

## **GLOBAL CLASSROOM**

### **International Design Presentation and Discussion**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

As part of Global Classroom's International Design Project, University of Washington (UW) Professors Douglas Wadden and Christopher Ozubko traveled to China in November, 2001, to provide information concerning project implementation and to establish communication with their partners. At the November Global Classroom meeting, Wadden and Ozubko presented information about their trip, with discussion centered around, "What we did," and "What we learned." This report describes the presentation and key discussion points.

#### **What We Did**

In preparation for their Chinese experience, Wadden, Ozubko, and their students created a website as a framework to provide project information and facilitate further partnership discussions. The website included a project overview and documentation of location, demographics, history, and culture of the Pacific Northwest, with an emphasis on the cultural history of water, the theme for the partnership project. Website translations were also distributed in Mandarin. A photograph of the University of Washington (UW) student and faculty team included a feature that allowed users to select a person and zoom in on his/her biography. The description of Design curriculum at the UW included click-and-review class descriptions and student projects. To familiarize Chinese partner faculty and students with the UW campus, 360 degree web tours were designed.

While in China, Wadden and Ozubko met with students and professors to discuss the partnership project. They were also asked to critique student work, to give lectures on design, attended by about 200-300 students and faculty, and to present workshops for 45-50 students.

Before leaving, several positive outcomes were established. A promise of two scholarly articles was achieved, one in February and one at the end of the project. An exhibit would take place in June of this year to be scheduled immediately after the UW commencement, with UW students traveling to China. UW scholarship funds from the Design program will cover transportation costs. China will host the faculty and students during their trip in June, using their government subsidies to assist with transportation and housing costs.

Professors Wadden and Ozubko hope that China assembles a similar team, and that the UW receives the team's profiles. Then emails, as well as images and ideas, can be exchanged between the groups. This first visit led to the realization of what is possible given resource and language considerations.

#### **What We Learned**

From the presentation and the discussion, the following important learnings are noted:

- Communication can be built through technology but there must be one-on-one contact to break barriers to the project. This single in-person contact in China helped “get over many hurdles.” The personal contact also established a better sense of who the Chinese students are and what level of work they are accomplishing. Personal contact also helps in understanding the Chinese orientation to the project, “local knowledge is essential to project success.” True collaboration is time consuming.
- Language and communication with Chinese students and faculty seems to be a difficulty. Professors Wadden and Ozubko noticed that their interpreters struggled with meanings of the phrases they used in conversation. Distance learning in a conceptual, theory-driven project might be complicated. The professors also noted that access to the internet in Chinese facilities was much slower than the UW standard.
- Creating the project website that included both English and Chinese names and translations made a big difference in how the UW professors were accepted during their visit. This is a strong recommendation that Professors Wadden and Ozubko would make to future project directors.

### ***Teaching and Learning***

- In China, the experience of teaching and learning are different from the experience at the UW. Chinese instructors teach in small segments, called pods, from which the students pick and choose. Chinese students complete the academic portion of their program at the university during the first year and then are students in the Academy for the following three years. One result of discussions during the visit may be a change in how Chinese faculty redesign their curriculum, breaking from the pod structure. They might allow students to work for longer periods of time on their projects. Wadden and Ozubko reported that China is looking to the US as a model for changes in their pedagogy. The “studio” culture is still very important to the art world.
- One of the biggest impediments to curriculum change in China is the newly implemented faculty tenure and promotion policy. Whereas formerly faculty were largely focused on craft, they now feel pressure to publish. The creative side of artistic design is not included in the Chinese tenure process. The UW professors held discussions with Chinese professors concerning the UW tenure and promotion system for Design professors, which may help the Chinese negotiate this change.
- In China, 1600 students apply to the program, but only 200 are accepted. As a result of the stringent application process, Chinese students can produce work early in their program, an unfamiliar outcome for UW students who learn as they progress through their program. Chinese students also stated that once they are accepted to the program, it is easy to graduate, which may not be the case at the UW. The professors also learned that the time schedule and academic calendar for UW and China are radically different.
- Chinese students know more English than the UW professors had previously thought. Professors Ozubko expressed, “They have a wonderful sense of bilingual possibilities.” Students want to see and learn, and do not wish to exclusively learn at a distance. Chinese students also seem to have a “romantic” notion of what the United States is all about and frequently share their opinions with

visitors. A significant number of Chinese students want to come to the UW, but need housing, which is a problem the UW needs to solve.

- Chinese students are interested in possible opportunities for graduate education in the United States. UW professors are considering creating a three-week experience for those Chinese students who travel to the UW.
- The process of student critiques are different in China than at the UW. Chinese students are willing to challenge and be critical. UW students are not willing to be critical and usually try to support one another. The professors question how UW students would critique a Chinese student's work. UW students might respond as a group, allowing them more freedom to express their opinions without directly challenging the student. Professor Wadden mentioned that he hopes UW students acquire the Chinese students' questioning abilities and their drive.

### ***Cultural Understandings***

- The "potential" in China seems to be true – the culture and population is moving at a high rate of speed. For example, high-quality posters and printed material were produced overnight. China seems to be looking for direct exchange of goods and people who will court them with gifts or symbolic gestures.
- Chinese culture and heritage is deeply engrained in their work. For example, in the Chinese culture, *water*, the theme for the project, is represented as female and *earth* is represented as male. The water system can be represented as networks in the body. The Chinese view of water is represented in "a style, a gesture, a symbol." These different perspectives would be inherent in the students' design projects. In contrast, UW students' design projects about water would challenge ideas, persuade, or educate. The dilemma to solve is the amount of influence the UW should have on the Chinese projects, yet maintain project ownership – the balance between shared learning and assimilation.
- Political conversations, as a window on the Chinese culture and their impressions of the U.S., were fascinating to the UW professors. For the Chinese the view is: "China is one, the U.S. is not." For example, everyone in China understands the image of water as female. Group generalizations tend to be shared by all, and they understand the environment in a very different way than U.S. citizens might. Professors Wadden and Ozubko feel that this exchange, or debate, about the environment would be healthy for UW students. UW students need to talk with people who are fundamentally skeptical about our country, and in so doing would be challenged to define and explain their values. The professors want to find out if there are universal values held by both partners and feel there is much to learn from communication efforts.