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CityU MBA experiential-based learning initiatives enrich students MBA journey with real-world experiences

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Designed to prepare students to take on business leadership roles that span disciplines, industries and regions, tailor-made experiential learning initiatives — a core part of the CityU MBA programme — enable students to gain first-hand experience of how to navigate real-world business challenges against a backdrop of increasing uncertainties.

Given the complex nature of the global business environment and the needs of today's businesses practices, experiential learning or "learning by doing" enable students to gain practical experience they can apply in real-world situations, says Prof Kevin Chiang, director of the CityU MBA programme and professor of management sciences at the College of Business, City University of Hong Kong (CityU). "Experiential learning adds breadth to the depth of our MBA programme by helping our students to develop the skills that will set them apart throughout their careers," says Chiang who explains that a well-designed experiential learning programme should empower students to draw on the experience of working with the partnering organisations while applying the various skills acquired during the classroom sessions.

While case studies have well-defined problems and challenges and measurable factors, Chiang explains that in experiential learning situations, students are exposed to real-life, real-time decision making. As business challenges become increasingly multifaceted, for example, experiential learning allows students to work directly with partnering companies to solve problems being faced in their specific company or industry. In addition to problem solving skills, students are able to practice their soft skills, which include communicating with senior managers, executives, department heads and clients. Importantly, says Chiang, no matter which career they choose, experiential learning experiences can help students to increase their business acumen and develop the cross-functional decision-making skills that are crucial for any profession. The experiential-based learning initiatives offered by the CityU MBA include an Entrepreneurship Workshop in the US, a Global Brand Management Workshop in the UK and an Enterprise Diagnostic Residential Trip in Asia.



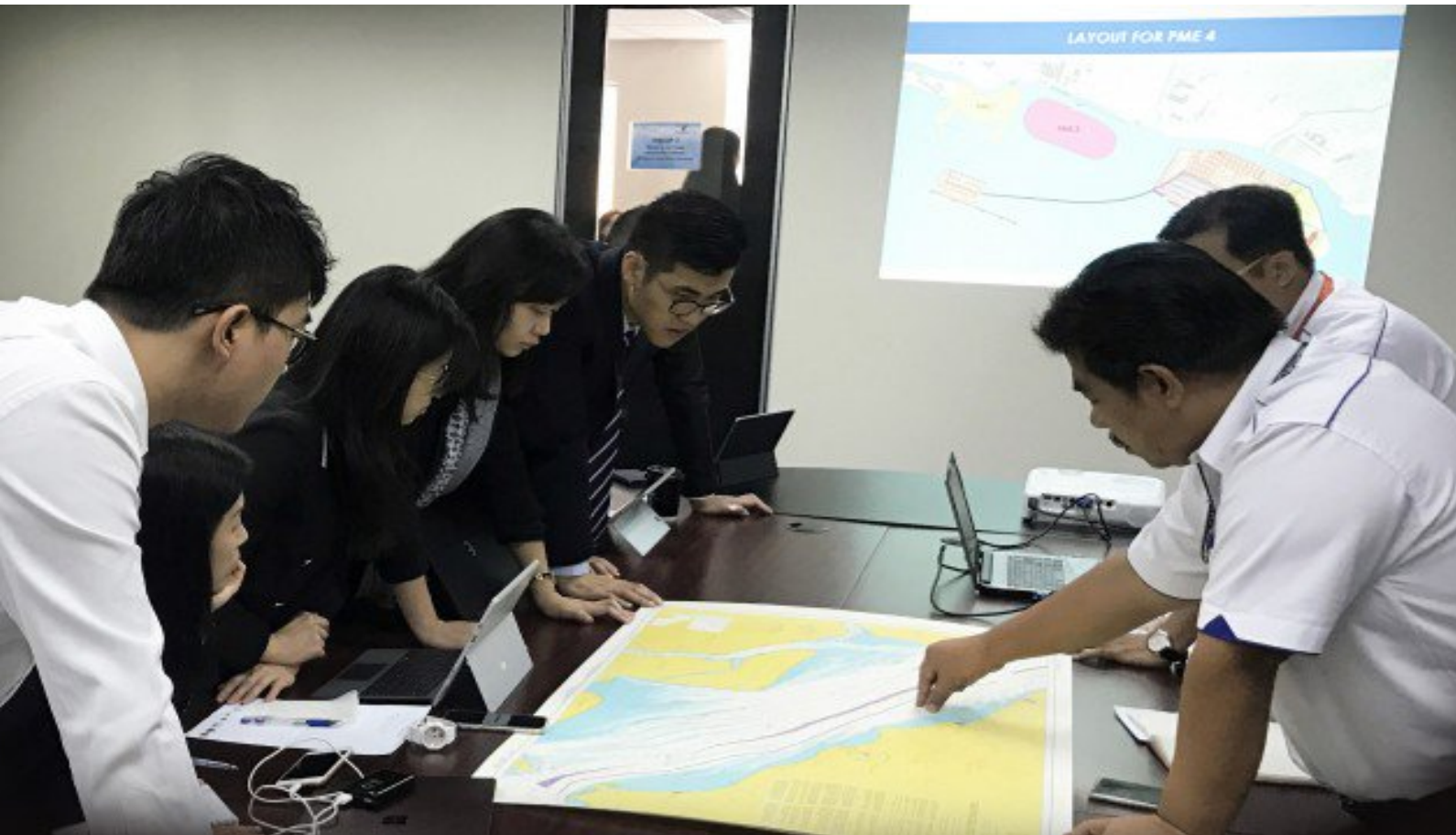
Widely recognised for inspiring innovative thinking, during the Entrepreneurship Workshop visit to the US, MBA students join UC Berkeley Entrepreneurship and Business Plan Development classes. Students also make a series of visits to Silicon Valley venture capital firms and network with start-up entrepreneurs who impart their insights and real-world experiences. Working in groups, students put what they have learned into practice by developing a comprehensive business plan, which they present to venture capitalists for evaluation. Chiang says through the process, students learn the important lesson of how to formulate an idea and communicate the proposal in a succinct way that makes it a viable project for potential investors.



For Jason Chen, a part-time Year 2 student who was formerly an engineer manager with a leading semiconductor company, the Entrepreneurship Workshop provided him with the motivation to change his career path and become the CEO of his own start-up enterprise. "The trip provided me with an opportunity to get immersed in Silicon Valley's entrepreneurship culture," Chen says. "When I kick-started my start-up business, I found that the skills learnt during the trip, including customer discovery, business plan development and pitching, are particularly applicable to my entrepreneurship journey," he adds.



Meanwhile, during the 10-day UK Global Brand Workshop in partnership with Imperial College London — a top 10 globally ranked university — students attend brand building, management, measurement and brand innovation presentations made by leading brand management experts. Students also form groups and work with faculty members to initiate "learning by doing" brand projects which culminate in presentation. During previous visits, CityU MBA students have worked on projects for iconic brands including luxury car maker Bentley, supermarket chain Tesco and Edwardian Hotels, where students developed branding strategies for the Asian market. A further highlight of the UK Workshop, students spend time at the Royal College of Arts, Impact Lab where they take part in experimental methods and laboratory-based discoveries, to test and transform original ideas into real business propositions.



Chiang says experiential learning provides opportunities for students to work directly with project sponsors so they can learn to solve problems being faced by the host company. For instance, launched more than 20-years ago, the MBA Enterprise Diagnostic Residential Trip in Asia, requires students to take on a consultative role to help partnering organisations to address business challenges and opportunities. Working in small groups with their assigned CityU professor, students analyse problems, develop solutions and produce a report for the senior management of the host enterprise. Originally focused on mainland China, as business in the Asia region becomes more inter-regional, recent consultative assignments visits have taken place in Cambodia, Malaysia and Korea.

With the fulltime and part-time MBA programmes both able to accommodate about 35 students, Chiang says the cohort size ensures a good range of student diversity, while still allowing for an extensive experiential learning experience. Chiang stresses that a diverse student mix, which ensures dynamic cohort interaction and networking experiences is key strength of the CityU MBA programme. While the CityU MBA curriculum — which consists of 19 credits of compulsory courses — is designed to sharpen students understanding of business fundamentals, for students who are interested in making a career pivot or advancing their interests in topics in a specific discipline, the programme also offers a concentration curriculum, which features five disciplines namely, accounting, finance, information management, marketing and supply chain management. Furthermore, Chiang adds that the Programme is consistently looking for new and relevant ways to develop and sharpen students' knowledge, business acumen and equip them with the skills and confidence readiness to take on new challenges. In addition to a focus on "sharp" learning, Chiang explains the SHARP acronym underpins the Programme's ethos to foster a business education environment with world-class Software, state-of-the-art Hardware, and well-connected Alumni so as to boost global talent Recruitment and power students to achieve a career advancing Placement.

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