

# Study on Teaching Reform of Urban Design Course for International Students Majoring in Urban and Rural Planning: A Case Study of Inner Mongolia Normal University

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**Abstract:** Urban design is the main course of the urban and rural planning major. Professional training of international students in China is faced with problems in teaching objectives, curriculum teaching, curriculum assessment system, and other aspects. This paper explores the characteristics of international students in teaching reform methods of China to solve the current talent training problems faced by international students in the urban and rural planning major

**Keywords:** Urban and rural planning; International students in China; Curriculum teaching reform

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## 1. Introduction

With the continuous promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, the exchanges and cooperation between China and the world are increasing day by day. Ways to establish international education with Chinese characteristics and train students with international competence is an important issue for the training of international students in China<sup>[1-4]</sup>. The number of international students in China in recent years has continued to increase, and the growth rate is higher than the average level of countries in the world<sup>[5-7]</sup>. It is both a new opportunity and a challenge for the education department to promote the level of international education with Chinese characteristics and China's education reform and development<sup>[8-9]</sup>. The urban and rural planning major focuses on the practical training of international students in China. As the main course in the talent training program for urban and rural planning majors, the teaching reform of Urban Design has a representative role in the reform of the training model of international students in China. By analyzing the characteristics of the culture, learning style, and language ability of international students in China, this paper finds the existing problems in the teaching of urban and rural planning, puts forward the teaching reform content that adapts to the development of international students in China in the new era and hopes to provide directions for the training of international students in urban and rural planning.

## 2. Main characteristics of international students

There are obvious cultural differences between international students in China and domestic undergraduates. In 1960, anthropologist Kalervo Oberg put forward the concept of culture shock, which refers to the cultural inadaptation caused by a person moving from his or her existing cultural environment to a new one <sup>[10]</sup>. The anxiety and sense of loss brought by culture shock will make people hostile to the new environment, resulting in a negative evaluation of the different culture, and irrationally attached to their own culture, which will hinder cross-cultural communication and the establishment of different cultural identities <sup>[11]</sup>. The cultural inheritance of different countries is distinct, and the difference between the cultural foundation and the Chinese culture has become the primary difficulty for international students studying in China <sup>[12-15]</sup>.

## 3. Analysis of existing teaching problems

The teaching goal of the Urban Design course is to train students to take domestic classic urban design cases as a reference, explore their development orientation, opportunities, and challenges, learn classic urban design viewpoints and technologies, and combine familiar cities around, study their regional development status, and form preliminary urban design ideas. However, international students in China have relatively little knowledge of domestic cities. Moreover, due to their characteristics, international students lack language communication skills in understanding domestic cities and collecting relevant information. In addition, they are mainly taught by teachers in the teaching process. Combined with their characteristics, international students do not adapt to this kind of theoretical knowledge teaching method, which will easily lead to a lack of attraction to the course and fail to inspire students' innovative thinking in time. At the same time, among the professional teachers of Urban Design courses, there are few bilingual teaching options, which cannot meet the needs of international students in English teaching, so the teaching effect of the course is not good.

## 4. Exploration of teaching reform

### 4.1. Teaching objectives

Based on the characteristics of international students in China, teaching reform should be explored from the perspective of setting teaching objectives and formulating teaching plans to solve the problem of teaching objectives.

#### 4.1.1 Setting teaching objectives

Take the world's classic urban design cases as a reference to discuss its development orientation, opportunities, and challenges. In urban design cases, the explanation of the original local and foreign classic urban design cases is transformed into the world classic urban design cases for reference, to minimize the anxiety and sense of loss brought by culture shock to international students. In the group discussion, the cities familiar to international students can also be selected for analysis, and the cultural distance between international students and domestic students can be drawn. Discuss classical urban design theories and study cutting-edge urban design viewpoints and methods. Through discussion, the study of classical Western urban design theories will be guided to reduce the influence of weak Chinese language ability on the study of international students in China. Use common methods to study the current situation of the region, and form urban design ideas accordingly. Combined with the current situation of the surrounding areas, common methods are used to form a mixed group of Chinese and foreign students, stimulate the independent learning ability of international students and the interest in team learning, and inspire and guide the students to form urban design ideas.

### **4.1.2. Make teaching plan**

The course plan is 92 hours, which is divided into two parts, theoretical study and practical practice. The theoretical knowledge part is completed in 32 hours, and the project practice part is completed in 60 hours. The theoretical knowledge mainly includes 6 chapters, including an overview of urban design, the historical development of urban design, a compilation of urban design, urban space design, urban space elements, landscape composition, design of typical urban space types, and so on. The practical part is mainly divided into three stages: basic survey and data collection, concept scheme generation and drawing production, and final evaluation of the map. The basic survey and data collection require 24 class hours with the survey consisting of completing the analysis report of the current situation of the base, completing the individual concept plan, and the students in the class will independently choose the excellent plan that they are interested in and group them into groups. Finally, the complete project plan will be completed in the group as a unit, and the interim results will be displayed. After several rounds of plan modification and improvement, the final design plan will be submitted, and the drawing evaluation and group mutual evaluation will be carried out by instructors inside and outside the school. A total of 36 class hours are required.

## **4.2. Course teaching problems**

The number of undergraduate students majoring in urban and rural planning is small in each grade, and international students and domestic undergraduates share classes during teaching. However, considering the particularity of the international students in China, corresponding adjustments are made in the course teaching.

### **4.2.1. Combine the topic selection with the actual needs of the project**

In the practical part of the course, the selection of topics is carried out by the actual project simulation. With the help of the platform of industry-university-research cooperation base of the Department of Urban and Rural Planning, College of Geographical Sciences, Inner Mongolia Normal University, through cooperation with several industry-university-research cooperation bases, the project that meets the actual needs and research direction of each other's project is selected for practice. The use of practical project practice is not only conducive to providing students with practical project practice opportunities but also can provide more design schemes for the industry-university-research cooperation base. In practice, it is easier to stimulate students' curiosity about the project and their sense of responsibility to solve problems. Students' innovative thinking and divergent creative consciousness are also easy to stimulate good design schemes. The actual project design process exercises the student's ability to combine theory with practice and comprehensive analysis ability from multiple perspectives and avoids the unrealistic design concept caused by theoretical discussion.

### **4.2.2. Adopt the combination of independent work and group cooperation in the form**

Since the final design results are jointly completed by the team members, in addition to the quality assessment of the team results, students' assessment also includes the daily performance of independent work. Before determining the design ideas of the results, the project needs to carry out preliminary research and basic data collection. Under the guidance of on-campus and off-campus instructors, international students need to complete the research by themselves and form groups to collect basic data. When reporting back to school, they must explain their work in the research and basic data collection stage. In this stage, the international students mainly rely on the way of independent work, the results are mainly drawn and written, which is the concept generation stage of the project design. This part of the content mainly exercises the students' ability to find problems in the process of research and also tests the student's ability to compile basic data, work in a team,

and solve problems.

### **4.2.3. Combination of problem guidance and situational teaching in means**

In terms of teaching methods, it mainly adopts heuristic teaching methods and situational teaching methods. Using problem guidance in the teaching process, the school's online teaching platform and micro-teaching assistant service number are used as the platform for class discussion, homework, and course knowledge testing, and the MOOCs APP is used as the platform for teachers and students to reference course resources, inspiring students to apply the theoretical knowledge learned, summarize and discover the practical problems existing in the project, and propose solutions. Heuristic teaching can stimulate students' enthusiasm, and cultivate students' exploration thinking and innovation consciousness. In the teaching process, situational teaching makes full use of practical projects for in-depth investigation, representative sites and examples as well as design schemes of typical cities locally and abroad to explore how different cities can use scientific concepts and technologies of urban design to deal with problems in the process of urban development. To strengthen the understanding of Chinese cities and the characteristics of urban design development for international students with different cultural backgrounds, help students not only pay attention to the design of urban material form, but also pay attention to the political, economic, and social development design of different cities, and understand the generation system of urban spatial form and the law of urban development.

### **4.3. Problems of the curriculum assessment system**

International students are encouraged to independently choose research projects on industry-university-research cooperation bases. In the teaching process, they should first choose projects and then learn theoretical knowledge and problems. In addition to the basic typical urban design concepts locally and abroad in the theoretical teaching part, they focus on the design of typical urban space types and focuses on the planning and design of the urban central area, urban spatial axis, urban skyline planning, urban light environment planning and design for the projects selected by students, combining theoretical knowledge with practical project design. The course runs through the whole process of project design, and the teaching content covers the content of project design, not only the project design. Finally, in the course project design process, students are organized to report once individually and three times in a group, providing students with multiple opportunities to report, showing the preliminary research and basic data collection, conceptual plan, preliminary results, and final results. Individual reports and group reports are evaluated by each other in the class, and the final results report is reviewed by the instructor. Let students gradually improve the content of the results and enhance their understanding of the whole design process.

## **5. Conclusions**

Most urban and rural planning majors in colleges and universities belong to engineering majors. In the teaching process, practice is an important part of engineering major learning, and it is also an important means for students to further get familiar with professional knowledge. In terms of culture, there are obvious cultural differences between international students and domestic undergraduates. In terms of learning style, the primary and secondary school teaching stage of international students mainly focuses on discussion and heuristic teaching, forming more obvious independence and criticism than the domestic students. In terms of language ability, their Chinese language ability is affected by their learning foundation, which is weaker than that of domestic students, and they have a poor acceptance of the ocular language teaching methods of professional courses during their undergraduate years.

Given the above problems, international students should pay more attention to the learning of practical knowledge in the teaching process of urban design. Combining with the characteristics of international students themselves, this paper puts forward the reform and exploration methods from three aspects: teaching objectives, course teaching, and course assessment system. In terms of teaching objectives, set up suitable teaching objectives for international students and formulate corresponding teaching plans. In terms of course teaching, the topic selection should be combined with the actual needs of the project, the form should be combined with independent work and group cooperation, and the means should be combined with problem-oriented and situational teaching. In the course assessment system, the teaching content and course assessment system should be improved. Problem-oriented and goal-oriented course reform of urban design for international students majoring in urban and rural planning is explored.

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