

Principle 2.16: QEP

Supporting Documentation

**Representative Blog Entries**

# What is the QEP blog?

by John Sibert, Interim President

The QEP blog is simply a mechanism to allow for an active, ongoing discussion of topics related to education at UT-Dallas. It is somewhat unfortunate that I have tied this blog to the QEP component of SACS, which has an important but much more targeted focus (please see the main page of the QEP website), because it presents a terrific opportunity to enter into a range of topics that extend well beyond the task of a QEP. Importantly, all members of the UTD community (faculty, students, staff, alumni and members of the corporate community) along with others having a vested interest in the welfare of UTD are invited to participate in this innovative approach to openly identify and discuss significant issues associated with the educational mission of our institution. In this blog, I will write articles (in most cases, fairly brief) that are designed to activate the thoughts of others. Readers of the blog can then post their views on the topics at hand with a subsequent thread developing organically. My role as the principal blog writer will not be dictatorial with respect to discussion content or topic resolution. Instead, I view it more as a facilitator of campus-wide discussions. To encourage participation in as transparent a process as possible, I have no plans to edit the posts of others. Your voice counts – please share it! Further, I welcome the suggestion of blog topics via e-mail, phone or in a campus hallway, cafeteria, etc. Finally, it should be noted that I am not writing to express the views of the university. I am writing to learn the views of the university.

John Sibert

# How do you identify an effective teacher?

by John H. Garvey

How do you define effective teaching? How do you measure effective teaching? The answer is the Holy Grail for addressing learning at any level. That definition would allow for the recognition and, importantly, reward of those who are effective teachers. It would allow others who aspire to be effective teachers to follow in clearly marked footsteps of success. Unfortunately, this question probably doesn't have a definitive answer, but it should continue to be asked.

Is effective teaching directly tied to the performance of students on standardized (or other) tests? If so, then Harvard, Stanford and the like have cornered the market on best teaching practices. Do you believe that? I don't. In fact, to suggest so does a disservice to instructors at less renowned universities/colleges who do yeoman's work in the classroom, laboratory, on stage, etc., but work with students who, on average, lack the skill sets of an entering Harvard undergrad. If so, then the "No Child Left Behind Law" (<http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-2/behind.html>) that enforced annual standardized testing in K-12 education will weave its way into the fabric of the university. Is that the path that we want to take? I think much of the work that we are currently doing for SACS (learning outcomes, course assessments, etc.) is designed to demonstrate that we can govern our own teaching practices without the need for intervention from those outside the university community (worst case scenario – Capitol Hill). It may be one of the more important reasons to take SACS seriously.

Is effective teaching related to a conveyed genuine passion for the field of study in which the instructor is teaching? I think it is, but how do you measure that?! In the classroom and community, faculty members are ambassadors for their fields of study. It is an often overlooked, but extremely significant role – in particular at the freshman level. Student views of areas of study are shaped and, in some cases, created by their instructors. Their classroom success, I suggest, is tied to the energy and interest of the instructor. For example, to this day, I have an illogical and unfairly negative view of the broad and important field of sociology. Why? Because I had an instructor who demonstrated little interest in the course material and was generally unavailable for discussion outside of the dispirited classroom. The lack of passion and emphasis on the significance of the course content left, at best, an apathetic taste in my mouth. Is that the field of sociology's fault? Most certainly not! Contrast that with the other extreme, namely the spirited efforts of the Jacques Cousteaus and Carl Sagans of the world whose interests in their disciplines were/are downright contagious. My field, chemistry, is not immune. In fact, when those I meet outside of the

university learn that I am a chemistry professor, I get a common response, "I hated chemistry when I took it". I remind myself of that prior to each of my lectures. Our students deserve better. If I'm not interested in the course content, why should they be? I don't aim to convert 160 general chemistry students into chemistry majors, but I fully recognize that these developing minds will be making decisions on important scientific issues throughout their lives and need to have an appreciation for the field of chemistry, in addition to some level of scientific literacy. Look what happened with the Board of Education in Kansas (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9967813>)!

The bottom line is that effective teaching is critical to student learning, student welfare and their subsequent retention at the university. So, what constitutes effective teaching and, perhaps the harder question, how do you measure it? A lot of folks want to know.

## 2 Responses to "How do you identify an effective teacher?"

### . JoyLynn Reed Says:

- 0. June 7th, 2006 at 3 30 pm
- 0. I agree with your excellent points. Certainly your example of how a sociology professor killed any interest in that discipline is a common experience many of us have had. Two professors killed my interests in math and chemistry.
- 0. Many scholars who study teaching and learning have noted the importance of a teacher's enthusiasm for both the discipline as well as for teaching itself. My question is, what is the difference between an effective teacher in high school and an effective teacher at higher levels? Further, are the qualities that make an undergraduate teacher effective the same ones that help graduate students learn well?
- . Among many other roles teachers have, they are leaders. In this sense, I am defining leadership broadly to mean having an influence. As you said, you are not out to convert all undergraduates to be chemistry majors. However, as an effective leader in the classroom, you ARE going to have influence, maybe even in a non-academic way. For example, I remember wanting to be as organized To add to your list of questions, what are ways that university teachers lead students?

### 0. **simon.kane** Says:

- 0. June 8th, 2006 at 11:11 am
- 0. I too have experienced many ineffective teachers. Ineffective teaching can be the result of a lack of knowledge \*or\* a lacking in the skilled ability to transfer the knowledge to others.
- 0. Educating is skilled communication. If the people teaching can't communicate effectively to their audience, than how can they be effective teachers?
- 0. I see a good educator as someone who:
- 0. – Must want to be an educator – a reluctant researcher teaching a lecture course is not effective.– Must have the time to communicate.– Must speak a common language clearly.– Has genuine interest (preferably passion/enthusiasm) in the subject being taught.– Has had some instruction in the art of education – for example they should understand that everyone has different learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) and should know how to leverage that knowledge to teach effectively.

0. Unfortunately, we often assume that a person with an abundance of knowledge in a subject, is a good teacher in it. Skilled educating does not come naturally to most. Fortunately, it can be learned and practiced well by many. But we must accept the fact that not everyone can be good at it and so, not everyone can become a good educator.

You ask "what constitutes effective teaching?" I think one of the answers is to have skilled educators who want to educate running the courses.

# Aug. 8 Alumni Meeting - Brief Summary

posted August 14th, 2006 by sibert

I had an interesting discussion last Tuesday night with a group of recent alumni (graduation dates ranged from Spring '01 to Spring '06) concerning the QEP and, perhaps more importantly, their varied experiences as students at UTD. Among many, three topics came to the fore during the ninety minute meeting. (1) Without exception, all agreed that issues associated with student life improved tangibly throughout their years at UTD. As a curious aside, some sincerely attributed this to their perception that UTD has changed its recruiting strategy to enroll students who are both academically-talented and well-rounded. (2) There was discussion concerning how their course work prepared them for the workplace. Several felt that the curriculum in their respective majors could have offered a more realistic expectation as to what they would ultimately do as professionals. Such exposure may manifest under the heading "experiential learning", a topic of major interest to classroom educators for at least the last quarter century and one that has been used as a component in QEPs at other universities. (3) Despite the clear recognition for the research and service related responsibilities of their professors, a significant component of the group would have liked a stronger teaching effort in the form of greater contact time and/or course interest.

John Sibert