Every year, the Vice-Chancellor hosts a Prize Presentation Ceremony for students winning external awards. This annual ceremony is an opportunity for us to honour and celebrate the outstanding achievements of some of our finest students, and to inspire the university community to learn from their dedication to excellence.

Among the hundreds of HKU students who excel in external competitions, we have selected several winning stories to feature.

Join us to congratulate the winning students and learn more at

http://cedars.hku.hk/pc2014

or

http://www.facebook.com/hkustudents.award

HKU Students’ Achievements
A team composed of HKU's Ms Cheung Wing Yin (BA, Chinese Literature), Mr. Tao Wen-yi (MSC, E-Commerce), and three PhD students from another local university, won the Champion, Best Presentation, and Best Social Mission out of more than 200 competing teams at the Hong Kong Social Enterprise Challenge (HKSEC) 2013 held in March.

The team's "Barrier-free School" social enterprise proposal aims to empower people with disabilities through making education, technological knowledge and career resources more available for them. It is a tailor-made online platform that provides user-friendly education materials, careers information and a job-matching service.

Participants of the HKSEC had the chance to participate in a series of workshops and meet with professionals of different fields. In addition, the Barrier-free School team also received support from teachers of the Computer Science Department on product enhancement, business structure, and legal issues; and staff from CEDARS on interaction with people with disabilities. "We have encountered many difficulties ranging from producing courses, finding people with disabilities from different organisations to testing it, expanding the market, managing external relationship with industries etc," Wen-yi and Wing Yin explained.

In order to facilitate social inclusion and enhance employment opportunity for people with disabilities, the team decided to provide practical, web-related courses such as HTML, Dreamweaver and Photoshop and they developed all the courses themselves. "We mainly target those who can use a computer. First priority is given to the physically impaired and the hearing impaired. In the long run, we'll consider courses for visually impaired people when we have recruited enough volunteers," said Wen-yi and Wing Yin.

As winners of the HKSEC, the "Barrier-free School" team will receive HK$500,000 in phases, according to the team's achievements, to launch their social enterprise project. Officers from HKSEC will arrange mentors to monitor the annual plan and use of the money to ensure it is spent in reasonable ways. Despite the excitement of winning the competition, the team has already developed plans with regards to the priority of their jobs and allocation of money.

"Our first priority is to recruit more teacher and student volunteers from universities to help develop quality online courses that meet the real market demand. If you are interested in joining our team to help people with disabilities in Hong Kong, please contact Wen-yi at h438534@connect.hku.hk," they said.
Melody Fung, a year 2 Social Work student, had her dream come true when she was announced champion of the "9th Young Ballet Star Award".

Melody has been dancing since the age of 5. "I was learning Guo Zheng and the ballet school was close to the music centre. I was fascinated by the grace and beauty of ballet and so I started learning," she said. The interest has not faded despite all the difficulties and has grown at time goes by.

"Of course it has not been easy. When I advanced to secondary school, some friends advised me to go for a full-time dance, but I would also like to balance it with my academic studies," Melody said. "My ballet school organizes performances and encourages students to participate in external competitions. This is actually not the first time I have taken part in the Young Ballet Star Award."

Sometimes her muscles get really tired and she needs a break.

"I know that I have to rest but at the same time I feel uneasy not to practise, especially seeing so many of my peers who are working very hard," Melody said.

She does not see her ballet practice as something that takes away her time for rest and entertainment. Rather, it has a magical effect of bringing relaxation and happiness to her and reducing the pressure from her academic studies too.

"Once I am on stage I forget everything, the pain and the tiredness, and just focus on dancing," she said.

Winning the Young Ballet Star Award has not only fulfilled Melody's dream, but also enabled her to expand her horizons. She will be granted a scholarship to receive professional training in the summer at the Paris Opera ballet, a renowned ballet school of her choice.

It can be difficult to decide whether to pursue a career according to one's academic background or personal interest.

For Melody, the two do not clash and can even blend perfectly together.

"The more I study Social Work, the more I realise that it is possible to use my academic profession to introduce the therapeutic power of dancing and expressing the self and thus help other people," Melody is planning to apply her knowledge and skills of Social Work and ballet to pursue a career in art therapy.

"Art therapy is not new but in Hong Kong we still need a lot more professionals," she says.

Happiness has been accompanying this ballet soloist, and soon it will be spreading and being shared by many other people.
Making Impossible Possible in 15 Minutes

Lee Meongsun, Sunny  BSc Sc, Year 2
Champion
Macau English Debating Association British Parliamentary Invitational

According to the Oxford Dictionary, debate is a formal discussion on a particular matter in a public meeting or legislative assembly, in which opposing arguments are put forward and which usually ends with a vote. But what is parliamentary debate? Are they the same? Sunny Lee, a year 2 Psychology student, may be able to offer some insights.

"The parliamentary debate style stresses the ability to present logical arguments, to give concrete examples and to make the debate engaging by responding to the points of the other team. This style is fun and suitable for everyone because you are not judged by English fluency or your outward presentation like body language and tone," he says.

Sunny speaks from experience, having been the winner in various international and local debating tournaments in the past year, including the Macau English Debating Association British Parliamentary Invitational. He started debating in high school, but has only been active in competitions since entering HKU.

Sounds easy? Let’s hear more. "We are given a motion only 15 minutes before the debate, then my partner and I need to condense our ideas into two 7-minute speeches, that are interesting enough to engage everyone," he says.

"While we may have stage fright, the biggest challenge is having no clue what topic will be given – it can be anything from politics, world economy, philosophy, history, to recent news and particular issues about a country."

The debaters need to be flexible enough to respond to attacks and challenge the points of the opposing team.

"We don’t write a fixed speech and stick to it, we pay close attention to the arguments of the other team, note their weaker ideas and ours so that we can re-organise and strengthen our points. Teamwork is very important in debating," Sunny explained.

"To cope with this mission impossible," Sunny spends eight hours a week reading articles, news and Wikipedia and another eight hours practising with his HKU Debating Team members.

While enjoying the excitement and fruitfulness of practices and tournaments, Sunny admits that the fun has yet to be shared widely by Hong Kong students. "Debating is still not too popular in secondary schools, and students need more professional training and other support such as financial subsidies for overseas tournaments," he says.

Keen to promote the debate culture, Sunny and his teammates are not only actively seeking co-operation opportunities with other university debating teams, they are also offering workshops for secondary school students. "Strong Asian teams like Singapore are supported by the government and schools and students are able to join 30-40 tournaments a year compared to around eight for us," he says. "Joining tournaments is important because debaters can receive valuable feedback from the judges. There are as many as 100 judges in regional tournaments and 500 in world class competition!"

It is their long-term goal to seek funding to enable more competition opportunities and ultimately expand the debating population in Hong Kong.
Behind the triumph of going on stage, taking the trophy from the prize presenters and receiving thunderous applause from the audience, every competition winner has a story of pain and tears. This is especially true for Adeline Chan, a year 2 Architecture student who is engaged in demanding physical training and is the winner of Ladies' Light Category in the 2014 U.S. World Open Taekwondo International Championships.

Adeline has learnt Taekwondo of her own accord since the age of 13. She started competing professionally about two years ago and was very serious about it. "Normally I train five times a week with my team, each time around three to four hours. I train on my own once or twice a week so my week is basically packed with training," Adeline said. With an Architecture major, Adeline has been trying hard to balance her studies and Taekwondo training. "I give up all other activities such as shopping or going to the cinemas etc. Sometimes I work overnight."

When Adeline began professional training she was prepared for a hectic schedule and minimal entertainment. But these are not the hardest things for her.

"The biggest challenge was maintaining a good psychological condition," she says.

"I have to keep myself relaxed but confident, which is really hard because for most of the time I simply freak out. On the other hand my weight has to be properly maintained for the competing category. So there are quite a lot that I need to pay attention to," Adeline explained.

Although her sport is tiring and much has to be given up, Adeline does not regret her choice of joining professional training and competitions because she has gained as much as she gave. "Every match is a physical and psychological challenge, and each victory is a certificate of my efforts," she says.

Apart from personal satisfaction, her active participation has widened her horizons and allowed her to meet and make friends with members of other national teams. "Making these friends is really cool because when I visit their country I can rely on them to take me around and I do the same when they come over to Hong Kong," Adeline laughed.