

## QEP Topic Conversations: School of Arts (04.14.09)

- The conversation began with a guiding question from one of the participants: Who are our students? It was suggested that our secondary schools are much more comprehensive than CBU. This being the case, how can we best address, teach, and embody the Lasallian values and mission? How can we best help our students to reach their potential? Where is service learning as a priority? Service learning is clearly present in the secondary schools. Why isn't it an integral component of the learning culture here at CBU? Our students need a much broader, more comprehensive world perspective, and service learning is a significant component of this. What is important in all of this is not simply learning – though that's obviously important as well – but knowledge and understanding; otherwise, its value is lost. We need to be more creative in developing programs that might attract more types of students, and this begins by asking some basic but fundamental questions, like: What are the standards that we value and why do we value them? Are we really who we say we are? Perhaps we ought to think about service learning-focused scholarships.
- One participant noted that one of the reasons it is so difficult to develop, incorporate, and sustain new programs is due to a lack of administrative support; quite simply, there is no funding . . . There was general agreement that it is not the faculty's job to go out and get grants. There seems to be a fairly long history of folks coming up with great ideas that never see the light of day; again, this is due primarily to a lack of administrative support.
- However, another participant interjected, resources should not be seen as being exclusively financial in nature; most important are human resources. The key in all of this seems to be the need for a deeper understanding of who we are as an institution and the ability and courage to articulate this need to and for our students. We need to encourage our students to consider what they're learning – what we're learning together – within the context of lived experience.
- Discussion then turned to some of the problems faculty members encounter on a regular basis in the classroom, such as a general aversion and resistance to reading (and learning). One participant observed that we have a culture – and, more specifically, a community at CBU – of students who do not know how to read. There is a general culture of laziness wherein students make little to no effort to do what is required in a given course. These students aren't dumb but, rather, simply lack motivation and a willingness to work hard. What to do? Suggestions included the need to change/alter our teaching methods and foster higher forms of thinking.
- The aforementioned suggestion regarding the need to re-think pedagogy led to a brief discussion of non-traditional or evening program students, and the extent to which the less traditional and more creative pedagogical methods seem to fail; as a result, those teaching in the evening program often receive lower evaluation scores, which is ironic, given their concerted effort to take into consideration the difference(s) in learning styles of students!

- A couple of participants then pointed to the need for some kind of faculty forum to discuss topics related to effectiveness in teaching (i.e., different methods, the acquisition of various pedagogical skills, etc.). At the end of the day, there is a clear need for faculty development, and for this we need resources and administrative support.
- Finally, one participant recommended that we – all of us – build a community of developing learning among and between faculty, students, and staff. She suggested that this really seems to capture the essence of what we discussed in the course of our conversation, and on this point there was consensus.

(Participants: B. Nelson, K. Leib, M. Schmelzer, E. Holmes, R. Easson)