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Service-Learning for Youth Leadership

The Case of Hong Kong

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Foreword

The past 8 years have provided The Hong Kong Polytechnic University with a rare but golden opportunity to reshape our undergraduate curriculum as we underwent the move that led us from a 3-year undergraduate curriculum to a 4-year curriculum that was first implemented in the 2012/13 academic year. We boldly took the opportunity to develop a new model for nurturing graduates who are not only successful professionals, but also socially responsible citizens. I have vivid memories of the debate in the Senate meeting held in December 2010 when we decided to require all undergraduate students to take at least one three-credit Service-Learning subject before graduation. Although most Senate members supported the new 4-year undergraduate curriculum, roughly one-fourth expressed doubts about the necessity, value and feasibility of the Service-Learning requirement.

We faced three "zeroes" when we decided to require our undergraduate students to take a three-credit Service-Learning subject as a mandatory graduation requirement. First, at that time, we had "zero" credit-bearing subjects of a similar nature, although we did have some isolated community service projects. Second, although we had a handful of colleagues who had experience of non-credit-bearing Service-Learning programmes, we had "zero" teachers with relevant experience of teaching Service-Learning subjects. Third, as Service-Learning received "zero" points in major university ranking exercises, some colleagues doubted the value of our pursuing it. It was obviously a daunting challenge. However, after much soul searching, we were convinced that it was the right thing to do as we had a rare opportunity that might not offer itself again, and we had faith that our colleagues would enable us to achieve that vision. Hence, we decided to take the bold move.

We are very grateful to the small group of passionate staff who plunged into this challenge fearlessly from the outset and led the way. They started to pilot Service-Learning subjects in the summer of 2011, developing exciting projects in Hong Kong and beyond. Other colleagues began to join in and the community grew. The whole university learned together. I followed developments closely and did my best to be part of that community. I visited students and their teachers working in the field in Hong Kong. I went to Cambodia in 2014 and Kyrgyzstan in

2017 to see the teams work in challenging situations. I witnessed our students' admirable spirit and their ability to overcome obstacles, as well as how our teachers nurtured and supported them. We are justifiably proud of our teachers and students. All along, I reminded them that Service-Learning is an academic pursuit and we have to ensure the successful achievement of the learning outcomes. My feeling is that colleagues have done a good job and they have achieved beyond our expectations.

I believe that even we in the university leadership team might not at the time have fully realized the scale and complexity of the challenge ahead of us. However, we have faith in our will and ability to succeed. We had to build the programme from scratch, encouraging academic staff to buy in and write the syllabi, develop guidelines for subject proposals, design the approval mechanisms, build up a central supporting office, train teaching staff, train students in relevant practical skills and ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes. These are very demanding tasks.

In addition to developing the academic structure, we have had to learn how to manage and operate the projects. We need to solicit funding for Service-Learning projects and to develop new financial procedures specific to the context of the projects, some of which operate in developing countries that are not part of the global banking system. Furthermore, we have to build up a global network of partners: academic, non-profit and even medical and ensure that our students are challenged, but in a safe and healthy manner. We are grateful to the support from more than 150 partners, including NGOs, universities, schools and other organizations in Hong Kong, Mainland China and several overseas countries. They have helped much in identifying and providing opportunities for our Service-Learning projects over the years.

In the process, many academic staff members have been stimulated to discover new ways to apply their research in community service, and their research has, in turn, been informed by the challenges encountered in the field. The result is much more than the sum of the number of students and teachers involved in Service-Learning. It is no less than a change of culture at our university. We have mobilized the whole campus to support the students, and in turn, we have all been inspired. Everyone feels part of the effort. We are indeed becoming a more socially responsible university. This book is about what we have experienced. By publishing a book, we document our successes and challenges that have played a part in shaping the PolyU culture. I believe this book would be helpful to colleagues in the higher education sector when they wish to scale up their own Service-Learning initiatives.

Of course, we are far from perfect. There are still many challenging tasks we face. In the spirit of the digital age, we can refer to what we have done at PolyU so far as Service-Learning 1.0. We are now striving to further improve the quality of our subjects, deepen the impact of the service projects and experiment with more innovative ways to teach. We are also expanding our international cooperation, using Service-Learning as a vehicle to teach global leadership and competency, and sharing our experience with other institutions in order to promote Service-Learning outside PolyU, even outside Hong Kong and the Mainland. This is what we are

referring to as Service-Learning 2.0. Readers can look forward to a future book along these lines.

Although Service-Learning still has a score of "zero" in major university ranking exercises, we strongly believe that it is a meaningful and impactful way to promote social responsibility in university students that helps a university to thrive. I am very proud to have played a part in laying the foundation for our new education model.

Professor Timothy W. Tong
President
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Preface

There are two issues surrounding the development of contemporary university students. The first issue concerns the attributes of university students. With the changing economy, there are views arguing that besides intellectual competence, university students should also possess skills cherished in the knowledge economy, such as critical thinking, resilience, cooperation with others and integrity. Unfortunately, the need for "soft skills" in university students is commonly overlooked by university administrators who are more interested in ranking exercises. At the same time, there are studies showing that university students are in fact more egocentric and less empathetic as compared to several decades ago. Hence, how universities can help to promote the holistic development of university students, including their social–emotional competence (e.g., resilience, emotional competence and social awareness), moral character and social responsibility is an important issue to be considered. Conceptually speaking, these holistic development attributes of university students can be regarded as indicators of student well-being.

The second issue is on the social responsibility of university students. With reference to the existence of social problems such as poverty and vulnerable groups, it is important to ask how we can nurture university students, who are "intellectuals", to help build a better society. Essentially, how can university students contribute to the quality of life of the vulnerable groups and the community should be considered. In fact, there are views suggesting that universities should help university students develop their civic engagement and social responsibility. This is especially the case when university education in the public sector is usually heavily subsidized by tax money.

How can we promote psychosocial competencies and social responsibility in university students? Traditionally, classroom learning with teachers delivering abstract materials is the main form of learning in university settings. While classroom learning can help students acquire knowledge in an efficient way, it is constrained by the lack of linkage to the real world. With the growing emphasis on the importance of experiential learning, which typically highlights the importance of student reflection, active learning and learning outside the classroom, teachers are

encouraged to promote reflective learning in students. As a pedagogy, Service-Learning provides excellent experiential learning to promote student learning experience through emphasis on the active role of the learners, student reflection and application of knowledge in real-life settings with particular reference to the vulnerable groups.

There is a growing interest in Service-Learning in Western societies in the past few decades. Research findings show that Service-Learning can facilitate student learning by helping students to apply the learned materials to real life. Besides, it also promotes civic engagement and youth leadership by enriching students' understanding of the needs of the needy people and the community. Most important of all, research has shown that Service-Learning promotes quality of life of students and the service recipients. Unfortunately, although Service-Learning as a vehicle for student change has been emphasized in many North American universities, Service-Learning is just at the beginning in many Asian communities, including Hong Kong. While there are many community service projects in different Chinese societies, they are primarily related to volunteering in university students (i.e., serving without explicit intended learning outcomes). Besides, evaluation of Service-Learning in the Asian context is weak. Hence, there is a need to document experiences on Service-Learning and its impact on the well-being of different stakeholders.

Because of the curriculum reform taking place in Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University seized this valuable opportunity to revamp the undergraduate curriculum. One bold initiative in the new 4-year undergraduate curriculum, which is a pioneer in Hong Kong, is to require students to take a Service-Learning subject before graduation. There are several common intended learning outcomes in different Service-Learning subjects. In the Subject Proposal Form, it is stated that:

On completing the subject, students will be able to:

- *Apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired to deal with complex issues in the service setting,*
- *Reflect on their role and responsibilities both as a professional in their chosen discipline and as a responsible citizen,*
- *Demonstrate empathy for people in need and a strong sense of civic responsibility, and*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of the linkage between service-learning and the academic content of the subject.*

Obviously, the above intended learning outcomes are closely related to well-being on two levels. As far as the well-being of the students undertaking Service-Learning projects is concerned, the competencies and empathy developed in the study constitute enhancement in student well-being because psychosocial competence is commonly regarded as an indicator of well-being. Knowing the importance of serving and acquiring the skills of helping are reflections of the well-being of students. Concerning the well-being of the service recipients, it is expected that Service-Learning projects would promote their wellness.

Although the vision of Service-Learning (SL) at PolyU is grand, there are several questions that remain to be answered—is it possible to implement SL in a massive scale (around 4000 students undertaking Service-Learning projects every year at the steady state)? Do students welcome SL? How can SL subjects in different disciplines be developed? Does SL experience promote the well-being of the students? Does SL promote the well-being of the service recipients? As systematic research on Service-Learning in different Chinese communities is almost non-existent, there is a great need to document the related experience and distil the factors shaping the development of Service-Learning in Chinese communities.

In response to the lack of documentation of the experience and lessons learned in the implementation of Service-Learning projects in Hong Kong, this book attempts to outline the development and implementation experience of Service-Learning subjects at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. This book is a pioneer attempt to look at Service-Learning with particular reference to the experience gained at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. PolyU is the first university that makes Service-Learning requirement a graduation requirement in Hong Kong. In terms of students taking Service-Learning per year (around 4200 in 2017/18 academic year), it is probably the largest number in the world. In this book, we describe the background of the SL initiative at PolyU. Besides, selected Service-Learning projects in different disciplines are described. In each case, the subject being offered, service site(s), service projects completed, evaluation findings and reflections of teachers will be highlighted. The opportunities and future directions for SL development at PolyU are also discussed. It is our hope that this book will stimulate thinking and sharpen the thoughts of educators, administrators and those who want to promote quality of life of students and service recipients through Service-Learning.

Kowloon, Hong Kong   Daniel T. L. Shek
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Chapter 1
Development of the New 4-Year Undergraduate Program in Hong Kong

Daniel T. L. Shek

Abstract To address the problems of the old 3-year undergraduate degree structure modeled after the British higher education system, a new 4-year undergraduate degree structure was implemented in 2012/13 academic year in Hong Kong. In this chapter, the background of the undergraduate curriculum reform is outlined. With reference to The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the development of the new undergraduate degree program is described. For the extra undergraduate year, the General University Requirements (GUR) was developed. There are several components of the GUR, including Freshman Seminar, Language and Communication Requirements, Cluster Area Requirements, Leadership and Intrapersonal Development, Service-Learning, and Healthy Lifestyle Program. To evaluate the impact of the GUR on the students, a longitudinal evaluation study was conducted. Results showed that the GUR was able to promote the holistic development in students. In particular, the evaluation findings showed that the Leadership and Intrapersonal Development and Service-Learning Requirements are the signature programs which can help students develop in a holistic manner.

Keywords Curriculum reform · The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Leadership · Service-learning · Holistic student development

1.1 Introduction

Before 1997, Hong Kong was a British colony. During this period, Hong Kong adopted the British education system. With specific reference to higher education, the duration of university education was 3 years preceded by 5 years of secondary education (Form 1–Form 5) and 2 years of matriculation education (Form 6 and Form 7). Under this system, students had to take two public examinations—the

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Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination at Form 5 and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination at Form 7.

Undoubtedly, the British higher education has produced many outstanding graduates and it is still very influential in the commonwealth countries. However, there are also many criticisms of the 3-year university system (Jaffee, 2012). Primarily, the British education system has been criticized for its early disciplinary training because students have to specialize in different streams when they reach Form 4. In the university years, students are commonly required to declare their major study very early, with some programs requiring the students to complete many major subjects in their freshman year. Second, because of the early streaming emphasis, students are not exposed to many non-major-related disciplines. This is in sharp contrast to the liberal arts education in North America where the students are encouraged to take general education subjects in their undergraduate years. Finally, as the students are not given adequate exposure, it can be argued that their development is not holistic in nature. The above problems are summarized in the report of the Hong Kong Education Committee that "learning effectiveness of students remains not very promising; learning is still examination-driven and scant attention is paid to 'learning to learn.' School life is usually monotonous; students are not given comprehensive learning experiences with little room to think, explore and create. The pathways for lifelong learning are not as smooth as they should be. To make up for these weaknesses, we need to uproot outdated ideology and develop a new education system that is student-focused" (Hong Kong Education Commission, 2000, p. 4). Obviously, there is a strong need to restructure the higher education system to address the above-mentioned issues associated with the old 3-year undergraduate program.

With the handover of Hong Kong back to China in 1997, there is a good opportunity to reconsider the possible changes in the education system with reference to three points. First, as the 4-year undergraduate degree structure is adopted in China, changing the education system in Hong Kong will create a better transition for students. Second, with the general shift from the manufacturing economy to the service economy in the global context, there is a need to rethink about whether the higher education system can nurture the attributes of ideal graduates, such as critical thinking and communication skills. Against the above background, Hong Kong Education Commission (2000) proposed a reform of education in the academic structure, curricula and assessment of secondary and higher education with the vision to promote lifelong learning, and holistic development in university students. Regarding the goal of higher education, it should not only enable "students (to) master the necessary knowledge and skills for specific professions/disciplines", but also "give them exposure to other learning areas and help them develop a sense of integrity, positive attitude, a broad vision and important generic skills" (Hong Kong Education Commission, 2000, p. 9). Starting from 2012/13 academic year, all universities supported by government funding changed from

a 3-year undergraduate program to a 4-year undergraduate program. For the additional year created, it is expected that it will be used for general education regardless of the specialization or career aspirations of the students.

The education reform was based on a thorough and comprehensive examination of the education system in Hong Kong, which attempted to tackle the issues such as specialization at an early stage (streaming at an early stage), morbid emphasis on examination, the practice of passive learning as well as the lack of emphasis on critical thinking, creative thinking, and lifelong learning. To broaden the learning experience of the students, the 4-year undergraduate education focuses on the breadth and depth of university education with an emphasis on holistic student development. According to the Hong Kong Education Commission (2000), the new 4-year higher education aims "to develop students' independent and critical thinking, creativity and ability to learn independently and to explore, in preparation for the mastering of knowledge in a certain discipline; to foster in students an aspiration for self-improvement, a positive attitude towards life and a commitment to their families, their society and their country; and to enhance students' ability to learn, live and work in a diverse social and cross-cultural environment" (p. 32–33) and it attempts to "strike the right balance between the breadth and the depth of such programs. This would, in addition to helping students master the necessary knowledge and skills for specific professions/disciplines, give them exposure to other learning areas and help them develop a sense of integrity, positive attitude, a broad vision and important generic skills" (p. 9).

According to the University Grants Committee (2002), higher education is "at the core of Hong Kong SAR's future economic development. Without a highly educated and capable workforce with the necessary developmental skills, there will be no success in building a knowledge economy, which is not simply appropriate for, but is essential to, Hong Kong's place as a developed, internationally focused community" (p. 4). While Hong Kong strives to be Asia's world city, "there is no doubt that realization of that vision is only possible if it is based upon the platform of a very strong education and higher education sector" (University Grants Committee, 2002, p. 1). Clearly, the education reform taking place in the higher education sector in Hong Kong can be regarded as a strategic move to develop a "strong" higher education sector which hopefully can positively respond to the changing economic and social environment across the globe. The new 4-year education is expected to nurture students with "generic and transferable skills" transcending specialization and will help the graduates to contribute to their work, Hong Kong, our nation and the world. Clearly, this echoes the global trend calling for strengthening the global perspective, critical thinking, and transferable skills through general education curricula in different regions, including the USA, Mainland China, Taiwan, and European countries (van der Wende, 2011; Xing, Ng, & Cheng, 2013).

1.2   New 4-Year Undergraduate Program at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU)

The overall goal of the new 4-year undergraduate curriculum at PolyU is to promote holistic development in undergraduate students. The core vision is that as learned intellectuals, graduates should not be just expected to possess professional competence alone. Instead, they should also possess other qualities such as critical thinking, communication skills, and ethical leadership. In the new 4-year undergraduate curriculum, there are six major desired attributes for graduates, including professional competence, critical thinking, effective communication, problem-solving, lifelong learning, and ethical leadership (Shek, Yu, Wu, & Ng, 2015).

Against the above background, in addition to the disciplinary-specific requirements for the major study, a new component of the undergraduate curriculum entitled "General University Requirements (GUR)" was designed and implemented in 2012/13 academic year. There are several components in the new 4-year curriculum, including Freshman Seminar (3 credits), Language and Communication Requirements (9 credits), Cluster Area Requirements (12 credits), Leadership and Intrapersonal Development (3 credits), Service-Learning (3 credits), and Healthy Lifestyle (0 credit). Based on the official documents (such as the papers of the Senate and other working groups), the details are outlined in the following sections.

1.2.1   Freshman Seminar

One of the reasons for changing the undergraduate curriculum to 4 years is that we want the freshmen to make informed choices about their major study. Hence, Freshman Seminar is included in the GUR to enable the students to gain more understanding of the broad disciplines so that they can choose their major study after having some basic understanding about their potential major programs. Besides deepening the students' understanding, this requirement also fosters creativity, problem-solving skills, and global outlook in students and helps them understand professional career development and basic spirit of entrepreneurship. Finally, the subject facilitates students' smooth transition to the university life and promotes their independent learning. The content of this requirement includes inspiring lectures and talks by experts and renowned researchers to stimulate the students and the innovative curricular components or activities that foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and global outlook in the students. For the teaching and learning activities, seminar or workshop component in small groups and freshman projects on discipline-related issue/problem inquiry are commonly employed.

1.2.2 Broadening subjects via Cluster Area Requirements, China Study Requirement, and Reading and Writing Requirements via Cluster Area Requirements

Throughout the world, general education subjects have been regarded as a useful means to broaden the intellectual development and multidisciplinary perspective of students. In many places, the Harvard model with different clusters such as culture, history, society, and technology is employed. After considering different general education models, PolyU has developed a general education model with four clusters, with at least three credits from each of the four cluster areas. The common learning goals of the four cluster areas are extracted from the official document approved by the Senate and are described below.

CAR (A): Human Nature, Relations and Development (HRD). This cluster is intended to promote students' understanding of human nature and its development from different theoretical perspectives. Through the related subjects, students will develop skills and attitudes in understanding oneself and others. Subjects from a wide range of disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, spiritual science, and arts fall within this cluster area.

CAR (B): Community, Organization and Globalization (COG). Humans do not live in a social vacuum. Subjects in this cluster area attempt to sensitize students to the nature and needs of the larger communities and societies. Through this cluster area, students will be nurtured to develop understanding in working with people in different organizations, community, and the world. Subjects related to sociology, political science, economics, management, business, and finance are relevant to this cluster area.

CAR (C): History, Cultures and World Views (HCW). In addition to human development and society, human beings develop in different cultures and there are historical changes involved. The subjects in this cluster attempt to help students inquire into the human condition in relation to others with reference to history and places. Besides, students are nurtured to appreciate ideas in other cultural traditions. Subjects in the areas of history, art, the literature, philosophy, religion, and culture fall within this cluster area.

CAR (D): Science, Technology and Environment (STE). Having a scientific mind and logical thinking is important. Hence, subjects in this cluster area attempt to help students understand scientific methods and their benefits. Besides, students are nurtured to apply scientific knowledge for sustainable development and dealing with real-life issues or problems.

There are two additional requirements within the CAR. First, to promote the communication competence of the students, students have to complete the English reading and writing requirements via one CAR subject. Similarly, to strengthen the

Chinese language skills of the students, they have to complete the Chinese reading and writing requirements. Besides, a China study-related requirement is included to help students understand the Chinese culture and Chinese society.

1.2.3 Leadership and Intrapersonal Development Requirement

As there are research findings showing that university students lack intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, how to nurture university students in a holistic manner is a grave concern. To prepare the students to lead themselves and others, they are required to successfully complete a three-credit subject in the area of Leadership and Intrapersonal Development. The objectives of the subjects designed to fulfill this requirement are to promote intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies as well as ethical leadership in university students. Regarding the objectives of this requirement, a subject in this area helps the students to understand and integrate the theories, research, and concepts on the intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities of effective leaders in the Chinese context. Besides, it promotes self-awareness, self-understanding, interpersonal skills, and self-reflection skills in students. This requirement lays the foundation for the students to become lifelong learners and develop ethical leadership.

1.2.4 Service-Learning Requirement

As learned intellectuals, students are expected to have passion about needy people and the society. Besides, students should develop a sense of social responsibility and citizenship. As Service-Learning is regarded as a vehicle to nurture citizenship and civic-mindedness as an academic subject, PolyU is committed to providing holistic education to our students through the Service-Learning requirement.

In the new 4-year curriculum, all PolyU students must successfully complete one 3-credit subject designated to meet the Service-Learning requirement. They are required to participate in substantial community service or civic engagement activities that benefit the service users or the community at large in a meaningful way. In their Service-Learning projects, the students will apply the knowledge and skills acquired from their majors or other learning experiences at the university to the community service activities. Throughout the process, we expect the students to reflect on their Service-Learning experience in order to link the theories with practice for the development of a stronger sense of ethical, social, and national responsibility.

1.2.5 Language and Communication Requirements (LCR)

To promote biliteracy in written English and Chinese and trilingualism in spoken English, Mandarin, and Cantonese, enhancement of Chinese and English language knowledge and skills is indispensable. To achieve this overall objective, four major requirements are intrinsic to LCR, including requirements in English (6 credits) and Chinese (3 credits), writing and reading requirements via the CAR subjects, and Discipline-specific Language Requirements. Besides these mandatory requirements, other language enhancement initiatives such as Read@PolyU and English Across the Curriculum are also carried out.

1.2.6 Healthy Lifestyle

To study well and adjust well in university, good health is indispensable. As such, a noncredit-bearing Healthy Lifestyle Program was designed to promote all-round development in students, covering the concepts on health and fitness, sports skills acquisition, and exercise practicum via e-learning and lectures. The subject helps students to understand the positive contribution of training or participation in sports, acquire knowledge on health (physical, social, psychological, and spiritual), appreciate the factors affecting health, reflect on values and priorities in health, reflect on one's health, and consider self-improvement.

1.3 Review of the New 4-Year Program at PolyU

Although the GUR structure was well designed, it is not clear how well these different components worked and how effectively the GUR was able to help nurture the desired graduate attributes in the students. In addition, there is a need to examine whether improvement is needed for a better implementation of the GUR in the long run. Hence, since its inception, different mechanisms have been used to evaluate the impact of the new 4-year program on the students, including the routine student evaluation strategies. In particular, to evaluate the implementation effects and effectiveness of the GUR, a 5-year longitudinal evaluation project has been implemented with the funding support by the Teaching Development Grants from 2012 to 2015 (Shek, Yu, & Ngai, 2015).

In the longitudinal evaluation study, several research questions were investigated, including: (a) How are different GUR subjects and programs offered and managed? (b) How do students and teachers view the content, teaching, and benefits of GUR subjects and programs? (c) Are there changes in the desired graduate attributes over their undergraduate study? The findings presented in this chapter are extracted from the reports on the GUR study and the published papers on the

effectiveness of the GUR study (e.g., Shek, Yu, Chai, Wu, & Ho, in press, a; Shek, Yu, & Merrick, in press, b).

To arrive at a more holistic picture about the effects of GUR on the students, seven evaluation methods based on different evaluation strategies were used. First, objective outcome evaluation was conducted. In particular, a longitudinal evaluation study using a pretest–posttest design with multiple posttest measures was carried out to look at the changes in the students. Besides looking at the developmental changes over time, two control groups (Year 3 PolyU students under the old 3-year program and Year 3 students under the new 4-year program from a sister institution) were used. Second, we used Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (CLA +) to evaluate students' changes in effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in the students. Third, the data collected from the routine student feedback questionnaires (SFQs) were analyzed to understand the views of the students on the GUR subjects. Fourth, we used the student focus group and qualitative evaluation form to conduct qualitative evaluation to understand the subjective experience of the students. Fifth, the views of teachers were collected via the teacher focus group and qualitative evaluation form. Sixth, a longitudinal case study was implemented to understand the views of the students throughout the undergraduate years. Finally, we used the repertory grid tests to understand the changes in the students after studying in the undergraduate program (Shek, Yu, Chai, Chan, & Ngai, in press; Shek, Yu, & Merrick, in press, d).

1.3.1 Longitudinal Online Survey

From the academic year of 2012/13–2015/16, a longitudinal online survey had been implemented on a sample of randomly selected students enrolled in the 4-year curriculum of PolyU in the academic year of 2012/13. The students were invited to respond to a survey questionnaire in each academic year to measure their performance with a set of developmental indicators corresponding to the five desired graduate attributes of PolyU. There were 543, 643, 566, and 538 students who completed the questionnaire in each of the 4 years, respectively. Four validated instruments were used, including Chinese Interpersonal Reactivity Index (C-IRI), Chinese Positive Youth Development Scale (CPYDS), Index of Learning Style (ILS), and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Based on the data collected over the 4 years, it can be concluded that the students developed in a positive manner over time (Shek, Yu, Wu, Zhu, & Chan, 2017).

To assess the changes in the students with reference to some comparison groups, two control groups were added to the study in 2014/15 academic year. Control Group 1 (CG1) comprised 300 students enrolled in the old 3-year curriculum of PolyU which would be phased out in the summer of 2015. Control Group 2 (CG2) consisted of 300 students enrolled in the 4-year curriculum in a comparable local university. The performance of experimental group (i.e., students participated in the four waves of the longitudinal survey) was compared with those of CG1 and CG2.

These studies showed that PolyU students in the 4-year program performed better than did these two control groups, thus giving support to the effectiveness of the new four-year program in promoting holistic development in university students (Shek, & Yu, 2017a, 2017b).

1.3.2   Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+)

Before the beginning and near the end of the academic years of 2013/14 and 2015/16, four groups of 150 randomly selected students studying in the 4-year curriculum of PolyU participated in the CLA+ test. The CLA+ is a standardized online test to assess students' competencies in problem-solving, written communication, and higher-order thinking. Group 1 included 150 first-year students who took the test before the start of 2013/14 academic year. For Group 2, 150 second-year students took the test in Semester 2 of 2013/14 academic year. We then compared the performance of Group 1 and Group 2. To understand the changes of the students over time, 150 first-year students (Group 3) completed the test before the start of 2015/16 academic year. Finally, 150 senior-year students (Group 4) participated in the test in Semester 2 of 2015/16 academic year. The findings showed that the senior-year students (Group 2 and Group 4) performed better than did the control groups (Group 1 and Group 3), providing support that the senior-year students showed better performance than did the control groups (Shek, Yu, Chan, & Ho, 2016).

1.3.3   Secondary Data Analyses of the Student Feedback Questionnaire (SFQ) Data

As a mandatory quality assurance mechanism, PolyU students are invited to complete a student feedback questionnaire for each subject. From the academic year of 2012/13–2015/16, the data of SFQs for the GUR subjects offered in each semester were collected from the Educational Development Center (EDC). In the four academic years, 15,810, 17,463, 22,589, and 13,765 (Semester 1), SFQs were collected. Secondary data analyses were performed on six standardized items in SFQ, which assessed students' perceptions of the GUR subjects in terms of their understanding of the intended learning outcomes, effectiveness of teaching and learning activities and assessments, understanding of the grading criteria, and quality and effectiveness of teaching.

Overall speaking, the SFQ findings based on the subjective outcome evaluation approach are favorable, suggesting that students had positive perceptions of the GUR subjects, including Freshman Seminar (FS), Leadership and Intrapersonal Development (LIPD), Language and Communication Requirements (LCR), Cluster

Area Requirements (CAR), and Service-Learning (SL). The mean scores for all six SFQ items regarding students' learning experiences and perceived teachers' teaching in all of the four academic years were favorable, indicating students' positive learning experiences in different GUR components regarding the intended learning outcomes, perceived effectiveness of the teaching and learning activities and assessments, understanding of the grading criteria, and perceived quality and effectiveness of teaching. Particularly, students evaluated very positively the LCR component, CAR component, and Tomorrow's Leaders in the Leadership and Intrapersonal Development Requirements (Shek, Yu, Wu, & Ng, 2015; Shek, Yu, & Pu, 2017).

1.3.4   Student Focus Group and Qualitative Evaluation Form

To enrich the quantitative evaluation findings, qualitative evaluation was carried out. Forty-seven-student focus group interviews with 279 students were conducted in the four academic years from 2012/13 to 2015/16 to investigate students' views of the GUR in terms of the content, teaching and learning, implementation, and benefits. In the academic years of 2013/14 and 2014/15, to understand the students' views of the GUR subjects, 163 and 332 randomly selected students also completed a qualitative evaluation form. Generally speaking, the qualitative findings suggested that the students had positive perception of GUR and they found benefits of studying the GUR subjects (Shek, Yu, Wu, & Chai, 2015; Shek, Yu, Wu, Ng, & Chai, 2017).

1.3.5   Teacher Focus Group and Qualitative Evaluation Form

To complement the students' views, teachers' views were collected to triangulate the evaluation findings. In the four academic years from 2012/13 to 2015/16, 4 ($N = 20$), 8 ($N = 49$), 8 ($N = 52$), and 8 ($N = 50$) teacher focus groups were conducted with different GUR subject teachers, respectively. The focus group interviews explored teachers' perceptions of the subjects they taught in respective GUR components with reference to their rationale, content, teaching, implementation, and benefits. In addition, 75 and 78 GUR subject teaching staff completed a qualitative evaluation form on their views of the GUR components in 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years, respectively. The findings generally suggested that the teachers endorsed the value of GUR subjects and had positive experience when teaching the GUR subjects (Shek, Yu, & Chai, 2017; Shek, Yu, Wu, & Chai, 2017; Shek, Yu, Wu, Zhu, & Chai, 2017).

1.3.6   Longitudinal Case Study

A group of first-year students, who were enrolled in the PolyU's 4-year curriculum in the academic year of 2012/13, were followed up for 4 years from 2012/13 to 2015/16. At the end of each academic year, the students were invited to attend an individual interview on their personal growth and adjustment under the 4-year curriculum and the GUR. In the 4 years, 71, 31, 20, and 23 students participated in the interviews, respectively. Despite the problem of attrition, the findings showed that the students changed in their undergraduate years and demonstrated positive changes (Shek et al., in press, e; Wu, Shek, Chai, & Zhu, in press).

1.3.7   Repertory Grid Test

To assess the change in students under the 4-year curriculum with reference to the five desired graduate attributes of PolyU, in the second semester of the academic year of 2015/16, 100 senior-year students, who had participated in the GUR longitudinal online survey, were selected using the random stratified sampling method to complete the repertory grid test. The findings were very positive, which suggested that the students changed in a positive direction in the undergraduate years.

With reference to the quantitative findings based on different evaluation strategies, several observations can be highlighted from the findings. First, the longitudinal study showed that the students displayed positive changes throughout the four undergraduate years. Besides, compared to the two control groups, the experimental group did better. These findings suggested that the students studying in the new 4-year undergraduate program had positive development. For the quantitative subjective outcome evaluation, the findings were also generally positive. The students showed positive views of the subjects, teachers, and benefits of the subject. For the repertory grid test, the quantitative findings showed that the students perceived positive changes after studying in the new 4-year undergraduate program.

With reference to qualitative evaluation, the findings based on the student focus groups, qualitative evaluation form, and longitudinal case study also suggested that students had positive perceptions of different GUR components. Besides, the data based on the student evaluation forms throughout the years generally indicated that students had positive impressions and feelings of the different GUR subjects they had studied, particularly for the SL and HLS subjects. They also had positive perception of the design of the LCR component and CAR component.

The qualitative findings also showed that the students had positive comments and experiences of different components of GUR, including the active, interactive and experiential nature of group projects (including group discussion, group presentation, and hands-on group workshop), fieldwork, service-learning, and multimedia teaching. These engaged them in active, collaborative, and deep learning, which is aligned with the intended learning outcomes of different GUR

components. Similarly, many teachers of different GUR subjects opined that they engaged the students in a deep level of learning and perceived the subjects to be able to nurture the desired graduate attributes of PolyU. For example, the group discussions and presentations on Tomorrow's Leaders promoted students' critical thinking and the subject facilitated students' understanding of the leadership concepts and utilization of some intra- and interpersonal skills in daily life.

1.4   Leadership and Service-Learning as Signature Requirements at PolyU

In this chapter, we focus on the students' views of two signature requirements of the GUR. The first signature requirement is Leadership and Intrapersonal Development focusing on the subject entitled "Tomorrow's Leaders" (TL; Shek et al., in press, a; Shek et al., in press, c).

Several observations can be highlighted from the evaluation findings. First, the students had positive evaluation of the teachers. Second, some students perceived that the TL subject promoted their self-reflection and self-understanding skills. Third, a portion of students expressed that as a leadership subject, the TL subject effectively strengthened their understanding of the leadership attributes and developed their leadership awareness and skills, particularly for the attribute of self-leadership. The evaluation work of TL can be seen in different papers (Shek & Leung, 2014a; Shek & Leung, 2014b, 2016; Shek & Ma, 2014; Shek & Yu, 2014, 2016; Shek, Ma, & Merrick, 2016).

Some of the narratives of the students are as follows:

The 'Tomorrow's Leaders' subject was very useful. It gave me a very detailed instruction about different attributes leading to leadership. This knowledge is very important and attractive to us.

The GUR subjects were more vivid and diversified. In many subjects in my major, we just sit there and listen as passive learners. However, the design of the GUR subjects such as 'Tomorrow's Leaders' was more vivid and joyful. It did not just have us sit there and listen but have interactions.

I used to be a person who tended to make blind conjectures … For example, I tended to make all kinds of conjectures of others' careless words or jokes, e.g., 'Why did she say in such a way?' or 'Does she not like me?' In this way, I would easily misunderstand others. After studying the 'Tomorrow's Leaders' subject, I realized that communication was so important. Since then, [when I met the similar circumstances,] I have been trying not to make any conjectures about others but directly ask them to explain their behavior. I feel much better after being more direct and open in interpersonal communication.

It was when I studied the TL subject that I had more opportunities to do self-reflection and gain more self-understanding. Leadership was scarcely mentioned in the subjects in my secondary school. However, the TL subject not only asked us to write a term paper, but also incorporated the theories and self-reflections in the teaching and learning. Therefore, our learning in the TL subject was deeper and more advanced.

Tomorrow's Leaders is a very good subject because it did not just teach us how to lead others, did not just teach group leadership, [it also let us know that] our self-leadership is also very important. It (self-leadership) means that we should be role models for others.

I think one benefit (of the TL subject) would be the critical thinking. It is like Lucy [alias for confidentiality] who just mentioned that the topic of moral dilemma had facilitated students' thinking in a multi-perspective way. Meanwhile, basically, we had a lot of in-class discussions in each class. They (the students) improved a lot. They knew how to express their viewpoints. We never told the students that 'your thinking is wrong!' We encouraged them to discuss.

Besides the views of the students, valuable and highly positive views of the teachers teaching LIPD subjects, particularly the TL subject, were gathered from the teacher focus groups and qualitative evaluation conducted in the four academic years. The teachers generally had positive impressions of the TL subject. Based on the qualitative studies focusing on metaphors and descriptors, some high-frequency descriptors included "a sense of achievement," "enjoyable," "meaningful," "reflective," and "rewarding". These indicated that the teachers gained positive experiences and feelings through their teaching of LIPD subjects.

The teachers perceived that the TL subject facilitated students' development in a variety of important competences, including effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The content of interpersonal relationship and the active teaching and learning methods in the TL subject, such as group project involving students from different disciplines, promoted students' interpersonal communication skills. The content related to the value judgment, group discussion, and presentation also effectively facilitated students' critical thinking.

Some teachers perceived that the TL subject changed some students' prior conceptions of leadership and developed students' understanding of the concepts of "ethical leadership" and "self-leadership." For example, in the teacher focus group in 2012/13, one teacher shared her experience, where she observed that at the very beginning, many students thought the TL subject had no relationship with them because "they thought many leaders were born in that way and they did not have the inborn traits of leadership." However, at the end of the course, the teacher observed that "many students thought that actually every person could become a leader. Most importantly, they knew that they should 'take responsibility for their life,' which means they knew the importance of self-leadership." Some teachers also observed students applying the leadership skills they learned in the TL subject in their daily lives. The sharing of a teacher is as follows:

The TL subject taught the students how to be a leader, particularly for the students who were taking leadership roles. … I remember there was a student from the Department of Radiography. He was the chairman of a student society. He said that he understood more about the functioning of teamwork, relationship building and problem-solving through studying the subject. He said that previously he easily ran into conflicts with some of his society members and felt tormented by that. Now he realized that conflict was a necessary journey to walk through. He also learned ways of conflict solving through our subject.

Another signature subject in the new 4-year undergraduate program is Service-Learning (SL). Primarily, the SFQ results suggested that the students'