
6. Teaching Environmental Policy at Tsinghua University—An OYCF Teaching Trip Report (Cheng CHANG)

(This teaching trip took place in Tsinghua University, April 2-25, 2003.)

Preparation

I proposed to teach “Environmental Policy” at the Department of Environmental Science and Engineering (DESE) in Tsinghua University. At the end of 2002, I discussed with the vice chair of DESE the possibility to offer a for-credit course. However, the university’s policy stipulates that a course can only be “for credit” if it can be offered for at least two consecutive years. Since the OYCF teaching program only supported one-month courses, we agreed to offer it as a departmental selective course.

I spent a lot of time preparing the course syllabus, concentrating on the focus and the structure of the teaching. Similar to what some of the previous teaching fellows had experienced, I did not know much about the size and orientation of my audience before I flew to Beijing. I tried to hire a teaching assistant (TA) before my arrival but failed. Thus, I left for Beijing knowing little besides my own teaching plan.

Once settled down at Tsinghua, I immediately appointed a TA who would help me with the logistics of the course, such as arranging for classroom space, borrowing a projector, making copies of reading assignments, and posting announcements, etc. Hiring a local teaching assistant proved to be extremely helpful.

After speaking with some faculty members, graduate and undergraduate students, I decided to tailor the course to graduate students. Because the regular semester was in session, it was difficult for undergraduates to add a non-credit course to their already heavy course load, but it was much easier for graduate students to do so since they had more or less finished required coursework.

Two days after my arrival, the office of graduate students at the department formally announced the class. The announcement was also sent to all the department members through the Internet.

I continued to revise and update the course syllabus up till the first class on April 2. In order to both fulfill the OYCF teaching requirement and finish the course by April 25, the day of Tsinghua University’s Anniversary, I designed the syllabus to be taught over nine classes from April 2 to April 25. Little did I realize that this arrangement actually allowed me to complete the course before the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak that severely hit Beijing in late April.

Course Coverage

Given the inter-disciplinary nature of environmental policy analysis, my course primarily focused on the institutional analysis of environmental policies and the experiences of western countries, the U.S. in particular. The course covered a broad spectrum of literature in the social sciences. If discussed more in depth, each topic could be developed into a full course. Since Chinese engineering students had little knowledge beyond the basics on organizations and organizational decision-making, the course was designed to provide them a chance to learn about environmental policy issues through comparative approaches and within a wider context. Table 1 summarizes

the topics that were discussed in the course. The first half of the course emphasized on the theoretical frameworks and foundations of environmental policy analysis, while the second half focused on three case studies and brief discussions of international environmental policy issues.

Table 1: Topics covered in the course

Lecture	Date	Title of the class
1	<i>Wed., April 2, 2003</i>	Introduction
2	<i>Sun., April 6, 2003</i>	Organizations and systems of administration
3	<i>Wed., April 9, 2003</i>	Decision making of organizations
4	<i>Sun., April 13, 2003</i>	Policy implementation
5	<i>Wed., April 16, 2003</i>	Economic analysis of environmental policies
6	<i>Fri., April 18, 2003</i>	Case study: Transportation pollution control and sustainable transport system
7	<i>Sun., April 20, 2003</i>	Case study: Enforcing environmental policies in the U.S.
8	<i>Wed., April 23, 2003</i>	Case study: Theory of Emission Trading and Experience in the U.S. and China
9	<i>Fri., April 25, 2003</i>	International obligations and debate on environmentalists

Teaching

The first class on April 2 attracted 17 graduate students, including both masters and PhD students. The size of the class was as expected. Besides DESE students, there were also several graduate students from the School of Public Policy and Management. Except for the materials on economic analysis, the course design suited their interests and needs very well. Most classes were held in the evenings in order to avoid time conflicts with regular classes. Each class lasted about two and a half hours, and we met two or three times a week.

Like most universities in China, almost all the classes at Tsinghua were taught as lectures with little student participation. In my class, I tried to encourage students to participate actively. At the beginning, they were not very accustomed to the teaching style and would only reveal their thoughts if I asked them to. With my continuous encouragement and stories gleaned from my experience in American classrooms, the students began to break the silence. Towards the end of the course, they actively participated in discussions, debated, and raised provocative and thoughtful questions, behaved no different from their American counterparts.

Another feature of the course is that English is the only language used throughout the course. Although I have stayed in the U.S. for more than two years, I had doubts about whether I could successfully manage a course that was entirely conducted in English. My confidence increased dramatically after the first class, in which I spent exactly two hours introducing and explaining the materials I had prepared in English. The positive feedback from the students was especially encouraging.

Drawing from personal experience, I learned that speaking in English in front of the public is the most daunting challenge for many Chinese students. During office hours, some students told me that one of the reasons that the course appealed to them was that they were encouraged to participate and to converse in English. As a side benefit, I think the course provided a unique arena for them to build their confidence in speaking English.

Besides the topics outlined in the syllabus, I also spent time discussing with the students about other subjects of interest, such as applying for graduate schools, studying and living in the U.S., and improving English language skills. Outside of class, we also had many opportunities to debate on social concerns in China. It had been an invaluable experience for me to listen to these open-minded students on many issues that are important to the country's future.

Fighting SARS in Beijing

My course had a smooth beginning but the prospects suddenly changed when SARS emerged as a serious threat.

In early April, there was no official news about the SARS situation in Beijing, but rumors about SARS were spreading. Beginning in the second week of April, more and more students chose not to attend classes, including my class. After the government formally acknowledged the gravity of the SARS outbreak in Beijing, students and faculty members became increasingly worried. Many seminars and student activities were canceled or suspended; classes that had over 10 students were asked to be divided into smaller groups, while students were given the choice of whether or not to attend classes. I was prepared to suspend my class at any time if SARS went out of control on campus. I asked the administrative staff to spray peroxyacetic acid, a strong oxidant, in the classroom everyday. When we met for classes, all the windows were opened and students were asked to sit more spaced out from each other. Given that all students at Tsinghua had been forbidden from leaving the campus, and that no student or teacher on campus had been infected, I was impressed that everyone on campus took serious precautions against SARS and behaved responsibly, without any signs of panic. So I decided to carry on the teaching. Around ten students continued to attend the rest of the classes, and we had a very good time. When I finished the last class on the night of April 25, I was overjoyed that we had successfully "defeated" the SARS epidemic in our class.

Suggestions

1. To OYCF:

First of all, the teaching program needs to obtain more publicity. We should introduce the OYCF teaching program to more Chinese universities, especially those located in the hinterland. This would benefit both the universities and future teaching fellows.

Although Tsinghua University is a leading academic institution in China, it still took me much effort to explain to its professors how the teaching program worked and why I would teach there for free. I believe that if the program were to be introduced to other universities in inland China, it might encounter even more scrutiny and skepticism. So far, the teaching program seems to rely much on personal contacts at the host universities, most of which are probably located in the eastern coastal cities. If this were the case, it would be difficult for the OYCF to achieve one of its goals to reach out to universities in the hinterland. Once the OYCF teaching program becomes better known in China, the universities would be interested in applying to host the OYCF teaching program as well. OYCF would become a strong bridge connecting Chinese universities and teaching fellows in the U.S. Once OYCF has a list of candidate universities, the screening process of the teaching fellows can be tailored to the specific needs of the various institutions.

Moreover, the lack of knowledge about the audience seems to be one of the toughest challenges to the teaching fellows. If cooperation between OYCF and the hinterland Chinese universities

can be facilitated more efficiently, teaching fellows would be able to learn more about their audience and host institutions before arrival.

In addition, a long-term partnership with certain Chinese universities might be necessary in order to make the OYCF teaching program available to undergraduate students. Although my course appealed to the needs of the graduate students in the DESE of Tsinghua University, because they had never taken such a course before, many of them had already committed to a certain research area and became much more focused than they did in their undergraduate study. An inter-disciplinary course such as mine would be better suited for the undergraduates in a Chinese engineering program. It is very difficult for the undergraduates to take an OYCF course unless the course can be incorporated into the ongoing curriculum at the university. In my case, I discussed with the chair and the vice chair of the DESE of Tsinghua University both before and after my course was held, and they both expressed the wish that I could offer the course to undergraduate students. More than once, the graduate students who took my course suggested that they would have appreciated the course more if they could have taken the course as an undergraduate, since the materials and analytical skills taught in the course would have been more beneficial to them at that point.

2. To future teaching fellows:

Finding a responsible TA at the host institution can make your teaching a lot easier. The assistant can provide helpful comments on both the overall teaching plan and the appropriateness of the course materials before you present them in your class. It is also a valuable experience for the assistant to interact directly with an American-educated scholar, which is an infrequent opportunity for most Chinese students. This arrangement is most certainly a win-win situation. In my case, although remuneration was not a consideration for the TA, I promised to pay him at the going rate at Tsinghua, which was around 550 RMB per month.

In addition, although I am unfamiliar with how other courses are taught by other OYCF teaching fellows, I would suggest that future fellows consider using English as the only language in the class. Students often appreciate the opportunity to practice their English language skills in a classroom setting.

Finally, I would like to thank OYCF for granting me the teaching fellowship. It was a remarkable experience for both the students and me. I would also like to give thanks to the students, professors and administrative staff at the DESE of Tsinghua University for their encouragement and assistance to the class. Without their understanding and support, the course would never have accomplished so much, especially under such unusual circumstances as the SARS crisis.

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