



Community Impact

INTRODUCTION

In the social sciences at The University of Hong Kong we rely in part on the impact of our research. We use metrics such as impact factors, citation counts, etc. These measures and other factors have paved the way for the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Less certain, however, is the non-academic impact and measurement of our research on government officials, businessmen, alumni and potential donors requiring the lives of Hong Kongers. We must demonstrate the relevance of our research inside and outside the University.

Understanding Non-Academic Impact

According to a LSE Public Policy Group study, impact implies 'recorded or auditable occasions of influence', that are, however, not the same as outputs or activities or outcomes, and that do not depend for their existence on some kind of social welfare gain (LSE, 2011: 5). The Hong Kong Research Grants Council's (RGC) support for public policy research is specifically designed to fund research that aims at this kind of impact. Measuring impact, however, is difficult in the humanities and social sciences. As my colleague, Professor Joseph Chan Cho-wai, (Department of Politics and Public Administration) has pointed out, 'Those of us working in the humanities and social sciences influence people chiefly through the medium of ideas, not through technology or practical skills (saving lives in medicine, or building bridges in civil engineering). Ideational impact is not only difficult to measure, but also *difficult to occur*. Impact depends to a great extent on how ideas are transmitted and whether people at the receiving end are persuaded. This depends on the relative power of non-ideational factors such as interests, power, and access to information, and people's open-mindedness. If our research fails to influence people in society, does it imply that our research has no practical value? Policy research or academic research *could* add immense practical value to society even if the impact is not clearly visible. Simply stated, the impact of ideas is determined by many factors outside of the control of the researcher. On the contrary, scientists, engineers, and doctors often have direct control over

the subject/material they work on. We should not expect a direct and clear impact' (E-m, Davies et al caution: '... much more diffuse and characterized by generalizations and ideological deliberation... Thus research choices, but also to the formation of understandings and possibilities in professional discourse and

These cautions are well taken. The non-academic impact of our research. First, we can infer indirect impact by directly advising of lectures, networking joint publications and co-authored books. It also be noted (LSE, 2011) that impact through a variety of channels.

- Discussions of our research in the media (including print, television, specialist media such as public policy journals)



... peer review and metrics in order to be certain of the academic counts, acceptance rates and the prestige of academic presses. ... of Social Sciences to be ranked 23rd in the world by QS. ... of social sciences research. Members of the public, politicians, ... are evidence of our impact on the development of Hong Kong and ... research since we depend on the good will and support from both

... k on, and hence they can create ... ail, 14 September 2012). And as ... ch important decision making is ... 'non-decisional processes' ... When ... provides a background of empirical ... eas that creep into policy ... can contribute not just to decisional ... ormation of values, the creation of ... ities, and to the quality of public and ... debate' (Davies, et al, 2005, 12).

... ken, yet we can try to understand the ... ur research through various channels. ... impact through the participation and ... in the legislature, government and/or ... es and think tanks. Academia creates ... g decision-makers. Second, the impact ... , contract work, student placements, ... nsultancies outside of the University can ... 1: 7). That is, we can look for evidence ... iety of means such as (LSE, 2011: 226):

... search that appear in the *general* ... nt, radio and TV, internet and blogs) and ... h as the trade press, industry journals, ... ls and magazines, newsletters of

- professionals, think tanks, consultancies, trade unions, charities and NGOs;
- Debates and proceedings of Legislative Council and its Panels;
- Papers, publications and website coverage of research by the government;
- Financial data available within the university indicating the scope of our activities outside the university such as research grants, consultancies, contracts, licensing income, payments made for training sessions, conferences and so forth; and
- Participation and/or visits by members of the public, business, government, and civil society to Department/Faculty activities indicating that these external actors found (or anticipated finding) something of value. 'The more senior these personnel are, the greater the imputed external value of what the department or lab is providing...' (LSE, 226). Logging the contacts and providing these participants with opportunities to feed back on their experience would be valuable evidence.

The impact of non-academic research focuses on many areas. Faculties of social sciences largely provide research that relates to public policy. Our Faculty of Social Sciences is no exception.





Tracking Impact on Public Policy

We can identify two general approaches to demonstrate the impact of research on public policy in Hong Kong: forward tracking ('producer-push') and backward tracking ('user-pull') (Davies, et al, 2005, 12). Forward tracking (perhaps augmented with user panels) asserts that a particular piece of research has been examined, taken up, incorporated into, or determined a particular public policy. We may understand the RGC's public policy research grants in this light. Under this scheme the government, through the Central Policy Unit (CPU), identifies some general policy areas of interest to the community, and encourages researchers in Hong Kong to submit proposals to a vetting panel in order to solve these public problems. The extent to which the proposals are likely to have an impact on public policy is one of many considerations for funding. In some cases (e.g., strategic public policy research) the proposals are circulated directly to concerned government agencies as part of the vetting process for determination of relevance. When the projects are completed, summaries of the results are published in a newsletter that is distributed to public bodies, including government. Whether government agencies take up these policy ideas is unclear.

Backward tracking involves examining policy decisions or practices to identify research-based influences. We can understand the government's need for public policy research by examining the contract research undertaken by members of our faculty. Tracking backwards can identify the policies on which the government sought research help from the University. The chain of influence can be identified through interviews with the commissioned government agency and with the researcher.

What We Are doing

Members of the Faculty have been elected to the Legislative Council (Dr Law Chi Kong and Dr Yeung Sum) where they influenced public policy, especially in the provision of social welfare and the furtherance of political reform. Members have also been seconded to the HKSAR Government's Central Policy

Unit (Professor John Bacon) or have been advisors to or Simon Zhao Xiaobin, Dr Ng Consultancies to the CP evaluating public support Nelson Chow Wing-sun, Joe Leung Cho-bun, Profes Chan Lai-wan. They have the Chief Executive's Policy cross border relations with members of the Faculty into advisory committees.

Eight colleagues from the policy grants from the Res results. Public policy reco been provided in the last colleagues from Geograph Kong as logistics hub in Sociology (Professor Lui Tai in Hong Kong, 2009; Profe networks of professional m Chou Kee Lee, integration 2010; Dr Edward Chan K Kong, 2010; Dr Ernest Ch services for the elderly, 20 processes on public v (See <http://www.ugc.edu.hk> for write-ups of the impac *Policy Digest*).

Finally, the Faculty is a ma government agencies in H According to the partial Section, in 2011/12 memb 57 contract research projec (but also for organization Taiwan). Of these the Ce largest number (9), followe (4). The Faculty's Socia Department held most of contract research for the E



Shone, Dr Peter Cheung Tsan-yin)
part-time members of the CPU (Dr
Cho Nam, Dr Richard Hu Weixing).
identifying policy options and
have been provided by Professor
Professor Paul Yip Siu-fai, Professor
Professor Lui Tai Lok and Professor Cecilia
advised on everything from drafting
Address to handling Hong Kong's
Guangdong province. In addition,
fluence and serve on many different

Faculty have won competitive public
Research Grants Council with published
recommendations for government have
three years, through these grants by
phy (Dr James Wang Jixian, Hong
the global value chain, 2009);
Lok, life chances and social mobility
Professor Wong Siu Lun, locating HK in
migrants, 2011); and Social Work (Dr
of new immigrants to Hong Kong,
Ho-ling, domestic violence in Hong
Lui Wing-tak, integrated home care
2011; Dr Law Chi Kong, consultation
works projects in HK, 2011).
nk/eng/rgc/publication/ppd/ppd.htm
ct of their work in the RGC's *Public*

major supplier of contract research to
Hong Kong and on the Mainland.
data of HKU's Research Services
members of the Faculty were engaged in
acts, mostly conducted in Hong Kong
ns on the Mainland, Macau, and
Central Policy Unit commissioned the
ed by the Social Welfare Department
al Work and Social Administration
these contracts. We also provided
Elderly Commission, the Hong Kong

Mortgage Corporation, the Hong Kong Mandatory Provident
Fund, public hospitals in Hong Kong, the Housing Society, the
Productivity Council, the Airport Authority, MTRC, the Office of
the Telecommunications Authority, and the Leisure and
Cultural Services Department. In addition to SWSA, colleagues
in Geography, Sociology, and the Social Sciences Research
Centre were actively engaged in public policy related contract
research, indicative of the Faculty's non-academic impact.

Professor John P Burns Dean

References

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