



Faculty Forum

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Students As Clients

I disagree with Bill Kane and Terry Kinnear's April 1 Faculty Forum opinion piece, "Student Learning is a Faculty Problem." With all due respect, I feel that their diagnosis and prescribed treatment for what ails WCU student learning could not be more wrong. They make it clear that, for them, the central issue is that students do not spend enough time preparing for *classes*. I suggest the real central issue (if there is such a thing) associated with student learning stems from faculty insistence that student learning only takes place via courses. In fact, I submit that students spend far too much of their time preparing for classes and not enough in genuine learning activities.

Rather than taking part in "facilitated dialogues. . .based on Peter Senge's (1990) methodology," as they advocate, I believe we should read and heed the advice of Roger C. Schank and Chip Cleary, in *Engines for Education* (1995), who argue that schools are troubled because they have institutional goals rather than student goals. Here are some of the **mistakes** they identify that are made by educational institutions:

1. Schools act as if learning can be dissociated from doing.
2. Schools believe they have the job of assessment as part of their natural role.
3. Schools believe they have an obligation to create standard curricula.
4. Teachers believe they ought to tell students what they think it is important to know.
5. Schools believe instruction can be independent of motivation for actual use.
6. Schools believe studying is an important part of learning.
7. Schools believe students have a basic interest in learning whatever schools decide to teach them.
8. Schools believe students will accomplish things only by having grades to strive for.
9. Schools believe discipline is an inherent part of learning.

Schank and Cleary propose that we add students to curriculum committees and recognize the following "Student Bill of Rights" to "sum up the real issues in education":

1. **Testing:** No student should have to take a multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank test.
2. **Real-Life Skills:** No student should have to learn something that fails to relate to a skill that is likely to be required in life after school.
3. **Memorization:** No student should be required to memorize any information that is likely to be forgotten in six months.

4. **Goal Clarity:** No student should be required to take a course, the results of which are not directly related to a goal held by the student, nor to engage in an activity without knowing what he can expect to gain from that activity.
5. **Passivity:** No student should be required to spend time passively watching or listening to anything unless there is a longer period of time devoted to allowing the student to participate in a corresponding active activity.
6. **Arbitrary Standards:** No student should be required to prepare his work in ways that are arbitrary or to jump through arbitrary hoops defined only by a particular teacher and not by the society at large.
7. **Mastery:** No student should be required to continue to study something he has already mastered.
8. **Discovery:** No student should be asked to learn anything unless there is the possibility of his being able to experiment in school with what he has learned.
9. **Defined Curriculum:** No student should be barred from engaging in activities that interest him within the framework of school because of breadth requirements imposed by the curriculum.
10. **Freedom of Thought:** No student should be placed in a position of having to air his views on a subject if the opposing point of view is not presented and equally represented.

We need to encourage and reward the non-classroom learning activities of our students. Let's give up our arrogance in assuming that only faculty can design learning goals and that such goals can only be met through mandated courses and teacher-prescribed work. Instead, we should devote our time and energy to helping students obtain credit, recognition, and assistance as they pursue their learning goals. We need to begin considering our students as adult business clients who pay us to consult with them about learning goals, propose solutions for them to consider, and then help them meet goals they select.

The problem is the unwillingness or inability of faculty to share learning decision making with the very students they are supposed to serve. Students will survive and learn, with or without us. The far greater danger is that faculty are becoming more and more irrelevant to the learning process.

Spend some time with Schank and Cleary.

John W. Moore, Communication and Theatre Arts

The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, e-mail Nienhuis by the 8th of the month.