RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO MAKE NCHU INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FRIENDLY

compiled by

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It is gladdening to know that the NCHU administration is concerned about its international students. Given below are recommendations needed to improve the situation of the international students of NCHU which has been put forth with the consultation of a group of representative international students. (Except the last paragraph titled “What International Students can do for NCHU and Taiwan” which is solely the reflection of my thoughts not a consensus arriving from discussion therefore any fault in intent or content is entirely my responsibility)

The major problem international students face is language. Therefore, most of the student's concerns could be resolved by the bilingualization (English & Chinese) of everything that pertains to international students.

Application & Admission

The process of admission is getting complicated each year. NCHU requires original educational documents authenticated by the Taiwan Embassy (or embassy equivalent) even for applying to NCHU. This is very time consuming and expensive since Embassies are located in the country's capital and in some cases the capital may be more than a thousand kilometers from the applicant's hometown and the process takes a few weeks (including traveling or mailing). Furthermore it is unsafe to send original documents by post. And it is not desirable to get the original documents signed on. (Taiwan Embassy authenticates only original documents by signing and stamping its seal on the back of the document. It would be better if the embassy inspects the original document but signs and stamps its seal on the photocopied documents.) These issues complicate even the application process thereby discouraging potential candidates. Such complications can be avoided by not requiring an authenticated document for application. It would be wise to demand authenticated documents from the selected candidates for the process of admission rather than demanding it from applicants during the application process.

It would be appreciated if NCHU sends the admission letter to the selected candidates at least two months prior to admission. This will give the candidates time to get their documents authenticated and also give them time to apply for their VISA and time to book the air tickets.
This booklet is entirely in Mandarin Chinese and the students are unaware of the courses available and are unable to choose their desired courses on their own. They need the help of the local students. It seems that from the academic year 2006-2007 the Syllabus and Course work details (選課本) will be available online in the NCHU website. It would be very convenient if it is available in English.

Even the rules on the requirements that students need to fulfill in order to graduate are also in Mandarin Chinese.

There are very few courses in English. This makes it difficult for most international students especially to students who don't belong to Southeast Asia. There should be at least a bare minimum of courses taught in English. There are departments in NCHU where international students are forced to use a Mandarin Chinese question paper to take their test and to translate it from Mandarin Chinese to English and then the answers back from English to Mandarin Chinese take about 3 to 4 hours to complete the test. Most teachers are considerate while some are not. The situation is worse for students doing their bachelors whose curriculum is course work intensive. It seems that NCHU, unlike few other top universities in Taiwan, has no rule to direct the teachers to teach in English when an international student opts for that course. (It would be very much appreciated if NCHU encourages professors who opt to teaching in English by honoring them and/or their department with special privileges or compliments.) It would be best if at least the obligatory courses are instructed in English. This is of major importance since the following year's scholarship depends upon the score of the previous year's courses and it is too much pressure on international students who have to sit in the classroom and listen to the lecture in a language they don't understand yet are expected to get good grades for the next year's scholarship.

Most of the announcements and notices sent to international students are in Mandarin Chinese. International students are unable to know what is sent to them unless a local student helps in the translation. In spite of all the good intentions the translation cannot be expected to be all that faithful leading to ambiguity.

The Web site of NCHU does have some pages in English and is much better than a few years ago. But there is scope for a lot of improvement. Individual departments and laboratories must be encouraged to host their web page in English. This will help attract international students to join NCHU. NCHU has quite a few world
class research laboratories but they lack their due publicity therefore miss to capture the attention of interested students who browse the web looking for good labs. The web site should also contain detailed information on the Taiwan Scholarships and other kinds of scholarships that students can avail.

Automated machines
The automated machine that prints out the score card or the grade sheet (成績單自動申請機器) is entirely in Mandarin Chinese. In spite of a good effort of someone who translated it into English and posted on NCHU website it is still difficult to do it on one’s own without the help of a local student.

Safety instructions
Elevators in NCHU do not have any safety instructions in English. And there is an emergency phone but the international students are unaware of what to speak in case of an emergency. These things can be dealt with in the orientation program.

General instructions
When NCHU announces a festival or a symposium or an invited lecture or a workshop etc, the publicity poster is seldom in English. So if international students want to participate in such events (even if they know what it is all about) they are left clueless. Bilingualization should be encouraged in the campus making it easy for both local as well as international students.

General facilities
This is common for both Taiwan students and international students.

Dormitory
NCHU must encourage that announcements and instructions be done in English. There is a general feeling that the overall quality of the facilities needs to be improved. The numbers of students per room should be reduced to a decent number, this is especially important for Masters or Doctoral students who may require more privacy due to their age and maturity.

Elevator safety
Elevator safety is almost nil in NCHU. It is a common practice for research students to stay late at night and also in weekends in the laboratory. If someone is trapped in the night or during weekends when the frequency of elevator use is minimum, the probability of someone to spot them and rescue them is very rare. And one is not sure about the proper functioning of emergency systems in elevators. There is no assurance that there is someone to help a trapped victim in odd hours (or even working hours). It is better if NCHU acts immediately before any untowardly incident brings lack of such safety measures to the notice of the general public and save itself from embarrassment.

Availability of trash cans in the campus
This may sound trivial but it poses an inconvenience of carrying our trash all the way to ones department or to the student’s canteen where there are a few trash cans.

Orientation program
There has never been one for international students. International students don’t even know where the library or cafeteria or the university clinic is until a friend tells
them. They are not even told about the VISA process upon arrival and after enrollment. An orientation program is a common practice worldwide to provide awareness to international students. NCHU must also catch up with this practice as soon as it can.

Scholarships

In the academic year 2006-2007 NCHU announced a NT$ 2000 hike in scholarships which though a small step is appreciated and welcomed by the international students of NCHU.

The scholarship alone is meager but since for doctoral students the advisor usually pays from their project funding it could be sufficient for sustenance. But this is not a rule and not all advisors pay enough for the international students. The pay from advisors is not standard, it ranges from generous to pitifully meager or none at all in some cases. The lucky few who get the Taiwan Scholarship can feel safe whereas the rest are at the mercy of their advisors. Some advisors can afford to pay the international students other cannot afford or are not generous enough. To avoid these discrepancies NCHU can hold a discussion to fix a minimum total scholarship for international students and the more deserving can get more as they deserve. If an advisor lacks funds to pay the international student, the advisor should find funding from other sources in order to pay the minimum. If the advisor is unable to find the minimum funding then he or she better not risk taking in the student.

Part time jobs

There is work permit issued by the Council of Labor Affairs, Executive Yuan for foreign students and overseas Chinese students who have been in Taiwan for more than one year. But international students who lack fluent Mandarin Chinese speaking skills this work permit is not that useful. So the university should provide part time employment for needy students in campus or outside the campus (if NCHU has collaborations). One suggestion is to utilize able international students in the task of Internationalizing NCHU especially in translations and bilingualizations of web sites, notices etc. International students are not aware of whom to contact for information on part time job in the campus. Again this too can be dealt with in the orientation program.

Problems in timing of payment

There are times when the funding from the advisor (from funding agencies like NSC or NHRI etc) arrives late sometimes paid late, but together for 2 or 3 months. This happens especially during May or June to August or September. Firstly this delay puts pressure on student's spending secondly this possesses an additional problem of Tax. Taiwan government levies income tax if income for one month exceeds NT$ 30,000/-, so if students are paid three months fellowship together as one down payment, Taiwan government deduces tax automatically and the student loses money for something that's not his or her fault. NCHU must pursue the funding agencies to provide scholarship on time or at least ensure that even if paid late should be paid in way such that the student doesn't loose money.

What international students can do for NCHU and Taiwan

In spite of being an economically and technologically developed country of about 23 million people under a functioning democracy with a good human rights record, Taiwan has not been recognized by the international community though Taiwan has been considered as a friend and an ally by many countries. The most unkindest cut of all came when the WHO did not recognize Taiwan and its 23 million people who were under the threat of the SARS epidemic and even after continuous pleas the WHO has not even given an observer status to Taiwan. Neglecting a democracy and its 23 million people is so very unfair. The international community is confused by the status of Taiwan and it gets worse during international sports events like the Olympics where we don't see the name Taiwan but Chinese Taipei. This is ambiguous and confusing. Only proper awareness can allay such confusion. And international students can be one of the
sources to help avoid such confusion and promote Taiwan. And the international students of NCHU can promote both Taiwan and NCHU as well. The international students can be provided with pamphlets of NCHU and also Taiwan. Pamphlets on Taiwan could contain a brief history of Taiwan, country profile, useful websites and a lot about tourism and education. International students can be given small gifts like pencil boxes, pens, pencils, key chains, little games or toys or other little compliments (representing Taiwan) suited for school kids. The international students can donate it to schools they know probably their alma mater to be given as prizes for competitions. And a more detailed profile of Taiwan, maps and booklets on education, tourism, wild life and biodiversity etc can be given to target teachers of such schools.

Similar things can be done for colleges and universities like T-shits with NCHU and Taiwan promotional pictures and words. A much elaborate plan would be to use the international student community to organize small exhibitions (photo exhibitions or art exhibitions or tourism exhibitions) on Taiwan in their home country. But the means and the scale of doing such things should be discussed and planed before execution. Before all that, the international students must be made aware of Taiwan, history and present status and its political situation in a way that would make them sympathize with the Taiwan cause. This can be achieved through a well planed orientation program.

Creative people either students or staff or both can give much better ideas on how international students can show their gratitude to NCHU. A discussion between students and staff of NCHU may be helpful.