

# The Necessity of Practice and Discussion Courses in Higher Education

## A Case Study of the Urban Planning Course

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### ABSTRACT

The comprehensive public elective courses are usually divided into humanities and natural science courses in the undergraduate stage of higher education in China. Compared with the courses of science and engineering, the practical course is a relatively small proportion in Humanities and Social Sciences. This study aims to design the practical courses in the public elective courses for undergraduates, so that the undergraduates can have an intuitive experience of urban design and urban planning. The students can think about the humanized needs of the city. This study takes the "Japanese city and architecture" course as an example. In this course, the students will learn the Japanese architectural, architectural design and simple Japanese city planning, so that students can have a preliminary understanding of Japanese city and architectural humanities.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Public elective courses, Practice, Group discussion and participation, Urban planning course.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The public elective course in undergraduate stage plays an extremely important role in broadening the knowledge of contemporary college students, improving their comprehensive quality and cultivating their innovation and practical ability. [1] Generally speaking, the research of public elective courses in Chinese universities can be divided into theoretical research and empirical research. In the aspect of theoretical research, it mainly analyzes the concept of public elective courses, curriculum objectives, curriculum and other factors. In the aspect of empirical research, it includes research methods, research contents and Countermeasures of teaching construction. [2] In the existing research, there are more researches on improving the teaching effect of public elective courses, [3], [4] the reform of course content and classroom teaching methods, but there is a lack of theoretical discussion on how to improve the innovation ability and cultural literacy of college students through practical teaching. [5], [6], [7]

So, this study aims to design a public elective course of Humanities and Social Sciences

combining practice and discussion, which will take the course of "Japanese city and architecture" as a case.

## 2. INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

### 2.1 Establishment of the "Japanese city and Architecture" Course

Cities change with the development of human civilization. With the great richness of human life and the increasing types of occupations, cities are becoming more and more complex. How to build a city scientifically and create a suitable living space is closely related to everyone who lives in the city, and is gradually getting attention from all aspects.

Japanese cities are fascinating and confusing. Its structure, architectural mode and distinctive visual characteristics subvert the traditional urban design theory. Today's Japanese society is formed by the interaction among city, architecture and humanity.

Based on the planning concept of Japanese cities, this course is designed for students who are zero basic in Japanese and are interested in

Japanese architecture and humanities. This course introduces Japanese city, architecture, nature, history, customs and Japanese etiquette and habits in daily life, so that students can have a preliminary understanding of Japanese society and humanities from the perspective of urban planning. According to the content of each chapter, combined with basic grammar and basic sentence patterns, we will teach some related daily expressions step by step.

## **2.2 *Compilation of Course Content***

The course of "Japanese city and architecture" is divided into four units: Japanese city, development of urban planning, urban renewal and design, and urban planning system. Unit 1 has two chapters, which are chapter 1 urban overview of Japan and Chapter 2 urban planning overview. Unit 2 has two chapters, which are chapter 3 modern urban planning development and Chapter 4 modern urban planning development. Unit 3 has two chapters, which are chapter 5 landscape planning and Chapter 6 urban design. There are two chapters in unit 4, which are Chapter 7 urban planning related legal system and Chapter 8 future topics. While teaching each chapter, we will teach some simple Japanese landscape design. [8]

## **2.3 *Design of Teaching Methods***

In addition to classroom teaching, this course mainly adopts practical case training, and multimedia teaching.

### **2.3.1 *Practical Cases***

There are a series of practical courses have been designed at the same time of teaching in Chapter 5 "landscape planning and urban design" and Chapter 6 "urban renewal and urban development", such as landscape planning, urban design and urban renewal. The students who are the zero basis of urban planning will have an intuitive experience of design. That can stimulate the students to think about the humanized needs of the city, and truly feel that life is full of humanity everywhere the sense of satisfaction in the city of modern design, really feel the idea that the city makes life better. Teachers are mainly responsible for leading, commenting and prompting.

### **2.3.2 *Multimedia Teaching***

The teacher will choose the film which combines with Japanese cities, architecture

appreciation and simple Japanese learning, so that students can watch it and have a discussion of the film. The teacher needs to comment on the students' group discussion.

## **3. *TEACHING PROCESS***

A good teaching process is constructed through classroom organization, and the whole teaching process includes classroom teaching and classroom discussion.

The classroom teaching is divided into conventional teaching, lectures, round table forum, new media teaching and so on. For urban planning related courses, especially the general elective course of the "Japanese city and architecture", it is necessary to combine some forms of new media of teaching. For example, flipped classroom, MOOC and so on, through the means of multimedia, let the students have a more perceptual understanding of the cutting-edge ideas and design concepts of urban planning and urban design, establish their own learning objectives before class, and exchange and share their learning experience with teachers and students at the same time.

"Flipped Classroom" or "Inverted Classroom" means that it is necessary to readjust the time inside and outside the classroom and transfer the decision-making power of learning from teachers to students. In this kind of teaching mode, with precious time in the classroom, students can focus more on active project-based learning, jointly study and solve the challenges of localization or, so as to obtain a deeper understanding. Teachers no longer occupy the classroom time to teach information, which requires students to complete autonomous learning before class. They can watch video lectures, read e-books with enhanced functions, discuss with other students on the Internet, and consult the required materials at any time. Teachers also have more time to communicate with everyone. The goal is to let students get more real learning through practice. It is to make learning more flexible, active and make students more involved.

MOOC, the large-scale open online course, is the product of "Internet plus education". Mass open online course is a newly emerging online course development model. MOOC has three main learning platforms. 1) "Coursera" is a large open online course project. Currently, MOOC is the largest developing platform, with nearly 500 courses from universities all over the world. 2)

EDX: a non-profit organization jointly funded by Harvard and MIT, allied with the world's top universities, with open source code and more flexible curriculum design.

In the whole teaching process, students can choose the corresponding multimedia materials for autonomous learning according to their own learning objectives, and the problems encountered in the learning process can be communicated with the teacher in time through e-mail or classroom questioning.

In addition, in the practice course, the course of "Japanese city and architecture" will focus on introducing the humanized design concepts in Japanese cities, such as the design of the hydrophilic platform or the Japanese landscape courtyard, so that students can think and complete some design assignments while appreciating the classic cases. In the aspect of classroom discussion, it can be carried out in the form of group discussion, classroom debate, role play, brainstorming, etc.

## **4. PRACTICE AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Practice**

In the practice of urban space planning and design, although both urban planning and urban design deal with urban space problems, the effectiveness of the two fields in practice is very different. The main object of contemporary urban design is "part of the city". When urban planning selects the main functional areas (commercial area, residential area, cultural and educational area, natural or historical preservation area, etc.) in urban area, urban design specialty can take over the work that urban planning fails to deal with in more detail, that is, to establish the overall structure of its spatial organization and its building volume in each specific area.

The practice course of landscape planning and urban design is set up in the course of "Japanese city and architecture". In the process of design practice, we can learn from the practice education and innovation education concept of American universities. American universities also attach great importance to students' practical ability to participate in experiments, attach importance to integrating theory with practice, and encourage students to participate in scientific research funds. The University of Virginia has a student research fund to encourage students to take the initiative in

inquiry learning and acquire their own critical thinking ability. Especially in the undergraduate stage, it supports students to go abroad to do research.

### **4.2 Group Discussion and Everyone's Participation**

Four class hours of design practice course is designed in the course of "Japanese city and architecture", so that students can experience the humanized design in Japanese cities while using their hands and brains. With the continuous development of society, the pace of people's life is accelerating, and people's independence as individuals is becoming stronger and stronger. People not only need rich and colorful material enjoyment, but also need warm and considerate spiritual comfort. Especially in the information age with fierce competition, the work has become more busy and tense. Since ancient times, China has attached great importance to people's own spiritual activities, experience of life state, and implementation of humanistic spirit. China has always stressed the spirit of Confucianism. Both Confucianism and Taoism advocate the concept of "harmony between man and nature". They believe that nature and man are inseparable unity. The world is closely related to human nature, human life activities, and the way of life. We should pursue and experience a state of life and spirit in which man and nature are in harmony, care about life, human affairs and attach importance to inner spiritual state. This desire of users makes the "people-oriented" design rise to the spiritual care for people.

### **4.3 Active Learning Is an Important Basis for Improving Teaching Effect**

The learning motivation of Chinese college students' is not strong and their autonomy is not enough. Through the form of classroom discussion, we can guide college students to cherish learning opportunities, clarify learning significance and learning objectives, improve their professional interest, enhance learning motivation, take the initiative to learn and learn independently. So that, learning can become the first demand of students' self-development.

#### **4.4 Teacher-Student Interaction Is an Effective Way to Improve Teaching Effect**

There are not many ways and time for teachers and students to communicate in Chinese universities. So, it is necessary to create space and conditions for communication and discussion between teachers and students, guide teachers to arrange more time to explore academic problems and exchange life experience with students in the form of classroom discussion, and encourage students to take the initiative to find teachers to report learning gains, consult academic problems, and answer questions for their own life difficulties and emotional puzzles.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

Public elective courses in higher education mainly focus on cultivating students' interest in autonomous learning. For example, in the course of "Japanese city and architecture", it introduces Japanese cities, architecture, nature, history, customs, and Japanese etiquette and habits in daily life, so that students can have a preliminary understanding of Japanese society and humanities from the perspective of urban planning.

Through the experience of a series of practical courses such as landscape planning, urban design and urban renewal, the students with zero basis of urban planning can have an intuitive experience of design, and stimulate the students to think about the humanized needs of the city.

### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper is independently completed by Fei Zhou.

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