

Faculty of Social Work

The Faculty of Social Work started its China Project in 1997, initially working with the Ministry of Civil Affairs and its major training arm, the China College of Civil Affairs. The focus back then was to collaborate with the emerging community of Chinese social work scholars and educators to promote social work practice, education, and research in China.

The collaboration between the Faculty of Social Work (FSW) and the Centre for International Health (CIH) started in the late 1990s, when the University of Toronto was trying to explore international collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Professor David Zakus was then representing the CIH on a University of Toronto task group which Professor Ka Tat Tsang coordinated. The other academic divisions represented included Department of Economics, Department of Political Science, Institute for Environmental Studies, and the Joint Centre for East-Asian Studies.

Through the UofT-CASS collaboration, colleagues from other divisions have come to learn about the work of CIH in China, and its active involvement with many of the country's pressing health care issues, including structural and service delivery problems as well as substantive health care challenges.

The major initiative in 2006 was the collaboration between the University of Toronto and Tsinghua University (THU) in China. THU is the top-ranking university in China. In 2001, THU decided to establish a new medical school, and has since been consulting with both domestic and international colleagues with regard to its direction. Professor Ka Tat Tsang, Director of the China Project of the Faculty of Social Work, invited Professor Zakus to participate this initiative, starting with exploration of interest with academic administrators of their Medical School. Ideas for collaboration was subsequently proposed to them.

Specifically, we encouraged them to focus their resource and energy on mental health, community health, and public health as a concerted effort to strengthen the psychosocial aspects of health care and medical education. THU has been very receptive to our suggestion, and Professor Liu Pozi, the head of their psychiatry program, started active collaborative work with us. He led a delegation to Toronto in February, 2005 and met with UofT colleagues from FSW, CIH, Department of Psychiatry, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and health care practitioners in the community. This has already led to the development of collaborative initiatives in research program development (e.g., application of traditional Chinese medicine to mental health and addiction problems), and the education and training of psychiatrists in China.

In 2005, Professor Tsang obtained start-up funding (CAD\$150,000 through private donation) for a major program that had developed out of this collaboration. This enabled the initiation of a national program to train 150,000 primary health care practitioners employed by the Chinese State Commission for Population and Family Planning. The State Commission has invited THU, in collaboration of UofT, to develop a training program for these practitioners to expand their role in public health, community health, and family life education. The State Commission has committed to support future training programs, including financial support. Professor Zakus is a co-director of this particular initiative. We anticipate significant impact on community health and public health practice in China as a result of this project. In 2006, the key focus was to establish working relationship with our colleagues in China and field visits to a number of local sites, preparing for a more systematic needs-assessment exercise to determine the learning needs of these practitioners.

Another exciting development is taking place in Shandong Province, China. Shandong is one of the most populous provinces in China, with a population three times the size of that of Canada (close to 100 million). In 2006, the China Project of the Faculty of Social Work, through collaboration with Shandong University, the premier university in the Province, started to bring together Chinese faculty members from the Shandong University Medical School, Nursing Faculty, and Department of Social work to explore interdisciplinary collaboration among the health care and social service professions. Professor Ka Tat Tsang has conducted a series of workshops and consultation meetings in the Province, and the initial responses from the participating academic departments have been very positive.

Meanwhile, the Faculty of Social work is working closely with the Centre for International Health to develop international learning experience for UofT students coming from the various health-related disciplines. The plan is to get these students from the health care and social work disciplines to work as a team in selected sites in a practicum training context. Possible sites include Cambodia and China.