

# Exploration of Undergraduate Entrepreneurial Education in China — Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System

Lixia Wen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> South China Normal University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

<sup>1</sup> Jinan University, Zhuhai, Guangdong, China

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding author. Email: shiqishidai1983@jnu.edu.cn

## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, with the reform of undergraduate teaching constantly goes deeper, it is the wave of future to think and explore a newly efficient way to cultivate innovative talents for adapting the higher education development in China. From the perspective of the Oxford Tutorial, the paper indicates the perfection of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System and presents the proper strategies from five aspects, in combination of entrepreneurial education of Chinese undergraduates. Furthermore, the strategies can be helpful in training talents and for sustainable higher education development. The paper tries to make the tutorial system play a more important role in training the innovative talents meeting all requirements needed of society.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial education, Oxford Tutorial, Off-campus entrepreneurship tutor, Innovation and entrepreneurship.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Undergraduates are the precious resources for the country, and it will be of great importance in actively promoting the innovation and entrepreneurship of university students. In addition, Ministry of Education of China indicated colleges and universities should hire entrepreneurs, businessman, investors, scholars and professionals as part-time tutors and provide one-to-one guidance for students' innovation and entrepreneurship.

Great efforts has been made in this field abroad, the paper tries to make the tutorial system play a more important role in training the innovative talents meeting all requirements of society. The paper is divided into five parts as follows. It opens with the introduction of Oxford Tutorial. Part Two states the status quo of entrepreneurial education in China. Part Three develops the off-campus entrepreneurship tutorial system based on Oxford Tutorial, followed by five implementing strategies in Part Four. Finally, the conclusion is presented in the last part.

## 2. OXFORD TUTORIAL

Oxford Tutorial was the combination of American credit system with British tutorial system. Also known as the "Oxford's jewel in the crown", the tutorial teaching system has been shown effective in practice of undergraduate education and management.<sup>1</sup>

Felipe Fernández-Armesto in *The Spectator* (*'Decline and Fall'*, 29/12/01) pointed out "The tutorial is Oxford's hallmark: every undergraduate gets – or, in theory, should get – weekly individual attention from an accomplished scholar, who takes an interest in the young person's work, and criticizes, encourages, inspires and guides it." The tutorial system creates an open, free teaching environment in which undergraduates can truly get involved and both tutors and undergraduates initiates a cooperating and sharing work.<sup>2</sup> Will G.

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1. David Palfreyman, THE OXFORD TUTORIAL: "Thanks, you taught me how to think", Oxford: OxCHEPS, 2008 (2nd edition).

2. Xue Yi, A Study of Undergraduate Tutor System in the View of Ideological and Political Education (in Chinese),

Moore, Fellow and Tutor of St John's College, published in 1968 *The Tutorial System and its Future*, describes that, "The roots of the tutorial method is a skeptical one, a method that inquires, probes, scrutinizes. It is not at its best in ex cathedra authoritative statement, but in criticism, theory, analysis, comparison. It prefers the relative to the absolute, the tentative to the dogmatic, the essay to the treatise."<sup>3</sup> The function of the tutorial system is not to instruct: it is to set the student the task of expressing his thought articulately, and then to assist him in subjecting his creation to critical examination and reconstructing it.<sup>4</sup>

Oxford tutorial emphasizes the personal attention, respects individual, and builds free academic atmosphere for fostering student abilities of rational and critical thinking, on the basis of equal dialogues between students and teachers. The value of tutorial system lies in teaching students how to think, how to analyze the question and push it to a deeper understanding. In this case, Oxford Tutorial was a teaching mode which cultivates elites against the background of traditional elite education.<sup>5</sup>

In China, the current students training mode of higher education, the tutorial system was generally applied into the training mode of postgraduates and PhD students. Some key universities employed the tutorial system, but not widely. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, aiming at cultivating innovative talents for knowledge economy, reinforcing the quality-oriented education, improving the quality of talent training, a number of key universities in China, like Peking University and Zhejiang University, began to carry out the undergraduates' tutorial system. So far, it is nearly 100 colleges and universities have implemented the undergraduates' tutorial system in China.

### 3. STATUS QUO OF ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

Entrepreneurial education is a kind of teaching concept and method resulted from adapting the development strategies of economy and society. Moreover, in combination with theory teaching in classroom and extracurricular practice training, it strengthens the entrepreneurial awareness, theoretical level and comprehensive ability, equips the undergraduates with the qualities needed for startup. On the premise of professional education, entrepreneurial education is an integrated education movement which attempts to create more opportunities for graduates, promote all-round development of university students, and drive the progress of society.<sup>6</sup> In the process of boosting popular entrepreneurship and innovation, the training of innovative thinking and cultivation of entrepreneurship cannot fulfilled only in classroom teaching or social practice, and the individual coaching in learning, research and creation should be provided by the off-campus tutors.<sup>7</sup>

The entrepreneurship education was in the exploring and developing stage, although the entrepreneurship teaching and practice was accepted in teaching programs of some universities. Entrepreneurial guidance was remaining in the "second classroom teaching", lacking of professional entrepreneurial courses, ignoring the strengths and characteristics of different majors. The reason for underachieved entrepreneurial abilities and low rate of entrepreneurial success was that, there is no professional and specialized mechanism of entrepreneurship teaching, which giving full play to "cluster advantage".

Facing the problems of uneven entrepreneurial teachers, and underachieved innovative and entrepreneurial competences of students, the paper proposes to build and implement the off-campus entrepreneurship tutorial system based on the Oxford Tutorial, providing guidance and insurance for advancing innovative and entrepreneurial education of higher institutions in China.

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Shanghai: Master Thesis of East China Normal University, April, 2012.

3. Will G. Moore, *The Tutorial System and its Future*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1968 (1st edition).

4. David Palfreyman, *THE OXFORD TUTORIAL: "Thanks, you taught me how to think"*, Oxford: OxCHEPS, 2008 (2nd edition).

5. He Qizong, *Research on Tutorial System and Undergraduates' Talent Cultivation* (in Chinese), Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House, Feb. 2014.

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#### **4. CONSTRUCTING OFF-CAMPUS ENTREPRENEURSHIP TUTORIAL SYSTEM**

Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System tries to evaluate students' innovation capabilities and entrepreneurship, and conduct a series of simulation, internship and practice by qualified tutors. With the Oxford Tutorial platform of freedom and equality, it helps students to enhance the initiatives of learning, grasp the method of innovation, elevate the enterprise consciousness and develop the ability of rational and critical thinking.

##### **4.1 Selection of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutors**

Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutor is the title of honor granting to the outstanding business leaders, entrepreneurs, managers and celebrities of all sectors of society both home and abroad. Mainly cover entrepreneurs of well-known enterprises, members of board, public officials, scholars and specialists, who are devoting educational cause, supporting the teaching, research, social practice and talent cultivation of higher institutions in China.

He Qizong remarks, tutors should possess good specialized knowledge, high professional proficiency, favorable personal qualities and abundant humanistic accomplishment.<sup>8</sup> In accordance with the qualification, it is necessary to build a corresponding "Database for Entrepreneurship Tutors" with the match of disciplines.

##### **4.2 Responsibilities Orientation of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutors**

The tutors are talents mainly from the government, enterprise and public institution. With the strength of extensive practical experience, tutors focus on Guidance, i.e. guidance on academics, guidance on research and guidance on entrepreneurship.

In the aspect of academics, tutors provide guidance on devising personalized learning programs and choosing direction of professional development according to different characteristics of each student. In terms of research, tutors help

students getting involved into scientific efforts, encouraging them to participate into competitions of innovation and entrepreneurship, guiding their scientific projects. With respect to entrepreneurship, tutors exchange startup experience, offer internship and practice, consciously develop the entrepreneurial ability and practical capability, lead students integrate theory with practice accordingly, and take bold pioneering action.

##### **4.3 Evaluation and Assessment of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutors**

Colleges and universities should attach great importance to the construction and implementation of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System, strengthen the link and coordination with relevant supporting systems, and build an efficient evaluation and assessment system. Firstly, university should establish ad hoc working group to provide leadership, coordination and guidance to the System, formulate measures for the System implementation at a macro level, determine the implementation idea and target, and monitor the concrete implementation of the System. Secondly, the school and department management mechanism for Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System should be set up to take charge of matters of tutors selection, training, evaluation and assessment. Regular tutor-student meeting should be held for sharing experience and solving problems. Then, the network evaluation platform for off-campus entrepreneurship tutors should be constructed accordingly with the steps of students' comments, tutors' self-assessments, and evaluation from school & department at the end of semester or year. Lastly, the results should be included into the annual performance review for commending and rewarding. Furthermore, the university will introduce and promote the outstanding tutors and advanced experience by making job briefings and annual report.

#### **5. IMPLEMENTING OFF-CAMPUS ENTREPRENEURSHIP TUTORIAL SYSTEM**

The implementation of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System is subverting the traditional educational forms of "teacher-centered, classroom-centered, and textbook-centered" to a new form of taking active initiatives in learning and practicing with effective communication between tutors and students in the free atmosphere. Additionally, the implementation of the System has

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8. He Qizong, Research on Tutorial System and Undergraduates' Talent Cultivation (in Chinese), Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House, Feb. 2014.

very important realistic meaning for deepening educational reform and improving quality of talent training. The concrete steps are as follows:

### 5.1 *Opening Brainstorming-centered Entrepreneurship Class*

In way of teaching, Oxford Tutorial focuses on individual coaching, teaching students with good examples and with patience. Moreover, it emphasizes morality and virtue of students in terms of teaching content to create a harmonious, relaxed and free education environment. Will G. Moore, in 1968 *The Tutorial System and its Future*, indicates that, there are three reasons for the success of tutorial system, i.e. pay attention to individual student, rely on cooperation between tutors and students and unique attitude to knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

The implementation of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System is not on “teaching”, but “guidance”, which guiding students think for themselves. Undergraduates can have brainstorming and free discussion under the tutor’s guidance. On the other hand, tutors can set up stage and build a good environment for students making full use of innovative ideas and personal features. With the mutual study and joint efforts between students and tutors, it is useful to discover and understand problems from a different perspective and dare to express themselves in the critical thinking pattern.

Entrepreneurship class is a new step in the teaching reform of International Business School (IBS for short), aiming to invite off-campus tutors with a wealth of practical experience and professional background to deliver site instruction with on-campus teachers in classroom. It will help students acquire practical knowledge and apply the textbook theory to social practice simultaneously. In the end, entrepreneurship class can boost the practical capabilities and theoretical comprehension with the on-site sharing and comments from the off-campus tutors.

The elective course *Introduction on Corporate Management Practice and Innovation* lectured by off-campus entrepreneurial tutors was adopted into 2013 undergraduate training program in International Business School. The course *Market Planning Practice* invited off-campus tutor Mrs.

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9. Will G. Moore, *The Tutorial System and its Future*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1968 (1st edition).

Pang, the General Manager of Jinjiecheng Coffee Trading Co., to share the promotion strategy of Korean Coffee Program and students was deeply inspired. Furthermore, the course *Retailing* for marketing students also had Mr. Tian, Marketing Director of Dantian Management Corporation, and Mrs. Lee, owner of Mini Bakery, to comment on the students’ social practice report from theme selection, research method and design, analysis and conclusion, image and language. The entrepreneurship class gained praises from on-campus teachers and students with the deep and professional guidance and useful suggestion on practice and research.

### 5.2 *Holding the Interaction-centered Entrepreneurial Forum*

Other teaching modes, like classroom instruction, individual counseling, seminar, academic saloon, lecture, would not be ruled out of off-campus entrepreneurship tutorial system. The tutorial system and other teaching modes should complement one another to the harmonious development and maximum benefit for students.<sup>10</sup> The heart of tutorial system is teaching young undergraduates to think for themselves. Therefore, the undergraduate is sent off to explore for himself and to produce a coherent exposition of his ideas on a subject or question.<sup>11</sup>

The entrepreneurial forum is an important component for the off-campus entrepreneurship tutorial system and interaction is the center. Without the formation of student’s subject consciousness, the tutorial system cannot reach the ideal state of tutor-student interaction. As long as students become the heart of forum and feel the charm from tutors, the entrepreneurial forum can stimulate the entrepreneurial interests of students and boost them to participate in startup and practice with intention and responsibility. Meanwhile, tutors should encourage students to develop autonomous study, independent thinking and ability of analysis and criticism.

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10. He Qizong, *Research on Tutorial System and Undergraduates’ Talent Cultivation* (in Chinese), Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House, Feb. 2014.

11. David Palfreyman, *THE OXFORD TUTORIAL: “Thanks, you taught me how to think”*, Oxford: OxCHEPS, 2008 (2nd edition).

### **5.3 Forging Practice-centered Entrepreneurial Competition**

Academic competitions play an important role in promoting undergraduate's entrepreneurial awareness and skills, establishing entrepreneurship. Necessary practical training is of great use in cultivating undergraduate's entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial competition with specific target and authenticity is helpful to transform the knowledge to skill in the process of concrete operation and form the entrepreneurial spirit and character. Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System should integrate with entrepreneurial competition, focusing on the summarization of undergraduates' results and putting excellent ones on all kinds of competitions for testing and exhibiting. Importantly, tutors need to encourage undergraduates in different major, different grade, different discipline, to work together, revises their results and push them to engage in the competition, like National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program for Undergraduates by Ministry of Education, Challenge Cup Entrepreneurial Competition by the Central Committee of Communist Youth League.

Meanwhile, university should hold various entrepreneurial competitions with its own characteristics, build diversified practical platform to cultivate student's abilities of learning, innovation, management and operation. Business Elites Competition, organized by International Business School, is a practice for perfecting talent training system, innovating student cultivation mode, and elevating undergraduate quality. It aims to expand their operation and management knowledge and skills, reinforce business consciousness, exercise ability of innovation and practice what they learnt. Held once a year, Business Elites Competition was sponsored by off-campus tutors' enterprise to design programs of enterprise transformation, management improvement and marketing strategy. The Competition is composed of three parts, scenario text, simulated actual practice and final party. The highlight of the Competition is high sponsorship and reward, enterprise practical platform, such as the champion team receive 5000 yuan and opportunity of internship for the First, 100 thousand fund for graduate startups in the Third, summer internship program in Macau for the Forth, 100 thousand annual salary post in tutor's corporation for the Fifth.

### **5.4 Expanding Cooperation-centered Entrepreneurial Base**

It is important to take active move to expand off-campus practice base for providing platform of student's entrepreneurial training and internship. University should establish long-term, stable entrepreneurial practice base and strengthen cooperation between university and enterprise to realize resource sharing and advantage compensation for mutual development. In addition, the enterprise production and research should be brought to the entrepreneurial education of university to offer practice sites for teacher and student. Therefore, the accomplishment can be jointly developed to improve the level of scientific achievement conversion for the university, provide scientific insurance for the enterprise.

Through the implementation of Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System, International Business School builds a more close relationship with more than 100 enterprises and public institutions, including 15 teaching and practicing bases, 2 demonstration bases of students' innovation & entrepreneurship, 1 University-Industry Entrepreneurship & Innovation Practice Center. All these provide convenient conditions for students and teachers, guidance for students' activities, social practice, internship and employment. There are 3 enterprises developing management training program in International Business School. It is win-win result both for university and tutor's enterprise, publicizing its enterprise in the university platform and promoting both social reputation and popularity. In July 2015, the School conducted one-month social internship and practice with corresponding Taiwan off-campus corporation, and undergraduates went through the professional study, enterprise visit and practice research around management concept, marketing mode, operation process, competitive advantage, product features.

### **5.5 Establishing Information Platform Between University and Enterprise**

In order to build a good information bridge and platform for students, International Business School held Off-campus Tutors Appointment Ceremony and Entering Class in the annual Freshmen Orientation. Each freshmen class will be assigned two entrepreneurs or high-ranking managers as the class supervisors, in accordance with their major and academic background, and freshmen will have

access to the guidance and education of off-campus tutors from the beginning.

Around the target of win-win and long-term cooperation, the construction of information platform should be originated from resource sharing and mutual benefit. With the principles of openness, sharing, availability and real-time, International Business School website set special column of Off-campus Tutors, with the sub-columns of Introduction of Tutors, Entering the Class, Entrepreneurial Leaders Forum, Business Elites Competition. On one hand, the information platform is good for talent cultivation and development, course construction, student's internship, graduate employment. On the other hand, it is a platform for enterprise to select talents and filter out great minds.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Although made some headway, the Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System has not achieved the expected results. There are still much room for improvement, like outnumbered students, unspecific guidance content, unclear responsibilities of students and tutors, insufficient support from university, and unequal incentive mechanism. Universities and colleges should set clear objectives of tutorial system and improve it in the constant practice, according to its own characteristics and reality. It is the wave of future to actively probe the Off-campus Entrepreneurship Tutorial System suited for its own development, construct an entrepreneurial educational framework and talents cultivating system with Chinese characteristics, and train more innovative talents with entrepreneurship to move forward the development of society and economy in China.

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