

Department of Computer Science

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Social commitment

CityU's flexible degrees prepare students for different career paths, writes **John Brennan**

Dr Anna Hui Na-na, associate professor at the department of applied social sciences at City University of Hong Kong (CityU), says that CityU's bachelor of social sciences programme is special. "Other universities in Hong Kong are more discipline-based, but we have created a more inter-disciplinary environment," Hui says.

CityU has been committed to the social sciences for many years. The institution has been developing its social work programme for a quarter of a century, and this year marks further refinements to the structure of the courses on offer.

"This year, we have changed the admissions system to one of departmental admission," Hui explains. Students will enter the department without having already declared a major.

"In Year One, they will study psychology, sociology and the social welfare system as their common core. After the first year, they declare which major they are interested in. The three options are psychology, applied sociology and criminology, and social work," she says.

Hui thinks this structure will benefit graduates throughout their careers. "Social workers, for example, need to

have some knowledge of psychology when they are helping mentally-ill clients," she says. "Similarly, psychologists offering psychotherapy to their patients need to understand the social welfare system."

Successful graduates from CityU's social sciences in social work programme are sufficiently qualified to become registered social workers. The government funded degree has consistently lead graduates to prosperous careers with high levels of job security, Hui notes.

"Within the field of social work, graduates have a wide range of choices. They can serve families, children,



Photo: CityU



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senior citizens, drug addicts, or victims of physical abuse,” she adds.

To prepare students for a career in social work, the programme incorporates a significant amount of practical training. The same applies to the rest of CityU’s social science programmes.

“Sociology and criminology are, again, general degrees but our graduates have some special career choices. For example, because they study criminal behaviour, criminology students often join the police, the correctional service, or the immigration or customs services,” Hui says. The CityU degree in criminology and sociology is the only bachelor’s degree in Hong Kong funded by the University Grants Committee.

According to Hui, criminologists also need interdisciplinary knowledge. For instance, the chances of successfully tackling criminal behaviour and its surrounding motivations are improved drastically by a strong background in psychology.

This broader perspective can some-





times lead students to ask important questions, such as “whether there’s something wrong with the whole system rather than just the individual,” she says.

Some sociology and criminology graduates go on to work with NGOs, as advocates for social or political causes. “Majors in psychology will usually be employed in academic fields, such as research.” A career in human resources is also a possibility, she adds.

Students enrolled in CityU’s computer science programmes are also given a variety of career choices, especially with the incredible rate that technology is improving. Dr. Wong Hau San, CityU associate head and associate professor at the department of com-

puter science, says the department’s curriculum has unique elements that distinguish it from the rest of Hong Kong’s computer science programmes.

In Year One, students cover the fundamentals of computer science, alongside more general science courses. But Year Two, Wong says, is exceptional in nature. “Students can specialise in one of our specific study streams,” he says. Streams include information security, multimedia computing, software engineering and project management. The department recently added a new stream, data science, in light of the increased importance of big data, Wong notes.

Dr Andy Chun Hon-wai, associate professor at the CityU department of

computer science, says Year Three is also unique. “We are the only university in Hong Kong that has a mandatory placement programme,” Chun says. “At CityU, students not only learn technical skills, they also gain a year of valuable, real-world experience.” Organisations participating in these paid placements have included HSBC, Disneyland, and IBM.

“The final year project is like a capstone in American universities,” says Chun. “Students put everything they’ve learned into a tangible artifact, such as computer software, to prove they can design, implement, test, and demonstrate a final product by themselves.”

Wong says the chance to study outside of Hong Kong has been another



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er strong attraction for students. “The department runs an overseas exchange programme, so students can spend a semester at an overseas university,” he says. “We also offer month-long summer-school study abroad programmes, for instance, in Britain.” On an even larger scale, CityU runs a double degree programme in collaboration with Columbia University in the US.

Joshua Wong, a final year student in the computer science programme at CityU, is already thinking ahead. “I’m planning on postgraduate study, and I think I will apply to a foreign university,” he says.

The CityU programme has had many highlights, he says: “I went to the US during the summer to get big data

experience. The university sponsored us for 60 per cent of the cost,” he adds.

Joshua, who worked at HKEX in his third year, says the placement programme is useful because it can help students decide what they want to do. “I found that there’s not much space for being creative within a big organisation. If I can get on to post-graduate programme, I would like to work in a start-up afterwards,” he says.

Joshua reminds interested applicants that “anyone considering applying to CityU’s computer science programme should understand that it is a challenging, but extremely rewarding course.” ■

