

# Quality Matters

Volume 2 No. 10 November 2008

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA)

St. Mary's University College

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## Quote of this issue

“Quite simply quality is what it takes to satisfy a customer ”

Karu Isikawa.

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance of St Mary's University College ( SMUC). The Objective of the newsletter is to inform the SMUC community as well as interested public, private, non-governmental stakeholders about the activities and endeavors of the institution in fostering quality education and research in the Ethiopian Higher Education setting.

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## Gender Needs Assessment Survey Completed

The Special Interest Group on Gender (SIGG) at St. Mary's University College has finalized needs assessment survey on gender. The study focused on both students and teachers who play critical roles in the quality of educational service delivery in the University College.

The instrument of the survey was developed by SIGG members of pioneer and newly established universities through a series of consultative workshops organized by EQUIP (Educational Quality Improvement Program). It was also piloted by a university which was selected for the purpose. The questionnaire had two versions for different study subjects. The English version was used to collect data from teacher respondents and the Amharic version was used for student respondents.

Accordingly, 100 questionnaires were distributed both to teachers and students each on the basis of which data were collected and analyzed. As part of educational quality enhancement programs of the University College, the result of the study is intended to be used as input to determine training areas and packages for the University College's students and staff members. ■

## From the Editorial Desk

Globalization is nowadays accepted as a reality across governments. Thus, education and training remain central to governments' initiatives in making citizens of all ages aware of the market and social dynamics. Consequently, the policies of countries in education and training are increasingly focusing on the acquisition of employability skills. Equally important is the role of employers in curricula development of the learning programs; a shift in education and training policy approaches from the human capital theory, which emphasizes achievement in terms of formal qualification, to a new policy commitment of lifelong learning, which places stronger focus on the process of learning more than the qualification. Learning for its own sake now has a higher value- in policy terms- than it has had in the past.

To date, the federal government of Ethiopia has laid investment in formal education and training. This is done in the belief that an increase in qualifications would contribute to economic growth in terms of increased productivity. This policy has led to the expansion of publicly-funded universities, a commitment to increase participation in post-secondary schooling. However, the importance of employability and global skills in our educational system should also be areas of critical engagement in the fight against

poverty and of course in enhancing our competitive advantage in today's global market. Otherwise, the fight against poverty will turnout to be a nightmare and the country will sustain continued global market disadvantage.

In the past, most people remained in one type of job for life, and the education that was completed at young age was deemed sufficient to last their lifetime. In today's economic climate, however, industry requires workers to upgrade their skills, knowledge and understanding continually in the face of the ever-changing needs of the labor market. On the other hand, those who do not have the motivation and the capacity to do so will be marginal to the labor market.

Generally, there is little doubt that the nations which will succeed in the 21st century will be "knowledge societies" – societies rich in human capital, effective in their capacity to utilize and successful in the creation and commercialization of knowledge. In such a world, therefore, there is a greater need for lifelong learning essential for the preparation of not just the first job but for succeeding jobs. And, this demands strong efforts of actors in the educational sector and other stakeholders. ■

# News Items

## **The Second Student Research Forum Held**

The Second Student Research Forum was staged on October 2, 2008 at the SMUC's multipurpose Hall, Mexico campus. The forum was organized by the Academic Vice President's Office of SMUC. The papers presented in the Forum were selected from degree awarding programs on competitive basis.

Attendants were students, teachers, advisors, faculty deans, and invited guests from SMUC and other universities. The Forum which is organized annually is meant for sharing students' research findings with the academic community and the industry; thereby developing their research skills. Also, the Forum provides junior students with a lesson on communicating research results.

The papers presented in the Forum are due to be published as proceedings of student research forum. Presenters of papers were drawn from five disciplines; namely, Law, Computer Science, Management, Accounting, and Marketing Management. ■

## **Training on Instructional Methodology, Measurement and Evaluation conducted**

The Academic Development and Resource Center (ADRC) of St. Mary's University College, in collaboration with the Department of Education, organized training on Instructional Methodology, Measurement and Evaluation for new and senior faculty members. The importance of such a training is justified by the need to enhance quality of the education provided by the University College. The training was held from 15 - 21 October 2008 at Mexico campus.

Attendants were 11 new and senior faculty members from the departments of Law, Computer Science, Marketing Management, Management and Accounting. The training, which was aimed at familiarizing instructors drawn from the aforementioned departments with instructional skills and assessment techniques, has a practical significance of enhancing quality of educational service delivery in the University College.

The trainers were faculty members from the Department of Education at SMUC, Addis Ababa University and Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA). Upon completion, trainees were awarded with certificates. ■

## Research Corner

**Title:** *The Need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of Professionals in Higher Education*

**Researcher:** Yalew Ingidayew (PhD)

**Research type:** Descriptive

**Date of publication:** August 2006 (a research paper presented at the 4th annual research conference on PHEIs organized and sponsored by St. Mary's University College).

The study attempted to examine the need of higher education instructors and researchers for grading and up-grading their professional competence (CPD) through continuing professional education (CPE).

The study bases its discussions on the assumption that professionals in higher education face challenges related to inadequate pedagogical and professional training to render efficient and effective services in their fields.

Accordingly, the study highlights three major problems: (a) lack of awareness and commitment to the current opportunities and possibilities of CPD programs (b) inadequate training and (c) limited access to and participation in the formal and non-formal CPE programs.

In conclusion the work stresses that professions are always dynamic, evolving, growing and changing. Thus, professionals in higher education should always undergo a process of professionalizing through CPE. ■

## Student Assessment Special Interest Group (SASIG)

### conducted its first workshop

A three-day consultative workshop on Student Assessment was conducted from 3 - 5 November 2008. The workshop was held at EQUIP's office in Addis Ababa. Attendants were representatives of ADRCs from both private and public universities.

The objective of the workshop was to develop training modules that would be used for staff development training on Student Assessment methods at tertiary level of education.

Participants of the workshop shared their experience on activities carried out with regard to enhancing the effectiveness of Student Assessment techniques that are practiced in their respective universities.

The module which is expected to be finalized at the end of a series of consultative workshops is planned to be used in training faculty members on instructional and assessment techniques for enhanced learning on the part of students.

During the three-day workshop, participants enriched the preliminary document to be compiled as a module, revisited and improved SIG guidelines. Finally, identification of tasks of the next workshop and other issues were raised and discussed thoroughly. ■

## Interview

This column features interviews of people including government officials, policy makers, educators, researchers, and presidents of universities or colleges as well as students on educational issues. In this edition we present the views of Dr. Girma Mitiku on issues of employability and global skills. The center would like to extend its thanks in advance for sharing us his time.



### Background

*Dr. Girma Mitiku is Director of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Office at St. Mary's University College. The primary functions of the office are academic researches complementary to business area and community outreach services.*

*Dr. Girma has a PhD in life sciences (Natural Resource and Agriculture) from The Ohio State University, USA. As an Assistant Professor, he has taught Natural Resource and Plant Physiology for ten years at the University of Illinois, at Champaign- Urbana in New York State, USA. Marcos from the center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA) was able to talk to him at length on issues of employability and global skills central to the global education and training. ■*

**Quality Matters:** At this time of globalization and technocracy, employability and global skills are nowadays becoming central in the education and training systems. How do you describe the phenomena in our country?

**Dr. Girma:** Employability and global skills are broader concepts that involve broader aspects of education and training. The following can be considered as the basic dimensions (priority areas) of employability and global skills as global education. Basically, the fact that employees need skills for employment is not in question. However, the impact of education also extends to people's wider role in society. In this regard, people, young and old, need to be able to deal with complex social, environmental and financial issues. Also, the fact that education and training for a global society should lead to the acquisition of skills is not in question. However, unless this includes essential skills of critical engagement areas (poverty alleviation, sustainable development, human rights, global citizenship, social justice, global terrorism, climate change, cultural values, and the like) and also leads to the adoption of impact-oriented behaviors, learning will be ineffectual. That generic skills that enable to function in a global market and society to compete in a global economy need to be embedded in education and training is irrefutable.

However, there is a need to set a framework on how these skills can lead to effective involvement in critical engagement issues stated above so as to think globally and act locally. Also, it is undeniable that language learning needs a far stronger focus. Countries like Ethiopia do not often have frameworks of employability and global skills in their educational system. The only exception in sub-Saharan Africa is South Africa. However, as the world shrinks into a small technocratic village, the need to integrate employability and global skills in the educational system is becoming far more greater.

**Quality Matters:** How do you think we can mainstream these critical areas of engagement in the educational system?

**Dr. Girma:** Probably the first thing that is needed, in this regard, is to initiate research based dialogue involving all stakeholders. This would allow searching ways for adopting these skills to fit into the local needs of the society. In this regard, all actors and agencies have crucial roles to play. This should be in partnership with learners. Actions also need to be taken from curriculum planning and staff development to strategic planning which will influence approaches to learning in varying contexts. Government policies and initiatives therefore, provide a framework of integration in this aspect. Currently, the Office for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at St. Mary's University College is carrying out survey research on employability skills.

This is done with employers in the industry. The output of the survey will allow the University College to prioritize the local needs of the industry on what are alternatively called employability skills, transferable skills, workplace know-how, basic skills by countries involved in such aspects of education and training in their educational system. Thus, the results of the findings will obviously be predictors of the quality of educational services offered by the University College, and accordingly be used to enhance quality of the education and training provided by the institution. However, 90% of the finding is expected to confirm the international trend as measurement of the issue based on the 67 globally defined employability skills around .

However, the challenge in this country is, there is lack or somehow absence of professionals in career counseling and consequently no units or offices exist to facilitate professional services in this regard. Moreover, all these lead to difficulty in identifying employability skills in line with the Ethiopian reality and ultimately fit them in a global context that builds our competitive advantage in the global market. No research in the country so far studied the skill levels and very little is known about the issue. However, there seems to happen a greater paradigm shift from the human capital theory of education to the theory of lifelong learning in the global labor market. ■

### Action Research in Teaching: scrutinizing the learning process

By Andualem Tamiru, CEIRQA

The teacher, engaged in the learning process, is very close to the learner. She/ he has a direct access to all the activities that enable her/him to investigate the pros and cons of the situation of learning, the context as well as the problems the students may be facing in learning the material presented. The teacher, therefore, is an insider to the learning activity.

Ferriance, (2000) refers to action research as a process in which participants examine their own educational practices systematically and carefully using the techniques of research. Accordingly, the teacher can solve the problems she/he faces while teaching through action research. Through action research the teacher can view her/his activities and that of the students. S/he can also identify students' problems in learning, and revise her/his strategy of teaching. "Action research aims to solve pertinent problems in given contexts ...to seek and enact solutions to problems of major importance to the stakeholders" (Greenwood and Levin, 2000).

While teaching, the teacher uses various strategies; she/he observes many problems which obstruct students' learning. The problems may vary with the context of the school environment. Thus, the teacher needs to scrutinize all the activities in the learning process. This requires the use of action research.

Classroom Action Research is systematic inquiry with the goal of informing practice in a particular situation. It is a way for instructors to discover what works best in their own classroom situation, thus allowing informed decisions about teaching." (Mett et. al, 2002-2003).

Classroom action research enables the teacher to adjust to the learning situation in which students are operating, and use new strategies to tackle students' problems. Thus, the teacher has the opportunity to carry out action research since they are the experts very close to the problem at hand and the sources of information. In Greenwood and Levin's words, "The insider has extensive knowledge of the problems at hand and the contexts in which they occur, as well as the knowledge about how and from whom to get additional information" (Greenwood and Levin, 2000).

In doing action research, teachers may need assistance from professional researchers but their role is indispensable since they are very close to the context in which the learning process is taking place. In this connection, Greenwood and Levin have the following to say:

Action research is built on interaction between local knowledge and professional knowledge. ... Is based on the assumption that professional knowledge is important and valuable, but local knowledge is a

necessary ingredient. ...The central inquiry processes of action research are linked to solving practical problems in specific locations (Greenwood and Levin, 2000: 96-97).

Thus, in order to study the problems that bother her/him and act accordingly, the teacher has every resource in terms of immediate access to the culture of the classroom and other sources of information. What she/he may need is consultation from professional researchers. The very important ingredient of action research - the context of the school environment - is well known by the teacher. She/he has a direct access to the sources of information in relative terms which is a very important condition for carrying out action research.

The methods of teaching we are employing here are not indigenous, they are adopted from the western world, which are produced through continuous research which had been updated based on the changing circumstances in our socio-economic and political environments. We need to, at least, check through action research whether it is working well to our context so as to make the necessary amendments with respect to the social, and cultural setting of the country.

It is also possible that the students have problems in understanding some facts or issues. The instructor may want to study and come up with some solution, which possibly is a new technique. Then, she/he makes use of the outcome of the study-the new technique- and, finally, checks whether it is working well or not.

My experience as a mathematics instructor has shown me that there are lots of misconceptions that students will bring to mathematics classes in the university which they have acquired while learning high school mathematics. I believe that these problems could be curbed if not eradicated through identifying the areas of misconceptions and acting accordingly. To do this the teacher needs to know about action research and needs to be convinced of the power that doing action research has in alleviating the problems that are faced in learning including misconceptions.

Since action research is doing research upon your own actions, and acting based on the research, it could be used in non-formal Education that don't lead to qualifications. In mainstreaming certain values which may not be part of the prevailing culture, the instructor needs to know how this could be done. The methods and approaches that best suit the particular topic at hand and the specific group of learners, paying attention to the individual differences that might exist among the students, are as important as the topic/the values to be mainstreamed.

Through action research, problems could be identified or understood. New approaches, techniques and methods could be tested and informed decisions can be made about learning. Thus, we can make improvements in courses which lead to qualifications as well as in those which don't lead to qualifications. ■

### **References**

1. Greenwood, D.J., and Levin, M. (2000).



Reconstructing the Relationships between Universities and Society through Action Research in Denzin, Norman K and Lincoln, Yvonna S. (eds) Handbook of Qualitative Research. USA: SAGE Publications.

2. Gwynn Mettetal (2002-2003) .Improving Teaching through Classroom Action Research. <http://academic.udayton.edu/FacDev/Newsletters/EssaysforTeachingExcellence/PODvol14/tevo114n7.html> (accessed on November, 2008)

#### Virtual Links

##### Ministry of Education

Web site: [http:// www.moe.gov.et](http://www.moe.gov.et)

##### Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (Ethiopia)

Website: [www.higher.edu.et](http://www.higher.edu.et)

##### PROPHE- Programme for Research on Private Higher Education

Website: [www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/](http://www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/)

##### International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

Website: [http:// www.inqaahe.org](http://www.inqaahe.org)

##### Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)

Website: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

##### Center for International Research on Higher Education

Website: [http://bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe](http://bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe)

##### Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia

Website: <http://www.qsae.org/>

##### International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa

Website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov>

##### International Network for Higher Education in Africa (NHEA)

Website: <http://www.bc.edu>

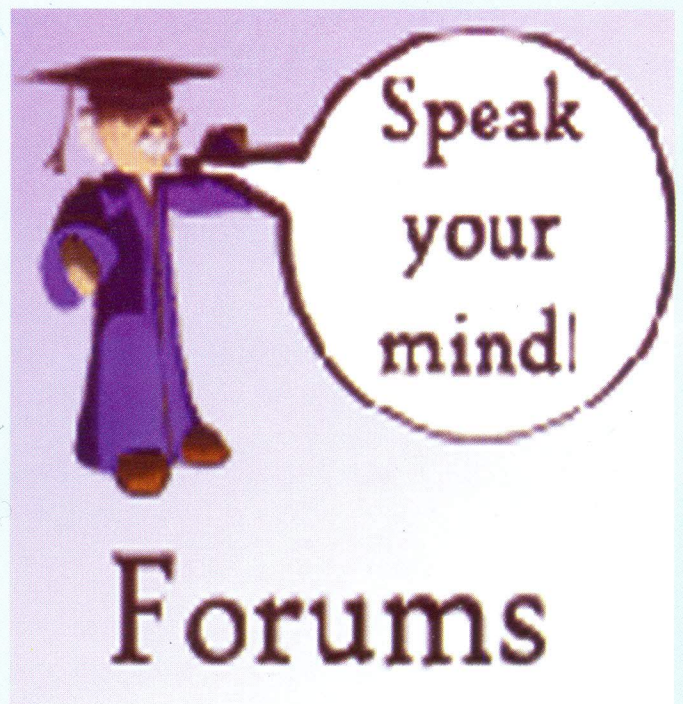
##### International Network for quality assurance Agencies in higher Education

Website: <http://www.inqaahe.nl>

## Forthcoming Event

The Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA) of St. Mary's University College has planned to organize and run a monthly research and experience sharing forum for academia and Students as of January 2009. All interested are invited.

The exact date and time of the event will be posted on the University College website.



# Fun corner

## Joke

A student at Baylor University named Jesse was taking one of the hardest psychology teachers on campus. Throughout the semester he was not doing so well on his exams and papers. It came time for finals and he studied very hard for that class knowing that it would be a one question test. During the year they talked about a number of different things like why people act the way they do and how to change that. What actions are taken in what situations and so on. To receive a good grade on the test the student had to write everything they knew on the test subject. The day came for the test and the students, especially Jesse, were very nervous. The teacher came in and wrote on the board the question:

What is it to Be Courageous?

All of the students started writing frantically. Jesse sat there for a while and simply wrote in his blue book:

This is being courageous.

Jesse received the only A in the class.

Score: 0.0, votes: 0

Source: the Internet

If you have comments on this issue of the newsletter or would like to contribute to future issues please contact our office on 011 553 8001  
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## Photo Gallery

The second student research forum( above) and partial view of Staff pedagogical training( below).



# Center for Educational Improvement, Research and Quality Assurance (CEIRQA)

## Areas of Internal Quality Management

Internal quality management and assurance mechanisms shall be departmentally generated and are continuous. The mechanisms shall be coherent with the quality assurance framework set forth in the university policy and approved by Senate and shall include mechanisms to assess the following areas.

- ▶ Quality of program and courses
- ▶ Quality of academic staff
- ▶ Quality of teaching and learning experience
- ▶ Quality in student assessment: Internal moderation
- ▶ Quality in support services
- ▶ Quality of resources and facilities
- ▶ Quality of research
- ▶ Quality of leadership

Source: Quality Assurance Special Interest Group, (2008)

# St. Mary's University College