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“How can we better enable students to form and articulate well-reasoned and evidence-based opinions? Why is it important for students to consult primary sources from multiple fields of scholarship to better understand humanity and to devise solutions to the problems we face today? How can research-led teaching and experiential learning help students not only comprehend the past, but also prepare them for today’s challenges and the future opportunities they will face as global citizens? What if I could provide students with an opportunity to step outside the ‘traditional classroom’ and encourage them to engage with local communities, entrepreneurs, business executives, and government officials? These are the questions that have shaped my teaching philosophy since joining the University of Hong Kong in 2014.

Whether I am teaching a first-year introductory course with one hundred students, or a capstone seminar with 15 students, key elements of my teaching practice remain the same: I believe that a successful learning environment is one where students are actively engaged, eager to ask questions, encouraged to define and solve questions, feel confident to share their evidence-based opinions, and willing to reflect on their learning experiences. Drawing on my research interests and personal life experiences, I have devised and taught courses that explore Japan’s seismic past and contemporary leadership in disaster preparedness and recovery as windows for students to think and engage differently with the world as it was, is, and might be, in the future. Importantly, in one of my courses, the classroom has moved beyond HKU all the way to northeast Japan. In 2016, I partnered with Mitsubishi Corporation and devised a course called Young Leaders Tour of Japan Field Trip, which enables students to explore recovery and reconstruction following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. A core aspect of this course is to provide students with an opportunity to experience not only the physical, social and economic destruction that was wrought on local communities, but also to see what sustainable reconstruction entails – both the triumphs and the ongoing struggles. In this new and sometimes confronting ‘real-world’ environment, I encourage students, as future leaders, to think about global problems such as recovering from natural disasters, reconstruction, and corporate social responsibility initiatives in society.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

"Dr Borland is definitely one of the best professors I have had in HKU. I took both JAPN1011 Introduction to Japanese Studies and JAPN4003 Japan: Earthquake Nation capstone course with her. In JAPN1011, she introduced me to the disciplines of history and Japanese Studies. As someone who was just starting to engage with academic writing, her methods of reading primary sources and writing history benefit me a lot. In the capstone course, she continues to help me with my dream to stay in academia. I was able to explore freely on my research interest with the best guidance and mentorship I could have imagined. Her classes are always very organised and clearly presented. They are welcoming and informative for students of all backgrounds and interests. You could tell she genuinely cares about making the material interesting and comprehensible to everyone. She brings enthusiasm and experience to every lecture that she gives. Such enthusiasm has motivated all members of the class to pursue our own research interests. She not only fairly grades, but also proofreads every response paper we handed in throughout the semester, which helped all of us greatly as non-native speakers. With her guidance and mentorship throughout my undergraduate years, I have landed on my feet in the graduate school of my dreams. But frankly I believe the skills she taught us will benefit us beyond academia as well. I feel truly lucky to have Dr Borland as my professor in HKU."

TONG Yijia
BA 2017

"In my mind, a great teacher is not only someone who delivers content brilliantly in class, but someone who has the best interest of students in mind and leaves an impact in their lives. To me, Dr Borland definitely checks all the boxes. I first attended Dr Borland's lesson at JAPN1011 Introduction to Japanese Studies where she lectured us on Japan's history of earthquakes. This course inspired me to pursue related subjects during my exchange in Japan. Dr Borland also offered me a precious chance to be part of the first group of students joining the Young Leaders Tour of Japan. Through experiential learning offered by this tour, I have been able to see the affected areas of the 311 earthquake in person. Most importantly, I had the opportunity to interact with local residents, learning a very different side of the reality, which is something that readings and lectures cannot deliver. Throughout the past few years, Dr Borland has been very supportive of students and has never turned down any request to those who wish to seek her advice. Without Dr Borland, I believe I would not have grown as much in my university days."

Gloria LIU
BA, current student

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

“When I attended the introductory course taught by Dr Borland, it was an eye-opening experience that humbled me to further pursue this field, and it also became an important milestone for me to decide to dedicate my four years of university life to Japanese Studies. Dr Borland provided a very specific but also rare perspective in to studying Japan, which is a historical approach in understanding resilience and preparedness of the Japanese community against earthquake. She presented an in-depth understanding of the historical-social changes in society in the face of disasters, while the knowledge she has given is very well applicable in present days. This helps me a lot in connecting the knowledge I learned in school and on paper with the reality I am living in, and helped me to develop a more diverse and open-minded understanding of cultures.

Dr Borland has also shown her great passion and compassion through the Young Leaders Tour of Japan field trip she launched. During the trip she was a very caring person and showed equal kindness to all students, at the same time she is also an inspiring teacher where she explained and showed us how resilience learned from history is revealed through the businesses we visited, the natural environment and the modern community. She is always willing to take the initiative to provide all kinds of support and opportunities to her students, which is not common among all teachers. I am very thankful for the once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate in the field trip, but Dr Borland brought this learning experience even further. She encouraged me to participate in the MORIUMIUS internship in Japan, even supported me to get a scholarship that covered my expenses in the internship. I have never expected a teacher to do that much for a student and more than the knowledge she has taught, the kindness and her testimony in committing to her studies are the biggest and most precious things Dr Borland has given to her students.”

LAI Chi Ling
BA 2018