

Discovering Rensheng Mubiao 人生目标

The Importance of Values-Focused Programming at
American Universities for Promoting Student Formation
and Values in Chinese Higher Education

Presented by Tricia Bølle
Dalton Institute on College Student Values
Florida State University
February 4, 2010

Recognition of the need for formative values education within Mainland China has increased dramatically in the last few years. While previously an issue that hardly garnered much attention, the personal well-being and ethical development of university students in China is now a growing concern among education administrators and society.

U.S. universities have an important opportunity to play a pivotal role in working together with China to positively influence the development of student services programs that promote student formation and values.

人生目标 = Purpose in Life

Chinese youth, lost, confused, uncertain of their purpose in life, come to universities focused solely on that which will make their family proud – getting top grades and, ultimately, graduating to a high-paying job or prestigious position.

This kind of singular focus leaves many students devoid of the kind of *personal formation, values* and *life education* necessary for the balanced development of themselves as whole persons as they prepare to enter society upon graduating from college.

Systemic and Cultural Factors Unique to Chinese Society

The following are some of the more significant factors contributing to the current crisis regarding healthy student formation and well-being in China.

- Social and historical turmoil – the Mao Years
Political ideology as a substitute for moral and ethical character development
- Dramatic increase in higher education enrollment
- Rapid socio-economic transition of the past two decades
- College entrance exams 高考
- One-child policy
- Generation gap
- Narrow definition of success
- Minimal spiritual formation

Social and historical turmoil – the Mao Years

Political ideology as a substitute for moral and ethical character development

- Chinese Communist Party influence and control was pervasive at every level of society and in every aspect of life, including education
- Mandatory ethics courses focused on the inculcation of social mores in accordance with CCP ideology and the teachings of Mao Zedong
- Proper social behavior determined by Party principles
- Fear of ruling party forced people's public behavior to conform lest be dangerously labeled a "reactionary"
- Confusion among youth as to the authority of parental teaching of values versus that of the Party



Dramatic increase in higher education enrollment

- Resources inadequate; stretched too thin
- Little financing
- Lack of experience
 - Experienced people, experts are in short supply
- No real precedent for life education and student formation in college
- Increased competition for grades, jobs, recognition, and the ever elusive number one spot

加油？



Rapid Socio-economic Transition of the Past Two Decades

- Politicized college level education on ethics and behavior is no longer compulsory and has receded into the background
- Since Deng Xiaoping's socio-economic reform, higher education reform initiatives have focused almost exclusively on the advancement of academia and technology over student well-being and formation in an effort to achieve world-class status and rapidly modernize China to compete well on a global scale.
- With the social migration of laborers from the countryside and the influx of student enrollment in higher education, jobs have become scarce. A simple degree will no longer cut it. To get a well-paying or respectable job in the city without good connections, a degree from a good university is now necessary.
- Change is so fast-paced that sense of values and place in the world becomes uncertain
- Capitalism with Chinese characteristics
- *Success = 房子，車子，妻子*
A house, a car, and a wife



College entrance exams 高考

- The pressure on students to perform well academically is quite immense.
- Little fish in a big pond. Having successfully gotten into a good university, students are expected to excel among their similarly challenged peers.
- In China, the greatest pressure on the student is from their family and from an internal dutiful desire to make their parents proud.
- Narrow definition of success
- One child for most families
- Focus on academic study 好好学习 leaves little time for children to learn about life education, values, etc.

One-Child Policy

- Rise of the “little emperors” 小皇帝
- 4-2-1 ratio of family pressure to succeed
- Unreasonable expectations on students
- Awkward familial relations for children “in the shadows”
- Fewer horizontal relationships, less opportunity for development of social skills with peers
- More limited understanding of concepts of successful interpersonal relationships such as nurturing, sharing, compromise, and conflict resolution



Generational Gap

- Difficulty of parents to relate to their children
- Many parents grew up during the Cultural Revolution
- Chinese youth today have freedoms that their parents never had
 - society more liberal
 - greater flow of information
 - Party less controlling of everyday life
- Values education can still come from the parents. There are certain values that can be taught regardless of the social situation of the time.

Narrow definition of success

- Narrow definition of success
 - Academic success
 - High powered / high paying / high status job
 - 房子, 车子, 妻子 (house, car, wife)
- Many parents lost their hopes and dreams in the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath. Possess a desire to live vicariously through their children and give them the chance at life they never had.
- Singular focus on academic study leaves little time for children to learn about life education, values, etc.
- Pressure on students to achieve this “success” leads many students to unhealthy habits and lifestyle practices in order to attain it
 - Psychological disorders (anxiety, depression, suicide)
- Need to redefine success

Minimal Spiritual Formation

- Spirituality generally associated with organized religion
- Atheist communist ideology naturally antagonistic towards religion
- Historical memory of religious oppression in China still far too recent for many to risk promoting spiritual well-being on campuses
- Although religious freedom exists to varying degrees throughout China, many are still too intimidated to freely express their faith and grow spiritually
- Current government policy restrictions make spiritual formation difficult, particularly among Chinese youth
 - No campus ministry programs
 - Students must find spiritual comfort and guidance off-campus
 - Few registered churches have student fellowships
 - No one to turn to for life issues that intersect with their faith
- Universities very sensitive to topic of spiritual formation
 - Feeling is that “students can go to their churches for that”
- Spiritual well-being highly correlated to psychological well-being, positive values, moral and ethical behavior, and strong sense of social responsibility
- Some university administrators are gradually becoming open to and aware of the positive social influences, ethics, values, personal formation and well-being that spirituality can bring



Student Values – Thinking and Behavior

- Understanding of Success
- Leading a Balanced Life
- Altruism and Service to Others
- Social Justice
- Diversity Issues
- Conflict resolution
- Taking Responsibility
- Interpersonal Relationships (Social / Emotional Development)
- Love, Friendship and Sex
- Psychological Issues
- Spirituality, Morals, and Ethics
- Personal Formation
- Other Transformative Experiences
- Breaking Boundaries – Finding Inner Strength
- Purpose in Life

A True Great Leap Forward

Sunshine in Your Heart - Life Education for Successful Living

- Started in 2004 to teach positive values and valuable life skills
- Lectures given at over sixty college campuses in China
- Collaboration between Chinese educators and foreign experts who care about China
 - Understanding Personal Well-being (Physical Social, Intellectual, Emotional, Spiritual, Life Satisfaction)
 - Understanding Oneself
 - Managing Stress, Time and Finances
 - Healthy Eating/Sleeping/Exercise Habits
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Developing and Understanding Values
 - Love and Relationships
 - Purpose in Life
- Life examples – Team Hoyt, Mother Teresa
- Very positive and enthusiastic response from students who've participated in program

We can learn from them...

How We Can Work Together

... And they can learn from us.

- The United States has a long history of university programs that promote personal formation, character development, positive values, social responsibility and life education.
- Fundamental aspects of original university system: to raise up whole people, leaders in society, global citizens.
- Administrative approaches such as those highlighted in *Involving Colleges*, countless university programs and organizations, outside grants and initiatives, and conferences such as the Dalton Institute are a testament to the strong belief in the importance of college student values and civic engagement.
- Each university has its own unique programming, demographic and experiences.
- Universities and organizations should utilize existing relationships they have with Chinese universities
- Begin a dialogue
- Stress importance of student values for your students as well as other issues related to cross-cultural understanding and student well-being
- Be very sensitive to the expressed needs and wants of the Chinese university. Respect their response. Be open to what they have to say. Chinese universities have a wealth of knowledge from which we can learn great things.
- Not all universities or administrators will be initially receptive. Keep trying. With all the connections I had, it still took me almost my entire first trip before I was able to begin a strong working relationship.
- Meetings should involve multiple student services administrators and later students for better perspective.
- Values and spiritual formation are an integral part of university educational experience, by helping to promote diversity, understanding, social responsibility and positive values in society.
- From an intellectual standpoint, initiatives such as UCLA's research on Spirituality in Higher Education and the Veritas Forum have brought together research, intellectualism and spirituality in a stimulating environment.
- Discuss how holistic student well-being is dependent on every aspect of the whole person: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, psychological, **and** spiritual.

By working together, we can accomplish great things.

What Makes Universities Great

World-class universities are exceptional not just for the brilliant minds that they bring together in one place, but also for recognizing the importance of student values and personal formation in developing such individuals to discover their purpose in life and go on in society to truly do great things.



Thank You! 謝謝您!

