

Analyzing the Outcome Requirements of Programs and Subjects

Proposal submitted for OBE project fund
Institute of Textiles and Clothing

I. Background

Institute of Textiles and Clothing (ITC) is the only provider of tertiary education in fashion and textiles in Hong Kong, and is merging as the center of excellence in fashion education and research not only in the Far East region but also in the world. ITC offers taught academic programs at various levels: High Diploma and High Certificate, Bachelor, and Master, with the BA (Hons.), Scheme in Fashion & Textiles (BAFT) as the backbone. Under the BAFT scheme, there are four specialisms: Fashion Technology, Fashion & Textile Design, Fashion & Textile Marketing & Merchandising, and Fashion Retailing. Thus the programs cover the whole spectrum of the soft-good chain. More than 200 subjects at different levels are offered and delivered to help cultivate our students to become competent professionals of the fashion business.

In terms of learning/teaching activities, ITC has been making efforts to generate the desired outcome with all of its subjects and its programs. Over the years ITC has educated students to meet the demand of the industry. The industry has very positive comments on the quality of our graduates, hence our programs and subjects. However, we have also been faced with challenges.

First, the industry itself has been in transition. The textile and apparel industry in Hong Kong used to be manufacturing oriented, primarily engaging in original equipment manufacturing (OEM). But now most of the manufacturing has been moved to low-cost countries and areas, primarily Mainland China, and the industry is increasingly becoming service oriented, primarily engaging in trading, sourcing, merchandising, and controlling. It is also moving from OEM into ODM (original design manufacturing) and OBM (original brand manufacturing). Competency requirements of the industry now are very different from those in the past. Thus, we have to clearly define the new outcome of our programs; accordingly, we need to design our curricula and develop our subjects to accomplish such outcome. In other words, outcome of each subjects also have to be defined to reach the final outcome of the program.

Second, horizontal and vertical relationships among subjects and among programs need to be better aligned. Over the years we have gone through several major restructuring changes to our programs and curricula under different contexts. Enormous efforts have been made to align these relationships in each restructuring. However, it is difficult to handle various conflicts, and due to many constraints many times the revision was not conducted with an overall perspective of outcome. One often-met problem is the overlapping of some subjects; sometimes between subjects at the same level, sometimes between subjects at different levels, and particularly between some HD subjects and some degree subjects with similar titles.

Now the emphasis on Outcome Based Education (OBE) gives us a good opportunity and resources to examine and reflect on our programs and their components (the subjects) from the perspective of outcome so as to enhance the overall quality of learning and teaching in ITC.

II. Objectives

The general aim of the project is to better implement the initiative of Outcome Based Education. Specific objectives of the project include the following:

- 1) To investigate and determine the required outcome of each of the program in ITC;
- 2) To analyze and define the outcome of all of the subjects offered in ITC;
- 3) To examine and stipulate the position of each subject in the curriculum of each program, and to streamline the relationships among the subjects both horizontally and vertically, especially for subjects with similar contents; and
- 4) Based on the above, to design the assessment methods at subject level and program level, which can also feedback for improving the teaching/learning effectiveness.

III. Methodology

A task force will be formed, which will be comprised of program leaders and headed by the DLTC chair. A project coordinator who has academic experiences will be hired to conduct the project. Consultation with EDC will be arranged during the process of the project. Opinions of stakeholders of our programs will be solicited in terms of outcomes of the programs and subjects, including primarily employers, graduates, students and staff members. Major methodology of data collection will include questionnaire survey, focus group discussion, and personal interviews.

- a) Questionnaire surveys: When quantitative data are indicative, questionnaire surveys will be employed with appropriate objects. For example, such survey may help us to identify the most important competencies of our graduates.
- b) Focus group discussions: When interactive opinion exchanges are deemed more appropriate to get insight, focus group discussions will be used. Relevant people will be invited to discuss the outcome of programs and subjects.
- c) Personal interviews: Interviews will be undertaken to collect comprehensive and in-depth opinions on some vague areas, such as the reasons behind the expected outcomes of the programs. In addition, outcomes of specific subjects can also be analyzed during the interviews.

Each Program Leader will lead the program committee to examine the outcome of the program. Each Subject Committee Chair will lead the subject committee to examine the outcome of the subjects. In each case, a small working group will be organized to conduct the analyses. The working group may invite people from the industry (ideally past graduates) to join. The working group will meet at different stages of the project, for example, to analyze the current situation (strengths and weaknesses in terms of outcome) at the early stage, and to define the outcome requirements at the late stage. Based on this, guidelines for assessment methods for subjects will be established. Mechanism for program outcome assessment will be further developed, based on the current graduate survey and employer survey, which will feedback for improvement of teaching/learning effectiveness.

The project coordinator will play a major role in planning these activities, and do the data analyses. These analyses will be both on the subject level and the program level. Thus, academic experiences, familiarity with the fashion businesses, analytical skills and communication skills of the coordinator is very important to the project.

An expert in OBE will be invited to provide professional advices. This expert will be identified (probably with the help of EDC), and will be invited to work with the task force two to three times. Firstly he will help us to analyze the problems with the current programs and the subjects from the perspective of outcome, and later he will help us to better define our outcomes of the programs and subjects. Meanwhile, seminars and workshops will also be arranged and conducted, so that academic staff members will have a deeper understanding of OBE and to implement OBE in actual teaching activities.

IV. Timeline

The project will be conducted in four stages:

- 1) In the first stage, some preparatory work will be done. This will include internal data and materials collection, project activity planning, and some contact to be made. This will be September to October of 2007.
- 2) In the second stage, analyses on our current programs and subjects will be undertaken, and opinions of stakeholders will be collected and analyzed. This will be November 2007 to February 2008.
- 3) Based on work of the second stage, desired outcomes of the programs and subjects will be developed in the third stage. This will be March to May 2008.
- 4) In the last stage, further communication will be conducted with stakeholders to get feedback on the outcomes developed. This will be June to August 2008.

It is hoped that the streamlined outcomes of the programs and the subjects will be compiled for the school year of 2008/09 and some feedback received by the first semester.