

Welcome to the “Dark Side” of Higher Education

Much of the AAC&U (2002) publication entitled *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* was pertinent to me as an experienced educator and administrator in post-secondary occupational education (PSOE). Two statements, ostensibly no more significant than any others, jumped out at me: “The dark secret of higher education is that most college professors are never trained to be teachers” (p. 16). PSOE institutions “rarely assist faculty members in any sustained way to become outstanding instructors” (p. 17). Further, institutions and their faculty peers denigrate the value of researchers’ scholarly work in the field of “teaching theory and practice” (p. 17).

For many years, I have been a crusader for PSOE instructor competence. Since 2004, I have especially focused on for-profit career colleges (FPCCs). Because FPCCs are typically vocational training institutions that grant diplomas and two- or four-year degrees, the instructors are subject-matter experts (SMEs) in their professions. Most instructors have at least baccalaureate degrees in their disciplines. However, neither experience as an adult educator nor knowledge of adult-specific educational principles and instructional methodologies is a requirement for initial or continued employment. Most FPCC instructors have little or no understanding of the uniqueness of andragogy, nor do they implement its precepts in their instructional activities. This learning environment is found industry-wide. Not only are most instructors devoid of andragogical training or experience, FPCCs typically do not provide sufficient continuing education in adult education theories, principles, and instructional methodologies for their faculty members. Instead, FPCCs focus on meeting accreditation standards, corporate goals, and the approval of their peers in the industry.

Brent & Felder (2001) write, “College teaching may be the only skilled profession that does not routinely provide training to its novice practitioners” (p. 1). From their perspective as vocational instructors, Lowry & Froese (2001) argue that PSOE schools must place a high priority on faculty training, especially in the area of instructional effectiveness. Further, they contend PSOE schools need better methods for fostering instructors’ competence. PSOE schools must focus resources on faculty development. Likewise, they must monitor instructors’ teaching skills and knowledge of instructional theory and methodology. Otherwise, these institutions fail in their mission to foster learning.

Hiemstra (2002) believes that maturation of adult education as a discipline, more financial support (although he is unclear about the sources), and honing of faculty development programs for adult instructors will eliminate the problem of instructional ineffectiveness and inefficiency and andragogical deficiency. Likewise, FPCC mergers and the growth of mega-for-profit entities, accompanied by expanded programs and accreditation by the same regional agencies that accredit state-supported colleges, are creating an atmosphere where the delineation between FPCCs and their non-profit and state-supported counterparts is becoming blurred. As for-profit higher education industry leaders – such as DeVry, Phoenix, Kaplan, and ITT – provide serious competition to non-profit and state-supported higher education, the requirements for PSOE instructional efficiency and effectiveness will increase.

In the meantime, I am deeply concerned about the overall poor quality of education PSOE students are receiving. Most of them face significant barriers to completing their educations without the added burden of ineffective teaching.

What recommendation does *Greater Expectations* have for resolving the issue of instructional ineffectiveness? Quite simply, student affairs personnel must promote faculty competence, support faculty development programs, and work to implement schemes for recognizing faculty excellence. Working with administrators on behalf of their constituents, student services departments can foster tremendous change for instructional excellence. What greater expectations do college students have?

Additional Resources

AAC&U Greater Expectations National Panel. (2002). *Greater expectations: A new vision for learning as a nation goes to college*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Brent, R., & Felder, R. (2000, June). *Helping new faculty get off to a good start*. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Society for Engineering Education. St. Louis, MO.

Hiemstra, R. (2002). *Lifelong learning: An exploration of adult and continuing education within a setting of lifelong learning needs* (3rd ed.). Fayetteville, NY: Author. Text available on-line at www-distance.syr.edu/III.html

Lowry, C. & Froese, W. (2001, May). *Transitions: Becoming a college teacher*. Paper presented to the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda Symposium. Laval University. Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.