

Committee on Student Affairs

Minutes of the 74th Meeting of the Committee on Student Affairs held on 10 November 2023 at 3:00pm at Room 5021, Academic Building (mixed-mode).

- Present : Prof. Arthur Lau (Chair), Prof. Allen Huang, Prof. Yaping Gong,
Dr. Benjamin Leung, Prof. Jinqing Huang, Prof. Zhongming Lu, Prof.
Pedro Sander, Prof. James Wong, Mr. Yiu Kai Nester Chik, Mr. Po Yin
Tsang, Ms. Xinyan Zhu, Prof. King Chow (Member and Secretary)
- Apologies : Ms. Pui Ka Mui
- Resource Person : DSTO: Mr. Ricky Yeung, Dr. Silver Chan, Ms. Cathy Ng
Student representatives: Ms. Diksha Kumar, Ms. Shabnam Taghipour
- In Attendance : Ms. Shirley Wu

Introductions and welcome of new members

1. The Chair welcomed the new members and emphasized that the CSA places a strong focus on student affairs, recognizing the importance of students' voices in driving future improvements.

Report on sports development and discussion of potential improvements

2. Members were presented with a report from Mr. Ricky Yeung on sports development. The report highlighted that in the 2022-23 academic year, a total of 233 sports skill classes in 24 sports were offered, with five new sports activities introduced, such as Diabolo, Funky Aerobic Dance, and Lacrosse. A total of 3,433 students attended these classes, and there was a growing interest from postgraduate students. Despite not having a large group of student-athletes, HKUST had 588 student-athletes forming 54 sports teams participating in 84 competitions, including the FISU World University Games and the 19th Asian Games Hangzhou.
3. The report also highlighted the importance of building a culture of respect, diversity, and inclusiveness through sports. To this end, the Unity Games were co-organized with GGHK in January 2023, the Wheelchair Fencing Exhibition Match was co-organized with the Hong Kong Sports Association for the Physically Disabled and GGHK in March, and the 21st HKUST-UM Sports Challenge Cup and Water Sports Carnival were hosted in April. A new community engagement project, the Sports Tutorial Service Scheme, was initiated with UGC funding support in Spring 2023, with 23 sports tutors providing sports tutorial sessions to 153 primary students from three primary schools.
4. Prof. Pedro Sander inquired about whether the water sports class could be counted towards

the common core course requirement, and Mr. Ricky Yeung confirmed that it could be. The Chair inquired about the possibility of expanding the Sports Tutorial Service Scheme into the Undergraduate Teaching Opportunities Program (UTOP) at schools, to which Mr. Yeung expressed that human resources would be a main concern due to the need for professional qualification certificates. Prof. Allen Huang inquired about the possibility of including e-sports at HKUST, and Mr. Yeung expressed that currently, there is no expertise in e-sports at HKUST, and qualified expertise would need to be sought out to develop the curriculum.

5. Prof. King Chow supplemented that three years ago, Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) conducted studies promoting e-sports, and some faculty members and students at HKUST expressed interest in e-sports, although the population is relatively small. Prof. Chow further commented that although around 400-500 students actively participated in different sports, there is a lack of community sports culture, as evidenced by the lack of our students cheering during the HKUST-UM Sports Challenge Cup. Mr. Nester Chik suggested that more effective promotion of sports competition schedules could be done through social media platforms, to which Mr. Yeung supplemented that sport clubs were encouraged to post sports activities on their social media.

(Mr. Ricky Yeung was excused from the meeting. Dr. Silver Chan and Ms. Cathy Ng joined.)

Report on counseling support and discussion of potential improvements

6. Members were presented with a report from Dr. Silver Chan on counseling support. The report highlighted that COVID-19 has amplified youth mental health issues, with about 9.1% of university students experiencing suicide ideation or attempts in 2022. The number of student counseling clients at HKUST has increased from 1,296 to 2,268 in the past five years, with mood concerns, psychological disorders, anxiety, and stress being the top concerns. Additionally, the number of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), such as ADHD, autism, hearing, and visual impairment, has also increased dramatically. To address this, the size of counseling team has doubled from 12 to 24 team members, including a new specialty - psychiatric-mental health registered nurse. The report also highlighted ongoing challenges such as increasing suicide attempts, engaging with faculty and staff members, hiring specialties, and space.
7. Dr. Benjamin Leung inquired about the assessment or monitoring process for SEN students. Ms. Cathy Ng shared that SEN students should submit medical proof issued by a local healthcare provider in the past three years to the university. When asked about advice for SEN students taking a full study load, Ms. Ng shared that with special arrangements, SEN students could take a full load like other students. They would be provided advice about study load, and they would have the opportunities to choose a full load, although some of them might underestimate their capabilities. Prof. King Chow added that although the

counseling team can assess the suitable study pace, it is more appropriate for the student to make the decision about course load in consultation with their academic advisor.

8. Prof. Zhongming Lu asked about strategies for dealing with students who express stress due to low GPA and the reasons for the increasing number of counseling clients. Dr. Silver Chan suggested that the first step is to understand the reasons behind the unsatisfactory academic performance, as there could be various reasons such as lack of interest in the subject. The student counselor would then provide advice on how to cope with the situation and mobilize resources for students seeking support. Ms. Cathy Ng shared the observation that students seemed to struggle with group projects and interpersonal coordination after resuming normal. The Chair noted that mental health is a complex issue and we need to focus on early identification and intervention.
9. Prof. King Chow supplemented that some studies show that the youth aged 15 to 25 are at a high risk period, partly because they are in a transition to adulthood and need to cope with many issues such as public exams, finding relationships and job seeking. They feel a lot of stress in this chaos and need more support from family, school, and peers. When they build good relationships with friends, family, and others, they can have a good channel to air their frustrations early on. Otherwise, when they accumulate frustration and seek counseling support, it usually takes a longer time to help these students.
10. Prof. James Wong reminded student members that they could seek help from student wellness managers at schools, in addition to counselors, and encouraged them to make good use of the university's resources. Mr. Nester Chik suggested that students need more channels to relieve stress and proposed placing more benches or other resources in various areas such as LG7 grass lawn and Shaw Auditorium, encouraging students to hang out and relax. Prof. Pedro Sandro added that before the pandemic, he held a class outside of the lecture theater, and students loved it with more energy and discussion.

(Dr. Silver Chan and Ms. Cathy Ng were excused from the meeting. Ms. Diksha Kumar and Ms. Shabnam Taghipour joined.)

Discussion on the concerns of students from cultural or ethnic minority groups

11. The Chair invited two student representatives from cultural or ethnic minority groups to share their concerns and experiences. Ms. Shabnam Taghipour raised two concerns for Muslim students: i) the university offers very limited halal food options, leaving Muslim students with few choices; ii) it is difficult to find a suitable indoor place for Sunni Muslim students to gather and pray. Prof. Zhongming Lu added that, as a community member, he would also like to see more diverse food options and inquired about the possibility of food trucks, which were placed on campus a few years ago. Dr. Benjamin Leung suggested that it might be possible to ask Fusion supermarket to introduce a few pre-packed halal food items. Prof. King Chow added that we could explore this issue, but some food outlets

might not consider operating on our campus due to cost and profit. Regarding the activity venue, Prof. Chow suggested that Ms. Taghipour could approach the student support & activities team to register as an interest group for booking a venue.

12. Ms. Shabnam Taghipour also raised the issue of language barriers that some of her friends have encountered during academic discussions or weekly meetings. Prof. King Chow mentioned that this issue has been discussed with department heads and school deans for several years, and they will raise it again to see what can be done. Ms. Diksha Kumar, a Hong Kong-born Indian, shared her experience with local student societies. When she was invited to an O'camp, she found that the activity was conducted in Cantonese. As a result, she tried to organize an international/local ethnic minority O'camp, but it was not successful. Ms. Kumar also mentioned that she has encountered language barriers when approaching local student societies for coordination. She is currently putting more efforts on integration such as co-organizing a cultural game night with the Game Society. The Chair encouraged different student groups to have joint events and be more inclusive.
13. Dr. Benjamin Leung suggested organizing more inclusive activities for students mingling, such as a marathon team and cheering team, where students can have regular meetings/training to interact with other students. Ms. Xinyan Zhu shared that their monthly RPg student gathering had improved with more food options when they interacted with some minority students. The Chair closed the meeting by stating that we are all in a learning process and encouraged both faculty and student members to work together to build a more inclusive campus at HKUST.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05pm.