

17/07/2001

Nurturing Excellence with Online Courses

Hundreds of academically gifted secondary-school students will be able to take university-level courses through a cyber university program being launched by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) in the 2001-2 academic year.

The first of its kind in Hong Kong, the program has recently been awarded HK\$2.2 million by the Hong Kong Government's Quality Education Fund.

Under the program, high achievers from local secondary schools will attend lectures via the Internet. This will be supplemented by online chat sessions with course instructors and regular face-to-face tutorials on HKUST campus as well as examinations.

Two elementary computer science courses and one physics course will be offered in September 2001, to be followed by a Mathematics/English course in February 2002. Students can earn three credits for each course taken, which can be counted towards their future degree programs. An estimated total of 600 students will benefit from these online courses.

The program represents an academic partnership between HKUST and Wah Yan College, Pui Ching Middle School, Kowloon Technical School, Sha Tin Government Secondary School, Ho Fung College and Queen Maud Secondary School. Six regional multimedia education centers will be set up in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories to facilitate the delivery of live video sessions. Students from different schools can travel to the nearest education centers to attend classes.

"To promote gifted education, we need to provide a diverse curriculum to suit the multiple abilities of outstanding students and respect their different learning needs. We hope to enrich their learning experiences through a variety of quality online courses so that they can get a head start in university education," said Prof Ting Chuen Pong, project leader and Associate Dean of Engineering.

The cyber university program is built upon the success of a pilot study conducted by HKUST offering an online computer course to Form 4 and 6 students from Queen Maud, Wah Yan and Pui Ching in September 2000. "The students who took the pilot study course asked more questions through online discussions than they would in a typical classroom setting. Their feedback showed a positive view of online learning," said Prof Pong.

"The program will help enhance our understanding of the online learning behavior of students and develop effective means for online education," added Prof Pong. He hopes that the program will provide a model for other tertiary institutions to offer similar courses to secondary students.