

The University of Canterbury
Graduate course for Antarctica Studies 2004-5

Supervised Project Report

Feasibility Study:

**Adventure Semester in Antarctica,
The University of Hong Kong**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study is to develop a logical and rational discussion on the feasibility assessment of organizing a multidisciplinary educational programme in Antarctica for the University of Hong Kong (HKU). The suggested programme will be a holistic approach of education which consists of both academic elements of Antarctica as well as adventurous elements aiming at personal and social developments. The programme will also make a strong emphasis on the leadership development through a personal interaction with the challenging conditions in this remote continent.

This study consists of two parts:

First part is a brief overview of the programme with clear explanation on the format of the programme and the key elements and activities that will be carried out during the trip. A suggestion on the schedule and the learning activities of the programme before, during and after the programme will also be listed.

Second part of this paper is a feasibility assessment of the programme using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis approach. This assessment will be based on the situation of HKU and the current education reform proposed by the Hong Kong Education Department. The current situation of the Hong Kong economy will also be considered as a crucial component of our discussion.

It is hope that this assessment will be use as a reference for the future development of the Adventure Education Programme (AEP) of the Institute of Human Performance (IHP) of HKU. It may also be considered as a preliminary investigation on the possibility of putting our leadership education programmes on a higher profile in conjunction to the Education Reform of the Tertiary Education in Hong Kong.

Chapter 2: Background of the programme:

"You'll learn more by walking ten thousand miles than reading ten thousand books." (Chinese proverb). This proverb has been a general belief among of the Chinese people and it is accepted that practical experience is very important in education particularly to young people. Knowledge-based traveling has been considered as an interactive approach of education and their effectiveness is unquestionable (Sharpley, 1994).

Western educationalist roots their works in the Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle; they suggested that the ultimate goal of education is the development of "human virtue". Human virtue includes wisdom; bravery; temperance and justice were considered as the key qualities for young people to acquire in order to assume leadership roles in an ideal society. (Hunt, 1990) While different in approaches (e.g. Plato with rationalism and Aristotle with empiricism), both Plato and Aristotle identified virtues, such as danger, risk and safety as important components for human growth (Priest & Gass, 1997).

Modern education has always been criticized as working in an "ivory tower" and has been detached from the reality (Schoel, Prouty & Radcliffe, 1998). The reliance of computer technologies provides us with a virtual setting of learning and living environment. In the 1930s, Kurt Hahn, the founder of the Outward Bound School, identified six reasons for the decline of modern youth during the industrialization of modern society which is still the scenario of today (cited in Richard, 1990, p.69), they were:

1. Decline of **Fitness** due to modern methods of locomotion;
2. Decline of **Initiative and Enterprise** due to the widespread disease of 'spectatoritis';
3. Decline of **Memory and Imagination** due to the confused restlessness of modern life;
4. Decline of **Skill and Care** due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship;
5. Decline of **Self-discipline** due to the ever-present availability of stimulants and tranquilizers; and,
6. Decline of **Compression** due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted.

Outdoor education is believed to be able to fill this gap and acts as a welding point for the intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and social domains of education. On one hand it provides an environment, a setting for academic disciplines such as geophysics, geology, biology, ecology and climatology etc. Antarctica, owing to its remote geographical location and unique environmental setting, it is regarded as the best preserved natural laboratory for scientists to perform their researches. On the other hand, Antarctica is also the best training ground for physical fitness and character development -- "the human virtues". The challenging environment of Antarctica stimulates personal growth and the elements were concluded by Neill, Marsh and Richard (1997) as "life effectiveness skills". This includes how well the participants are functioning at work or school, as well as in personal and social life (Neill, Marsh & Richard, 1997). The philosophy of adventure education includes a theory of knowledge that has the applicability in many other areas of education. Kurt Hahn was not primarily an outdoorsman; he was an educator and philosopher, his main concern was to use "outdoor adventure" as a tool for a broader sense of education. It provides a platform for a holistic development of an individual and this development may sustain for the rest of his life (Priest and Gass, 1997). The effectiveness of Outdoor adventure experience may transcend into the driving force of further education and other walks of life (Gass, 1992).

Outdoor education is being regarded as a holistic approach of education by means of the out-of-door environment. Neill & Richard (1998) suggested that "Outdoor education is education 'in', 'about' and 'for' the out-of-doors." It takes place 'in' the "natural environment where students will gain a first-hand experience, to direct contact with the topic and to participate interaction and socialization. These topics are 'about' the natural environment. Biology, geology, ecology, art appreciation, physical skills are all-included. In a broader sense, it studies the interrelationship of the human being and the natural resources, upon which societies depend, with the goal of stewardship in mind. 'For' means that the purpose of outdoor education is related to implementing the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of learning for the sake of the ecosystem itself. It means understanding, using and appreciating the natural resources for their perpetuation.

Antarctica, the frozen continent, the coldest, driest and windiest desert on earth, however is being seen as a paradise by at least two distinctive groups of people: the scientists and the adventurers. Scientists want to preserve the continent as their laboratory to perform their scientific researches whilst the adventurers want to challenge themselves on the hardship and

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