

QEP Topic Conversations: Christian Brothers (08.18.09)

- A recurring concern expressed in this delightful conversation with five of the Brothers had to do with the deficiency in basic academic skills observed in our students in general, and in incoming students in particular. More to the point, many students appear not to know how to study, how to read, how to learn, and what it means to go to college. This is a deficiency that desperately needs to be addressed right from the beginning, when students arrive on campus to begin their studies at CBU.
- One Brother reflected on something that, in the past, was seen as very important to the “face” of CBU: namely, the need to give commuters the same experience as our day students. But how to do this? It was suggested that we need to “make places” and “make spaces” to pull our students - and students and faculty – together. Programs need to be developed to assimilate commuters into the life of the University.
- Too, we need to be creative in thinking of ways to teach students to teach other students how to become scholarly, to nurture a sense of intellectual curiosity, and develop a love of learning for the whole of one’s life. In short, we must do much more than “deliver information” to our students.
- These sentiments were echoed by another Brother who noted that there was a time when CBU students used to study together – much more than they do today – in dorms, for example. He made mention of the fact that there were particular rooms in the dorms where students actually studied together; unfortunately, these were converted to offices by administrators.
- What is really being emphasized here is the importance of collaborative learning. One Brother suggested that we, as a faculty, need to agree on a core of “things” we will all present to all of our students; whether in the form of essential academic principles or values reflective of our identity as a Lasallian university.
- Congruent with the emphasis on collaborative learning, mention was made of IDS, and the fact that, at least in the original pilot of IDS 101, Peer Counselors, as a group, played a key role in encouraging such learning. (There was a brief conversation regarding the intrinsic value of IDS and what we lost when it was decided to eliminate it; perhaps we need to retrieve the best of what was there, whether in principle or in fact, and incorporate this into whatever it is we settle on as a community for our QEP topic.)

- Discussion then turned to the myriad crises our students often face that are not necessarily of a curricular or academic nature or character: e.g., issues of sexual orientation, sexual behavior and practices, abusive parents, matters related to insurance, etc. In other words, real life issues, questions, and concerns that oftentimes impinge upon students' learning and have a profound effect on their performance and success in the classroom; these "distractions" can loom quite large in the lives of students, both in- and outside of the classroom. We need to make our students aware of what's available in terms of resources since, as previously mentioned, these sorts of things often interfere with learning and student performance.
- On a related matter, one Brother asked the question: Are we graduating students who are aware of a world that does not revolve around the U.S., "my" religious tradition, etc.? In other words, are we graduating students who are able to interact with those who do not share their beliefs? More to the point: How many of our seniors leave CBU with the very same rigidity they brought to CBU?
- In conclusion, one Brother broached the topic of grade inflation, and suggested that this problem seems only to be getting worse. What message does this send to our students about the importance of aspiring to academic excellence? Another Brother touched on the problems associated with class attendance, and the extent to which there does not appear to be any clear standard (at least that is adhered to). And yet, it was noted by one Brother, there is a clear statement in the University catalog regarding the prerogative of professors to assign a failing mark should a student's absences exceed 20% of scheduled classes. Moreover, with the evening program now going to one class session per week and, therefore, eight meetings in total, this issue could get even more complicated and troublesome. What to do?

(Participants: Bro. L. Althaus, Bro. A. Johnson, Bro. J. Baumeyer, Bro. M. Smith, Bro. F. Martin)