



Combining Charity and Cultivating Culturally Inclusive Care Talents

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Taiwan is entering a super-aged society in 2025, with the population aged 65 and above reaching 20%, coupled with low birth rates, presenting even greater challenges in care practices. Scenarios like seniors living alone, elderly caring for elderly, and foreign caregivers have become the norm. Clinical settings face severe shortages in nursing and daily care personnel, and educational institutions are working to cultivate more diverse care talents.

To address the care workforce shortage, the Ministry of Education opened applications for international industry-academia cooperation programs in long-term care-related departments. Starting in 2019, Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology (now Tzu Chi University) applied for an international long-term care cooperation program. Adhering to Tzu Chi's charitable educational philosophy, they recruited 48 disadvantaged students from the Philippines who had lost educational opportunities due to natural disasters. After learning Mandarin and long-term care professional skills, these students remain in Taiwan as caregivers who provide safe, compassionate care for the elderly, with the hope that education will help them escape poverty and transform their lives through stable employment.

To help long-term care associate degree graduates successfully enter the workforce, the Ministry of Labor announced and implemented the "Talent Retention and Long-term Employment Program" on April 30, 2022, and further amended it in June 2023 to enable "mid-level technical personnel" to stay in Taiwan and become part of care teams.

To cultivate foreign long-term care associate degree students for cross-cultural care in Taiwan, the school's curriculum must consider several aspects, including: language, professional skills, culture, daily life, internship, and employment-



Tang Lee-Chun(center front), Assistant Professor of Nursing at Tzu Chi University, with the third cohort of long-term care program graduates. Photo provided by Commonwealth CHEERS magazine.

related learning and adaptation. Therefore, the curriculum follows a cumulative and progressive learning principle, planned over four semesters:

- First semester: Mandarin language courses
- Second semester: Long-term care concepts
- Third semester: Practical courses
- Fourth semester: Internship courses

To help foreign students learn Mandarin and understand long-term care concepts, courses are taught bilingually, with a language ratio of 70% English to 30% Mandarin. Practical and internship courses progressively transition to full Mandarin instruction.

According to Ministry of Education regulations for international industry-academia cooperation programs, students must receive at least 15 hours of Mandarin language courses per week in the first semester and pass the basic Mandarin proficiency test. Recognizing that learning a new language requires an environment, students are



Tang Lee-Chun (second from right) visiting a hospital internship site to understand the learning status of foreign long-term care students.

arranged to volunteer at community centers during their first semester to practice and familiarize themselves with Taiwanese care culture. After completing professional concept learning in the second semester, they volunteer at hospitals to become familiar with workplace environments and language. After completing practical courses in the third semester, they work part-time in hospital chronic care wards to understand job responsibilities.

The fourth semester includes a three-stage, 16-credit, 640-hour internship, comprising:

- Basic care internship (hospital chronic care wards and residential institutions)

- Institutional care internship (day care centers)
- Community care internship (community centers)

Beyond language and academic adaptation, cultural life adaptation is crucial. Beyond long-term care faculty, counselors, the Humanities Room's mentors, international office and student affairs staff, and dormitory parents are all important mentors for foreign students. Dormitory living regulations represent another important cross-cultural interpersonal relationship for students who have never lived on campus, with daily life details from bathing and meal times to bathroom habits all being part of the adaptation learning process.

Foreign students who have all three daily meals at the school cafeteria learn about festival customs, dietary culture and etiquette, and religious ceremonies – important life adaptation experiences for both local and foreign students.

Campus internationalization reflects future workplace diversity, with cross-cultural living experiences being important for both local and foreign students. As the number of foreign students has gradually increased in recent years, the first cohort of long-term care foreign students encountered more challenges, with communication being the greatest difficulty. With previous limited experience with foreign students, school faculty and administrative staff worked to overcome language communication barriers – foreign students strived to learn Mandarin, while administrative staff actively practiced English.

The school also organized cross-cultural activities to help students encounter diverse cultural people and things, increasing mutual understanding and reducing misunderstandings and stereotypes.

Clinical care providers have also become more diverse, such as foreign family caregivers or foreign residents. Foreign students have a language advantage, able to use relatively fluent English to assist clinical communication and reduce differences.

The long-term care program has cultivated 48 graduates over three cohorts:

- 17 work as nursing assistants at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital
- 13 work as care service personnel in residential institutions at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital
- 10 work as care service personnel at Taichung Tzu Chi Nursing Home

Their vibrant and optimistic national character can bring a different workplace atmosphere. These disadvantaged students are grateful for the opportunity, cherish what they have, and are working hard to become part of the care team in Taiwan.