

Kourtney Woo, Student Consultant

Hi, I'm Kourtney. I've just graduated from Lingnan University and I was majoring in translation and minoring in English so I've been working as a Student Consultant for about 3 semesters. So I may share some of my experience as a Student Consultant and I can talk a little bit about the Program.

Importance of Student's Involvement

Every teacher has their own teaching style but sometimes they don't really know whether it is suitable for all the students. And regardless of the teachers, whether they are a new teacher to the school or they are some experienced teacher, because they are in a different environment every time and the student may change as well, from generation to generation or from one school to another school. So different schools may have different styles of student and also different generations may have different learning styles as well so I think it is quite important for the students to raise their opinions to the teachers because it is a way to let the teachers know how the students themselves can learn better.

However it is hard to find a student who is studying the course to take this position because first of all they have to focus on listening to the class. They have tests, they have exams to take and they have homework to do, so most of the time they should be concentrating on the class. Secondly I think that if you find one of the students from the class to raise opinions for other students it may not be neutral enough. So that's why we should have the Student Consultant.

The Student Consultant is in a rather objective position so I will try to give my opinions and try to observe from an objective point of view and then will give out some constructive ideas to the teacher based on my experience so that we can help the teacher to know more about how the students think. So to me, I'm very happy to get some of the feedback from my partner saying that my opinions can actually help them to reflect on the teaching style, like they may try to reconsider whether their course or their teaching style is having too many lectures or maybe it's a way to encourage them to think of more activities and things like that.

Working with the library

So besides working with the faculty partner, we have also teamed up with the library a few times. Usually we will have some observation for the library workshops and for myself, I have observed three to four workshops personally.

I think observing the library workshop is quite different from the normal observation because you know a lot of the workshops are only a one time thing which may cause some difficulties because we may not be able to see the result changes instantly because we just observe one time and then for a long time we will not have a follow-up observation. And also sometimes some students on listening maybe have less incentive to listen to a library workshop because all they want to do is to fulfil the ILP - but I also think that this may be a problem but this can also be a motivation for us to work better because if we can think of more

constructive ideas or we can give more suggestions then we may help to change the workshop into a more interesting activity so that the students will be more willing to participate in the workshop. So yes I think this is also a challenge but it is a good thing for us that can motivate us to work harder with the library.

Another thing is that a library staff is different from the faculty partner obviously because the faculty partner is very experienced in teaching but not with library staff, so that they may not know the students as much as the faculty partner. So again it is more challenging for us to maybe tell them more about how the students think or tell them more from the student perspective on how we view these kinds of activities. So to me I think that observing a library workshop is more challenging than a normal observation.

However I am also happy to be working with the library as well because I think that working with the library is not a personal thing. Just like in other observations, we may be fully responsible for the whole observation with one faculty partner; however working with the library is like the whole team of the Student Consultant Program that is working with the library because some of them may do the observation of a certain workshop before but in the next observation for the same workshop it may not be the same Consultant. Therefore we may share some of our opinions and then we will try to think of the ideas, give out some suggestions together in our regular meeting and then try to collect all our information and all our opinions and give those opinions to the library so as to help them to change the workshop, making it better.

Let me just take an example. Every year during the NSO the library the library will hold some activities for the freshmen to explore the library. Two years before one of our Consultants had observed this kind of activity and she told me some problems that she had been observing and she also told me how she gave ideas to the library staff that she was working with. Last year I got the chance to observe NSO activities but I'm very happy to see that the activities are much better than what she described to me and I think that it is because the library has really taken our opinions into consideration. It has made the NSO activities much more organized and there is much more interaction. By the end I can see that the freshmen of that year can actually benefit from our opinions and were enjoying taking part in the activities. So I'm very happy to see this kind of changes. So to me, I think that working with the library is really a kind of way for us to show our team spirit, how the Consultants can work as a team, not only individually but also as a team, to give out our constructive ideas to our partner.

Looking back...

So I may talk about how I feel after I'm not a Student Consultant any more, as I graduated, but I can talk about how I feel about being a part of it. At first when I was told that I could be one of the Student Consultants, I was quite worried because I think that I may not be able to handle this job, because for all this time I have been just a student sitting in the classroom, listening to the teachers but not really the one who give comments. But I am thankful to this Program - because I've taken part in this Program, it helped me to learn a lot. It helped me

to be a more be a person who is more willing to express my thoughts and my opinions because it really encouraged me to do so. It makes me think that my opinion matters.

At first of course it is challenging because it is really hard in the beginning for me to think that teachers and student are in an equal position because especially, you know, in the Chinese society, there's a difference between the teacher and the students and all we have to do as a student is to listen and obey. But in this Program we are not in that kind of a position any more or in that kind of relation any more because we are working as a partner. We have the equal position but though it is an equal position, what I'm talking about does not mean that it can allow me to challenge the teacher or being disrespectful to the teacher - not like that at all - but I think it is a way for me to be honest with my opinion, because being honest with the teacher is the whole point of this Program.

Although sometimes you may point out some of the problems of the class, actually that information is what the teacher needed because they want to know what students can benefit from or what is not very helpful for the students. So I think it is quite challenging for me at first to be honest with all of my opinions but later on I found out that it is quite a surprise that all of my partners are actually very willing to listen to my opinions. Although some of my opinions they may not take because it is impossible, as I know as I raised our opinions, I only raised it from a student perspective but after all I'm not a teacher; I don't know the difficulties of being a teacher. So we would have a little discussion during this and he or she will tell me about why my ideas it's not possible, things like that, so I can know more. So it is another good thing that I learned from this Program, that I can know more about the difficulties of being a teacher.

So, yes, it is very good that we can have very good interaction and discussion between me and the teachers. So, yes, I think this has trained me to be more honest with my opinions and try to raise up my opinions to the teachers because a lot of the teachers are actually very open to comments . And from the feedback of the faculty partners, some of them actually told me or told Dr.Ho that they think that this Program is helpful because although maybe the opinions or the suggestions that we have given them are not very useful - like they may not be the one important thing that they appreciate about this Program - but at least it will help them to reflect on their teaching style, like thinking about how the students may react to their teaching style, so they may think of another teaching style that can help the student better that can help them increase the learning effectiveness.

I'm also very happy to see that during the whole observation week, I can actually see changes in the classroom environment. And sometimes it will make me really throw out to be honest because I think that this is a way to show me that my opinions actually help and this Program actually helps the students and helps them to learn in a better environment, or they're more willing to participate in class and have a better classroom environment. So I think this kind of Program is very important for the teacher as well as the student to improve the learning effectiveness.