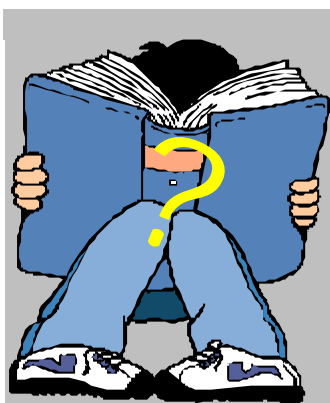


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From the Editor:

20 March 2003

*'Learning Matters at Lingnan' are short papers that aim to promote a dialogue on teaching and learning. I encourage all staff to consider this as a vehicle for sharing thoughts on educational issues as they might affect us at the University. If you feel you have something which might be appropriate for inclusion in an issue of this publication, then please forward it to the TLC. I would be delighted if staff (and not only academic staff) from outside the Teaching and Learning Centre were to be prominent or even occasional contributors.*



*This edition is contributed by Dr. Yolanda Young of the Student Services Centre reporting on the conclusions drawn from a study about problems faced by university students, which are not only academic in nature, but also social and psychological.*

## Do We Understand our Students?

How much do we understand the problems and concerns of our students? Affective assistance can be given by us if we understand and share their thoughts and feelings and want to do all within our power to win their confidence and trust. The following is a summary of those major problems and concerns raised by students in a study on their mental and psychological well-being.

One

### **Future plans and marriage**

Students consider that the most difficult problems and concerns are those related to their future plans and marriage matters. This may not directly relate to their immediate personal situation, but is strongly indicative of their doubt and uncertainty which at this stage they feel they cannot deal with but have to postpone and leave as unsettled.

Two

### **Career problems and concerns**

This area is related to career choice and also the availability of real job experience. Students have encountered difficulty in finding a way to clarify their interests and whether they have the suitable abilities to pursue a particular career.

Three

### **Extra-curricular activities**

When responding to problems regarding extra-curricular activities, students feel that participation in extra-curricular activities is a good thing in itself, but as such pursuits do not contribute directly to their final grade, they usually cannot spare the time. Some think that such activities may not be currently beneficial, but the experience may ultimately be of benefit later in life and may provide practice for real work responsibilities.

Four

### **Aesthetic/Spiritual problems**

These problems are related to the appreciation of art, philosophical knowledge, personal values and religious belief. It is usually in the second and third year that students express a greater concern about aesthetic pursuits as their academic abilities improve with a greater interest in other areas of knowledge, reflecting their educational development. Students from the lower income groups have greater difficulty in the aesthetic/spiritual area. This may reflect the lack of exposure in their family environment, where many parents have had little or no recognized education.

Five

### **Academic Problems and concerns**

These are related to study skills, writing skills, academic advising, relationships with professors and language skills. Students stated that their greatest difficulty, which they admitted right away, was their ultimate academic success with graduation always as the main goal. Academic problems/concerns appear first during the adjustment period, as many students face new terms, new courses. This is reflected in the need for them to exercise time management and decision-making techniques to build up confidence.

Six

### **Resources problems**

These problems are related to the practical provision of housing, transportation, study areas, library and financial support. More first year students than second year students show that *housing and financing study expenses* is of a greater difficulty. In year 2 they are becoming accustomed to the conditions, and in year 3 they are closer to the end of the study period. On the other hand, second and third year students may show greater difficulty to concentrate in their studies especially when they do not have a favourable place to study. Students from lower income families have greater difficulty in getting resources for the obvious reasons of low family income.

Seven

### **Physical/sexual problems and concerns**

These are related to realizing the value of fitness, exercise, nutrition and understanding sexual identity.

Eight

### **Personal-social problems**

This personal-social aspect of problems and concerns is related to the understanding of self, clarification of personal values, autonomy, independence, coping skills and relationships with others, and agreeing with and gaining support from others.

Knowing some of the problems faced by our students will help us provide better support and to detect problems before they become too big for the students to handle by themselves.

*Dr. Yolanda Young  
Associate Director of Student Services  
Student Services Centre*