

Transforming Student Learning - 4-year UG curriculum reform at HKU

**C9+ 1 Inaugural Symposium on
Undergraduate Curriculum Reform
20-22 October 2010
The University of Hong Kong**

Amy B M Tsui

Pro-Vice-Chancellor & Vice-President, HKU
Chairman, Steering Committee on
Four-Year Undergraduate Curriculum



Curriculum Reform at HKU: Backdrop

- Education re-structuring in HK 2012 -
 - secondary education: 6 years, new curriculum for S4-S6, new exam system: SRA
 - undergraduate education: 4 years
- UG education
 - professional and non-professional programmes
 - No. of FYFD places are allocated by UGC, some are specifically allocated for manpower planning, eg. Medicine, Nursing, Education, Law
 - Non-local student (incl. mainland China) quota capped at 10% → 20%
- UGC (Govt) funding:
 - UG heavily subsidized by govt
 - 90% TPG self-funded
- Medium of instruction in schools: mix of EMI and CMI



Challenges and Paradoxes in Higher Education

- Great demand for HE, yet employers and tax payers are increasingly dissatisfied with university graduates.
- Employers demand generic capabilities, yet they expect graduates to be able to function fully with little training.
- Students are more vocationally focused, yet they change career paths earlier and more often than before.
- International competition for academically able students is keener than ever before, yet reputation of universities is based on international ranking, which has more to do with research performance than quality of teaching
- Values and ethics is a missing piece in undergraduate curriculum, yet the core values of a democratic society are critical to sustainable development



HKU Educational Aims

To enable students to develop capabilities in

- the pursuit of academic/professional excellence, critical intellectual inquiry and life-long learning
- **tackling novel situations and ill-defined problems**
- **enacting personal and professional ethics**, self-reflection and greater understanding of others
- **intercultural understanding and global citizenship**
- communication and collaboration
- **leadership and advocacy for the improvement of the human condition**



**How do we achieve these
educational aims?**



Conventional Conception of Learning

Classroom Learning (Formal curriculum)

- Systematic
- Organized
- Explicit
- Decontextualized
- Assessed

Extra-/Co-curricular activities (Informal curriculum)

- Non-systematic
- Incidental
- Tacit
- Contextualized and situated
- Not assessed

Learning in Participation

**Classroom
Learning**

**Curriculum =
Total learning
experience**

**Extra /
Co-curricular
Learning**

Key Features of New Curriculum



Common Learning Experiences

1. Flexibility and student choice; balance between formal and informal curricula: **Enabling structure and credit unit system** ▶
2. English as medium of learning and *lingua franca* on campus : **Language requirements and provision, and intercultural communication and understanding** ▶
3. **Common Core Curriculum** ▶
4. Clear learning goals and standards for achievement: **Outcome-based student learning and assessment**
5. Induction to university learning: **First year experience and academic induction** ▶

1. Flexible Curriculum Structure & Curriculum Space

Component (% of total no. of credits)	Courses	No. of credits*
Required for all students (22.5%)	Common Core	36 credits (15%)
	English	12 credits
	Chinese	6 credits
Specialization (30% - 40%) (15% - 20%)	Major	72-96 credits
	Minor	36-48 credits
Electives (17.5% - 32.5%)	Electives	Standard: 6-credits; 3 or other multiples of 3 with justification
Total no. of <i>required</i> credits	60 credits per year	240 credits
<i>Maximum</i> no. of credits	72 credits per year	288 credits

*6 credits = 120 – 180 student workload hours



Student and Staff Profile at HKU

Total no. of students: 12,000 UG; 9700 PG

Non-local students: over 6,500 fr 72 countries

- **Mainland China: 2500**
- **International students: 4,000**
- **Exchange students: 850 fr 180 universities**

Academic Staff: over 800

- **International : 40% fr 35 countries**

Intercultural communication and understanding

- English as a lingua franca on campus: English / bilingual publicity materials, increase proportion of student activities in English
- IS and LS buddy system
- Global Lounge
- Mix of LS, MS and IS in halls of residence
- 8 levels of Putonghua course for IS
- Provision of Halal food in student canteen, place of worship for Muslim students
- Etc.



Global Lounge



HKU Common Core Curriculum

“The student who can begin early in life **to think of things as connected** ... has begun **the life of learning.**” (Mark van Doren, 1943, p. 115)

Aim: To help students to see the interconnectedness and the interdependent nature of human existence through exploring some **common human experiences:**

- Aesthetic expression of ideas and emotions
- Relationship between individual & community, and the role of former in the latter
- Interactions amongst communities
- Relationship between human beings and nature, and the interdependence of nature
- Beliefs and values essential to human bonding
- Relationship between past, present and future



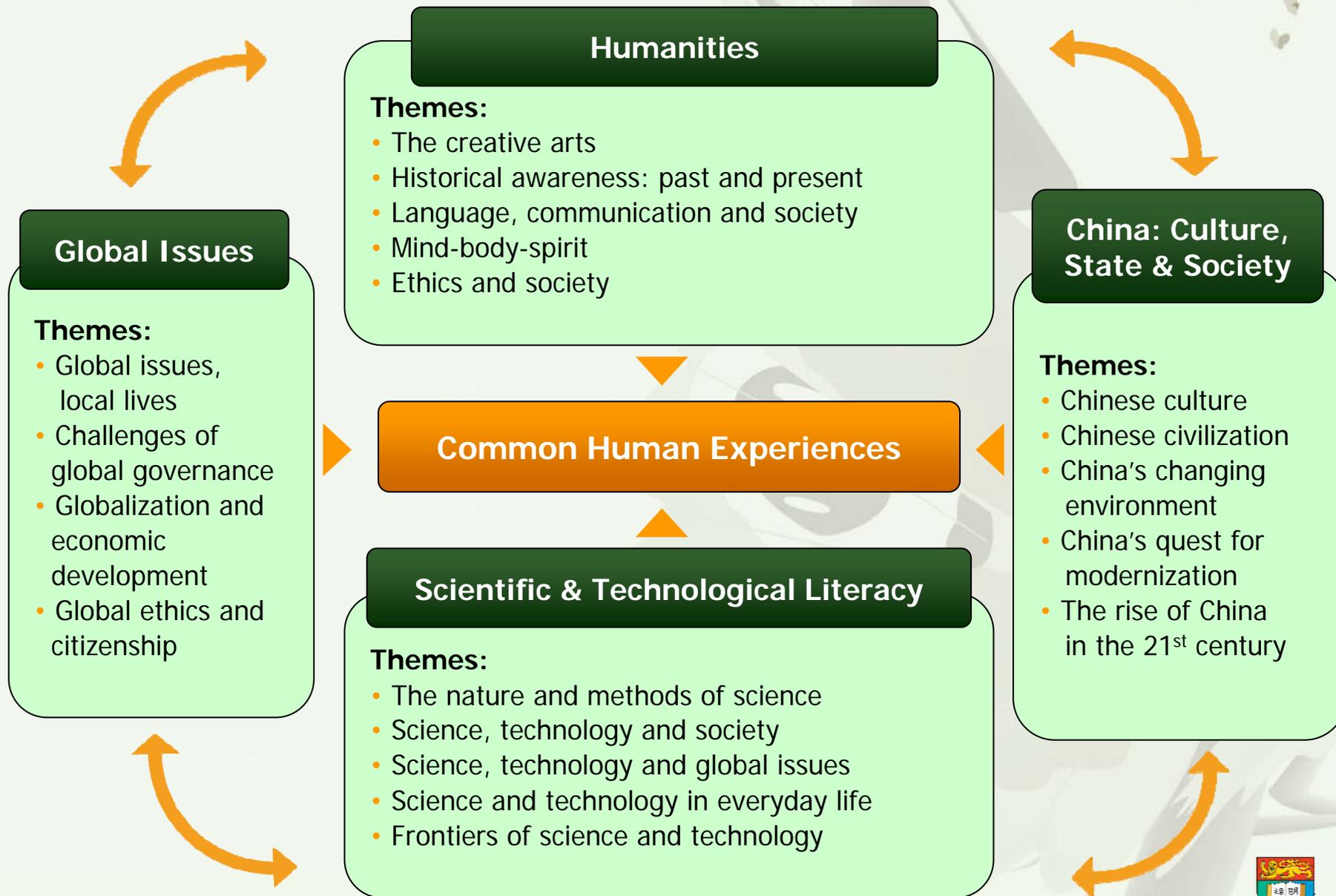
HKU Common Core

Goals

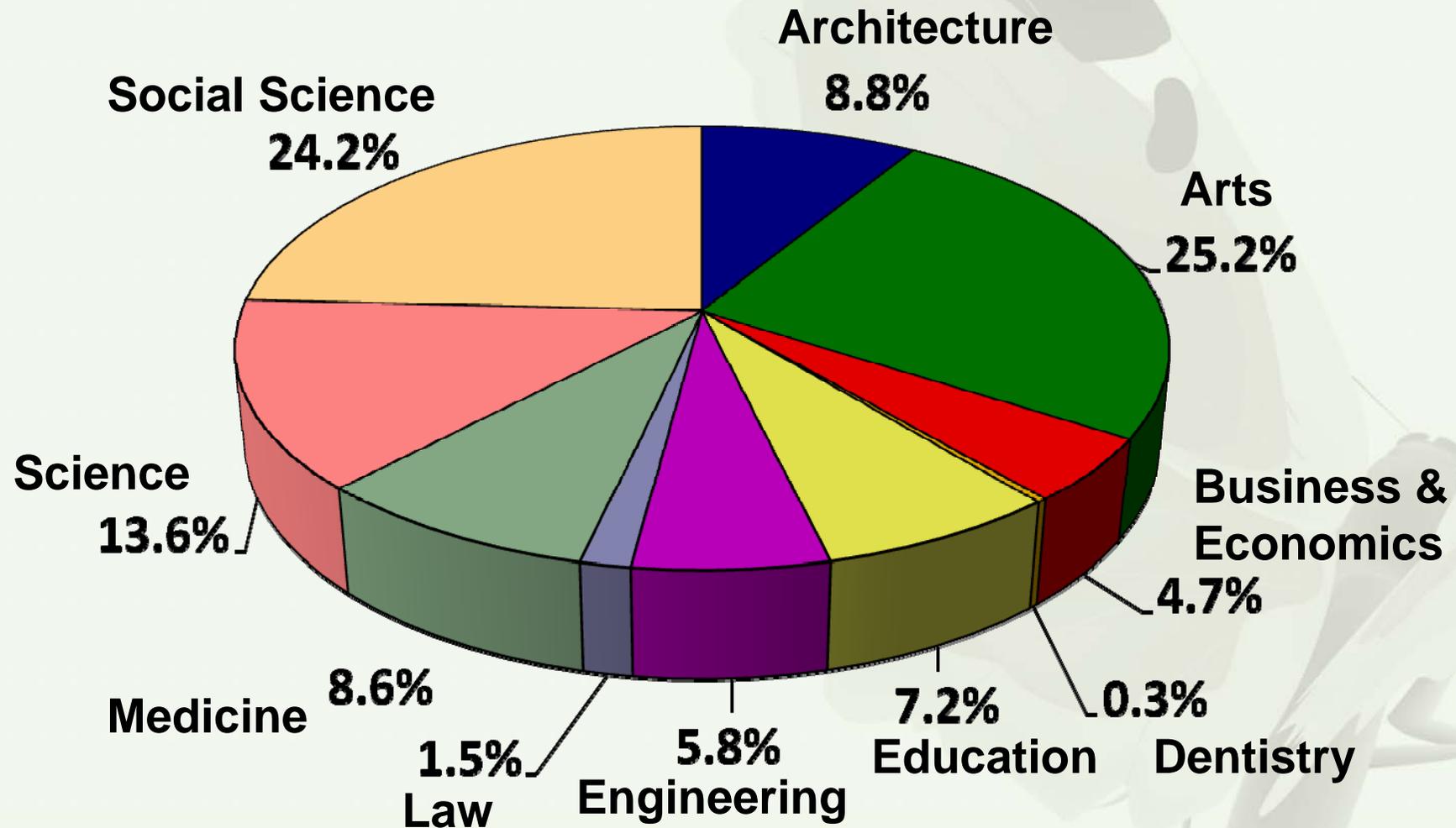
To enable students to

- (a) have a **broader perspective** and a **critical** understanding of the **complexities and interconnectedness** of the problems and issues that they are confronted with **in their everyday lives**;
- (b) have a deeper understanding of their own cultures and other cultures, and to appreciate the **interrelatedness and diversity among cultures**;
- (c) see themselves as **members of local as well as global communities and to play an active role** as responsible individuals and citizens in these communities;
- (d) **develop the critical intellectual capabilities** that will be further enhanced in their disciplinary studies.





Common Core Curriculum: Faculty share of teaching (2010-11 to 2012-13)



Feeding the World (2009 Pilot CC Course)

Course Description

One billion people go hungry every day and there is deep pessimism about long-term food supplies because of growing populations, competition for water supplies and concern about energy prices. This course looks in-depth at key issues such as the Green Revolution, meat production, food subsidies, genetically-modified crops, biofuels and the special problem of China (the world's biggest producer and consumer of food). Students will develop a strong integrated technical, economic and political understanding of the global food supply crisis. They will be equipped to understand and appreciate media reports related to this issue in their lives as informed and influential citizens.



Feeding the World



Dr Harold Corke
Faculty of Science

“I want students to think about where what they eat comes from and the human and environmental consequences of producing food. And I want them to be aware that most of the hunger in the world today can be attributed to political factors, not technological ones.”



Feeding the World

“This course has definitely **changed how I look at food**. Before, I would shop for food that was cheap and didn’t have nasty things in it. But now I think about where the food comes from, what government rules there are and if I’m supporting an undesirable system. The professors were very, very objective and **we were given both sides to consider, pros and cons**. They wanted us to think **critically** about the whole issue of food.”



Y1 Journalism student



Common Learning Experiences

6. **Setting personal and academic goals and drawing road maps: Academic advising**
7. **Experiential learning:** integration of theory and practice, learning in the workplace and the community (local and global) 
8. **International experience**
9. **Capstone experience:** final year, integration of knowledge (Undergraduate Research Fellowship)
10. **Synergy between formal curriculum, co- and extra-curricula** 

Experiential Learning

Graduation Requirement

- Soc Sciences Faculty Graduation Requirement (2007-)
 - Social innovation: 12 credits
 - Global citizenship: 12 credits
- Science Faculty Graduation Requirement (2008 -)
 - Experiential Learning: 6 or 12 credits
 - Service Learning: non-credit bearing (2010 -)
- Architecture Faculty requirement (2008 -)
 - One semester placement in Shanghai

Credit bearing

- Arts Faculty (e.g. Japanese Studies, Linguistics, European Studies)

Non-credit bearing

- All Faculties



Science Faculty Experiential Learning



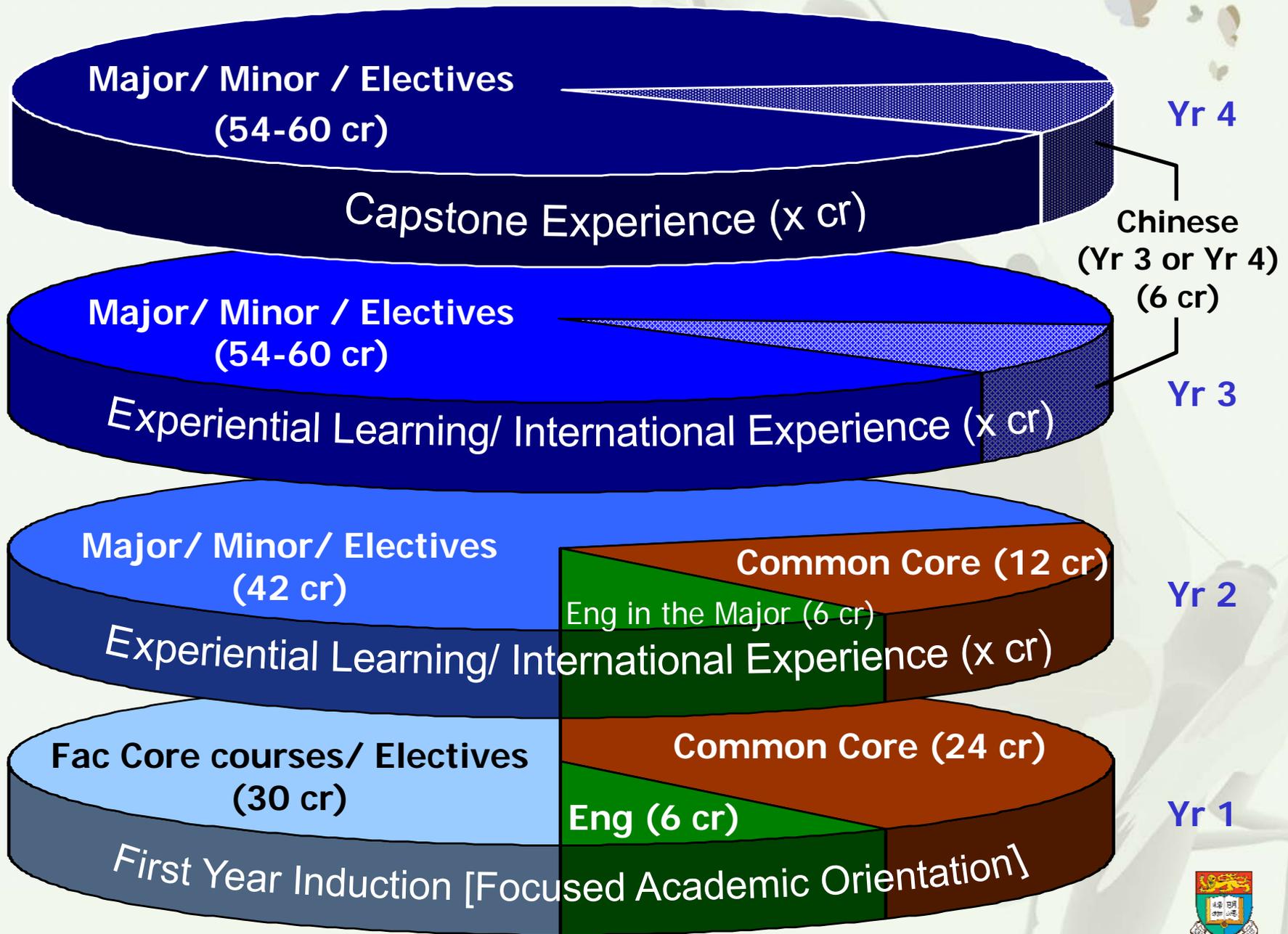
Some key objectives

- to integrate theory and practice, and to understand limitations of their current knowledge
- to broaden their social and cultural experience, and to develop their social and cultural values
- to work in a team and to collaborate with people with diverse background

Types of Experiential Learning:

- Projects
- Field studies
- Summer internship (31 community partners)
- Overseas exchange study (40 universities)
- Research fellowship (local & overseas)





Challenges and Opportunities

- **Double cohort**
- **Transition to university learning**
- **Flexible curriculum structure and academic advising**
- **Common Core Courses: intellectually challenging and coherent learning experience; pedagogy**
- **Shift from norm-referenced to standards-referenced assessment**
- **Structuring and assessing experiential learning**



Thank you

