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Comparison of Teaching Agribusiness Courses between US and China's Universities

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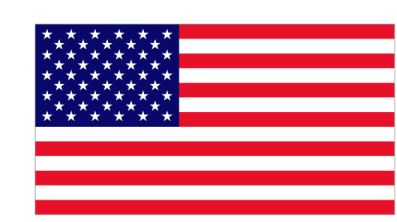
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★ Introduction

The author has been teaching agribusiness courses in a teaching orientated US university for 10 years, with a 100% teaching load, meaning 12 Weighted Teaching Units (WTUs) per semester, or 4 classes/sections of 3-unit courses per semester, and also had opportunities to teach several agribusiness courses in a couple of China's universities during summer time in the past few years. Classes taught in China (in English) includes agricultural marketing, production economics, and international trade for both undergraduate and graduate levels. At the same time, the author also hosts several visiting scholars from China each year and has lot of conversations with them about the teaching roles in China. With the great opportunity to experience to observe from both countries, the author would like to share the teaching comparison between US and China's universities with our profession and provide some suggestions for those who are also interested in this area.

★ Comparisons

1. Teaching Freedom



The instructor has the authority to select textbooks, topics, structure of the class materials and the delivery method for the class. Following on the guidelines of the program curriculum and teaching goals of each subject. In the US, the instructor can decide which textbook to adopt and what chapters to cover and how deep to go for the class. The instructor also has the freedom to choose how to deliver the class to students. There are very little or no interference from the administration. For example, for one course with different sections, if taught by different instructors, different sections may have different coverage of topics of the same class, although the key components should be similar.

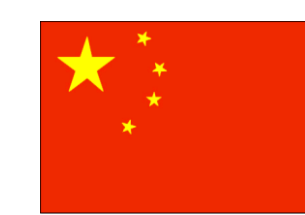


The instructor has very little control of the textbook selection. The department chair or other administration personnel, normally with teaching role, too, has the authority to select the textbook. The topic and class material selection should following the curriculum strictly. Even one class with different sections, the class coverages are very close, keeping consistency among different sections.

2. Trust between Faculty and the Administration

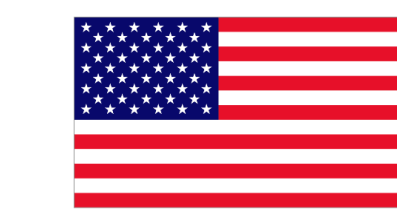


The administration trusts faculty in their teaching roles and seldom interferes with faculty teaching, except for helping or improving purpose. The administration never involves in faculty teaching and grading roles. Faculty has complete control of teaching and grading. The final grades are assigned by faculty only. That is trust. For example, for some day, if the instructor finishes the class material few minutes early, the instructor may let students leave few minutes earlier. This is an issue in the US. But it may be a big problem in China



The administration has more power to interfere faculty teaching. There is lack of trust between administration and faculty. For grading, some universities do not need the instructor do make the final grading decisions. Instructor can just forward sectional grades to the administration and they will add the grades together and make the final decision on students' final grades. If after grading, the instructor wants to make some corrections, the instructor must sign or initial besides the changes on student test. All the students' finals will be kept by the administration. But sometimes, before or during the grading, some personnel from the administration may ask the instructor to give some special care for a student, who has some connections with the administration.

3. Faculty's Dedications to Teaching



In the US, universities are classified into different types, such as research oriented, or teaching oriented. In this presentation, we just focus on teaching oriented universities. Faculty in teaching oriented universities are very clear about their teaching roles, 80%, or even 100% teaching. Faculty know that teaching is their priority, while research or services are not as important as teaching. Faculty know how many classes to teach each semester, no uncertainty and are dedicated to teaching. Faculty's income is based on the fixed annual salary, no fluctuation and no bonus, with fixed workload.

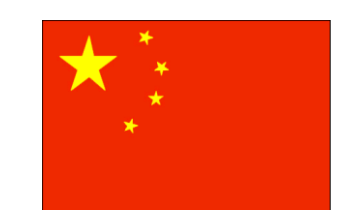


In China, universities are not classified by their main roles. Most of the universities are performing same roles. Faculty in different universities are expected to teach and research at the same time. Most of faculty are facing strong pressure from the research side. They can not dedicate themselves on teaching. Research and publication play important role for their promotion. In addition, faculty income is related to teaching load: beyond regular salary, faculty will receiving addition compensation for teaching courses. Workload is not very clear. Teaching more classes means more income for faculty members. If teaching more classes, and conduction heavy research at the same time, faculty's dedication to teaching is weakened.

4. Student Difference

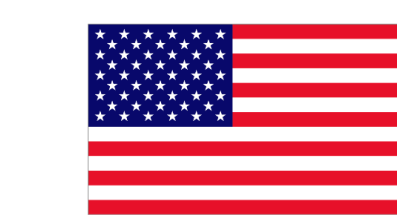


US students are very active in class. Students will ask questions if they don't understand. Instructor also encourages students' participation during teaching, lots of interaction between instructor and students. US students, especially for agricultural students, normally have one, two or even more part-time jobs besides their school work. Their time on study is limited.



Chinese students are very quiet during the lecture. Even they don't understand the topic, they don't want to ask. They would rather solve the problem by themselves after class. Even the instructor encourages students to participate, they seem to be shy or not want to speak English in front of others and don't want to participate in any discussion.

5. Grading

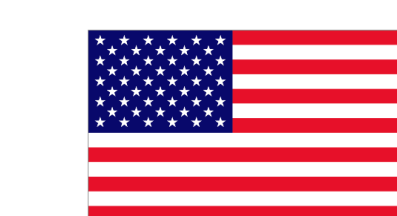


In the US, students' letter grades are normally based on a cumulative percentage of all the homework assignments, quizzes, projects, midterms, and final. Instructor has more grading responsibilities, meaning heavier workload for teaching. For students to get a better grade, they have to work hard through out the whole semester.



In China, students' grades are mainly based on one final. During the whole semester, instructor seldom gives any homework assignments or quizzes. Very few instructors will design a group project. Some students can get a better grade by studying really hard for few days before the final, while other times, they don't need to work hard.

6. Teaching Materials



US students (in these teaching oriented schools) are relatively weak in math. Many students never take calculus class. It is difficulty for instructor to explain many economics concepts without applying calculus, like marginal concepts, optimization concepts. Class materials cannot cover any concepts requiring calculus. It takes longer time to explain equilibrium and optimization concepts.



Chinese students are very strong in math. Calculus is a required course for all students. Even for undergraduate students, instructor can cover some advanced topics, such as Slutsky Equation in Microeconomics. Class can cover more topics because consumer equilibrium, optimizations, etc. can be explain well quickly using calculus.

★ Opportunities and Suggestions

Many China's universities require faculty to have overseas experience for their promotion. And both central and local governments as well as university allocate some funds for faculty to have study abroad opportunities. More and more Chinese faculty put US as their priority choice for their study abroad destination. If US faculty are interested in teaching courses in China during the summer, hosting visiting scholars from China and establishing connections through visiting scholars is a fast way to do it.