

STUDY ABROAD REPORT  
TRA VINH UNIVERSITY - 2009

It is my pleasure to submit this report summarizing my activities between 01-May and 31-Jul/2009 at Tra Vinh University (Vietnam) and Asia University (Taiwan). Although both activities were supported in part by a Study/Travel Abroad grant, I have chosen to talk directly about my period at Tra Vinh University (TVU) as it was the primary purpose for my travel.

As part of a CIDA/ACCC funded project, Vancouver Island University (known then as Malaspina University-College) participated in a Canada-wide consortium to establish Vietnam's first community college in Tra Vinh Province, one of the poorest provinces in Vietnam. This community college has since been upgraded to a university consisting of over 10 000 students using the University-College model as its guide. To my understanding, although this project is no longer being funded by CIDA, Vancouver Island University (VIU) continues to be active in developing Tra Vinh University through professional links (primarily through visits by VIU professors and technical assistants to TVU) and creating transfer credit links between the two institutions. This assistance is particularly relevant as Malaspina University-College has also been making a similar transition from University-College to University over the last year.

My purpose in traveling to TVU was envisioned as a cultural exchange with some class room experience, as well as building ties for future shared research projects between the Engineering and Technology College at TVU and the Engineering Department at VIU. These original plans were expanded upon my arrival and ultimately included the following:

- \* Introduced two groups of five 2<sup>nd</sup> year students to a simple microcontroller. These sessions (three hours/session) occurred once a week over five weeks for each group. The microcontroller was left with TVU so that students could continue to study and build projects based on what they learned. It should also be noted that for this and all seminar/lecture sessions, my talk was given in English and translated into Vietnamese by one of the staff at TVU. Students were encouraged to follow my spoken English as a learning experience.
- \* Prepared and presented a seminar series for teachers at TVU (campus wide) on communication skills (i.e. idea generation, persuasive writing, proposals, technical reports, and oral presentations).
- \* Offered the above seminar series in a single weekend for teachers/administrators at universities and colleges within southern Vietnam. This event was hosted at TVU and was well received by its participants.
- \* Gave a 1 hr seminar to each section of 2<sup>nd</sup> year Engineering students (8 to 10 seminars in total) titled 'What is Engineering?'. This seminar was intended to get students thinking about their studies and what career path they may wish to study. It was similar to the program that I have set up within the Engineering Department at VIU for our 1<sup>st</sup> year students. .
- \* Gave 'guest' talks to a few English classes to allow students to hear a native English speaker within an interactive environment.
- \* Gave a research seminar to the Chemistry department on some of my past activities during graduate school and current activities at VIU.

- \* Met with teachers at TVU and gave and received feedback on teaching technique and the student learning environment at both TVU and VIU.
- \* Worked with the administration and presented a report (available upon request) on several recommendations/suggestions towards helping TVU successfully transition from a community college to a university. I will expand on this point for the rest of this report.

Tra Vinh University faces many challenges in making its transition from community college to university, many of which are considerably different or magnified compared to those experienced by VIU. For example, due to space constraints, TVU does not follow a semester system as we experience it in North America. Students in different cohorts (or sections) have a start time which may differ by several weeks to their peers. In other words, Cohort A may start Class I on Jan 05, while Cohort B may start the same class on Jan 12 etc.... In addition, individual classes may range in time from 30 hours to over 60 hours. This schedule tends to limit student choices as it is difficult to 'escape' a cohort once enrolled. More critically, it makes standardizing credit transfers between TVU and other institutions nearly impossible.

Challenges such as these are slowly being overcome. TVU recognizes the need to standardize with the Western model in terms of course requirements, scheduling, etc... to increase their students' choices and opportunities. The dedication and sincerity of the teachers and administrators at TVU towards improving the educational experience for students while maintaining their cultural strengths encouraged me to re-direct my attention towards working with them towards achieving this goal. I was involved in several meetings including senior administrators, student assessment coordinators, as well as faculty deans and teachers – all were keen on learning new ways of thinking and I learned much in returned that I have brought back to the classroom at VIU. A few of the ideas we discussed may be attempted over the coming year using the Engineering and Technology College and the library at TVU as guinea pigs as it was within those two areas where I had the closest contacts.

Overall, my experience at TVU was very positive. TVU was very hospitable to me during my visit – taking care of accommodation as well as ensuring that I had a strong cultural experience during my stay. I am excited over the possibility of going back to Vietnam next year to follow up on some of the changes that we made during my initial two month stay. I would also look forward to seeing friends again.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the content of this report, or would like to know more about my experiences at Tra Vinh University I encourage you to contact me.

Thank you for this incredible opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Brian Dick', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Brian Dick, Ph.D  
Engineering Advisor/Professor  
Vancouver Island University