

SLLO Newsletter

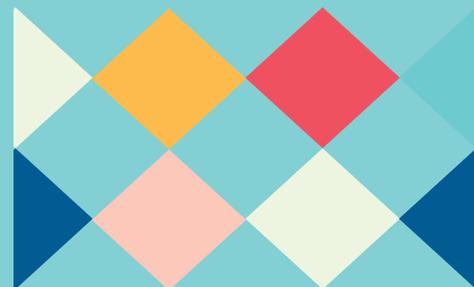
Special Issue I

Mar 2020

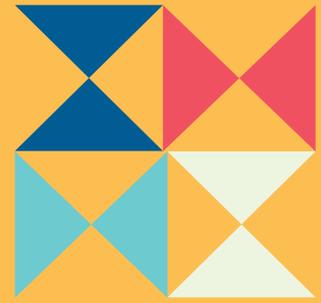


A lot has happened in Hong Kong and at PolyU this last semester. First we had the social movement and the campus shutdown, and then we had the coronavirus outbreak. All of us are obviously affected by these events, and it is a challenge to keep up the quality of teaching and learning, and at the same time, keep our students and staff safe and well.

Service-Learning (SL) is of no exception, and perhaps hit even harder because we need to go out into the community to serve. In this newsletter, we will describe some initiatives that our teachers and students have devised to overcome these challenges.



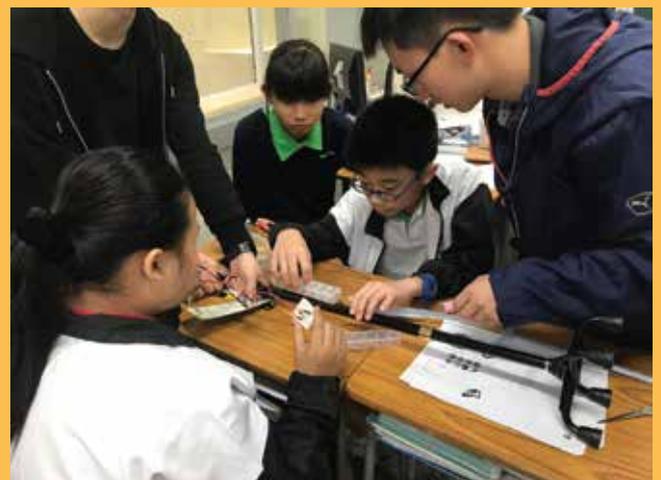
Redesigning the project, Retaining the impact



Interaction with service recipients is a key element in SL. However, our teachers and NGO partners understand that face-to-face activities would put our service recipients and all stakeholders at risk during an epidemic, especially since many of our service recipients may already be in high-risk groups (e.g. elderly people, disabled individuals, etc). However, poor people do not stop being poor, people who need help do not stop needing help, even with the virus. So we still need to serve the community, but we can find innovative ways to do so. Two SL subjects offered by the Department of Biomedical Engineering (BME) show us how they do that.

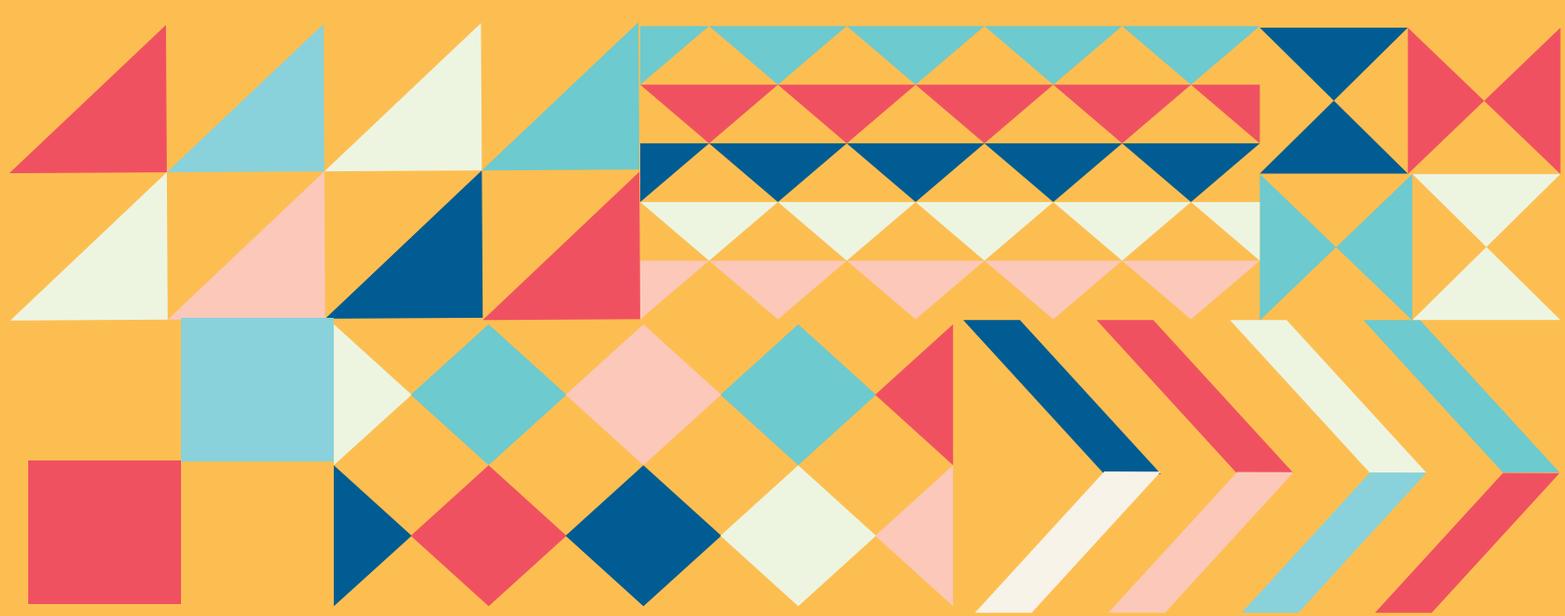
Hong Kong's biggest online learning experience is progressing steadily, as students and parents are forced to adapt to online education. One of our SL subjects, BME2S03, *Reducing the Scientific Divide in Secondary Students through STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Projects*, has our students work with secondary students to apply STEM knowledge and skills in designing assistive tools for the elderly to overcome daily life problems. However, the coronavirus outbreak has forced many secondary schools to suspend on-campus classes.

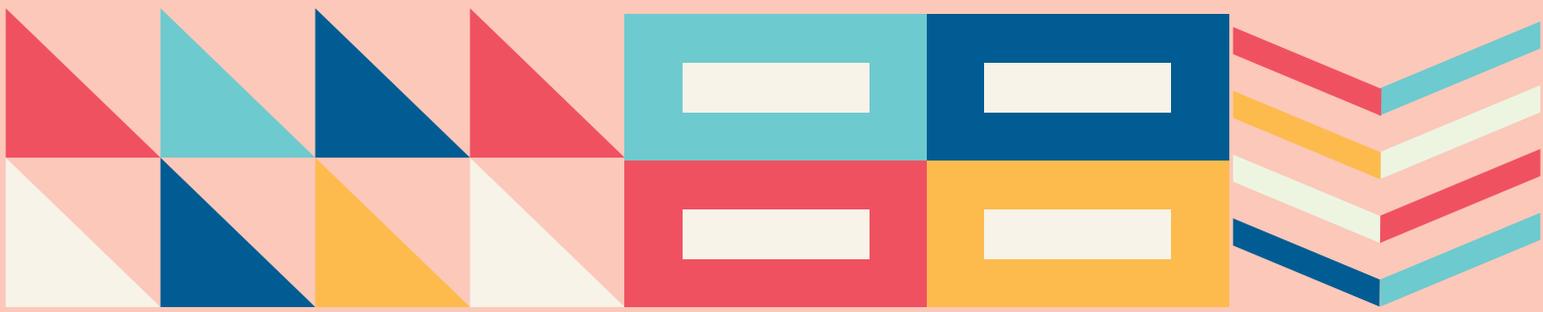
This would look like a disaster for this subject, but Dr. Hin-chung Lau, the subject lecturer, remains positive. Working closely with our office and the NGO partner, Dr Lau has been looking into re-scheduling and the possibility of service delivery in other ways. The students' STEM workshops will be shifted online if necessary, and they will also directly interact with secondary students through online media. PolyU students would also develop teaching and learning kits and mail them to school students and teachers. Elderly home visits would be another challenge, but our NGO partner, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council, has kindly offered to help our students by setting up video calls when their social workers make their rounds and pay their visits.



Another of our SL subjects, BME3S02, *Assistive Technologies: Service learning towards the elderly and disabled*, has a similar challenge. In their service project, students design and develop assistive devices for the elderly or disabled. This usually involves students paying multiple visits to their service recipients, as they evaluate and refine the design for a better customized fit. This is clearly not going to be possible during this time, as the elderly and disabled are very vulnerable demographic groups in the face of covid-19.

Dr James Cheung, the subject leader, revised the project design for the students. Working with the NGO partner, the project specifications were redesigned to focus on small devices or mobile apps, many of them focusing on maintaining some level of physical or mental fitness while isolated at home. These products are then delivered by the NGO partner during home visits to check on their clients or to deliver meals. Our students then get feedback from the service recipients by phone and by video. "Our students will interview the social workers to understand the needs or preferences ... and then tailor-make assistive devices. They will also produce video and user manual guides for the needy and social workers." James said.





We can Serve anywhere

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the spread of the Covid-19 disease caused by the coronavirus outbreak as a pandemic. This virus has infected people across China and spread to almost every continent. Many countries have put into place travel bans in an attempt to control the spread. We have a responsibility to protect our students and staff, and this obviously affects our many subjects with offshore service projects.

APSS2S06, *Striving for a Sustainable Livelihood in Guangdong*, brings PolyU students to study the impact on rural sustainability by urbanization in Guangdong Province, in particular, the impact on disadvantaged groups. This project is practically impossible now. The subject leaders, Dr. Sik-chung Yeung and Dr. Chi-yuen Leung, are planning to switch the service to Hong Kong. It is not an easy task because they have around 50 students in their class and they need to find sufficient NGO partners to accommodate all their students. After much efforts, they successfully connected with Eco-Agriculture and the Conservation of Earth, PEACE at Nam Chung Village, Yi O Agricultural Society, Tin Shui Wai Community Development Network and Lai Chi Wo Village. The students will conduct the service in June and July.

Dr. Yeung and Dr. Leung are concerned that their students will be disappointed by the contingency plan. "In the past, students chose this subject precisely because they were attracted by the experience of rural life and the interaction with the villagers," Dr. Yeung and Dr. Leung said. "All we can do is to ensure that the service will be still meaningful and enjoyable."

We believe that there are many people who need help in Hong Kong. Our students can learn and serve anywhere. The virus does not block service delivery, as long as we are creative and adaptable.



Love spreads faster than the virus

Surgical masks are pretty much a staple of life in Hong Kong nowadays. They are also in very short supply, and those which exist are quite outrageously expensive. This means that those in the society who are on the lowest economic rungs — the poor, the homeless, the disabled — are often forced to do without.

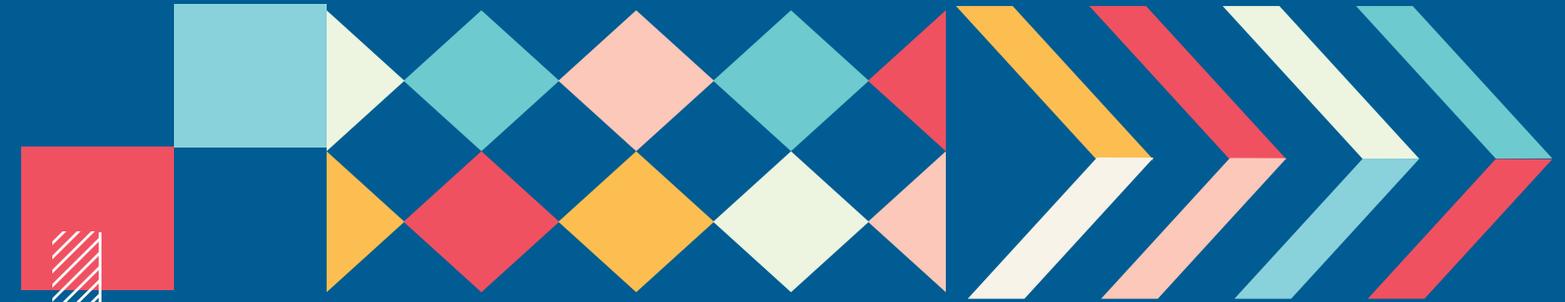
Five of our students — Aidina Tleugabyl, Ann Lau, Geyyaratana Wirasutta, Katie Ho, and Minju Kim — decided to do something about this. Working with the NGO Christian Concern for the Homeless Association (CCHA), they designed a project that would provide much-needed masks to this segment of the population. They prepared 150 anti-epidemic packs (including 15 kid-friendly ones). Each of the packs contained 10 masks, a bottle of self-made hand sanitizer and a packet of tissues. An additional 803 masks were sent directly to CCHA. Since masks have been practically unobtainable in Hong Kong, the students sourced masks from Indonesia and France through their own networks. The expenses for the project were supported by SLLO and the Lee Hysan Foundation.

In addition to distributing tangible supplies, Katie and Ann also filmed two videos demonstrating how to make DIY hand sanitizers and tips for maintaining hygiene in crowded places such as homeless shelters. The students had to think hard to ensure that their content would be relevant for their audience. As Katie said, “We had to think about people’s lifestyles and what kind of challenges they faced, since the shelters are run quite differently from our homes. I learned that through creating videos for them.”

This group of students are alumni of the Global Leadership and Civic Engagement program, sponsored by the Lee Hysan Foundation, which sends students to the United States to learn about civic engagement in a different culture. This past summer, this group took part in a 2-way exchange between PolyU and the University of Southern California's Joint Educational Project. Together with USC students, they spent two months working with the homeless population, first in Skid Row in Los Angeles, then in Sham Shui Po in Hong Kong. This project brought back memories for them. “Preparing the packages reminded us of the times we worked at NGOs of Los Angeles”; one student said. “In a pandemic like this, we really think that the people who have less have a lot to suffer. And that’s why we decided to contribute in a way we can”.

When the pandemic abates and the situation allows, they plan to offer a series of practical life skills training for the members at the CCHA women's hostel.





SLLO joins hands with subject teachers amid virus outbreak

Social distancing is critical for controlling this coronavirus outbreak, but it doesn't mean that we have to be more distant with each other. To facilitate experience sharing and create a support network, SLLO worked with the Community of Practice in Service-Learning to organise four online sharing sessions for our teachers in February and March. All of the teachers had challenges, many were worried, but everybody was positive and really wanted the best out of this situation, both for our students as well as the community. Some teachers shared interesting alternative service ideas. Some face-to-face teaching activities may be switched to online learning. Some overseas projects may be rescheduled or switched to local services. Nobody knows which plan is the best, but we want to remain positive and we believe that we will overcome all challenges together. We will organize more sharing sessions or follow-up actions to ensure that our teachers get all the support that they need.



We have also been developing different kinds of resources to support the subjects and projects. A MOOC on SL helps teachers by delivering generic knowledge and skills to students, so that teachers can focus on preparing discipline-specific teaching content. In this semester, more than 1,400 students from PolyU and other local Universities are using this MOOC. There are also some activities, such as team-building, that are not as easily conducted online. SLLO worked with teachers to develop teaching content, and we finally successfully delivered an online team-building workshop for 60 students, at the same time! This is a first for us and for them! We look forward to working with our teachers to enlarge our repertoire.



T: (852) 2766 4376
F: (852) 2334 6690

E: sлло.info@polyu.edu.hk
W: <http://www.polyu.edu.hk/sлло>

