

# Quality Matters

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A Quarterly Newsletter of the Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CERQA)

St. Mary's University College

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## Quote of this issue

“ Quality is fitness for purpose”

HERQA

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance of St Mary's University College ( SMUC). The Objective of the newsletter is to inform the SMUC community as well as interested public, private, non-governmental stakeholders about the activities and endeavors of the institution in fostering quality education and research in the Ethiopian Higher Education setting.

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## The Sixth National Annual Conference on private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) conducted

St. Mary's University College conducted a national conference on Private Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia on the 30th of August 2008. The conference was organized for the sixth time, it was learnt.

His Excellency, Dr. Sintayahu W/ Michael, Minister of education, members of the academia; both from the public and private sector, as well as invited guests attended the conference which was held in the UN ECA conference hall in Addis Ababa. The major discussion issue, this time, was enhancing the Teaching-Research Nexus in Private Higher Education Institutions.

In the conference, national and international scholars presented various research papers. Thus, the conference, with retrospection, gave all participants a forum to reflect their views and professional opinions on the issue. Also, the conference would enable actors of the education sector to define tasks and social responsibilities waiting ahead. ■

## From the Editorial Desk

Ethiopia has recently embarked on massive Higher Education reform program. What necessitates this phenomenon are two folds. On the one hand, there is a need for accelerated and sustained economic growth. On the other hand, the huge demographic challenge the country is facing in the midst of what economists call chronic inflation need to be reversed.

The reform program which represents a paradigm shift from elite education to mass education, however, brings with it another challenge; that is, widening access while at the same time maintaining standards. Also, the issue of equity is critical. Gender equity has been the concern of policy makers of the national education. This, indeed, is a very critical landmark for the socio-economic development of our country. In this regard, a substantial body of research works in the area reveal empowering women through education is an instrumental policy to sustainable socio-economic development.

Unfortunately, Ethiopia's educational system seem to suffer from educational quality deficiency syndrome. Thus, in order to benefit from what Marx called the huge industrial reserve army of the educated professionals that we produce through such massification, we need to establish a mature educational system of transforming low achievers to average and top achievers. The question is how do we do this?

This needs a lot of commitment on the part of the teacher. The teacher, thus, should individually listen and help students who come from diverse socio-economic background. This holds true as research works show students who develop a personal professional relations with their teachers are more likely to stay in college and achieve better. Teachers who know their students and understand learning styles and problems of their students, often find ways of dealing with those problems and inspire their students. In this regard, we, the community of St. Mary's University College, have got to have this special commitment and show our students the real professionalism and virtue in our careers. ■

## Virtual Links

*Ministry of Education*

Web site: [http:// www.moe.gov.et](http://www.moe.gov.et)

*Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (Ethiopia)*

Website: [www.higher.edu.et](http://www.higher.edu.et)

*PROPHE- Programme for Research on Private Higher Education*

Website: [www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/](http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/)

*International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE)*

Website: [http:// www.inqahe.org](http://www.inqahe.org)

*Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)*

Website: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

*Center for International Research on Higher Education*

Website: [http://bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe](http://bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe)

*Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia*

Website: <http://www.qsae.org/>

*International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa*

Website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov>

*International Network for Higher Education in Africa (NHEA)*

Website: <http://www.bc.edu>

*International Network for quality assurance Agencies in higher Education*

Website: <http://www.inqahe.nl>

# News Items

## Graduate Tracer Study Completed

St. Mary's University College recently finalized its graduate tracer study on its graduates of the regular program. The importance of such a study is justified by the need to improve/enhance the university-industry linkages.

Thus, the study was made to assess the effectiveness of the University College in terms of how well its education and training has prepared graduates for the workplace, further education and life after the University College. This is done by obtaining feedback both from graduates of the University College and their employers. The study specifically tried to identify and address mismatches between the services provided by SMUC (education/training) and what is actually needed in the labor market in general and workplaces in particular.

With the importance of reaching more people in terms of generating rich and reliable data needed for the study, an attempt was made to solicit feedback from all traceable graduates. As a result, a total of 665 graduates (17% of the target population) were able to be traced and to take part in the study. Similarly, a total of 85 institutions employing the graduates of SMUC were reached through their employees and responded to the questionnaire, which was designed for employers. ■

## Training on Project Design and Research methods conducted

The Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA) of SMUC organized and conducted a day and a half long training Workshop on Project design and research methods for faculty staffs. The training was conducted from September 23 to 26, 2008 at Mexico Campus . Fourteen faculty members from all the faculties of the University College attended the training.

According to Dr. Eylachew, coordinator of the training, St. Mary's University College would like to make its staff engage in research activities. Thus, such a training is instrumental to this end. The training, therefore, intends to refresh skills of faculty staff in the following areas: Project identification and selection techniques, research project proposal preparation, techniques of project planning and programming, research report writing, and research project defense and dissemination of research results. This being the first session, the training is planned to be completed in five cycles. ■

# Research Corner

**Title:** Helping weak students - decades of research on student support in southern Africa

**Researcher:** Mike Cantrell, PhD

**Research Type:** Descriptive

**Date of presentation:** August 30, 2008 ( a paper presented at the Sixth National Annual conference on Private Higher Education Institutions).

‘Access’ and ‘equity’ are terms which can be found in the higher education development plans of most countries in Africa. The challenge of widening access, while at the same time maintaining standards, is one which the southern African region has been grappling with for the last 30 years. The imperative to open previously closed doors to all South African students at the end of apartheid produced a number of models of student support from which lessons can be learned.

The review covers initiatives in Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland and focuses on one case study - a well-documented Science and Mathematics Foundation program at the University of the North in South Africa. This annually selects 150-250 students from disadvantaged education backgrounds: special aptitude tests, however, show they have potential for further studies despite weak paper qualifications. These are admitted into an integrated preparatory foundation year before entering degree programs. Tracer studies also reveal that ex-foundation students, previously judged to be too weak to be admitted to degrees, consistently out-perform others in the subsequent years of degree studies. By the beginning of the new millennium, virtually every university and technikon in South Africa had created a student support system.

The paper show the nexus between students and research is essential to prove the impact of interventions such as those described and concludes by showing how specially designed programs can also contribute to equity issues. ■

**Quality Assurance Special Interest Group (SIG) held its Fourth Workshop**

Quality Assurance Special Interest Group (SIG) of Pioneer and newly established Universities met for three days, September 22 to 24, 2008 at EQUIP’s Office. From the Private sector, St. Mary’s University College attended the Workshop. The consultative Workshop organized by EQUIP, an educational quality improvement program consultant working with HERQA, is meant to facilitate joint efforts of Ethiopian higher education institutions for the enhancement of quality educational service delivery in higher education settings.

The workshop which was meant to end up by September, 2008 is extended until April, 2009. This is done with the intention of further enhancing the capacity and experiences of faculty members of participants who work for the ADRCs’ in their respective Universities.

This time the consultant trained participants on Webcam and OMR (Optical Memory Reader) application: a computer system for correcting students’ exams of objective questions type. However, the absence of these webcam devices in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions casts doubt on the use of this technology, it was learnt from participants.

Also, members of the QA SIG discussed on issues which have been incorporated in the trial version of the Quality Care Manual produced and piloted in the course of the workshop by participants from various universities in the country. This being so, the quality care manual is expected to be finalized by the next workshop. ■

## Interview

This column features interviews of people including government officials, policy makers, educators, researchers, and presidents of universities or colleges as well as students on educational issues . In this edition we present the view of an Educational consultant Dr. Mike Cantrell. And the center would like to extend its thanks in advance for sharing us his time.



Dr Mike Cantrell, who is British, has spent most of his career in Africa helping prepare students for undergraduate studies. Our staff Marcos was able to talk to him at length around the time of the 6th St Mary's Research Conference where he presented a paper 'Three decades of research on increasing the number and quality of students entering science and technology degree programmes in southern Africa'. ■

QM: Tell us your professional background and work experience prior to arriving in Ethiopia.

Dr Mike: I am a biologist by profession and started my university career at the University of Malawi as a freshwater ecologist. However, I also had secondary school teaching experience and was later recruited by the VU University Amsterdam to work in Botswana on a new project trying to bridge the gap between school and university. The aim was to increase the number and quality of students entering the Faculty of Science. Since then I have remained with the same Dutch university on various projects to set up and advise on so-called 'Pre-Entry' or 'Foundation' Programmes for inadequately prepared students at various universities in South Africa and Namibia.

QM: Please explain more about the Foundation approach

Dr Mike: most countries face real shortages of science and technology graduates and have looked for innovative ways to increase the number of good students in their undergraduate programmes. The problem, of course, starts at school where students lack good science and mathematics teaching and have little experience of practical work. Few make it to university and the failure rates there are high. The foundation approach identifies students who have not made the grade

(A very large pool) and are too weak to start degrees directly, but have potential for further studies. These are admitted to university using special aptitude tests, and first enter a Foundation Programme of science and mathematics, integrated with language and study skills training. This usually lasts a year. They then join the normal 1st year BSc. In my paper at the conference I presented strong evidence that these so-called 'disadvantaged' students often perform better than 'advantaged' students who came from good schools.

QM: But surely it is the responsibility of schools to produce well-prepared students for university?

Dr Mike: In theory - yes, I agree. In practice, this rarely happens. One reason for this is that EFA (Education for All) focused on primary education without a long-term perspective. The huge bulge of students enrolled in primary some years ago has now reached secondary level and schools throughout Africa cannot cope with the numbers there. This means that in reality, teachers will be unable to prepare students adequately for higher education for many years to come. As a consequence, universities, many of which maintained ivory tower isolation from general education, have had to redesign their programmes to meet the level of the school leavers. In southern Africa this movement was called 'Academic Development'. In other words, both the students and the institution have to change (the former in Foundation Programmes and the latter through curriculum reform). Note that my

current project called EQUIP has been setting up Academic Development and Resource Centers in public universities for staff development so that they can take a lead in improving pedagogy and curriculum reform.

QM: It sounds as if you are advocating dropping standards to admit more students – is this true?

Dr Mike: Not at all! Worldwide there is little correlation between performance at school and at tertiary level anyway. These foundation students show good potential, but have been disadvantaged by their schooling. When admitted to a good Foundation Programme, they are highly motivated and in later years continue to be so, actually encouraging 'normal' students to work harder. Therefore, standards can actually be raised.

QM: In Ethiopia, girls are especially at risk and many gender offices provide extra support. Surely this is a better way to help the weaker students?

Dr Mike: You are assuming that the problem lies with the students (a deficit model). What I said previously is a different approach which admits that the institution is also at fault since it does not cater for the level of incoming students. In southern Africa, extra help in the form of

Continued to page 9

# Perspective

## Benefits of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning (CL) is an instructional strategy that employs a variety of motivational techniques to make instruction more relevant and students more responsible" (Forsyth and McMillan, 1994).

Markos Mezmur (M.Sc)

This article is the continuation of the article published in the previous edition of the newsletter ( Vol.2.No. 8).

CL develops students' social interaction skills.

According to Kessler and MaCleod (1985) "CL promotes positive societal responses, reduces violence in any setting, eliminates fear and blame. It rather increases honor, friendliness, and consensus. Process is as important as content and goal. CL takes time to master, and facilitators who have done the personal work that allows sharing of power, service to the learners, and natural learning, find CL a joy."

Sherman (1991) in this regard makes the observation that most social psychology text books contain considerable discussions about conflict and its resolution and/or reduction. Almost all introductory educational psychology text books now contain extended discussions of effective pedagogies for improving racial relations, self-esteem, internal locus of control and academic achievement (Messick & Mackie, 1989).

CL fosters student interaction at all levels (Webb 1982). Research has shown that when students of high ability work with students of lower ability, the former benefit by explaining or demonstrating and the latter benefit by seeing an approach to problem solving modeled by a peer. Warm-up and group building activities help students understand their differences and learn how to capitalize on them rather than use them as a basis for antagonism.

CL helps majority and minority populations in a class learn to work with each other. Because students are actively involved in exploring issues and interacting with each other on a regular basis in a guided fashion, they are able to understand their differences and learn how to resolve social problems which may arise. Training students in conflict resolution is a major component of learning training (Johnson & Johnson 1985).

CL is particularly effective at increasing the leadership skills of female students and for getting male students used to turning to women for help in pressure situations (Bean 1996). This benefit is especially important in mathematics classes where men generally dominate class discussions and presentations. The Johnsons (1990) pointed out , "Students tend to like and enjoy math more and be more intrinsically motivated to learn more about it continually." CL also helps to develop learning communities within classes and institutions. All too often, however, students of private colleges do not remain in campus for extracurricular

or social activities. Many students have jobs and/or encounter family pressures which also limit their ability to participate in campus life. Thus, it is the teacher who should create an atmosphere of community within the University College.

The previous discussion of the social benefits of CL, thus, make it clear that creating a community of learners is easily accomplished using CL techniques. If groups operate long enough during a course, the people in them will get to know each other and extend their activities outside of classrooms. Students will exchange phone numbers and contact each other to get help with questions or problems they are having, and they will often sign up together for classes in later terms and seek out teachers who use CL methods.

Creating an understanding that learners are effective in learning something they value

CL develops higher level thinking skills (Webb 1982). Students are engaged in the learning process instead of passively listening to the teacher. Pairs of students working together represent the most effective form of interaction. When students work in pairs one person is listening while the other partner is discussing the question under investigation. Both are developing valuable problem solving skills by formulating their ideas, discussing on them, receiving immediate feedback and responding to questions and comments.

This aspect of cooperative learning does not preclude whole class discussion. In fact, whole class discussion is enhanced by having students think out and discuss ideas thoroughly before the entire class discusses an idea or concept. In addition, the teacher may temporarily join group discussion to question ideas or statements made by group members or to clarify concepts or questions raised by students.

CL fosters higher levels of performance (Bligh 1972). Critical thinking skills are increased and retention of information and interest in the subject matter are improved. This creates a positive cycle of good performance building and higher self -esteem which in turn lead to more interest in the subject matter and better performance. Students share their success with their groups, thus enhancing both the individual's and the group's self -esteem.

Skill building and practice can be enhanced and made less tedious through CL activities used both in and out of class (Tannenber, 1995). In order to develop critical thinking skills, students need a base of information to work on. Acquiring this base often requires some degree of repetition and memory work. When this is accomplished individually the process can be tedious, boring or overwhelming. When students work together the learning process becomes interesting and fun despite the repetitive nature of the learning process

CL Develops students' oral communication skills. When students are working in pairs, one partner verbalizes his/her ideas while the other listens, asks questions or comments upon what s/he has heard. Clarification and explanation of one's ideas is a very important part of the cooperative process and requires higher order thinking skills. Students who tutor each other must develop a clear idea of the concept they are presenting and orally communicate it to their partners (Neer 1987).

Enhancing meaning: creating challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include learner's values and perspectives and contribute to an equitable society.

The focus of cooperative learning is to actively involve students in the learning process. Whenever two or more students attempt to solve a problem or answer a question, they become involved in the process of exploratory learning. Promotive interaction, a basic principle of CL, builds students' sense of responsibility to themselves and their group members through reliance upon each other's talents, and CL assessment processes reward both individuals and groups thus reinforcing this interdependence (Baird & White 1984).

During the cooperative process, students can become involved in developing curriculum and class procedures. They are often asked to assess themselves, their groups, and class procedures. Teachers can take advantage of this immediate formative input without having to wait for the results of exams or course evaluations. Students who participate in structuring the class assume ownership of the process and their opinions and observations are given credibility. CL helps students wean themselves away from considering teachers as the sole sources of knowledge and understanding (Felder 1997).

The primary focuses in CL are the process of learning and the means by which individuals function independently and within groups. The high level of interaction and interdependence among group members leads to "deep" rather than "surface" learning and to more emphasis on higher order learning. CL is student centered, leading to an emphasis on learning as well as teaching and to more student ownership of responsibility for that learning. In contrast, other teaching paradigms consist of individual student effort, competitive testing to assess competence and an evaluation hierarchy based upon "grade orientation" rather than "learning orientation" (Lowman, 1987).

Students who develop personal professional relations with teachers by getting to know them, and who work on projects outside of class, achieve better results and tend to stay in school. Additional benefits accrue to students in areas of grade improvement, retention of information, information transfer to other courses and disciplines, and improved class attendance. There is a strong positive correlation between class attendance and success in courses (Johnson and Johnson 1989) which may help account for the improved performance.

Students who are actively involved in the learning process are much more likely to become interested in learning and make more of an effort to attend school (Astin 1977). Also, classes where students interact foster an environment conducive to high student motivation and participation as well as student attendance.

CL inherently calls for self-management by students (Resnick 1987). In order to function within their groups students are trained to come prepared with assignments completed and they must understand the material which they are going to contribute to their group. They are also given time to process group behaviors such as checking with each other to make sure homework assignments are not only completed but understood. These promotive interactions help students learn self-management techniques.

CL increases students' persistence and the likelihood of successful completion of assignments. When individuals get stuck they are more likely to give up, but groups are much more likely to find ways to keep going. This concept is reinforced by the Johnsons (1990) who state, "In a learning situation, student goal achievements are positively correlated; students perceive that they can reach learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals. Thus, students seek outcomes that are beneficial to all those with whom they are cooperatively linked."

#### Conclusion

CL provides many advantages to teachers and learners. Many of these advantages arise from the intrinsic motivational strengths of CL and the extent to which CL fosters student interest, behavioral and attitudinal change, and opportunities for success. As Keller (1983) demonstrated this set of outcomes results from the successful incorporation of motivational issues into instruction. ■

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Continued from page 6

tutorials and coaching for weaker students was not successful and was abandoned. It was found better to address things in a systemic way and to ensure that academic staff redesigns the first year programme to cater for the weaker students. Not only that, the very best lecturers should teach the foundation courses and not leave it to inexperienced staff or students to provide support.

My own experience has been mostly in helping maths and science students, but Foundation Programmes can be adopted for any discipline. When I left South Africa in 1999, virtually every university and technikon had set up foundation programmes for weaker students. This meant that they took one year extra to

obtain a degree, but this was an improvement on previous times when most failed and repeated and many dropped out.

QM: This sounds an expensive option – is it affordable for a country like Ethiopia?

Dr Mike: as shown above, students usually take more than the minimum time to complete science degrees anyway. Since science and technology graduates are expected to help drive the economy, the donor community is often keen to provide assistance. For example, the European Union funded the Pre-Entry Science programme in Botswana for many years, including generous provision of science laboratories and equipment. The staff there made science exciting by spending most of the time doing in practical work in the labs. To my mind, a practical approach is the best way to create good scientists and engineers.

QM: Thank you for your time – do you have any last comments?

Dr Mike: In European universities, students under-perform and drop out, but this has little implication for the country's economy. In Ethiopia, every student admitted is valuable and I look forward to a time when universities have support systems such as Foundation Programmes to cater for, and retain the increasingly heterogeneous student intakes.■

## Fun corner

### The English Language

Have you ever wondered why foreigners have trouble with the English Language?

Let's face it

English is a stupid language.

There is no egg in the eggplant

No ham in the hamburger

And neither pine nor apple in the pineapple.

English muffins were not invented in England-

French fries were not invented in France.

We sometimes take English for granted

But if we examine its paradoxes we find that

Quicksand takes you down slowly

Boxing rings are square

And a guinea pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig.

If writers write, how come fingers don't fing

If the plural of tooth is teeth

Shouldn't the plural of phone booth be phone beeth

If the teacher taught,

Why didn't the preacher praught.

If a vegetarian eats vegetables

What the heck does a humanitarian eat!? Why do people recite at a play?

Yet play at a recital?

Park on driveways and

Drive on parkways

You have to marvel at the unique lunacy

Of a language where a house can burn up as

It burns down

And in which you fill in a form

By filling it out

And a bell is only heard once it goes!

English was invented by people, not computers

And it reflects the creativity of the human race

(Which of course isn't a race at all)

That is why

When the stars are out they are visible

But when the lights are out they are invisibl

And why it is that when I wind up my watch

It starts

But when I wind up this observation,

It ends.

Source: the Internet

If you have comments on this issue of the newsletter or would like to contribute to future issues please contact our office on 011 553 8001 Ext 145 Or email: [CEIRQA@SMUC.edu.et](mailto:CEIRQA@SMUC.edu.et)

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# Photo Gallery

## The Sixth National Annual Conference on Private Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia



# Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA)

## Research Grant Schemes

### Funding Information

The center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance has got three research grant schemes in place. Thus, both faculty and non-faculty may apply for one of the three research grant schemes toward supporting for their research undertakings.

SMUC Research fund;

Faculty research fund;

Graduate and Undergraduate student research fund.

### SMUC Research Fund

This scheme is intended to promote outstanding and professionally recognized contributions in the form of original research leading to publication. Eligible faculty members will receive a fund for this scheme.

### Eligibility

Eligibility applies to all members of the university college.

### Application Deadline

Application deadlines are December 31 and June 30 each year.

#### Faculty Research Fund

The faculty research fund scheme will be a competitive scheme which is designed to contribute to the university college's strategic research objective of increasing the number of research-active SMUC staff. The scheme is established to encourage research inactive members of staff to become research active by focusing specific support on the individual.

### Eligibility

Applicants must be full-time faculty members at SMUC.

### Application Deadline

Application deadlines for this scheme are December 31 and June 30 each year.

### Student research fund

This research scheme is meant for undergraduate and graduate students who are preparing their research project as partial fulfillment for the requirement of their first and second degree. The area of their research projects should, however, be aligned with SMUC's research interests.

### Eligibility

Applicants must be full-time graduate (masters) or undergraduate degree program students.

### Application deadline

Deadline for the application of research grant for this scheme is on or before December 31, every year.

# St. Mary's University College