

Sabbatical Experience – Fall 2015

By

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Introduction

“That is the pearl of academia” one of my colleagues at BSU quipped one afternoon. We had just finished a sabbatical planning meeting for “newbies” like me in early 2014 and I had so many ideas as to what I should, can, and want to do. First, however, I had to organize my plan and apply! After speaking to several colleagues, friends, and family, I came up with my idea – an idea that would bring me back to how I felt the first semester of my undergraduate experience. It was my freshman year at Boston University and after an exhausting, but enriching day of classes, projects, and thinking, I realized my education was diverse, varied, and essentially captured experience that of a “Renaissance Man”. Here I was two decades later planning my sabbatical trying to capture what I once realized I was already a part of at BU, albeit inadvertently. I set out writing my proposal for BSU keeping this theme in mind, a “Renaissance Man.” What would this mean? Where would it take me? What would I learn? What would I produce? I realized I would need an experience I have never had before – somewhere I have never been and something that would take me out of my travel “comfort zone”. Africa, the Middle East, Australia, Asia...the list went on and on. After much deliberation I settled on Asia and set up a meeting with our Asian Studies coordinator at BSU, Dr. Wing-Kai To. My list came down to Beijing, China, Hong Kong, or Seoul, South Korea. I decided on Hong Kong due to excellent accommodations and the ability to communicate well in English (my limitation). I then began the planning process of what to do, where I would go, and what I was going to “produce” from this experience.

Narrative

Having just completed a professional trip to the American Public Health Association (APHA) conference in Chicago from October 31 until November 4, 2015, I was back home in Dedham, MA before I was to leave for Hong Kong on November 5, 2015. I unpacked and repacked within 20 hours! I then sat on my United Airlines flight anticipating the 17-hour journey to Hong Kong, via Newark, NJ of course! I arrived on November 6, 2015 at 8:45pm, travel weary, but excited to begin my time in Hong Kong. After clearing immigration and claiming my bags, I was pleasantly greeted by one of the faculty of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), Dr. Fenghua SUN, or “Bob”. We took a 45-minute taxi ride at light speed across Hong Kong city proper and into the “suburbs”. I arrived at my guest hostel, a multi-room flat at the top of a hill on campus

around 10:30pm. I was there! After unpacking a bit I opened the balcony door and took in the humidity and 80+ degree warmth – a welcomed change from the fall coolness of New England. I actually had to turn on the air conditioner much of the time I was there as the temperatures and humidity held constant.

I quickly learned the campus, ventured off into the town of Tai Po, and even had my own office. I met with the Faculty and Staff of the Department of Health and Physical Education to discuss interests, goals, and plans for the next 6+ weeks. The following is a summary of what I accomplished while at HKIED and how it relates to my goals of experiencing my academic “Renaissance”.

Teaching

- I had the opportunity to teach 5 seminars for two sports science classes on a variety of topics. Both seminars were upper level undergraduate courses.
- I evaluated student presentations toward the end of the course and was part of their grading process.

Travel/Culture

- I thoroughly explored Tai Po, which is where HKIED is located. This is about 45 minutes from downtown Hong Kong, so I was not as able to go into the “city” as much as I would have liked. However, when I did, the times were memorable.
- While in Hong Kong I went to all of the “tourist traps” – the Western Market, Temple Street, Central, etc., but also Lantau Island, Shek-O, Shatin, and the bay. I also rode a 5-mile gondola to the Po Lin Monastery Buddha, hiked the Lion’s Peak in Shatin, and took a trek up to Victoria’s Peak for a view of the city.
- To take advantage of the close proximity to other destinations in Asia, I booked a 5-day holiday to Denpasar, Bali in Indonesia. What an experience! I was not ready for the culture shock of motorbikes everywhere and people trying to sell products on every street corner. What I did realize was how hard and dedicated people are in their communities, which was evident in their sense of pride in their work. Bali was beautiful and quite a contrast to both Hong Kong and itself. Some areas were so quiet and peaceful and around the corner it was like NYC at rush hour on methamphetamine! I toured temples, shops, “Turtle Island”, the beaches, and many other areas in a brief 5 days. The cost of living is quite low and the US dollar goes a LONG way. Total spiritual peace and relaxation was had, as I so desired; this was a welcome interlude in my travels.
- On December 21 I began my trek back to the U.S. – up at 6am to pack any final items, then to check out of my hostel, on to a cab for a 1 hour ride to the airport and then on to my first leg (13.5 hours) to Chicago, IL. From Chicago – a short puddle jumper flight to Boston and...HOME!

Research

- I advised and interacted with two PhD graduate students concerning their topics and proposals. One was in the area of health and obesity prevention in Hong Kong and the other concerns a biomechanical analysis of running gait and injury.

The goal of the latter is to develop an injury algorithm that can inform wearable biofeedback clothing...very novel and cutting-edge!

- I delivered two research-based symposia for the HKIEd faculty and staff. The first topic focused on my research agenda connecting sports science with public health and health promotion. The second talk explored the value of e-Learning in sports science and health. Both sessions were enjoyable and well attended.
- I also worked on several upcoming papers and research presentations for AY 2016. Specifically, I submitted two manuscripts (one was accepted for publication) and have a third in progress and ready to submit early in 2016. Overall, I would categorize my research activity as VERY productive and renewed my interests in my ongoing projects.

Physical Challenges

- According to my pedometer on my iPhone, I averaged 18,000 steps per day since being in Hong Kong.
- I hiked some of the steepest peaks in the area and have the blisters and worn-out shoes to prove it!
- One day, I trekked 23 miles in total – all worth it from what I saw.
- I completed my goal of running/exercising most of my days and losing some good weight in the process. In fact, most of my pants did not fit me by the time I made my return back home!

Collegiality

- During my stay at HKIEd, I met with several of the faculty and staff. I discussed research and curriculum ideas with Drs. Fenghua SUN and Gangyan SI. Additionally, I met with the Department Head Dr. Daniel Chow to see how BSU and HKIEd could better align future collaborations with both faculty and students. It is my hope that we will have a faculty/student exchange in the near future.
- Towards the end of my stay at HKIEd I met with the Dean Dr. Joanne CHUNG. We discussed strategic alliances, collaboratives between BSU and HKIEd, and the future missions/visions of our institutions.

Conclusion

Now having the time to reflect on my 6+ weeks experiences on sabbatical at HKIEd, I can honestly say that I have achieved my goal of an academic “Renaissance” experience. I have learned, taught, experienced, reflected, and I have grown. My interests in my own teaching approaches and methods as well as my research interests and writing have been infused with new enthusiasm. I plan to keep this pace as I return to the U.S. and reintegrate into academia at BSU. However, I do this with an open mind and a receptive heart.

~ James E. Leone/December 21, 2015