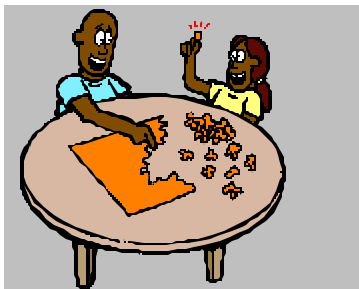


17/2000

21 September 2000

From the Editor:

'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.



Student Responsibility for Learning

Universities are learning communities. Individuals who are accepted into these communities have the rights and privileges of membership. They also incur responsibilities. Learning in university is a joint proposition, which is the mutual responsibility of students, teachers and administrators.

While it is certainly the role of the university to provide the most optimal conditions for teaching and learning, it is the students' responsibility to make the most of the university experience.

Much of the current rhetoric about institutional accountability and consumerism in higher education is one-sided. If students don't graduate, the institution is accountable. If students don't learn, the teacher is accountable. If the graduates don't get good jobs, the institution is to blame.

Colleges are, of course, accountable for a lot of things ... But surely the students are also accountable for the amount, scope, and quality of effort they invest in their own learning and development.

Pace, 1984:6

Student responsibility is an essential ingredient for learning and student development. Students are responsible for involving themselves in their class work, taking advantage of the opportunities and resources provided by the university and the department, and carrying their studies into their lives and relationships. Ultimately, students must transform their educational experiences by making these experiences part of their way of being and using what they learn.

Student Involvement and Effort

During the last 20 years, research on student outcomes has unambiguously demonstrated that university outcomes are tied to the effort that students put into their work and the degree to which they are involved in their studies and campus life. The more students are actively involved in the learning process and take personal responsibility for their learning outcomes, the greater are the learning results.

As members of the campus community, students need to ask themselves from time to time: Am I actively participating in class, not just taking notes and staring blankly into space? Am I engaged with the material, posing questions and supporting fellow students in discussion? Do I seek out teachers and academic advisers for advice? Do I make friends with peers and learn and grow with them? Do I attempt to find connections between my academic work and other aspects of my life?

For students to benefit from the university experience, they must take advantage of all that the university has to offer. Universities offer a rich variety of intellectual opportunities. Thus, finding success in university means taking advantage of the social and academic enrichment that comes through informal interactions with teachers and peers, in and out of class, and through the effort that students put into using the university's resources and facilities.

Universities and Students as Partners

Student responsibility does not just come about. We must expect it, foster it, and nurture it. Universities alone cannot produce student learning. Universities provide opportunities for interaction and involvement and establish a climate conducive to responsible participation. If students are unwilling to do their part, then outcomes will be less than satisfactory. Hence, the challenge for university administration is to understand the dynamics by which institutional efforts can build student responsibility and to develop policies that promote students' involvement in their own education. We must nurture an ethic of responsibility and acknowledge students as equal partners in the relational experience of learning. Both students and universities have mutual obligations to one another. Universities have an obligation to promote a climate that facilitates student involvement and interaction. Students must be responsible partners with universities and extend themselves to take advantage of the opportunities that are offered.

The most important factor that affects student learning and development is *what the student does*. The environment may shape an individual, but it does not determine learning outcomes. Determination of outcomes lies with teachers and administrators but, most of all, *with students*. Students should be more than passive transients through an institution. They must become active, responsible, and empowered participants in their own learning and development.

Maureen Tam

Reference:

Pace, R. (1984) *Measuring the Quality of College Student Experiences*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation.