

Quality Matters

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A Quarterly Newsletter of the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA)

St. Mary's University College

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Quote of this issue

“Even though quality cannot be defined, you know what quality is.”

Robert Pirsig

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) 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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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The 8th National Conference on Private Higher Education was Held

The 8th National Conference on Private Higher Education was held on September 25, 2010 at the UNECA conference hall. The conference was organized and sponsored by St. Mary's University College. The theme of the conference was *Invigorating the work on access, equity and quality of the Higher Education sector in Ethiopia*. A range of research papers related to quality assurance, access, TVET, distance education and HIV/AIDS were presented and discussed. More than 250 participants from private and public higher education institutions, national and international research organizations, civil service organizations, and government organizations took part in the day long conference. Ato Wondowssen Tamrat, Founder and President of St.Mary's University College delivered the welcoming speech followed by an opening speech by Ato Eyesuswork Zafu, President of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations. Prof. Luc Rukungama, UNESCO country director of Ethiopia also delivered a keynote speech■

From the Editorial Desk

Higher education is central to economic and political development and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalizing knowledge society. As a result the focus given to the performance of higher education institutions (HEIs) has been increasing. In a similar way, many changes have occurred in Ethiopian higher education. In relation to the expansion of the higher education sector in the country, concern about the quality of the sector is on the rise. Considering the current expansion rate, it is inevitable that the quality assurance agency will soon need the help of independent associations to assist in the quality assurance process. However, in the current external quality assurance system in Ethiopia, the role of professional associations is limited. In many developed higher education systems professional associations play a key role in the quality assurance system especially in program peer review. For instance, in the USA strong professional and other voluntary associations assume the responsibility of quality assurance on a voluntary basis. This type of arrangement not only enhances a sense of belonging on the part of the professionals in assuring quality, it also minimizes the burden of the federal government to a large extent. In Ethiopia, if such kind of initiative is encouraged it could help the government to focus its effort on areas of higher education development. This would leave the responsibility for quality assurance to be undertaken by professional associations. There are quite a good number of professional associations in Ethiopia which can contribute to assuring the quality of the higher education sector. Since quality assurance is the concern of all stakeholders in higher education, it should not be left as the sole responsibility of the

government. Thus, Ethiopia needs to develop strong independent associations that might usefully assist in addressing the current nation-wide concerns about quality ■

Virtual Links

- Ethiopian Ministry of Education
Web site: [http:// www.moc.gov.et](http://www.moc.gov.et)
- Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (Ethiopia)
Website: www.higher.edu.et
- PROPHE- Programme for Research on Private Higher Education
Website: www.albany.edu/dept/eaps/prophe/
- International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE)
Website: [http:// www.inqaahc.org](http://www.inqaahc.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
- Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia
Website: <http://www.qsae.org/>
- International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa
Website: <http://www.cric.cd.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.inqaahc.nl>
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
Website: <http://www.enqa.eu>
- Asian Pacific Quality Network
Website: <http://www.apqn.org>
- Ethiopian Knowledge and Technology Transfer Society (EKTTS)
Website: <http://www.ektts.org>
- Association of African Universities (AAU)
Website: <http://www.aau.org>
- HEDDA , Higher Education Development Association
Website: <http://uv-net.uio.no/wpmu/hedda/about/>
- The African Quality Assurance Network
Website : <http://afriqan.aau.org/>

News

The Language Resource Center at SMUC Officially Inaugurated

An opening ceremony for the English Language Resource Center at SMUC was held on October 25, 2010. In the opening ceremony, Ms. Semira Alhadi from the US Embassy, the Executive Vice-President of SMUC, Ms Beki Quick, the founder of the Resource Center and English Language Fellow, and other staff members of SMUC were present. The participants in the opening ceremony commented that the center would be helpful to the community of SMUC. The Language Resource Center is open to both staff and students of SMUC all day long. Books, CDs, magazines and other important printed materials are available in the language resource center■

Quality Assurance Training Conducted

As part of the Ethiopian government's initiative to develop a strong quality assurance system across all levels of education, different sub-city education offices and institutions are incorporating quality assurance structure into the institutional structure. To support this endeavor two staff members of CEIQA gave training on quality assurance and quality audit procedures. The training was organized by Lideta sub-city (Kifle ketema) TVET office on October 21, 2010 and by Nifas Silk Lafto sub-city (kifle ketema) TVET office on November 9, 2010. A total of around 100 experts from public and private TVET program providers participated in the training■

The Fourth National Student Forum held

The 4th Annual National Student Research Forum, organized & sponsored by SMUC, was held on the 21th

of August 2010 at the University College Multi-purpose Hall. The Forum was meant for enhancing the potential of young graduates in conducting and presenting research undertakings. Accordingly, a total of 12 papers drawn from SMUC and other higher institutions were presented at the forum. The forum lasted for a day and papers addressing issues of various concern were presented and entertained by participants. Participants of the seminar were SMUC staff members, students and invited guests outside of SMUC. Participants of the forum indicated that they have had a fruitful discussion and gained invaluable experience■

The Second Annual Multi-disciplinary Seminar held

The 2nd Annual Multi-disciplinary Seminar, organized and sponsored by SMUC, was held at the University College Multi-purpose hall on the 26th of August 2010. The seminar brought scholars from various professions to discuss on issues of multidisciplinary aspects. The seminar was officially opened by Ato Wondwosen Tamrat, SMUC President. A total of 12 papers were presented on the seminar. SMUC faculty members took the center stage by presenting nine papers out of the total. The remaining three were presented by scholars outside of SMUC. Papers addressing issues related to Business, Law, Information Science, social issues and other cross-cutting themes were presented. More than 200 participants drawn from both SMUC faculty members & students as well as invited guests and interested scholars were in attendance. Participants of the seminar noted that the seminar achieved its goals■

Research Corner

Research Title: Quality of Academic Staff in Ethiopian Higher Education: Views of Students, Department Chairs and Deans of Faculties.

Research Type: Exploratory

Date of Publication: A Research paper presented in the 8th Annual National Research Conference on Private Higher Education Institutions organized and sponsored by St. Mary's University College, published in the proceedings of the eighth conference, September 2010.

Researchers: Dr Teshome Nekatibeb, from Addis Abeba University, Ethiopia.

The study attempts to explore the quality of academic teaching staff in Ethiopian higher education as perceived by students, department chairs and faculty deans. As a secondary objective, the study also intended to review factors that influence the quality of teachers in higher education institutions. A survey method which was based on quantitative methods of data collection was used. The sample included 11 public universities and 2 private higher education institutions. 576 students, 197 department chairs and 55 deans were asked to directly give opinions and views on different types of competencies or the qualities that teachers demonstrate in the course of their services. Moreover, deans and department chairs were asked to give their opinions of factors that affect the quality of teachers of higher education. This was done to imply possible explanations of the observed level of quality of academic staff.

The findings indicate that the quality of higher education teachers is not satisfactory. A variety of factors were identified that have influence on teachers' quality including low salaries and social acceptance, large class size and lack of teaching materials. Students, department chairs deans all agree that there is a lot to be desired from staff of higher education institutions. One of the biggest problems for deans and chairs has to do with conducting research while students said that diligence is a problem. Moreover, department chairs say that participation in income generation activities, providing support to other institutions, and providing assistance to students with special needs are some of the problems of higher education staff.

These findings imply that the quality of teachers needs to be improved as higher education institutions are expected to be centers of excellence for the production and distribution of new knowledge. One way to do this was identified that is improving factors that negatively affect teachers' capacities to accomplish their duties■

Forthcoming Event

Call for Abstracts

Association of African universities (AAU) on strengthening the space of higher education in Africa. The conference will be held in Stellenbosch, South Africa from May 30-June 3,2011 and will be hosted by the Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

For further Information: Visit <http://www.aau.org>■

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 issues of importance in the higher education sector. This edition presents interview with Dr. Welday Amha - a director of Association of Ethiopian Micro-finance Institutions.



Background

Dr Welday Amha is currently the Director of Association of Ethiopian Micro-finance Institutions (AEMFI) . Dr Welday Amha has a PhD in Agricultural Economics from Technical University of Berlin, Germany. He has served as a Lecturer and Assistant Professor at Hawassa College of Agriculture and Addis Ababa University. He has also worked as President and Vice president of the Ethiopian Economic Association for 10 years.

In this edition, we interviewed Dr Welday Amha about the role of professional associations in quality assurance. The Center would like to extend its gratitude to Dr.Welday Amha for sharing his opinion with us■

Quality Matters: *What do you think about Ethiopian higher education and its quality?*

Dr. Welday Amha: I like the fact that the higher education system in Ethiopia is expanding. I also believe that quality will be enhanced as the access to students is increasing. As the system expands, through time it will develop its own mechanism of quality assurance there by a good level of quality. During the Derg regime, it was difficult to open new programs let alone new universities. Back then the focus was on developing the existing one or two universities. A plan to open new programs was taken as a threat to the existing institutions and their programs. So I appreciate the new higher education expansion plan because it is providing a chance for many students to have access to higher education. In relation to this, the focus of the quality assurance system should be on developing and assuring the marketable skills of graduates. At the same time we should make sure that the system of quality assurance does not discourage initiatives to open new programs and institutions.

Quality Matters: *What do you think is the role and contribution of professional associations in higher education quality assurance?*

Dr Welday Amha: The aim of the quality ►►

assurance system should not be mainly controlling. It is difficult to apply standardized approaches in evaluating quality in higher education in a similar way as in a manufacturing industry. We should develop a holistic view of the overall components of 'input', process and output in a given quality assurance system. In addition, we should also give a great consideration to the quality of 'input' before it becomes part of higher education. A greater consideration should also be given to staff development.

This entails that pedagogical and other types of training should be given to the academic staff of HEIs. Moreover, in the selection process for academic staff members, we should look beyond the grades of the applicants.

I like the fact that the higher education system in Ethiopia is expanding. I also believe that quality will be enhanced as the access to students is increasing. As the system expands, through time it will develop its own mechanism of quality assurance thereby a good level of quality.

I also believe that professional associations in Ethiopia should take part in the external quality assurance process. However, in most of the professional associations' in Ethiopia only few committed people tend to assume the responsibility of the associations. Furthermore, the real problem lies in sustaining the professional associations in Ethiopia. This is mainly because of the difficulty in raising funds. In some cases, it is also difficult to raise funds even from the members also. Some years back, the Ethiopian Science and Technology Agency used to fund such kind of professional associations to a certain extent. We also lack strong research publication culture. In this case, it is difficult to have strong professional associations which can play strong role in the quality assurance process.

Thus, these associations should be strengthened in the future in order to enhance their role in the quality assurance system. All in all I believe that the potential to contribute to quality assurance by professional associations is there. I hope that the professional associations will engage themselves and work hand in hand with the quality assurance agency and higher education institutions to assure quality in the near future.

Quality Matters: *Tell us about the progress of the Ethiopian Economic Association?*

Dr. Welday Amha: The association was founded in the year 1992. It was located at Addis Abeba University at first. After a while we left the University and opened our own office.

In the initial stages, our association faced shortage of financial support. However, after a long way of commitment the association became one of the strongest professional associations in the country. Right now we organize conferences, publish journals and organize trainings to members and non-members. We also have collaborations with other universities in developed countries to organize programs which can be used as a bench mark for Economics departments (programs) in public and private HEIs in Ethiopia. In the case of quality assurance we are working towards the certification of the qualifications of economics graduates. I hope that the association will realize this plan in the near future.

Perspective

Quality Assurance in Ethiopian Higher Education

By : Essete Abebe

CEIQA

While the general concept of quality is difficult in itself, quality in higher education is much more complex, because it is not always clear what the product is and who the client is. As Van Vught (1994) argues "quality is a political, highly sensitive, multi-dimensional and subjective concept"(p.38). However, a given quality assurance system can develop its own definition of quality. For instance, the "fitness for purpose" approach has been accepted as a working definition in Ethiopia (Workshop Proceeding 2005, HERQA as cited in Tesfaye & Dawit, 2008, p.3). Likewise many quality assurance systems could develop a working definition for their respective systems.

Quality assurance in higher education is more complicated than quality assurance in industry or other sectors because there are so many players in the field. Basically the two common ways to evaluate quality in a given higher education system are 'internal' and 'external'. In the internal quality assurance process, faculties, departments, student bodies and other groups can be important. Many academics are reluctant to accept the external quality control pressures. However, in today's higher education environment the chance to have this type of autonomy is rare and the chances are that their activities are going to be evaluated by one of the two evaluation methods i.e. internal or external.

In Ethiopia, for the internal quality assurance system, the most commonly used information collection

tool is the student evaluation method or 'course experience questionnaire' (students measuring their instructors' performance) .This is done by circulating standardized evaluation questionnaires to students across all departments in a given system. There are also other initiatives to have internal quality audit structures in the public HEIs.

An external quality assurance system has been incorporated into the Ethiopian higher education system after 2003. Accordingly, new external quality assurance agency has been set up to undertake the external quality assurance process. Quality audit, accreditation and surprise visits to HEIs are some of the mechanisms used by the agency. Following this, a number of higher education institutions have set up quality assurance units but these are very much in their infancy and are just becoming functional (Tefaye & Kassahun, 2009). In a recent training offered by CEIQA staff members to representatives of TVET institutions in Lideta sub-city, on the procedures of quality audit, it was learnt that majority of participants held the view that the amount of budget allocation from government is the main factor to enhance the quality of the education sector. However, it is difficult to claim that more investment on higher education could necessarily enhance quality. Rather, what we should focus on is how we can use the available resources effectively to achieve the goals set by our institution or system. For this the quality assurance mechanisms should incorporate the views of all stakeholders in a given higher education system. ►►

The best approach to quality in higher education is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder has for judging quality and to take into consideration these different views when assessing quality (Green 1994, as cited in Iacovidou, Gibbs and Zopiatis, 2009, p.149). In this aspect, the various trainings HERQA gave to selected HEIs academic and administrative staff is to be appreciated. For instance, according to Tesfaye and Kassahun (2009) some of the pilot programs for internal quality audits that were introduced in two (one public and private) HEIs were presented in such type of meeting where the other participants could learn from the results. However, HEIs also should attempt to develop a mutual understanding about the concept of quality among their academic and administrative staff members. All members of the institution should believe that quality assurance is beneficial to the well being of the institution and the overall higher education system. In a study conducted by HERQA among public HEIs in Ethiopia, it was learnt that majority of the public HEIs do not have: written policy on quality assurance, quality assurance office and a comprehensive and robust system for quality assurance (Tesfaye and Kassahun, 2009). Hence, the current quality assurance structure should be sustained in order to build a strong quality assurance culture in Ethiopian higher Education.

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An Example of the contribution of professional associations in quality assurance

Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), USA

(Source: <http://www.abet.org/gov.shtml>)

Engineer's Council for Professional Development (ECPD), established in June 1932 was an engineering professional body dedicated to the education, accreditation, regulation and professional development of the engineering professionals and students in the United States.

In 1980, ECPD was renamed the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) to more accurately describe its emphasis on accreditation. In response to the anticipated boom in computer science education, ABET helped establish the Computing Sciences Accreditation Board (now called CSAB) in 1985. CSAB is now one of ABET's largest member societies with more than 300 accredited programs. In 2005, ABET formally changed its name to ABET, Inc.

ABET is a federation of 30 member professional and technical societies (29 members and one associate member). Most member societies have curricular responsibilities — they recruit, select, mentor, and assist in training qualified Program Evaluators who, along with Team Chairs, comprise the teams assigned to accreditation visits.

In 1936, ECPD evaluated its first engineering degree programs. Ten years later, the council began evaluating engineering technology degree programs. By 1947, ECPD had accredited 580 undergraduate engineering programs at 133 institutions.

Producing guidance and training publications was a large part of ECPD operations. The council produced dozens of books, pamphlets, brochures, and even a couple of movies.

ABET's international activities began in 1979 when ECPD signed its first Mutual Recognition Agreement with the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board. By 1989, ABET was a consultant to both fledgling and established international accreditation boards, a substantial equivalence evaluator of international programs, and a founding member of the multinational Washington Accord.

Currently, ABET accredits over 3,100 programs at more than 600 colleges and universities worldwide. Each year, over 2,000 volunteers from 29 member societies contribute to ABET's goals of leadership and quality assurance in applied science, computing,

engineering, and technology education, serving as program evaluators, committee and council members, commissioners, and Board representatives.

ABET has been recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) since 1997. In 1997, following nearly a decade of development, ABET adopted Engineering Criteria 2000 (EC2000), considered at the time a revolutionary approach to accreditation criteria. EC2000 focused on what is learned rather than what is taught. At its core was the call for a continuous improvement process informed by the specific mission and goals of individual institutions and programs. Lacking the inflexibility of earlier accreditation criteria, EC2000 meant that ABET could enable program innovation rather than stifling it, as well as encourage new assessment processes and subsequent program improvement.

Today, the spirit of EC2000 can be found in the evaluation criteria of all ABET disciplines, and studies like Penn State's Engineering Change prove those criteria are having an impact on accredited programs. ABET encourages the EC2000 perspective with other accreditation boards and degree programs, promoting global education and worker mobility through agreements like the Washington Accord ■

Fun Corner

An economics professor at school had a strict policy that the hourly examinations were to be completed at the bell and anyone who kept writing on their exam after the bell would take a zero on the exam. Well, one guy kept writing on his exam for a while after the bell and then confidently strode up to turn it in.

The professor looked at him and said, "Don't bother to hand that paper in... you get a zero for continuing after the bell."

The guy looked at him and said, "Professor, do you know who I am!"

The professor replied, "No, and I don't care if your dad is President of the United States...you get a zero on this exam"

The guy, with a enraged look on his face, shouted, "You mean you have no idea who I am?"

The professor responded, "No, I've no idea who you think you are."

With that, the guy said "Good!" plunged his exam into the middle of the stack of other students' exams, and did a hasty retreat from the examination room■

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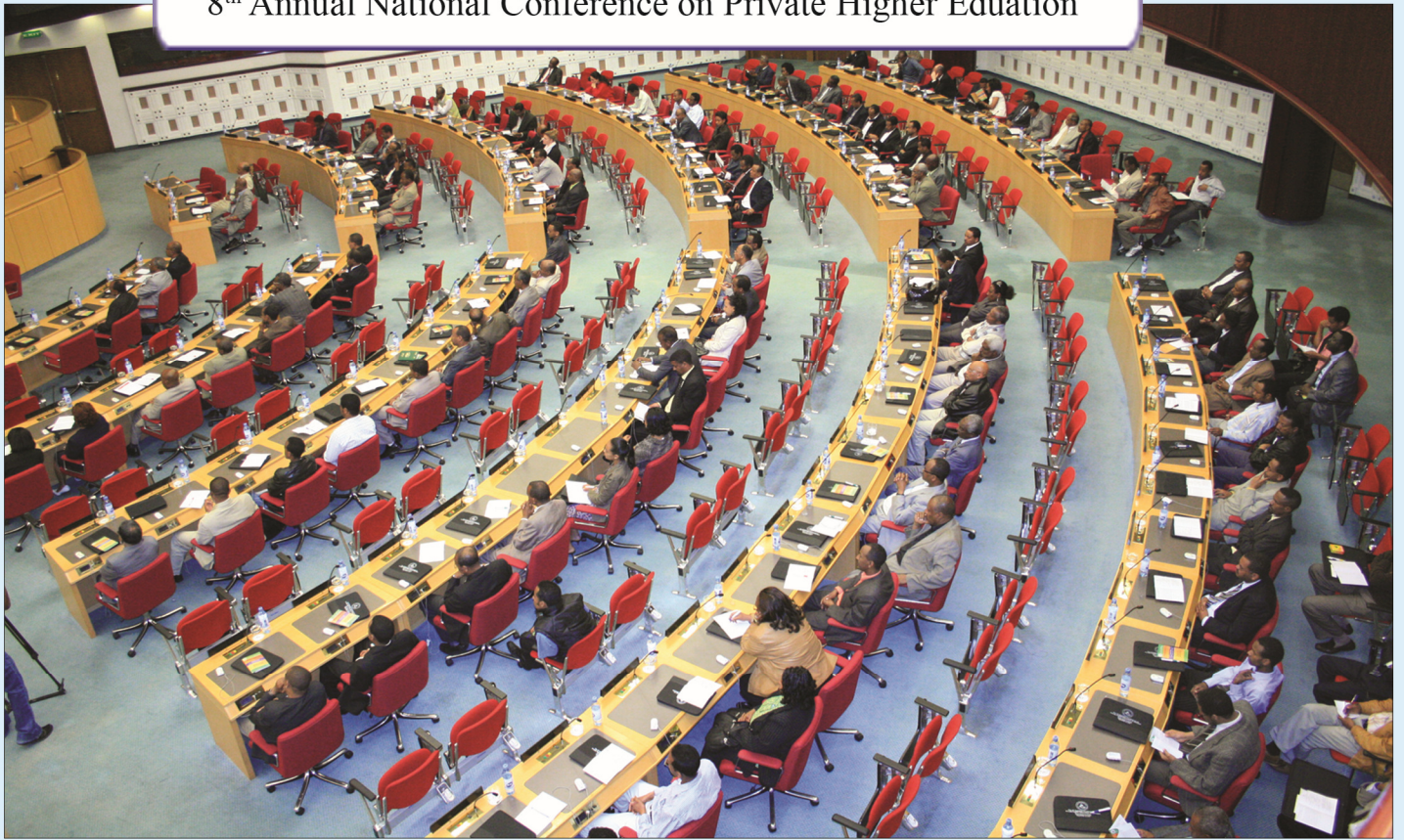
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If you have comments on this issue of the newsletter or would like to contribute to future issues, please contact our office on 011 553 79 99 Ext 145 Or email: ceirqa@smuc.edu.et

Photo Gallery

8th Annual National Conference on Private Higher Education



St. Mary's University College

Vision and Mission

Vision

The Vision of St. Mary's University College is to become among the leading higher education centers of academic excellence in teaching-learning, research, publications and community services in East-Africa and contribute to the development of Ethiopia.

Mission

The Mission of St. Mary's University College is to offer conventional and distance education that is accessible to the larger society through reasonable tuition focusing on quality and standards in teaching, research and outreach services.