that provides a rich, broad-based and fulfilling liberal arts student experience. The document is intended to:

- draw from the literature those facets that are recognized to be good learning and teaching strategies;
- highlight and celebrate the long tradition of a liberal arts education practised at the University;
- help identify strategies and future directions for the development of the unique Lingnan learning and teaching environment;
- identify areas of strength in the current learning and teaching environment, and those that would benefit from further development;
- further develop synergies between learning, teaching, community engagement, and the scholarship of the teaching; and
- encourage self-reflection on, and collective review of best practices in teaching, learning, programme review, and in the professional development of academic staff as teachers.

### **The Lingnan Mission**

The Lingnan University model for Learning and Teaching derives from the Liberal Arts tradition of a broadly based curriculum where a student-centred approach to learning and teaching is paramount. At Lingnan, students experience curricula in which higher levels of intellectual discourse requiring analytical thinking and independent research capabilities are considered fundamental to the student experience.

Learning and teaching at Lingnan does not simply involve the formal periods in the classroom. The learning and teaching environment at Lingnan is predicated on small group teaching, close staff–student relationships and a rich student experience, including the integrated learning programme (ILP), Service-Learning, hostel life, and student societies. In addition, the Lingnan model embraces innovative teaching and learning practices that include internships, overseas field trips, language immersion studies, directed research projects, blended learning and cooperative learning, along with inquiry- and case-based learning.

The key aims of the University, and of the multidimensional approach to learning and teaching, are to instill a sense of civic duty in Lingnan students, and to cultivate skills, competencies and sensibilities that enable graduates to thrive within, and contribute to, a rapidly changing social, cultural and economic environment. Thus, the undergraduate education experience at Lingnan aims to produce graduates who possess the following attributes:

Scholarly and Interdisciplinary:

- LU graduates will have a secure grounding in a chosen academic field(s) and cross-disciplinary applications.

**Digitally Literate:**

- LU graduates will have proficiency in technology.

**Skilled Communicator:**

- LU graduates will have excellent communication skills, including oral and written English and Chinese (Putonghua as well as Cantonese) skills.

**Critical and Analytical:**

- LU graduates will demonstrate independent critical thinking and strong analytic competence.

**Creative and Entrepreneurial:**

- LU graduates will be creative problem-solvers and be capable planners, and entrepreneurs.

**Committed to Service:**

- LU graduates will have a commitment to service to the community.

**Glocally Minded:**

- LU graduates will have a global and local (a Glocal) outlook with the ability to understand various cultural perspectives.

**Personally and Socially Responsible:**

- LU graduates will have tolerance, integrity, civility and a sense of responsibility.

**Committed to Life-long Learning:**

- LU graduates will have a desire for life-long learning.

**Internationalisation**

The University is committed to expanding the horizons of students, particularly in terms of internationalisation. Strengthening the internationalisation of the student body has been accomplished by actively supporting inbound and outbound student exchange programmes, recruitment of non-local undergraduate students, securing and sustaining partnerships with overseas and Mainland universities, offering a variety of international Service-Learning programmes and summer institutes, as well as providing a wide-range of activities and programmes to enhance the integration between local and non-local students. The University's international recognition has also been enhanced by engaging in a range of international practices and activities involving students, faculty members, and supported by pro-active policies and programmes.

**Good principles for effective university teaching**

*Teaching in Higher Education “starts from the premise that University teachers ... take the main responsibility for what and how their students learn ... and it is the teacher's responsibility to create the conditions in which understanding is possible, and the students responsibility is to take advantage of that” (Laurillard, 1993, Introduction).*

The learning and teaching environment at Lingnan University is predicated on a liberal arts philosophy and fostering student attainment of the Lingnan University Graduate Attributes. There are a number of principles that may be considered central to this philosophy. They are:

- significant and strong relationships between students and staff in order to improve student engagement, motivation and managing their intellectual development;
- the development of readiness for lifelong learning;
- the development and creation of a learning environment that emphasizes active learning amongst students;
- a curriculum that provides both summative and formative feedback in a timely fashion;
- developing a culture of reflective practice, including responding to student feedback, in order to inform and improve the learning and teaching environment.

This Statement also affirms that while there is no one single ‘best’ way to teach, the research literature has identified a number of factors that are generally agreed to be indicative of good teaching. They include:

- |                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ➤ communicating and sharing the passion a teacher holds for their subject;                                                                     | ➤ developing a curriculum in which the activities and materials stimulate, and engage students in active learning;              |
| ➤ the capacity to make the learning outcomes very clear, including what students have to demonstrate, the level required, and the reasons why; | ➤ encouraging and supporting student independence;                                                                              |
| ➤ a focus on key concepts and addressing students misconceptions rather than covering content;                                                 | ➤ providing high quality and timely feedback about student work;                                                                |
| ➤ the ability to adapt and improvise when the occasion calls for it;                                                                           | ➤ explaining content and concepts, using clear and appropriate language, and engaging students at their level of comprehension; |
| ➤ carefully designed assessment tasks which are aligned with the intended learning outcomes;                                                   | ➤ responding to and learning from student feedback, using this as one of the bases for improving learning and teaching.         |

### **Engaging students actively in learning**

A wealth of research literature shows that encouraging students to adopt a deep approach to learning results in higher level, and higher quality learning outcomes. Students who adopt a deep approach to learning are also more likely to be satisfied with their learning experiences. Paramount to the student approach to their learning is the manner in which individual instructors design their curricula and the learning experiences and activities to engage students’ curiosity and interest. Effective teaching focuses on, and has an explicit expectation that students should be aiming to achieve higher level learning outcomes.

At Lingnan, academic staff are encouraged to take utmost care in crafting teaching methodologies that require students to adopt an active role in the learning process. One key aspect of this is ensuring that students perceive that there is clear alignment between the intended learning outcomes and the course-related activities that they are required to undertake.

Another key aspect is that the students receive high-quality and frequent feedback, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will achieve high quality learning outcomes.

Cooperative learning, inquiry-based, case-based and/or problem-based learning have all been shown to increase student engagement in their learning and are central to the Lingnan experience. Problem-based learning is commonly used to help students consolidate the theories and concepts they have learned and to apply them in real situations, thereby enriching their learning experiences and strengthening their problem-solving skills. Problem-based assessment tasks are adopted, for example, in the forms of projects, where students work individually or in teams to engage their active, independent and cooperative learning of the subject matter. Course instructors shall articulate the problem-based approach more explicitly to students in class, especially when some assignments for that purpose are given to students. For courses which emphasize and depend upon learning designs that involve student collaboration and/or cooperation, it is especially important that the teachers ensure that desired individual student contributions and student accountability are clearly articulated in the documentation given to students about the curriculum design, intended learning outcomes, and in assessment guidelines, task briefings or rubrics.

Learning at Lingnan extends well beyond the classroom. The co-curriculum supports a raft of opportunities for students to engage in activities that involve them actively in developing knowledge, skills and life-long learning habits. For example, the ILP, student-mentoring and student exchange programmes, university requirements for service-learning, hostel life, and student societies all offer opportunities for students to learn and develop the skills and knowledge expected of a Lingnan Graduate.

### **Aligning the curriculum**

Curriculum alignment, whereby the intended learning outcomes and the means by which students are required to demonstrate these outcomes, need to be articulated, shared and explained to students. The Biggs model (Table 1) of curriculum alignment is one that has wide support from institutions around the globe and in the research literature. It is important that the focus of curriculum design is on achieving the intended student learning outcomes at the course and programme levels. It follows that course outlines, provided to students at the beginning of the term specify the intended learning outcomes, describe the assessment tasks, through which students are required to demonstrate their level of achievement of the learning outcomes, and clearly indicate what other course-related activities are required of students, whether within or outside the classroom. Course outlines also need to state and explain the course aims, summarize the content coverage, indicate required readings or other reference materials, and provide guidance on optional resources.

Table 1: Curriculum alignment

| <b>Teaching Activities</b>                                                                                               | <b>Curriculum Outcomes</b>                                                                                                                                           | <b>Assessment Tasks</b>                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Intended to support students to develop modes of study that promote their achievement of the intended learning outcomes. | Are described (with the use of appropriate verbs) in a manner that makes it clear to students the learning outcomes the teaching activities are designed to support. | The range of assessment tasks provide the means for students to demonstrate their learning outcomes. |

(After Biggs, 1999, 2003)

For courses that are taught by more than one teacher and/or a number of concurrent sections, it is expected that a single document will articulate what students will experience if they take the course, regardless of the section they are in. Such a document will specify a common framework, while indicating where there is flexibility or leeway in the assessment tasks expected of students. For example, students in all sections may perform a common assessment task, which is assessed with reference to a common consensus rubric or common set of assessment criteria, but with a choice of topics.

### **Engaging in effective assessment practices**

In Hong Kong, the University Grants Committee has mandated an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning. There is an expectation that institutions will move towards the adoption of criterion-based models of evaluating student performance on assessment tasks. Within Lingnan University's assessment guidelines, the principles of fair, open and transparent assessment practices have been more fully articulated. In summary, the following are expected:

- Students will be aware of the criteria for each assessment task, and will know how to apply them;
- Instructors will clearly articulate to students what the assessment requirements and marking processes are;
- Within each programme, the various assessment tasks will together reflect the broad-based nature of a Liberal arts curriculum;
- Assessment tasks will encompass both breadth across and depth within a subject domain;
- Within each course, one or more of the assessment tasks will provide substantial opportunity for students to demonstrate outstanding performance relative to the academic level of the course;
- Within each course, students will be provided with timely feedback as to their academic progress and guidance on how they might further improve.

It is also acknowledged that there will be a steady progression in the level of difficulty and demands made upon students as they move closer to graduation. Further details regarding the assessment guidelines may be found in the Lingnan University Assessment Guidelines document.

### **Promotion of quality teaching practices**

As a Liberal Arts University with a strong commitment to high quality teaching, Lingnan University recognizes the importance of adopting rigorous metrics for evaluating teaching, along with a means of recognizing and rewarding excellent teaching. All courses undergo student evaluation using the Course Teaching and Learning Evaluation instrument. Such information is used:

- as evidence for confirmation of probation in the first year of employment as a teacher;
- to support applications for contract renewal, tenure or promotion;
- as part of the evidence required for teaching awards;
- as a component of teachers' curriculum vitae; and
- as material to support personal reflections by the teacher.

One of the key drivers for promoting and supporting excellent teaching is the Teaching Excellence Awards Scheme. This biennial event seeks to identify individual teachers who have clearly demonstrated:

- a high level of competence across a wide range of teaching skills;
- strong commitment to the requirements of the discipline;
- deep concern for student learning;
- passionate interest in the continual improvement of teaching and the development of teaching innovations; and
- devoted contributions to the design/administration of courses and/or programmes.

### **Blending the learning environment: The place of eLearning**

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the context of education (eLearning) continues to grow and develop and is having a major impact on the student learning experience at all levels: social, academic and professional. Through the Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning, the Library, and the Information Technology Services Centre, the University provides considerable support for the use of ICTs as powerful means of enriching and enhancing teaching and learning, and of facilitating the assessment of learning outcomes. While there is no mandated use for ICTs within the University, blended learning pedagogies such as flipped classroom, classroom response systems, are encouraged to complement with face-to-face teaching; furthermore, search engines, online scholarly resources, networking and collaboration tools, and other ICTs offer powerful opportunities for teachers and students alike to engage, collaborate, and communicate more effectively while undertaking research, analysis, writing, and other academic work, and to reconceptualize the learning and teaching environment in the light of contemporary affordances.

Many professional fields, into which many of Lingnan's graduates routinely go, require significant skills in the use of ICTs, and the University has taken a major step, mandating the introduction of a compulsory Information Technology Fluency test together with self-study resources to ensure that students become sufficiently ICT literate.

### **Addressing quality in teaching and learning**

The University is committed to maintaining excellence in teaching and learning and actively supports evidence gathering processes (e.g., analysis of data about student performance on core assessment tasks, evaluations of teaching effectiveness and courses, achievement of Graduate Attributes, Alumni and Employer feedback) that gather feedback from students and staff in order to continuously improve the student experience and maximize student learning outcomes and Graduate Attributes. The evidence is disseminated to appropriate groups and/or individuals. The information gathered demonstrates that the development of Lingnan University Graduate Attributes is highly correlated with the academic experiences of the students, particularly in the realm of development of critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, self-managed learning, and problem solving skills. There is also substantive evidence that the unique nature of the Liberal Arts philosophy and the Lingnan student experience of small class sizes and close teacher-student relationships are seen by many students as some of the most important and defining features of their university experiences. In addition, the co-curriculum

is evaluated on an annual basis and provides further evidence of the value students place on the breadth of experience provided by the university.

### **The Core Curriculum**

As a key element of the 4-year curriculum introduced in 2012, the Core Curriculum aims to provide students with a broad and balanced foundation, and exposure to the necessary range of subjects under the new academic structure in which a cohesive and all-round education is emphasised. In the new curriculum, the Core Curriculum is one of the keys to achieving the broad goals of a Liberal Arts education.

The Core Curriculum forms an essential part of the undergraduate curriculum experienced by students. The core curriculum courses are not just a peripheral or additional year of foundation study, but will be embedded and integrated with the major disciplines throughout their four years of study to ensure continuity between the core and majors as well as contributing to the development of the Lingnan University Graduate Attributes and providing evidence for progression of student development. The Core Curriculum is expected to provide a firm intellectual foundation for Lingnan students, enhancing their ability to think critically and tackle social, cultural, moral and ethical problems rationally.

### **Service-Learning**

Service-Learning is an integral part of the Lingnan University learning experience. It offers students opportunities to contribute to the well-being of society as a whole, and aims to foster commitment to involvement in and service to the community, develop citizenship skills and knowledge, and cultivate other Lingnan University Graduate Attributes. When undertaking Service-Learning as part of a credit-bearing course offered by an academic department, students draw on theoretical knowledge and methods acquired through academic study to inform the provision of services to the community, and to reflect on the process of civic engagement. By engaging in Service-Learning, students have the opportunity to develop many of the interpersonal and organizational skills that the University values so highly, including tolerance, civility and a sense of personal responsibility.

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