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### **I. Teaching Experience/ Program Structure/ Pedagogical Issues**

Macau Millennium College (MMC) accepts and confers degrees to undergraduate students who have just graduated from high school as well as to the returning students, employed by local businesses, primarily in the casino industry. The students can major in a number of fields, including social sciences, business, accounting/finance, and hospitality management. The courses are offered throughout the year, divided into 3 major semesters, fall, spring, and summer. The enrollments vary, but the physical space is, in fact, rather small; the seven classrooms and a number of offices are all located on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of a major business building in Macau's downtown area. The students are required to complete core general education courses, ranging from Macau history to accounting and English. In terms of the basic structure and student population, MMC can be compared to Montgomery College (MC). On the other hand, due to its small size and the specific student population, MMC also sharply contrasts with Montgomery College. As a result, teaching a 6-week English summer course at MMC has its program-specific values as well as challenges.

English courses at MMC are taught in a non-English speaking environment and as such, fall under the category of English as a Foreign Language courses. All enrolled students are speakers of Cantonese, with limited English proficiency. Some of them take Basic English as a regular semester class, which roughly corresponds to lower level Work Force Development (WFD) courses at Montgomery College. On the average, the students who register for the English 101 summer course taught by faculty from Montgomery College have low comprehension skills, minimal speaking skills, and rudimentary writing skills. For an instructor who cannot communicate in Cantonese, this represents a challenge but also offers a new perspective on teaching techniques and methodologies. The main factor is the ability to be flexible and plan the lessons from one class session to the next. Regardless of the syllabus and the planned content of the course, the instructor needs to be aware of the linguistic difficulty of presenting the material and the difficulty that students may have acquiring the skills in the 6 weeks allotted to the course.

The following are the most critical points regarding my experience at the MMC this past summer.

Thanks to the valuable input from the Montgomery College faculty who had already taught at MMC, I selected two beginning-low intermediate level textbooks, *Communicate What You Mean* and *Grammar Express*: which were pre-ordered, and, as I found out upon my arrival, had already been purchased by most students. The cost of the two textbooks combined was an issue with a large number of students. I used the textbooks in addition to other materials, mostly visual aids, such as pictures, short video clips, and impromptu cultural notes, comparisons, and idiomatic phrases that seemed to be high-interest for the students.

The first class meeting made it clear that the teaching methods in an ESL language learning context at MC can be only marginally used in a foreign language setting at MMC. MMC offers two sections of English 101, taught on three alternate days: MWF or TTRS, twice a day, 10:30-1:30, and 6:45-9:45 in the evening, to accommodate students' work schedules. The number of registered students varies from year to year, and this past summer it was around 40-45 students. On the first day of class, MMC provides student assistants who are functionally bilingual in Cantonese and English. My first class, therefore, was somewhat of an exercise in translation for the student assistants. The first day of teaching for me was Monday, so I was assigned the MWF schedule, whereas my colleague, Xinghui Xing, was scheduled to teach TTRS. The fact that she is a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese, which most students also speak, was helpful to the students as well as me as her colleague in numerous at-work and other situations.

The diagnostic test that we administered on the first day resulted in dividing the students into two groups, roughly lower and higher proficiency levels. Addressing the students' comprehension needs and the language learning circumstances, my colleague Xinghui and I decided that the slightly higher proficiency group would be assigned to me and the lower level to her. However, one major issue, which had been brought up by the previous MC instructors as well, is that the students' attendance shifted based on their work schedule. For instance, each one of us had three subgroups of students: the daytime students, the evening students, and the day/night students, whose schedules could change every few days, and that impacted both their attendance and the amount of time they could spend in class and studying outside the class. Most students came to class tired and unprepared, although they generally tried to keep up with any written homework assignments.

In the 3 hour sessions (repeated content due to the students' schedules), I attempted to cover mainly familiar topics, high interest vocabulary and idioms, while relying on visuals and repeated practice to allow for adequate language processing time and acquisition rate. Overall, the students had positive attitudes, were curious and attentive, willing to understand and learn the new vocabulary as they frequently used their i-phones, i-pads, tablets with Cantonese-English dictionaries. This multi-layered,

interactive way of learning did not cause frustration. In fact, it turned into what I would term collaborative comprehension and interaction.

In retrospect, the teaching experience at MMC had a unique professional development value. In addition to being directly immersed in the culture and the foreign language context, I have gained a new perspective of the language learning process and the variable options that the instructor has in different teaching/learning situations. I also feel that I have a renewed sense of understanding the difficulties the Macau students had to grapple with, as well the fresh understanding of the international students at MC, especially those who come from similar language learning contexts to MC and are the speakers of Chinese/ Cantonese. Even though the MMC students did not dramatically improve their English skills, the exposure to an ESL teaching/learning context, helped them solidify the basic vocabulary, sentence structure, and learn some culturally nuanced expressions.

The current summer teaching program at the Macau Millennium College enrolls Macau students who are largely employed in hospitality/gaming industry. The program could be broadened to include a student exchange between Montgomery College and the Macau Millennium College. A select number of highly motivated students in good academic standing from each institution could visit each school and get introduced to both academic and cultural aspects of attending each college and developing a career in these majors.

## **II. Living Conditions**

The living conditions for the visiting faculty from Montgomery College are adequate. The apartment building is located close to the MMC and if heat and humidity prevent one from walking, the bus pass for the numerous bus lines helps. The College is only three stops away. The area is generally safe and lively day and night. The one downside to the apartment is the lack of cooking facility, although the varied food choices in Macau, from a variety of Cantonese and other Chinese, Macanese, Portuguese, and western-style restaurants make the overall experience a memorable culinary treat.

In general, just in any other new cultural situation, teaching and living in Macau for a visitor from another country can have its challenges, yet the experience definitely sharpens the life skills necessary to deal with the unexpected. Although the College staff was extremely helpful and responded to every request, big or small, communicating and receiving assistance when needed was sometimes difficult, especially if my colleague Xinghui was not around to help, or if the main administrative staff were out of the office. One of the issues was the use of

technology. The College has a number of computers, and the classrooms are also equipped with computers and projectors. However, the equipment is fairly old, the computers are slow to start, and the Internet connectivity is a frequent problem. In the apartment, the College technician was able to connect our two laptops, although it took a while for that to happen, through a borrowed router, and the connection often broke down. Our dining table was covered with wires, which we didn't mind as long as the Internet was available.

The College provided us with working cell (mobile) phones, which they will no longer be able to do due to the changing system in Macau, from 2G to 3G, something to be aware of when planning the stay of the next group of MC faculty next year.

For me, the arrival in Macau was smooth and pleasant, but what immediately followed was rather disorienting and worrisome. Two young College employees met me at the Ferry Terminal, hardly able to communicate in English, eager to help but not easy to communicate with. They took me to the apartment on a Saturday evening, and were about to leave had I not insisted that they help me get to know the neighborhood, grocery stores, restaurants, streets (no maps from the MMC at that point), and phone connections outside of Macau so that I could get in touch with my family. As I insisted, they kindly stayed with me a few hours and helped the best they could. This potential problem for the arriving faculty, especially those who don't speak any Chinese, should be addressed, and Macau Millennium College should work on improving the situation.

The most relevant and important point regarding the length of time that Montgomery college faculty are expected to teach, is that the Macau government has tightened its immigration laws, so that leaving Macau more than once to, for instance, visit Hong Kong, is not recommended. The very stringent new regulations may create a serious problem, which happened to me after visiting Hong Kong twice over a few weeks. Every time a visitor leaves Macau, the 30-day visa stamp in the passport, as is the case with the U.S. citizens, gets inspected by the authorities. The first return to Macau was smooth—an extension of 30 days from the new date was granted. The second time I travelled to Hong Kong for a weekend, however, the time on the stamped visa was not changed. In order to be able to stay in Macau through the last week of classes and exams, I had to go through the formal procedure of requesting an extension at the local Immigration office and was granted the extension thanks to the helpful explanations of the MMC staff who went with me. Dr. Fok had also indicated that he would be able to intervene should anything go wrong. Overall, my experience is that the Montgomery College faculty should not travel unless absolutely necessary, or may leave Macau for one-two days and only once. Any travel plans should remain for the end of the stay, once the teaching job is done.

### **III. Concluding Notes**

On the whole, the experience of teaching in Macau and being immersed in a new linguistic and cultural environment, the history, art, lifestyle, have been a highly valuable professional opportunity, and it is my belief that it should continue as a program while taking into account some of the limitations and challenges that can be improved. Fluency in Mandarin or, even better, Cantonese, would be a plus for any future visiting faculty. Furthermore, the Macau Millennium College should have a well-planned, detailed orientation for the Montgomery College faculty on the day they arrive or the following day, making sure that they are well taken care of upon arrival. This would help the adjustment process for both the visiting faculty and the receiving institution.

One final note is that the other details of the teaching experience of the two Montgomery College instructors this past summer will soon be published as a feature editorial in the local Macau newspaper, which my colleague Xinghui Xing and I expect to receive in the mail within a month.