

# Chapter 1

## A Module for General Education Curriculum Development in Chinese International Universities: A Practical Example Concerning Law and Morality

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter focuses on a discussion of general education curriculum development in international universities, with an emphasis on the reflective pedagogical practice found in China. It defines general education in the context of Chinese academia, and explores its development and future trends influenced by the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and contemporary transnational education (TNE). In particular, this chapter examines the curriculum design of the law and morality module (L & M Module) taught at the Chinese Culture Teaching Center (CCTC) at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), Suzhou, China, and identifies any practical problems in relation to teaching quality and assessment methods. It also advances corresponding suggestions to enhance students' learning outcomes and efficiency.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In its 1945 report, the Harvard Committee defines ‘General Education in a Free Society’ with an introduction by James Bryant Conant, a former president of Harvard University (The Harvard Committee, 1945). In this definition, general education is regarded as the cornerstone of the Harvard College curriculum, and divided into four categories: aesthetics & culture; ethics & civics; history, society & the individual, and science & technology in society. Since the fall of 2021, Harvard University has offered 40 different courses from these categories. Another example is Temple University, which requires every undergraduate student to complete the general education curriculum before graduating. Its program stresses the development of personal competencies rather than content knowledge (Temple Undergraduate Bulletin, 2022). Students are encouraged to engage in critical thinking, contextualized learning, interdisciplinary thinking, the development of their communication skills, scientific and quantitative reasoning, civic engagement, information literacy and lifelong learning.

In China, the theoretical framework for a general education curriculum has been set up and actively carried out by Peking and Tsinghua Universities. Peking University has introduced 57 courses covering three areas: Human Civilization and Its Traditions; Issues in Modern Society; Studies in the Humanities, Nature, and Methods (Peking University Undergraduate Education, 2022). In 2020, during the pandemic, Tsinghua University launched 18 online courses (Tsinghua SEM, 2022). These courses integrate the concept of general education into a reflection of professional knowledge to improve the ideological thinking and the quality of life of students. The courses aim to help build personality and civic awareness and enable students to further their reading and analytical skills, and their ability to innovate. Communication and presentation skills are also emphasized.

As of August 2022, China had established 10 independent international universities: The University of Nottingham Ningbo China; Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College; Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University; New York University Shanghai; Wenzhou-Kean University; Duke Kunshan University; The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen; Shenzhen MSU-BIT University; Guangdong Technion-Israel Institute of Technology; and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Guangzhou (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2022). Independent departments in these international universities provide students with general education courses. As the largest Sino-foreign cooperative university in China, XJTLU, vigorously explores the new mode of TNE to make up for deficiencies in traditional higher education. It aims to become a Chinese research-led university recognized internationally. CCTC is responsible for providing general education to XJTLU students.

This chapter discusses general education curriculum development within the scope of Chinese international universities, with a particular focus on the L&M Module offered by CCTC at XJTLU. Curriculum development is a fluid process that necessitates ongoing reflection on prior experiences together with design adjustments changing circumstances can be adapted to (Susam et. al., 2020). In this regard, evaluation is of great importance. This chapter examines the L&M Module evaluation model, which plays a decisive role in both measuring the quality of teaching of CCTC staff and XJTLU student learning outcomes for TNE.

The objectives of this chapter are to investigate the curriculum design of the L & M Module so as to pinpoint existing difficulties and potential challenges, and use them to put forward moderate advice for the enhancement of the corresponding teaching and learning performance. Through this investigation, a

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