

Voyages of discovery



Special social science master's courses offer students a whole new perspective, not just on global issues but also about themselves, reports **Andrea Zavadszky**

While university programmes are often interesting and useful, they are seldom life-changing. But Wang Zhengfei, who began studying for his master's degree in September, feels that the course is already changing him and how he views his future.

Wang, who studied journalism on the mainland and was an exchange student in Sweden for a year, saw an introduction to the master of social sciences in global and Hong Kong studies (MSSGHKS) offered by The Education University Hong Kong (EUHK)

at an education and career fair, and found it very attractive.

"We are not just studying theories; the case studies are very lively and I'm learning about issues in a lot of countries. I started to feel closer to, and more caring about, human beings in general – this is a new kind of feeling," Wang says.

The course was launched this academic year and aims at developing students' multidisciplinary perspectives in the fields of politics, economics and sociology. Once students have a good grasp of the interlinked nature of economics and politics, and a

global overview through finishing four core courses in global studies, Hong Kong is placed in its global context via four other core courses. Students assess whether any lessons can be learned from other societies, and how to approach particular local problems.

According to Dr Adam Cheung Ka-lok, MSSGHKS programme director and assistant professor in the Department of Social Sciences at EUHK, the course is unique. There are no comparable Hong Kong studies courses which, at the same time, provide such a global perspective.

“For example, a lot of people see the rise of localism as a Hong Kong problem. This course explains that although Hong Kong is unique, what we have today is also a problem in other societies. Then we turn to Hong Kong again and see if any lessons can be learned from them,” Cheung explains.

He adds that politics and economics nowadays cannot be separated, and students need to understand the international relations perspective to understand how global forces affect Hong Kong’s economy, and what is likely to be the long-term direction. These insights will offer a unique perspective on strategic planning for anyone in a business-oriented career.

“All the courses are very useful, whether it is economics, social science or culture. They are all intertwined in a big organic system. There is also more to Hong Kong than meets the eye, not just the economy,” Wang says.

There are numerous opportunities to work in groups and refine communication, leadership and teamwork skills. One such enlightening project was in the global society course on infectious diseases. As Wang’s team gathered information, they realised that transmission of diseases is only part of the problem. It is also closely connected

to the general well-being of the population, countries’ economic performance and other aspects.

“Understanding the interrelationship, we gained a clearer sense of how to predict, prevent and deal with global diseases,” Wang says.

He adds that while trying to keep up with all the most recent events, such as Brexit and Trump’s victory in the US presidential election, the course gives students a method to look at and analyse events and different angles to examine social issues. For example, when analysing the US election, the class also talk about the financial markets and how they digest events, react and move forward.

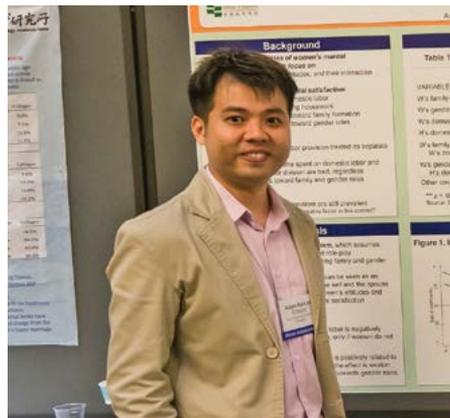
“I am so surprised they have all these perspectives I have never dreamed about,” Wang says. “We see things from many

“We see things from many different dimensions and know we have the power to change things”

- Wang Zhengfei



Leung Ting-ho (left) graduates from the master’s in social science education in Greater China studies. He chose the programme because he felt a broader understanding of the topic would help his career.



The Education University of Hong Kong, formerly the Hong Kong Institute of Education, offers a wide array of postgraduate courses. Pictured: Wang Zhengfei (left) and Adam Cheung Ka-lok (right).

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different dimensions and know we have the power to change things. It is very exhilarating. It gives you new ways to reflect on who you are and the life you want to live after the programme.”

The course is also opening up more career opportunities for Wang. Previously, he thought his career path was restricted to journalism. But when he recently visited EUHK’s career development centre, he received detailed suggestions about future job opportunities. Among the various options, his knowledge will stand him in good stead in business and even banking. He could also become a civil servant or work for an NGO and progress all the way to working for the UN.

“Now I have a broader sense of the world

and have started to see opportunities everywhere,” he enthuses.

Cheung emphasises that the mentoring system means faculty meet students one-on-one several times a year and offer advice about career choices or other questions, while potential employers are also invited to meet students through informal channels.

The university has also recently established the Academy of Hong Kong Studies Research Centre, which is spurring more and more scholarly research, and has widened options for those who wish to continue towards a PhD.

While about half the students are fresh graduates, others have worked in community organisations, political parties, journalism,

the legal profession and various industries. The course is also available part-time, and students who are currently working can benefit from being able to directly apply the theories they learn to their work.

Meanwhile, the master's in social science education in Greater China studies, also at EUHK, is a programme differentiated by an education aspect and a focus on Greater China. Launched in 2011, it gives more attention to the political economy of Greater China, as well as education at a macro level. This includes recent reform, the impact of education on society and vice versa, according to the programme's director, Dr Alfred Wu Muluan, assistant professor in the Department of Asian and Policy Studies at EUHK.

"It is a good programme for those who like social sciences. Learning about Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau provides multiple perspectives," says Wu. "Many Hong Kong students only know about the territory - and not even in depth!"

The programme is made particularly interesting by the opportunity to go on field trips. The Taiwan trip takes 10 days and students have the chance to talk with policymakers, NGOs and government leaders, and visit universities to meet academics. There are also field visits, conference and case-study workshops. Students have an opportunity to go to Shenzhen and discuss the city's healthcare reforms, and to Macau for two days, attending Macau University lectures, as well as visiting museums.

"Taiwan is unique and studying it is definitely valuable. I got a chance to talk to people from all walks of life, participate in lectures, go on a sightseeing tour, build friendships with my classmates. I had been in Taiwan before but the field visit was definitely unforgettable," says Leung Ting-ho, who now works in an administrative role at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Leung chose the programme because he felt that understanding the whole of Greater China was essential to his career

development. From this point of view, the course he found most useful was comparative social policy, which offers a comprehensive review of the concepts of social policies in the three areas studied.

Although many of the students are fresh graduates, teachers and senior managers from primary and secondary schools also find the course practical and helpful in climbing the career ladder.

"About a quarter of our students become teachers, and another quarter journalists, while others work with NGOs or in the private sector. We have students doing their PhDs in Cambridge and York, in Britain, and also in Taiwan," Wu says.

At the moment the intake is mostly from Hong Kong and the mainland, but the university is making efforts to create a more international student body and attract candidates from Southeast Asia and the Middle East. ■

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