

It's All About Students . . . Learning

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Education is all about students! Pro or con? It depends on your outlook. Should students determine what the curriculum is and how a professor teaches a class? Absolutely not! Should the curriculum and a professor's class organization and presentation be geared to maximize student learning? Absolutely! Consider the following:

A very good friend assailed me a few years ago about how uncaring her daughter's college professors were. "They have no concern for the students," she said. Evidence for this was that in high school her daughter could take tests and turn in written assignments as many times as she wanted. Each time her teachers would correct the exam/work, give it back, and allow the student to study/correct the work, and do it again. College professors grade it the first time, so they don't like the students. While there is something to be said about allowing a student to learn from his/her mistakes, to totally remove accountability for the student's actions does not prepare them for the real world.

I have also known teachers who allow students to vote on what will be covered in a class. "I want the students to like me," some say.

Our Academic Vice President, a former English professor, periodically shares essays about faculty responsibilities. In the most recent essay, he talked about the need to be student-centered in our teaching. Our goal, he wrote, should be to "transform not just to inform students."¹ We "should forget any need to impress and try instead simply to bless."¹ This does not mean that we should pander to students; putting the student first also means that we "should not be afraid to correct in love, nor to set high expectations."¹

In his essay, Vice President Tanner also quoted from a memoir by a Jane Tompkins, a Yale educated literary critic, entitled *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned*.² As she hurried to class, after extensive preparation of what she hoped would be a brilliant lecture, she had an epiphany:

"I thought to myself for the first time: I have to remember what they want (meaning the students), what they need. . . Whereas for my entire teaching life I had always thought that what I was doing was helping my students to understand the material we were studying . . . as a result of that moment I realized that what I had actually been concerned with was showing the students how smart I was, how knowledgeable I was, how well prepared I was for class. I had been putting on a performance whose true goal was not to help students learn, as I had thought, but to perform before them in such a way that they would have a good opinion of me."¹

A related issue is the expanded mission of the College University Athletic Training Students Committee (CUATSC). This committee has performed excellently in assisting and directing state, district, and national student senates/committees in organizing and conducting student programs for district and national conventions. Students have received valuable leadership training, through their involvement, program offerings featuring leadership topics, and in observing and working with excellent role models (members of the CUATSC).

Earlier this month, this committee received an additional challenge; to become advocates for student interests to the Education Council Executive Committee (ECEC). This will entail a concerted effort to encourage students to share their thoughts and ideas concerning their education. Does this mean every suggestion by students will result in education reform? Obviously not. But it will influence ECEC discussions, decisions, and communication with the NATA membership, and it will be a constant reminder of one of the basic philosophies of the ECEC, "Always act in the best interest of students."

Classroom and clinical educators, program directors, and educational administrators and leaders should always keep uppermost in their minds that it's all about student learning.

References

1. Tanner JS. *Substitute Teaching*. Notes From an Amateur Series. <http://avp.byu.edu/pages/speeches.html>
2. Tompkins JP. *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned*. New York: Perseus Books; 1996.