

## Transcultural Experience— UW & NCKU Nursing Students



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My journey to National Cheng Kung University began in spring, 2006 and culminated in April and May, 2007. I consider myself lucky to have been swept up in events that propelled me to the University.

I was lucky in the spring when Mei-Feng Lin, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Nursing, School of Medicine at NCKU sent an email asking if she and her eight students could attend my Summer Term class, "Culture, Diversity, and Nursing Practice." I did not have a clue about what this would mean for the class, but I prefer to welcome everyone who asks to attend my class. This class is the required basic course in cross cultural nursing for undergraduates in the curriculum at the University of Washington School of Nursing in Seattle, Washington. The summer class is a smaller version of the class offered in the regular school year and is required for students in our Masters Entry to Professional Nursing program. A variety of other students take the class: pre-nursing students, students admitted to the school who want to take the class early, and students who find the subject matter to be interesting. I reasoned that it might be fun to have students from Taiwan take the course. I did not plan on their positive impact on the class or on me.

I promptly forgot my action until July when Mei-Feng emailed that she and the students were in Seattle and ready to attend the class. I quickly counted chairs in the classroom to determine that there were places for all to sit and was relieved that there was space. Mei-Feng also said that the students were prepared to make three class presentations about life and culture in Taiwan.

The lectures were spectacular. The three teams gave their lectures on successive Mondays (our class day) in July. They spoke about Becoming an Adult, The Preference for Boys, and Suicide. The Powerpoint presentations were informative and professional. The students were clear and articulate in English. The presentations involved the American students and created a dialogue between nursing students in two cultures. My students loved it! We were sad when our Taiwanese guests had to leave. I saw many of the students exchanging email addresses with each other.

Mei-Feng remained an additional few weeks to finish her work as a Visiting Scholar and to attend both the undergraduate class and the graduate seminar on Transcultural Nursing. She also said that she and her students believed that I could make a contribution to part of the educational mission in the

Department of Nursing at NCKU. Mei-Chih Huang, the Director of the Department invited me to visit Tainan. I should explain that although I knew about Taiwan, a number of health and illness practices, some of its political history, and its geographical location, I had not heard of Tainan. When students spoke of Tainan in their presentations, I thought they said "Taiwan." After some time to negotiate the timing and the duration of my visit (difficult because I teach a graduate seminar in the Spring and regularly lecture in the larger undergraduate cross cultural nursing class), we agreed that I would be there from mid-April to mid-May. I would, therefore, miss the worst heat and the worst rain in Taiwan.



Over the intervening seven months, I made plans about how to teach my graduate seminar at the University of Washington (I invited four anthropologists to give guest lectures and required students to write reaction and analysis papers to be read and graded at a distance), decide what lectures to give in two courses at NCKU, and to arrange for the care of our dog while my wife and I were gone. My wife Judy also spent a great deal of time learning about Taiwan and, later, about Tainan. She started just after Christmas to replenish our travel supplies, to purchase some new clothes, and to pack.

I had heard from colleagues that EVA Airline was comfortable and the cost was competitive; our tickets fell within the funding guidelines provided by the Department of Nursing. We were shocked that the flight left at 4 in the morning! But we gritted our teeth and planned for our month-long trip.

Our arrival was exciting. Two nursing graduate students, Chia-Yu Lee and Yu-Wen Wang, spotted us immediately and rushed to greet us. Luckily, their faces clicked with a nine month old memory. They told us their English names, Alice (Ali) and Phoebe. By mid-May I was able to use their names in Chinese which was preferable for me, but still difficult to pronounce. Now we were really

in Taiwan, where neither my wife nor I had been before and where we had not dreamed of visiting. I love traditional markets. They provide a great view of the culture and are the perfect subject for my always-present camera. Sunday was another sightseeing high point. We spent the afternoon and evening visiting temples and other sights in Tainan. We started at the Confucius Temple, saw two city gates, the shrine for Chen-Cheng Keng, and then had dinner. My favorite temple turned out to be my favorite goddess: Mazu.



Monday began my excellent teaching experience in the Department of Nursing. I had a spacious and comfortable office in the medical school with a computer set up for an English speaker. My Monday class, "Cultural Competence Care," met from 15:10 until 17:00. The professors for this graduate level class were Mei-Chih and Shio-Jean Lin. The students welcomed me warmly as did the teaching assistant, Meei-Ren Wang, who was a great

help throughout the whole month. (For example, it was Meei-Ren who helped me find the dry cleaning shop.)

The faculty held a welcome party for my wife and me right after the class. This was a warm and wonderful event. There were eight to ten different kinds of tasty food, including fruit and sweets. The nursing faculty all seemed pleased that I was able to visit their department and nearly all had made appointments with me during subsequent weeks so we could talk about their research and writing objectives.

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday were my days to have faculty visitors to my office to discuss their research. This was a challenge for me because NCKU nursing faculty research is not only interesting and well done, it is also extremely diverse. Thus, I could not be a content expert on some projects. I think that the twenty or more people with whom I met found our interactions useful. I know that I learned a great deal.

Fridays, I taught in the cross cultural course taught by Dr. Ying-hwa Su, "Professional Issues in Trans-cultural Nursing." This is the course from which visitors to the University of Washington School of Nursing come. There were about 14 people in the class, of whom 11 would visit Seattle in the summer. Like the graduate course, this class met in the late afternoon. I looked forward to the teaching experiences

each week and the opportunity to get to know the students better. In addition, students in both classes were marvelous teachers for me. Once they discovered that I really did want to hear stories, I learned large amounts about health care in Taiwan and about cultural practices. Class members in each class provided great examples. One memorable cultural example came from Ying-hwa's class. After I reported that there must have been a ghost in our hotel room in Taipei, students told me a few other ghost stories thus they confirmed that ghosts as part of the Taiwanese culture. In Mei-Chih and Shio Jean's class, two home care students provided a great mini-lecture about an American patient with cancer and the many ways they worked hard to provide him with culturally congruent care.

On the first Saturday, I had been invited to give three lectures in the Workshop of Transcultural Care: an introductory lecture on basic principles of cultural competence, how cultural competence is integrated with community health nursing, and on the frontiers of research in transcultural nursing. Afternoon lectures were research reports on health and immigrant populations. The lectures seemed to be well received by the very large crowd in the lecture hall. I was very pleased at the level of interest in cross cultural care.

On our second weekend, we accompanied the Department of Nursing faculty, staff, and their children on their yearly trip. There we were treated to a parade honoring the goddess Mazu. There were representations of gods, two bands, other musicians, and—loudest of all—at least four sets of firecrackers. I loved the parade; Judy loved the shopping.

We were ready to go. Our last event was very special. We attended the capping ceremony that demonstrates that the second year nursing students are ready for more responsibility in the hospital. Judy had tears in her eyes as she remembered her own capping ceremony in the 1960s. This custom has now disappeared from nursing schools in the United States.

