

CBU Community Convocation

“Requiring Total Community Involvement: The Continuing Saga of the QEP”

August 20, 2009

In mid-July, I received an e-mail from Dr. Frank Buscher asking me to speak this morning, for about fifteen minutes, on the topic, “Requiring Total Community Involvement: The Continuing Saga of the QEP.” I replied and said I’d be glad to provide an update on where we’ve been, where we’re at, where we’re going, and how long we have to get “there” with respect to the Quality Enhancement Plan. However, I told Frank that the title sounded a bit imposing, daunting, dramatic, and dark! He was kind enough to offer some clarification in his reply, letting me know that, at this first CBU Community Convocation, there would be an emphasis on *community* this year, which is obviously quite relevant to the success of our QEP. In sum, he said, I would have fifteen minutes to tell all of you that “everybody needs to be onboard.” So: “Everybody needs to be onboard.” But I see that I have a few minutes left, and so I’d like to expand, just a little, on what Frank meant and what I mean

In the second correspondence I sent to all staff and faculty members back in mid-March – which some of you may actually have read in its entirety – I mentioned a very important insight or truth that has stuck with me, and that was gleaned from one of the plenary sessions at the 2007 SACS Annual Meeting in New Orleans. The keynote speaker was Dr. Ben Carson, director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University, perhaps known best for his pioneering work in separating conjoined twins. At one point in his presentation that was inspiring, challenging, and, at times, entertaining, Carson defined *success* as “using your God-given talents and abilities to elevate other people.”

I have to confess that that *haunted* me for some time, and I've thought about it a lot over the course of the past several months – especially in relation to our privileges and responsibilities as educators. Since, as St. John Baptist de La Salle once wrote: “To touch the hearts of [our] pupils and to inspire them with the Christian spirit is the greatest miracle [we] can perform, and one which God expects of [us].”

Unfortunately, I think that, if we're completely honest with ourselves, we'll have to admit – not simply as academics or educators but as human beings – that we sometimes emphasize institutions over individuals, maintenance over mission, routine over risk. *Fortunately*, as a university community called not only to teach but also to *serve*, we have the unique opportunity to re-think and re-envision *who we are* and what it is, exactly, that we have been called to do and to be on behalf of our students. That opportunity is the QEP or Quality Enhancement Plan.

The on-site visit for SACS – the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which is the accreditation agency to which we are accountable – has been set for March 28-30, 2011. And, in preparation for this visit, efforts are *well* underway for selecting a QEP topic, the development of which will demonstrate – *first and foremost* to our *students*, and only *secondarily* to SACS – our firm and unwavering commitment to improving student learning at Christian Brothers University.

We *are* where we are *at* in the overall QEP process thanks to the selfless, generous involvement and concerted effort of all those who have either been invited or who have graciously volunteered to assist in identifying specific areas of concern or themes that seem most relevant to CBU's commitment to “enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness” with a view to improving the learning climate or culture here at 650 E. Parkway S. And if you don't remember anything else I say this morning, *please* remember this: **We're doing this for our students, not for SACS.**

Moreover, I really believe that, to the extent that our primary concern is to pray to see each individual student through the eyes of the One who loved them into existence, this effort will prove successful.

My first job, as chair of the QEP, was to bring together representatives of as many CBU constituencies as possible in order to *listen* to them; to hear what they had to say about our students and how we might – “together and by association” – take very concrete, practical steps to improve student learning. And so, this past spring, I met with representatives from each of the Schools of Science, Business, Arts, and Engineering – as well as the Deans of each of those Schools – the Library staff, Advising, Admissions, the Registrar, Graduate and Professional Studies, Student Life, Career Services, Campus Ministry, Campus Safety, the Faculty Assembly Curriculum Committee, the Student Government Association, the Honors Program, and yesterday enjoyed lunch with several of the Brothers.

There were two basic and fundamental questions I posed at the outset: First, what kind of educational experience do we want our students to have? And, second, what do we most want our students to learn? I still plan to meet with several alumni and adjunct faculty members – especially since the latter comprises nearly 20% of the CBU faculty – and Donna Freeman is helping to arrange a time for me to meet with some members of the Board of Trustees.

Just this week, a group of ten individuals – which included various administrators, faculty, and staff – graciously agreed to meet with me to sort of slog through the sum and substance of these conversations, in order to identify no more than a handful of recurring themes that seem clearly to emerge from said conversations. We’ve already met twice and have agreed to meet one final time – tomorrow morning – to identify these themes or focus areas. From there, we will decide – *as a community* – what will be *the focus* of our Quality Enhancement Plan.

If there's one thing that has become abundantly clear to me – and to others with whom I've spoken – in the course of these conversations, it is how much we *all* – every single one of us – care for and about our students and their success, and about their becoming not simply smarter, but also *better* men and women.

In the next week or so, I'll be meeting with the appropriate “experts” on campus to help set up and maintain a SACS website to provide each and all of you with updates as well as announced opportunities to become directly involved in the actual selection of the QEP topic as well as the detailed development of the Plan itself. Rest assured, there will be no shortage of opportunities for you to become involved! And even if it were not mandated by SACS, I would do everything in my power to encourage broad-based, University-wide support, buy-in and involvement in all stages of the process, at absolutely every point along the way.

You know, I have really come to *believe in* the importance and intrinsic value of what we're doing here, and I *also* believe that the timing could not be more perfect. But in order for us to succeed – and in this we have *no choice* – we'll need to come together – *ALL OF US* – and utilize our God-given gifts, talents, abilities, and resources to their *best advantage*, which will ultimately be *most* advantageous to the ones for whom Christian Brothers University exists in the first place. Thank you very much!