

Interdisciplinary University Curriculum Making Through Balancing Tensions and Resolving Dilemmas at a Hong Kong Chinese Research-Intensive University

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Using the university-wide interdisciplinary General Education at The University of Hong Kong, also known as the Common Core Curriculum, as a contextualized example, this article particularly highlights eight critical dimensions to attend to when undergoing interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum making, namely engaging with wider stakeholders; cultivating mutual visions and goals; deciphering learning beyond disciplines; leveraging community resources; mixing diverse learning and teaching approaches; strengthening professional learning; navigating planning and evaluation; and granting extra reward and incentives. This article aims to contribute to both the scholarship and practice of interdisciplinary education in the university setting by bridging the long-standing theory-practice gaps, addressing curriculum complexities, resolving polarized tensions, and offering insights for sustainable development of interdisciplinary education around the world.

Keywords: interdisciplinary education; curriculum making; university education reform; Hong Kong

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Introduction

Throughout the last few decades, many interdisciplinary activities have been emerging and flourishing within the walls of even very traditional universities with increasing disciplinary and sub-disciplinary differentiation and specialization (Lindvig et al., 2019). The emergence of interdisciplinarity signifies an innovative approach to comprehending, navigating, and transforming knowledge, which subsequently influence the content and structure of the relevant curriculum (Welch, 2011). Although interdisciplinarity is frequently employed across policy rhetoric and programmatic discourse in higher education settings as a buzzword, the indicators of quality interdisciplinary work remain challenging to define, which make interdisciplinary education difficult to pursue and achieve (Mansilla & Duraising, 2007). A number of opponents criticize interdisciplinary education as something suspicious of vagueness and lack of rigidity rather than dynamic, flexible, liberal, and innovative as argued by the supporters (Weingart, 2000). Nonetheless, interdisciplinary education is not merely an organizational strategy that induces cosmetic changes or realignments. It instead signifies a deeper way of thinking about the purpose of schooling, sources of the curriculum, and the way in which knowledge is utilized (Brand & Triplett, 2012). The curriculum-making process of interdisciplinary education in the university context involves interactive and dynamic processes of interpretation, mediation, negotiation, and translation across multiple actors and sites of activities, and with different levels, layers, and domains (Priestley et al., 2021). In the context of this study, curriculum broadly refers to the series of elements of the educational experiences provided for students, which include but do not limit to course content, pedagogical and assessment means, evaluative measures, and co-curricular elements. Therefore, this reveals the need for selecting a contextualized example to illustrate the complexity and dynamism of the interdisciplinary university curriculum-making process.

This article will focus on the example of the university-wide Common Core Curriculum (CCC) offered for all undergraduate students at The University of Hong Kong (HKU). It is one of the many examples of interdisciplinarity education around the world. All 10 faculties at HKU contribute newly created courses for CCC that benefit students, faculty members, departments, schools, and the university as a whole. Since its full implementation in 2012, CCC has enrolled over 200,000 undergraduates, approved 284 courses, and engaged more than 520 teachers, 1,310 tutors, and 260 demonstrators. CCC now extends beyond formal courses to pedagogical experimentations, student research, and co-curricular learning projects (Tsao et al., 2024). Building on the findings emerging from the series of academic publications on CCC as well as the official information publicly available on CCC's and HKU's website,

this qualitative study grounded in the approach of documentary analysis focuses on the interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum-making aspect (Bowen, 2009), which leads to the overarching research question: *What are the critical dimensions of interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum making as manifested by HKU's CCC?*

Research Contribution

This study aims to offer several contributions to both the scholarship and practice of interdisciplinary education in the university setting. First, given that there are different conceptions, formulations, and arrangements of interdisciplinary education, the use of a contextualized example of HKU's CCC can offer more specific and coherent insights on what interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum could be included and excluded as well as what shape and form it could take. This can also bridge the long-standing gap between theory and practice when it comes to specifying how to afford interdisciplinary education in the real-world setting of university with boundaries and constraints. Moreover, the understanding of the interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum-making process involves considering the wider environments and contextual factors for changes as well as process of and strategies for changes, which imply the multiple dimensions involved throughout the process that touch upon personal and professional capacities, academic and epistemological themes, institutional structures and organizational cultures, as well as socio-political dynamics as proposed by Klein et al. (2022). All these dimensions need to be holistically considered for sustaining and thriving interdisciplinary education in the university context in the long run. Furthermore, this study will focus on the polarized frames commonly embedded in the interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum-making process, and recognize the possibilities to navigate these tensions and integrate them as a cohesive whole. This can offer references for university policymakers, administrators, and educators around the world when it comes to interpreting, meditating, and resolving the tensions when actualizing interdisciplinary education in the university context.

Interdisciplinary General Education Among Hong Kong Universities

General Education (GE) is one of the ways for Hong Kong universities to offer students interdisciplinary education, which targets at offering a broad and balanced learning experience

for whole-person development and life-long learning, and caters to the diverse learning needs, aptitudes, abilities, and interests among students (Shih, 2019). The government mandated each of the eight publicly funded university to introduce GE as part of the New Academic Structure under the 3+3+4 curriculum reform since 2012, which subtracted one year from senior secondary education and added an additional year of undergraduate education, and GE accordingly remains as an essential element (Xing et al., 2012). The introduction of GE is also a timely response to the long-standing public criticism that higher education has too early narrowing and streamlining of students' study through professional and disciplinary programs and majors, which make their perspectives remain narrow and superficial rather than multiple and integrative (Jaffee, 2013). With the affordance of GE, students can master the necessary knowledge and skills for specific professions or disciplines, expose to other learning areas, and cultivate a sense of integrity, positive attitude, a broad vision, and important generic skills (Education Commission, 2000).

Given that the Hong Kong government do not mandate a standardized GE curricular structure under a top-down approach, there is still considerable divergence in the shape, form, and philosophy of their own GE. Nonetheless, while each of the universities has subsequently come up with their own unique GE structure and components, their common learning goals and outcomes touch upon broadening knowledge, critical thinking, interpersonal communication, problem solving, civic responsibility, morality and ethics, global outlook, as well as life-long learning (Freake, 2012). Among all these common features, interdisciplinarity has been emphasized as a positive criteria and valued characteristic of GE in almost every university in Hong Kong (Jaffee, 2013). The overarching focus here is not only about learning and producing relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions, but also about goals, norms, and visions of transformation by framing from multiple perspectives and across various contexts, which can better prepare students for their future studies, work, and life (Lam, 2023c). HKU's CCC as the focus of this article is one of the illustrative examples of the interdisciplinary GE offered by the eight publicly funded universities in Hong Kong.

Critical Dimensions of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Curriculum Making

Top-Down and Bottom-Up Development: Engaging with Wider Stakeholders

As the introduction of CCC at HKU was changing the core university practices and

educational focus, the promotion of participative process becomes important, especially in terms of combining the backing of senior administration and buy-in among teachers. Therefore, HKU's CCC has accordingly established several cooperative and coordinated structures diffusing across the whole university since the first day of launching the curriculum reform. For instance, the CCC Committee is responsible for coordinating the development and selection of CCC courses for recommendation to the Senate, establishing and monitoring assessment procedures and processes, including the nomination of examiners and the monitoring of the quality of the curriculum for the Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TLQC) at the university level (Common Core Office, 2024i). Each new CCC course proposal goes through a rigorous vetting process by the CCC Committee to ensure that it has intellectual depth, but is also accessible for non-major students. The rigor of the vetting process is evidenced by the fact that in the first round of applications, only 72 of the 225 proposals submitted by all ten faculties across the campus were accepted (Tsui, 2012). Meanwhile, there have been CCC working groups and Area of Inquiry (AoI) committees, which connect various frontline teachers with interest in interdisciplinary education, and allow them to have continuous exchange and debate on how to further improve the delivery of CCC. While the senior leadership and management needs to have an oversight of the overall curriculum reform process, the actualization of CCC on the ground needs to be delegated to and embraced by all faculties, departments, schools, and centers through the shaping of a widely distributed network with these groups and committees as multiple interfaces (Verbeek, 2020). Interdisciplinary education will take its roots only when it is interweaved across all stakeholders as opposed to sporadic and linear efforts being made by only a few academics (Bhagwan, 2020). All feedback and suggestions from various stakeholders need to be factored in for revising, modifying, or fine-tuning as early as possible and throughout the process. After all, establishing a more consultative, participative, and interactive governance model can better elicit ideas and support, coordinate roles and responsibilities, and minimize risks and resistance (Shek et al., 2017).

The specialized interests among many individuals also led to strong resistance to CCC as the interdisciplinary curriculum reform agenda at HKU. For instance, the introduction of the broadening CCC has taken course credits off the major degrees, which leads to many specialized professional organizations, such as nursing and pharmacy, feeling uncomfortable as this will weaken their monopoly on expertise and claim to professional credentialism. Therefore, a tug-of-war was emerged regarding whether students should take four rather than six CCC courses as wished by the reform team and senior leadership. There has also been call

for not introducing CCC and release the space for specialized courses. Similar resistance was also found among disciplinary professionals who disagree with the generalist educational approach as they felt that only they have an epistemic claim to certain topics or materials, and CCC was potentially eroding their sense of ownership and control over their curricular territory. Therefore, HKU's curriculum reform team as well as the senior leadership and management have been constantly reaching out to network and collaborate as well as staying in touch with frontline individuals to minimize and avoid isolation and misunderstanding of their CCC-related work. They have also been holding firm along the line of six CCC courses as the mandatory undergraduate requirement, and articulating how they can benefit from letting CCC operate in their designated territory by widely and visibly sharing results and outcomes, which will help legitimize the overall curriculum and pre-empt political challenges (Verbeek, 2020). The introduction of interdisciplinary education into the university context involves dismantling of the existing institutional setups with persistent focus on specializations, which will inevitably invoke discomfort and grievances as it threatens existing power structures that requires some individuals to give up their original control and autonomy (Chew, 2021). Therefore, all the corresponding participatory organizational arrangements need to focus on all the salient internal stakeholders within the university, which in turn reaffirming their acceptance of the potential changes as well as resulting in its internal legitimation and validation (Beddewela et al., 2021). When these stakeholders feel safe and confident with one another in taking risks and feel able to expose vulnerabilities in such high-trust environment created among themselves, they are more ready to identify and voice problems, seek support and feedback, and change and innovate with one another (Brown et al., 2021).

Centrality and Flexibility: Cultivating Mutual Visions and Goals

To initiate a university-wide discussion of introducing CCC at the beginning stage of the curriculum reform, the senior leadership and management has developed a shared conceptual framework for thinking about CCC and a common language to talk about it. Since then, the relevant terminologies have been repeatedly consulted, debated, and reinterpreted, and new terminologies have been emerging throughout the discussion (Tsui, 2012). The senior leadership and management has also been seizing all possible opportunities, such as orientation sessions, professional seminars, training workshops, and publicity materials, to frame, justify, and convince individuals with varying background the underlying significance, value, and meaning of CCC. All these terminologies cover the principles of curriculum design

and planning, achievement of educational aims, as well as distinctive features of the curriculum. CCC has eventually come up with a staff handbook, which aims to reproduce and communicate the underlying visions and values as well as structure and content to all teachers. Given that individuals with deep understanding of the CCC reform process can complete other things or even leave over time, there is a potential that the set of concepts and ideas might not last beyond the transition. Therefore, the handbook can ensure the coherence and continuity in conceptualization upon which CCC is built, consolidated, and improved throughout the decades (Verbeek, 2020). The actualization of interdisciplinary education in the university context requires a consistent rhetorical focus for action while also acknowledging the possibilities of unforeseen opportunities (Holley, 2009). When confronting with the tension between the emergence of plural understandings and demand for a single universal definition of interdisciplinary education, universities can accommodate unity in heterogeneity by cultivating a common discourse that ensures all individuals involved are on the same page when they embark their own interdisciplinary trajectory (Reay et al., 2013). This involves identifying the characterizing features and building blocks, as well as constructing and maintaining an overall picture of exactly what every change is and what it aims to attain, such that the various instances of interdisciplinary education can subsequently be examined, compared, understood, and explained (Pountney & McPhail, 2017).

Another remarkable point is that there is an online centralized archive of the relevant documents and previous works in relation to the CCC reform process throughout the years, including reports, notes, and position papers, which can be readily accessible by the current university leaders and teachers, and can be potentially passed on and relied on by the future successors (University of Hong Kong, 2024a). Together with the series of consultation sessions, reform retreats, formal meetings, public lectures, experience-sharing seminars, exchange forums, and issue-based workshops, all these offer opportunity for all parties to read and discuss the foundational ideas and practical expressions of CCC, which can make the university-wide interdisciplinary curriculum remaining living and sustainable (Lam, 2023b). Although the discussion of CCC can take place anytime and anywhere, it is important for building and crystallizing the discussion on a concrete basis. These documents are successful for keeping the discussions strategic and focused, especially in ensuring that the theory and practice of interdisciplinary undergraduate GE at HKU will not easily grow farther apart and disconnect eventually. These documents are also helpful for ensuring all the individuals involving in the curriculum are on the same page, especially in terms of articulating the same visions and values of the curriculum. Furthermore, these documents can further communicate

and share the series of values and ideas behind CCC, which can avoid them from becoming muddled, neglected, or even forgotten over time (University of Hong Kong, 2024a). Without remaining grounded in core and sustained visions and commitments established at the outset, the heterogeneous responses offered by these individuals throughout the interdisciplinary curriculum reform process can easily become unclear, piecemeal, and fragmented. This can also lead to various duplicating, conflicting, and competing efforts, and some matters remaining unattended and unaddressed (Leung, 2012). Therefore, universities need to embed the articulation of the significance, value, and meaning of interdisciplinary education from the very beginning of the reform process and as a regular part of the everyday practice. All these dimensions will also become more robust and sophisticated when various disciplines, participants, institutions are interacting and negotiating as well as unpacking and rearranging continuously (Vienni-Baptista et al., 2022). Meanwhile, imposing any fixed and static understanding can easily obscure or even rule out the underlying nuances and differences, which are essential to enriching the evolution of interdisciplinary education when each individual experiment, adapt, and evolve their own concepts, means, and outcomes (Cairns et al., 2020).

Inward and Outward Thinking: Deciphering Learning Beyond Disciplines

At HKU, teachers are invited to design their CCC courses based on their specialized expertise and interest, which eventually involve both disciplinary perspectives and interdisciplinary orientation. They need to put their very advanced and focused subject area into a much broader and more comprehensive thinking process, which involves thinking carefully how to present the crux of their academic disciplines, especially the general concepts, fundamental principles, and intellectual frameworks, in relation to society and the world as an accessible manner to all students across the campus (Lam, 2023a). Each CCC course will be offered under one of the four AoIs, namely Science, Technology, and Big Data (CCST), Arts and Humanities (CCHU), Global Issues (CCGL), and China: Culture, State, and Society (CCCH). Each AoI has a conceptual framework, which addresses the CCC's goals, and under each AoI, four to five themes have been identified, each with an outline of the key issues that should be addressed (Common Core Office, 2024b). As teachers are designing and planning their CCC courses when writing up their own course proposal, they are mandated to specify the fundamental questions and issues that their course will address, highlight the connection of their course objectives with the stated goals of the chosen AoI and CCC as a

whole, and indicate the key ideas, practices, methods, and perspectives that will be utilized in the course with a week-by-week schedule. This can ensure that each CCC course has its own consistent and compatible as well as strong and unifying thematic areas to tie all the interdisciplinary elements throughout the course. Meanwhile, this can offer students authentic, meaningful, and purposeful learning experience when the content is often rooted in their daily encounters and real-world contexts (Tsao et al., 2024). In line with Hannon et al. (2018), such designing from the ground up allows for integrating disciplinary knowledge first into curriculum knowledge and subsequently into learning and teaching, which contrasts with a patchwork approach that lacks cohesion or a narrative arc. Interdisciplinary education involves respecting and recognizing diverse and plural perspectives, and employing and integrating them as arguments and content for addressing the series of real-world issues and challenges in an open-ended and dynamic manner (Fawcett, 2013). Meanwhile, individuals need to reflect on and realize the limitations and weaknesses of disciplinary knowledge, and to further explore other knowledge sources that are more practical and expedient, which are no longer bounded by the rigorous rules and rigid processes of disciplines (Rennie et al., 2011).

As CCC has become more developed and mature in recent years, the optional CCC Minors and Clusters are introduced, in which a cluster consists of four CCC courses while a minor consists of six courses, with all courses drawn from the same thematic cluster, including: *Sustaining Cities, Cultures, and the Earth*; *The Quest for a Meaningful Life or The Universe and the Question of Meaning*; *Creative Arts*; *The Human Life Span*; and *Gender, Sexuality, and Diversity*. Both aim to further motivate students to personalize themselves a more coherent interdisciplinary learning trajectory through taking courses of similar themes under the broad distribution requirements. Meanwhile, students can be offered multiple and iterative opportunities to build upon their learning gradually and progressively based on a meaningful and logical learning sequence (Common Core Office, 2024a). Spanning boundaries across disciplines in interdisciplinary education remains complex and demanding, especially in terms of how the overall curriculum design can support such an overarching goal (Smith et al., 2024). It is easy for the curriculum to remain multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary, which simply presents multiple perspectives without any support for the connections across and integration of disciplinary knowledge (Spelt et al., 2009). Therefore, there needs to be attempts to ensure that the organization of the curriculum is not merely a sampling of knowledge from each discipline and subsequently a collection of themes with questionable subject linkages and coherence (Wright, 2018). Interdisciplinary education involves structuring the curriculum without an arbitrary collection of themes and topics of limited value. On one

hand, some topics remain so general as to provide little guidance as to how they might be given integration and coherence. On the other hand, some topics are so specific, which are subject to idiosyncratic interpretation and potential educational damage. The above few examples of interdisciplinary minors and clusters reveal the potential of generating learning experiences and outcomes that are worthwhile in themselves, and offering a solid basis for further progression (Humes, 2013). At the same time, these dimensions are helpful for advancing students' capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking for cognitive advancement; they involve thinking about emphasis on knowledge use, careful treatment of each discipline involved, and appropriate interaction and purposeful intertwining among disciplines (Boix Mansilla et al., 2000).

Learning Within and Beyond Classrooms: Leveraging Community Resources

Over the last few years, CCC has been further experimenting with new modes of interdisciplinary learning and teaching beyond the formal curriculum with various student groups, non-governmental organizations, community groups, social enterprises, and business corporates both locally and internationally. All these extra-curricular and co-curricular collaborations aim to further advocate participatory readiness and life-long learning among students through exposing them to a diversity of individuals and activities (Common Core Office, 2024h). To ensure close alignment between these learning partners with CCC, their purposes need to align with CCC's mission of learning and teaching of interdisciplinarity, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and future readiness. Meanwhile, all of them need to propose a detailed year plan of how they will work with CCC, and they all need to undergo a review process every year to ensure continued eligibility for partnership. As support provided by CCC, these partners can co-organize events under CCC, including venue booking, promotion and publicity, and registration management, and apply for the annual CCC subsidy for operating expenses (Common Core Office, 2024e). A much broader group of individuals coming from a diversity of backgrounds, whereas each with expertise and experience to offer as well as learning to be attained, need to be involved in the co-production processes of mutual learning and development throughout interdisciplinary education (Fam et al., 2018). This also involves moving away from the asymmetric hierarchies and conventional dichotomies of knowledge production, such as teachers and students, experts and novice, researchers and informants, as well as schools and communities. This is primarily because no way of knowing, acting, and being should be privileged, in view of the series of ill-defined, societally relevant,

and complex real-world problems that require a wider pool of ideas and actors (Riveros et al., 2022). Along this line of collaborative interdisciplinary education, students are empowered with the responsibility and ownership of their learning, followed by out-of-school partners offering them mentor support and supervisory guidance (Garcia et al., 2010).

Another example is the series of interdisciplinary undergraduate student research projects supported by CCC. Some of these projects are short co-curricular and light-touch experiential projects initiated by CCC. These projects loose up students' imaginations by framing research experiences more as authentic and real-life projects rooted in students' familiar daily encounters and diverse real-world contexts. Some of them are out -of-classroom opportunities for an individual student or small groups of students to pursue funded research on a topic of their own choosing, which can involve any fields and forms. Each project usually lasts for around six weeks to six months, and will be supervised by an experienced faculty mentor nominated by students themselves (Common Core Office, 2024j). Apart from these local projects, there are also international interdisciplinary knowledge exchanges, which aim to promote students' capacities for intercultural understanding and global citizenship, as well as a critical self-reflection and greater understanding of others (Common Core Office, 2024f). The overarching goals for all these projects are facilitating students to naturally and seamlessly search for new and integrative research questions, hypotheses, approaches, perspectives, and interpretations, which is also the value of adopting an interdisciplinary point of view in research (Barković, 2010). Meanwhile, given that one of the inherent problems for many interdisciplinary programs is the one-off and limited exposure offered to students, all these local and international cross-curricular research projects can offer further coherence and continuity for students to further utilize and deepen their interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, as well as values and attitudes acquired from their formal courses (Lam, 2023d).

Traditional and Progressive Pedagogies: Mixing Diverse Learning and Teaching Approaches

At HKU, pedagogic and assessment innovation is an essential part of interdisciplinary education, meaning that learning and teaching development is synergistic with managing CCC. Many CCC courses have been employing a wide range of interactive and creative assessment practices, which help contextualize continuous and dynamic interdisciplinary education among students and teachers (Lam, 2023a). Throughout CCC courses, students will engage in different activities, such as role-plays, devising drama, participating in debates, close readings, reflective writings, video production, art installations, fieldwork, group projects, laboratory

inquiries, museum explorations, quizzes and examinations, interviews, as well as other forms of assessment. All these learning and teaching means are linked to creating projects, addressing social issues, discussing different perspectives, creating an innovative solution to a problem or a new company to address those problems, or deciding what questions most activate their own curiosity (Common Core Office, 2024b). As teachers are embarking on their own curricular experiments and developing their own best practices of interdisciplinary education, this involves a fusion of values, ideas, and experiences from different cultures and civilizations (Yang, 2016). They need to utilize a wide range of approaches and strategies as well as methods and practices, as well as adapt to different types of students with diverse backgrounds and expectations (Li et al., 2012). After all, direct instruction, inquiry learning, and collaborative learning each has its own strengths and weaknesses; this requires a comprehensive understanding of their conditions, purposes, and effects, followed by a complementary use to enhance interdisciplinary learning and teaching. This is also upholding pedagogical triangulation under the premise that the various pedagogical practices are often conflicting in theory but compromising in reality (Schul, 2015).

According to a comprehensive review conducted by Hounsell and Cheung (2014) on the 582 assessment tasks across 152 CCC courses offered in the 2014–2015 academic year, the most common assessment types are essays and reports (68%), in-class participation in tutorials and discussion (68%), quizzes and examinations (61%), as well as group work and presentations (48%). Meanwhile, there are wide use of other kinds of assessments like poster, Web, and video presentations (29%), various instances of assignments (18%), projects and case studies (17%), practicum (16%), journals (15%), debates and forums (15%), as well as portfolios (7%). Meanwhile, a CCC course will typically make use of a blend of assessment tasks, with an average of 4.3 tasks per course in CCST, 3.6 in CCHU, 3.8 in CCGL, and 3.7 in CCCH, which are also the four AoIs constituting the CCC. All these assessment patterns reveal how CCC emphasizes the incorporation of greater diversity and inclusivity in learning and assessment, encouragement to work individually and collaboratively, as well as development of capabilities and capacities in communicating own knowledge and understanding in written, oral, and multimedia forms, and across academic, social, and workplace settings. Adopting an open and a flexible perspective in interdisciplinary education allows teachers to appreciate opposing poles as a driving force and perceive opportunities in contradictions. This reveals a strategic and pragmatic approach in employing whatever available helpful means to support interdisciplinary learning and teaching, which is never about choosing one particular model, but using both simultaneously and dynamically (Yang, 2017).

Individual Territories and Collaborative Networks: Strengthening Professional Learning

In every semester, CCC will organize a series of training workshops that help course instructors and tutors cultivate knowledge and skills that help with lesson planning and delivery, creating assessments, delivering feedback, and emerging innovative pedagogies. CCC will look both within and outside the university for individuals with specialized teaching expertise and outstanding teaching performance to act as speakers and facilitators for these workshops. For instance, at the start of the semester, CCC will offer an experiential orientation workshop for all new and experienced CCC tutors, while throughout the semester, CCC will offer various thematic certificate courses for tutors to enhance their practical skills and strategies, and subsequently enrich the engagement and experiences of students within their respective course tutorials (Common Core Office, 2024k). Meanwhile, to further support interdisciplinary learning and teaching, in recent years, CCC has been building up a central online repository of resources and advice for all teachers, which is also named as NEXUS Online Repository, regardless of their specific disciplines or courses. This aims to offer teachers universal advice on teaching practices and classroom management, guides to using key education technology tools, pedagogical models, lesson plans, course frameworks, assessment rubrics, feedback templates, and sample assignments (Common Core Office, 2024g). When it comes to actualizing interdisciplinary education, there is likely to be many varieties in terms of how individual work was accomplished that compromise the overall organizational commonalities. Therefore, a further step of facilitating collective meaning-making is necessary to ensure further integration, coherence, and alignment across the whole university. Teachers need to take on and reconnect their new micro-level practices throughout daily work back into the macro-level organizational context (Reay et al., 2013). These initiatives mainly include learning about, discussing, and reflecting on the implementation of new curriculum or instructional practices, developing and discussing school improvement plans, and researching and discussing new research-based practices (Gersten et al., 2010). At the same time, throughout the process, they need to engage in a process of bricolage to make sense of the compatibility between their own professional logics and broader institutional logics, as well as in comparison with other counterparts. They need to eventually reflect on how aligned their own roles and priorities are with emerging and competing institutional logics (LaCroix, 2022).

At the same time, there are regular networking and informal socializing activities that bring together CCC course instructors and tutors across the campus, which come from a wide

range of disciplines with varying beliefs, perspectives, and identities. In particular, the CCC Social Committee formed of dedicated teachers has been established to help in planning and coordinating these regular activities. These activities include board games, tea and coffee chats, walks, picnics, and group dinners. All these activities aim to create spaces and channels via which CCC teachers can swap ideas, advice, and assistance, and share emotional and psychological support with one another, which are crucial to maintaining their overall well-being, aiding their individual and collective growth, and ultimately improving the learning and experience dynamics (Common Core Office, 2024d). Through an effective group process of forming a shared reality, these teachers can foster among themselves the collective validation and appreciation of the contributions and perspectives as well as acceptance and recognition of the otherness and difference of each other (Evans, 2015). These CCC teachers can cultivate and foster mutually supportive and beneficial relationships for continued collaboration and mutual learning, which allow them to have a stronger sense of belonging and cohesion toward the interdisciplinary community and culture within the institution (Fam et al., 2018).

Static State and Dynamic Development: Navigating Planning and Evaluation

When actualizing CCC, HKU's senior leadership and management comes up with a detailed and transparent action plan with five phases of development from 2006 to 2016 as the time when the first new cohort of undergraduate students graduate by then. For each phase, namely conceptualization of a new curriculum, exploration and experimentation, refinement and consolidation, partial implementation, and review and renewal of the curriculum, they outline the relevant components, anticipated outcomes, concrete deliverables, responsible personnel, and contingency plans. HKU has also allocated human, financial, physical, and professional resources as concrete and practical infrastructural support for each phase (Lam, 2023b). There needs to be detailed and operational planning that can grant all individuals time and space for settling and deepening their practices and experiences for attaining desirable results throughout the curriculum reform process. This can also ensure that all relevant initiatives and strategies are keeping pace with the ever-evolving and unanticipated changes in the wider environment (Deutsch et al., 2021). Meanwhile, assessing the outcomes and impacts of interdisciplinary education are uneasy, especially when some of the successes are not immediate, concrete, and explicit enough (Lawrence et al., 2022). It often involves a diversity of mechanisms and actors generating change and impact through a complex and

non-linear social process of interaction, learning, communication, and negotiation (Joly et al., 2015).

All CCC courses, teachers, demonstrators, and tutors will be evaluated by students each semester through the Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning. The reports will be made available to individual party and relevant heads of department and deans for references. All these course reports will also be presented to the CCC Committee for information and discussion, whereas pertinent issues will be identified, relevant parties will be alerted, and support on course enhancement will be provided if necessary. At the same time, for all CCC courses in their first three-year cycle, a formal course review will be conducted at the end of the second year of offering. Courses with satisfactory review results may continue to be offered for another three-year cycles, while courses which are not considered satisfactory will receive support for course enhancement and may continue to be offered for another three-year cycle subject to the performance of the first offering of the new cycle. After all, should there be no substantial improvement shown afterward, the course concerned may be discontinued from the CCC menu and be replaced by a course from the course pool (Kochhar-Lindgren, 2016). In addition to these internal mechanisms, there are external examiners reviewing the courses in each AoI and across the program in every academic year (Common Core Office, 2024c). For all CCC courses, the course outline as distributed to students is required to be sent to the respective external examiners for inspection. Meanwhile, for selected courses in each AoI, the following documents are required for selection as samples of students' work for inspection by external examiners, such as descriptions of course assignments, question papers, as well as grade descriptors and marking rubrics for different types of assignments; a sample of work of each grade for each assessment type as described in the course outline with teachers' annotated comments; other documents or course materials that the course coordinator considers appropriate for submission to external examiners. After careful review by these external examiners, their written observations and recommendations will be further presented by the respective AoI coordinator and discussed among the CCC teachers in the annual CCC Sharing Session held in every May of the academic year (University of Hong Kong, 2024c). As a standard format for organizing interdisciplinary education does not exist, multiple tailor-made monitoring and evaluation approaches designed around the specificities of each initiative and approach are needed (Munaretto et al., 2022). The university needs to solicit evidence from a wide range of sources, such that the strengths and potentials for leveraging and unleashing as well as gaps and challenges for improving and supporting could be identified. All these findings need to be widely disseminated and regularly discussed, so

as to allow them to examine and assess the changes and continuities of the interdisciplinary curriculum (Ellington et al., 2022).

Limited Time and Resources: Granting Extra Reward and Incentives

Each approved CCC course will receive adequate and long-term funding to be operated with the wide range of teaching, administrative, and logistics support. The funding allocation to faculties for each CCC course will be reviewed on a three-year basis. By offering recurrent and appealing financial incentives, faculty leadership through departmental heads will encourage their fellow members to get access to the funds through designing and planning new courses, or even recruiting and bringing in new people for the move. After all, the budgetary allocations can enhance investment and engagement with CCC's curricular agendas and teaching goals, and change individuals' relationship to the learning and teaching of CCC by making them more engaged (Tsao et al., 2024). Since very few interdisciplinary university programs have their stand-alone or independent faculties and departments, they are instead relying on the involvement of various faculties and departments to offer instructors and courses. Any inadequate pragmatic support can undermine the actualization of interdisciplinary education. The delivery of interdisciplinary courses is highly resource-intensive, especially that it often demands much time and effort than other disciplinary courses, and hence inadequate funding will adversely affect the quality of learning and teaching (Benson et al., 2016).

At HKU, the Teaching Development Grant (TDG) has been established by the TLQC to support projects and activities that will have an impact on the strategic development and promotion of learning and teaching. Throughout the years, the TDG has been supporting the development and evaluation of each CCC course that has been approved by the CCC Committee. Successful applicants are expected to make the project deliverables, such as detailed course descriptions, learning and teaching materials, as well as assessment items publicly accessible to staff and students, with the aim of providing exemplars for the CCC. Meanwhile, they need to outline the mechanisms for the evaluation of course effectiveness, such as peer review, mid-course and end-of-course survey findings and corresponding improvement measures, focus group discussions, and analysis of assessment artefacts, to gather evidence of both intended and unintended learning outcomes, and to identify areas of misunderstanding. In line with the current requirements for applying TDG, all applicants must submit an annual progress report and an evaluation report upon the completion of the project (University of Hong Kong, 2024b). There is always an imperative to further encourage

faculties and teachers to take up the ambitious challenge of teaching interdisciplinary courses by introducing a wide range of relevant initiatives, especially when their commitments are contributing to the diffusion and durability of the curriculum in the long run. This also aligns with Newman (2024) who argues how academics cherish material incentives and tangible rewards, such as rewards through performance criteria, internal grant schemes, and other monetary incentives, as means for encouraging interdisciplinary dynamics.

Conclusion

Using HKU's CCC as a contextualized example, this article particularly highlights eight critical dimensions to attend to when undergoing the multifaceted and complex interdisciplinary undergraduate curriculum-making process, namely engaging with wider stakeholders; cultivating mutual visions and goals; deciphering learning beyond disciplines; leveraging community resources; mixing diverse learning and teaching approaches; strengthening professional learning; navigating planning and evaluation; and granting extra reward and incentives. According to Daneshpour and Kwegyir-Afful (2022), universities need to decide on strategies fitting their contexts and benefits most, exploring the nature of the problems to be solved and the type of solutions and outcomes to be anticipated, as well as proposing the corresponding methods and available resources. The key to actualizing interdisciplinary education is crafting a rich portfolio of strategies rather than adopting a single initiative or model, which combine transformative and incremental approaches of changes as well as strategic targeting and general loosening of barriers (Klein, 2009).

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香港華人研究型大學的跨學科大學課程制定：平衡張力、解決兩難

林文灝

摘要

本文以香港大學全校跨學科通識教育（又稱共同核心課程）為例，特別強調了制定跨學科本科課程時需要關注的八個關鍵維度，包括：與更多持份者接觸；培養共同願景和目標；拓展學科之外的學習；善用社區資源；結合多元的學習和教學方法；強化專業學習；實踐規劃和評估；提供額外獎勵和激勵。本文透過彌合長期存在的理論與實踐差距、解決課程複雜性、消除兩極化張力，為全球跨學科教育的可持續發展提供意見，旨在為大學環境中跨學科教育的學術和實踐作出貢獻。

關鍵詞：跨學科教育；課程制定；大學教育改革；香港