



Portland State
UNIVERSITY

Report on

Evaluation and Faculty Assistance Visit UNS-PSU Collaborative Program

Ho Chi Minh City
February 18-20, 2008

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A. Visit Schedule:

February 16, 10:00 PM: Arrive HCMC

February 18 Morning

Meeting: Met with Dr. Phuong, Dr. Thuy, Dr. Triet, Hai and Huong
Purpose: Meet faculty who will be teaching CBSL in Spring
Discuss and plan CBSL courses for the Spring

February 18, Afternoon

Meeting: Dr. Phuong, Hai and Huong
Purpose: Discuss and plan for UNS workshop to be held on February 19

February 19, Morning

Workshop: Met with approx 30 UNS faculty, administrators, and students
Purpose: Review progress of CBSL classes and to explore ways to integrate CBSL into the broader curriculum at UNS

February 19, Afternoon

Meeting: Dr. Phuong, Dr. Tuan, Hai and Huong
Purpose: Review workshop accomplishments; meet with faculty members teaching CBSL to plan curriculum in the Spring

February 19, Evening

Went to dinner with Dr. Phuong, Dr. Thuy, Hai and Huong

February 20, AM

Meeting: Dr. Phuong, Dr. Thuy, Ruby, Hai and Huong
Purpose: Assessment of 1st year program, review priorities for year 2

February 20, PM

Meeting: Ruby
Purpose: Discuss program accomplishments and partner collaboration

B. University Engagement Workshop, February 19

A major part of my visit involved participating and presenting in a workshop that the CEE had organized. The workshop was held on the morning of February, 19 and was attended by several faculty and administrators from UNS as well as four representatives from Dam Sen Park, including the park manager (see attached for list of those attending). Several of the students who had been involved in the community based service learning course that worked at Dam Sen Park also attended.

The workshop was intended to present the results of the first CB-SL course taught by Dr. Phuong and to discuss the possibility of expanding the CB-SL courses in the curriculum. The first 90 minutes of the workshop were presentations. Dr. Thuy gave the introduction to the workshop meeting and indicated that she was very impressed with the results of year 1 and the collaboration with PSU, as well as the results of the class taught by Dr. Phuong and the establishment of the Center for Educational Excellence (CEE). I, then gave a brief presentation of PSU and our work with Community University Partnerships. Dr. Phuong gave an excellent presentation on her course and the results of the project at Dam Sen Park. Several students shared their experiences with the course and the project at the Park. Mr. Ba, the manager at Dam Sen Park then presented what he saw to be the results of the projects that the students worked on at the Park and presented some ideas and plans he has for continuing the partnership with UNS.

The second half of the workshop was an extensive discussion by the faculty and administrators about CB-SL. There was considerable interest expressed by the faculty in this approach. Dr. Phuong had emphasized the benefits of this for the students. An important benefit that Dr. Phuong emphasized was how CB-SL gives students experience and skills with "autonomous thinking." She relayed the story of one of the students who had been in the CB-SL who had attended a tour of a local plant after taking the course. Dr. Phuong went on to say that this student asked many questions of the employer and was demonstrating initiative to inquire and fully understand opportunities that existed for employment with this employer. Dr. Phuong emphasized that this kind of initiative is very rare with students and she attributed the work done in the CB-SL that gave this student confidence to take such initiative. Dr. Phuong emphasized the importance of self-initiative if students are to work in the modern economy. This point seemed to resonate very loudly and underscored the value of CB-SL in the minds of many at the workshop. There was a great interest and discussion around how students in CB-SL develop skills that are relevant in the work-place including the skills to take initiative and solve problems. The other main area of discussion was around the practical issues of teaching CB-SL courses and some of the logistics of making this approach a larger part of the curriculum. The main concern expressed was the extra work (and possible expense) in teaching courses this way. Dr. Phuong and Dr. Thuy were very clear about the fact that this approach to teaching and working with community partners, while being very valuable, required more support for the faculty and the CEE. There was concern about where this support would come from and we discussed some possible ways to explore gaining more resources through community partners who were benefiting from the CB-SL work the students would do.

Two important developments that have some promise for expanding CB-SL that were discussed. The first development involved changes that were being made in the university system to both lower the total number of credits required for graduation and to permit students to enroll in 'independent study' options. Both of these changes could greatly increase the feasibility of students and faculty being able to have more options and time for CB-SL courses. The second development that was mentioned in the workshop, was the possibility of coordinating the CB-SL and the community university partnership work of the CEE with the Youth League Summer Program. Ms Nguyen Tuyet Phuong, Secretary of the Program on campus spoke about this. This possibility of a closer working relationship with the League seems like an excellent possibility for combining and strengthening the support needed for CEE and faculty teaching CB-SL courses, as well as raising the awareness of CB-SL within the community.

All in all, the workshop was a well attended and a very energetic discussion and constructive meeting. The interest in the CB-SL approach was very high but there was considerable concern about whether or not there would be sufficient resources available to support this work. But the positive results of the first year, the stories about student successes and the testimony of the representatives from Dam Sen Park clearly left a positive impression on those attending the workshop.

C. Evaluation and Faculty Assistance Outcomes

During my visit I was able to address the accomplishments, opportunities and challenges in assessing the outcome of Year 1. On several occasions I was able to have discussions with Dr. Phuong, Dr. Thuy, the Program assistants Hai and Huong, and Ruby about these development. In addition, I was able to hear from the community partner at Dam Sen Park as well as students who participated in the CB-SL class. The feedback and observations from these discussions can be summarized in the following sections. I will mostly focus on efforts to initiate the CB-SL Courses but will also address progress made with the Center for Educational Excellence (CEE) and the Environmental Education Center (EEC)

- (1) CB-SL Courses. The initiation of the CB-SL courses at UNS was a key objective for Year 1. Two CB-SL courses were planned to be initiated in the Fall: one course by Dr Phuong and one course by Dr. Hui. Each of these classes had different outcomes, but both efforts were important to helping understand and gain experience with both the opportunities but also the challenges of CB-SL courses.

The course by Dr. Phuong, which included a community based-service learning activity at Dam Sen Park, is a hallmark of accomplishment. Dr. Phuong's course was by most all measures a great success. The large class (over 200 students –which is very common for classes at UNS) was divided into a smaller section (approximately 20 students) that was selected to participate in the community project at Dam Sen Park. Having a smaller group of students to work on the community project made the management of the project and the quality control for the work much more feasible. This approach to dividing large classes into a small group to do the community project is something that proved to be a good approach given the types of classes and situations that faculty face at UNS. The students were able to complete projects at

Dam Sen Park in small work groups. Each group presented their work at a presentation at the end of the term. Both the work and the presentation given by the students were very well received by the community partner. The students who worked on the project were very highly motivated. Being selected to work on the project was seen to be a great reward and honor for the students that were selected. This process of selecting a small group of students out a class seems to have also resulted in a high level of enthusiasm and motivation among the students selected to work on the community project. This process of “pre-screening students for the CB-SL though time consuming and requiring more work on the part of the instructor appears to be a very important reason for the success of the community project. The community partner has expressed great interest in continuing to work with UNS and Dr. Phuong on future projects based on this success.

The success of the class, however, was not without complication and difficulty. The work at the park was delayed to late in the course due to difficulties of making logistical arrangements for students to gain access to the park and to work with the partner. This late start on the project made the time the students had to complete the projects very compressed. In addition to the late start, the project took considerable amount of time and energy from Dr. Phuong who worked exhaustively to screen the students and to manage the course as well as the project. This increased workload experienced is an important lesson that was learned and reinforced the need for assistance that instructors have when teaching CB-SL. Also, the potential complications and extra time required for making arrangements with community partners for the working on projects was underscored by this experience.

The course that was taught by Dr. Huy was not completed as a CB-SL class. The reason for this appears to be because a formal agreement with the community partner was not finalized. Even though Dr. Hui and the community partner appeared to have some informal plans and agreements for the community service projects, the fact that there was not a more formal agreement was seen to be a problem that resulted in a discontinuation of the course as a CB-SL course. Though I was unable to discuss this with Dr. Huy, it appears that the decision to not include this course as a CB-SL was not entirely Dr. Huy’s decision though he apparently agreed. This is a disappointing outcome for first CB-SL classes that were planned for the first year. Considerable time and effort was put into getting Dr. Huy’s course planned and he is seen to be potentially a very valuable contributor to CB-SL courses at UNS. Though the course was not completed as planned, the efforts to offer the course as a CB-SL and Dr Huy’s contribution in the helping to get the initial CB-SL courses offered was very valuable. Hopefully he will be able to continue to be involved in future efforts to expand the number of CB-SL courses at UNS in the future. Also, Dr. Phuong in reflecting on Dr. Huy’s experience, as well as on her own experiences and difficulties she had with securing a formal agreement with the community partner, have provided an important opportunity for the engagement team to better understand how to “work around” this potential problem in the future. That is, the importance of allowing more time and flexibility in requiring formal agreements from the community partner in starting the relationship. This flexibility is seen as necessary for a successful CB-SL course for establishing good partnerships.

Two other CB-SL course have been planned to start this year. I met with both the faculty members who are teaching these courses, and they both promise to be a valuable addition to the overall effort to build and expand the number and quality of the CB-SL course at UNS. Dr. Triet's graduate course in wetland restoration will be taught as a CB-SL and will build off of a long history that Dr. Triet has had working with numerous partners through the Vietnam. Dr. Triet was very interested in expanding his work to be a CB-SL in that he saw the possibilities of increasing the value of the courses he has been teaching by including more direct involvement with the community partner. Dr. Phuong's success with her course in having students make presentations on their work and get feedback from the partner was very intriguing to Dr. Triet and is something he is going to pursue within his course. This course also has the added value of involving graduate students who could possibly be mentors to undergraduate students and possibly projects assistants to other CB-SL courses. Dr. Triet was very interested in pursuing this possibility and given his expertise and experience in this field promises to be a valuable addition to the overall effort. The second new CB-SL course is to be taught by Dr. Dang Le Anh Tuan. He is planning to teach a CB-SL course with a high school as the community partner in which students will help in developing new 'field-based' curriculum in high school classes and being mentors to high school students. This course promises to be a very important addition the CB-SL courses by partnering with the school system in HCMC which could open the doors for other courses with schools in the community as partners.

All in all, the goal to initiate CB-SL courses in this first year have seen good successes as well as some valuable experience and learning which will be highly useful as the efforts to expand and enhance these courses in the future continue.

(2) The Center for Educational Excellence (CEE). Efforts to organize and begin the Center for Educational Excellence (CEE) were seen to be a critical element of the plan for year 1. As the number of courses and faculty involved in CB-SL are planned to expand, it is essential to consider the infrastructure that is in place to support these efforts. The CEE is the foundation for that infrastructure. There have been some notable accomplishments this first year in getting the CEE organized, placed and staffed. In addition, the CEE has been very important as an organizational entity through which a number of important events have been sponsored. These activities have expanded the awareness of the efforts to build engagement in UNS through workshops, forum, presentations, and a maintaining a web-site. The workshop organized during my visit was testimony to this. In addition, the CEE has good staff support in Hai and Huong who provide program and administrative assistance. Dr. Thuy has been instrumental in these efforts and has provided leadership in getting the CEE organized and situated in UNS. Though there has been notable progress in developing the CEE, there still remains important work to build its capacity to fully support plans to expand CB-SL in the curriculum. Dr. Thuy acknowledges that there needs to be more support provided to the CEE from the UNS. Two important areas that she is planning to devote her efforts toward is getting my physical space for the CEE to house its library and the work of the staff and faculty that are working with the Center. This is a high priority. A second area is to explore more opportunities for securing funding to

support faculty who teach CB-SL with assistants. PSU can be of continuing support of these efforts especially in the area of resource development.

- (3) Environmental Education Center (EEC). An important element of plans to increase the visibility and accessibility of efforts that the CEE and CB-SL courses being offered are the two planned Environmental Education Centers. One of these is to be located at UNS. The other is to be located at Dam Sen Park. HEPA (the Environmental Protection Agency in Ho Chi Minh City) has pledged support for these two centers. Though I did not get a chance to see either of these locations on my visit, Dr. Thuy and Dr. Phuong expressed optimism that these two centers will be a very positive addition to the overall effort to expand both the visibility and the resources of the UNS community-university engagement efforts. Also, the EEC presents a valuable opportunity to solidify a long-term partnership with HEPA which could prove to be extremely important in developing a long-term base of potential resources to support UNS efforts to be more engaged in addressing environmental challenges in the City.

D. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

On the whole, my visit and meetings with the engagement team was a wonderful opportunity to review the progress made and be involved in helping to shape plans for the next year. Having a very successful inaugural CB-SL course is clearly an important milestone in the development of this program. The positive and enthusiastic response that this course has had among the UNS faculty and administrators as well as the community partner is testimony to the strong foundations that this initial effort has had for growing the program. In addition, the attraction of two excellent faculty members to begin to teach CB-SL classes is a very positive indicator that the program is getting off to an excellent start. Though there was a disappointment experienced in having one of the first two classes not succeed, there were valuable lessons learned in the process that should help inform future efforts. As Dr Phuong expressed it, they are now learning how to do CB-SL the “Vietnamese” way. In this case, the lesson that adjustments are sometimes needed in beginning partnerships to allow for the partner to become comfortable and capable to work with the CB-SL courses will help inform future efforts to build this program and develop the community infrastructure needed to expand this program. This will in most cases mean taking extra time to organize the community component for the CB-SL and that this extra should be allowed and anticipated. In addition to the initial successes of CB-SL classes, notable progress has been made with getting the CEE established and staffed with some excellent support personnel. The EEC as well has by all signs a good beginning.

With these successes of Year 1 noted, however, there still remain important challenges that are faced. Addressing resource issues are paramount to the continued success of this program. The CEE, though off to a good start, is very marginally supported within the UNS structure. Important areas of program support and especially assistance to faculty teaching CB-SL are needing considerably more investment in order to take full advantage of the growing interest in CB-SL within both UNS and community partners and to address the increased demands put on the faculty who are teaching CB-SL who are already serving in a very demanding environment. Soon to be implemented changes in

the curriculum will provide new opportunities for the students to participate in CB-SL and give the faculty more options to structure CB-SL courses. But there still will be the need to address the resource issue for providing assistance to faculty (to be) involved in these courses.

Two promising possibilities for resources to support CB-SL exists both internal and external to UNS. The first involves teaching and project assistance for CB-SL courses to be given by graduate students. This could serve to greatly benefit the graduate student with additional experience and could be a resource available to give valuable assistance to faculty in managing the CB-SL courses. The work that Dr. Triet is doing could be an opportunity to explore this possibility. Externally, there are very real possibilities with the community partners to provide resources to the CB-SL efforts. Mr. Ba made reference to some possibilities of “hiring” students in the future to continue the work that was started with the CB-SL. These student “hires” could be important project assistants to future CB-SL activities at the Park. This possibility is suggestive of some future scenarios that could provide support for both the CEE and for expanding the number of CB-SL courses and should be followed up. Also, the support that HEPA has pledged to the EEC is a very rich possibility for growing CB-SL programming – both the support the EEC but also to be more directly engaged in other work HEPA is doing that could partner with CB-SL courses at UNS.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Support from PSU
- Educational reform program at UNS
- Student support
- Collaboration of partner

Barriers:

- Large class size
- Lack of assistant
- Time consuming
- Looking for willing partners to collaborate

SUPPORT

- Center for Academic Excellence (PSU)
- Experience in organization
- Experience in working with partner
- Develop syllabus
- Training

CEE

- assist faculty in developing syllabus and integrate CBSL into their courses

- develop the relationships between faculty, department and multiple discipline courses
- organize workshop to disseminate information and experience in innovative teaching and learning methods
- carry out market research to explore the need of the community
- combine the strength of the faculty with the society need to carry out projects, solving real problems of community

Role of assistant lecturer

- Classroom organization
- Student supervision
- Student evaluation

Role of students: students need to be prepared for

- Communication skill
- Team work
- Oral and written report skill

PSU-UNS Collaborative Program:

Establish a community-university engagement facilitation office in the University of Natural Sciences in cooperation with PSU

Integrate community-engagement curriculum and guidelines into the UNS's courses
Collaborate with community to undertake a number of community-university engagement projects

COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE LEARNING

- Combine theory with practice
- Work with partner
- Partner define their problems
- Students carry out projects to solve the problems under the supervision of faculty
- Projects are integrated into academic course, in accordance with students' level and skill
- Team work
- Partner can use project result

Benefits to Students

- Gain experience and understanding of course content
- Develop autonomous thinking
- Team work
- Communication skills
- Develop Oral and written report skills
- Increase civic mindedness

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| Courses: | Environmental Science Wastewater Treatment |
| Partner: | Dam Sen Park |
| Partner Problems: | How to improve the landscape and environment Water treatment in the lakes |
| Projects: | Aesthetic and Environmental conditions of the park Solid Waste management at the park Sources of water pollution and water quality of the lakes Building physical model to illustrate sources of water pollution |