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The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) received two awards at the Wharton-QS Stars Awards 2014: Reimagine Education, also known as the "Oscars" of innovation in higher education, in recognition of its innovative e-learning programs.

The Awards, the first global awards for recognizing innovative higher education pedagogies that enhance learning and employability, were organized by The Wharton SEI Center for Advanced Studies in Management, University of Pennsylvania, and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), publisher of the QS World University Rankings.

Among entries from 427 universities and enterprises from 43 countries, a team led by Prof Ting-chuen Pong, Senior Advisor to the Executive Vice-President and Provost (Teaching Innovation and e-Learning), and Professor of Computer Science and Engineering of HKUST, came second in the Hybrid Learning Category of the awards for their "Hong Kong Virtual University" program (HKVU), which was established with initial funding from the University Grants Committee's Restructuring and Collaboration Fund. The program aims at creating a virtual campus for students around the world to study blended learning courses offered by universities in Hong Kong.

HKVU enables students to take classes unavailable in their home institution and builds a bridge for students transitioning from secondary school to tertiary education. It also offers lifelong learning opportunities and useful feedback for educators. The blended learning mode, which integrates face-to-face teaching with online media, allows more flexibility for students to learn according to their own timetables. The Wharton School and QS recognize HKVU as "an outstanding contribution to innovation in learning".

The winner of the Hybrid Learning Category went to the University of Utah, with HKUST sharing the runner-up position with Delft University of Technology and finishing ahead of Harvard University, which came in third.

In addition, HKUST also won the Natural Sciences Award for its "Chemists Online" program under the HKVU initiative. This enterprising program gives secondary school students exposure to university-level education in Chemistry through seminars and laboratory sessions. Over 8,000 students from 140 secondary schools in Hong Kong and Macau have benefited from the program.

Prof Wei Shyy, Executive Vice-President and Provost of HKUST, congratulated Prof Pong and his team. "The awards are recognition of our initiatives in innovative e-learning. The program has nurtured the scientific literacy and questioning skills of the students by providing them exposure to university education through blended learning. HKUST will continue to promote an innovative e-learning medium to benefit the younger generation worldwide."

Prof Pong said, "I was delighted that we were able to gain such recognition in the face of strong competition from around the world. These awards show that HKUST is not only committed to innovative education but is among the global leaders in its approach and development of such teaching and learning mode."

Students who were enrolled in HKVU said that the program had aroused their interest in science and research and offered them an excellent platform to engage in interesting discussions on advanced science.

HKUST is one of the pioneers in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), university-level courses open to anyone linked to the internet. The University launched in 2013 three courses each on Coursera and edX, the two most popular global MOOC platforms. HKUST will continue to strive to promote an innovative e-learning medium to give worldwide learners an opportunity to take classes provided by top universities, as well as make learning more personalized and flexible for students.

For details of HKVU, please visit <http://hkvu.ust.hk/hkvu/index.html>.

For media enquiries, please contact:

Sherry No

Tel: 2358 6317

Email: sherry@ust.hk

Ella Au Yeung

Tel: 2358 6306

Email: ellaauyeung@ust.hk



Prof Ting-Chuen Pong (middle) wins two Wharton-QS Stars Awards 2014 for the innovative e-learning programs. Mr Brian Tang (left) and Ms Christine Lau (right), students who were enrolled in the "Chemists Online" program, share their experience.