

Mediocre teaching a problem

Committee ineffective

by Pat Sytnick

The university's Committee for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning (CITL) plays a useful role, but doesn't adequately answer the problem of mediocre teaching, says the U of A's Dr. Leon Craig.

If we really want to improve the quality of education in the university we must direct our efforts at the "deeper structural problem," he said.

Craig was referring to the reward system — including salary incentives and promotions in modern universities which encourages professors to be more concerned with publication than teaching.

CITL was established more than 16 years ago to assist professors interested in improving their teaching. According to committee coordinator Bente Road Cochrane, the committee provides professional development opportunities for academic staff and operates three programs.

Each fall it runs an "orientation to teaching" workshop for graduate teaching assistants, and throughout the year it offers special sessions on various aspects of teaching.

As well, it runs a peer consultation service where professors are paired with a colleague so they can evaluate and improve their teaching.

Craig said CITL is needed because "we should offer every possible resource to people who are interested in improving their teaching." But he stresses the committee is not directed at and cannot counteract the stronger structural pressures that contribute to the deterioration of teaching.

The quality of teaching and consequently education has declined because academic staff quickly realize the kind of scholarship that goes into teaching doesn't pay off as well as the kind directed at pub-

lishing, said Craig. The problem is not that professors don't want to be good teachers, but rather that most can't afford the time.

Craig believes the modern university structure favors publication over teaching because, "if you want to become an internationally recognized authority it's always got to be through publication. Good teaching can only enhance your local reputation."

Dr. Amie Zelmer, associate VP Academic at the U of A, does not agree this necessarily discourages good teaching. According to her, it's important to note there are a number of academics who choose to concentrate on teaching rather than publication since "for them a good local reputation is just fine."

ASA elections stand

by Suzette C. Chan

A woman who was active in an attempt to impeach members of the student union executive earlier this year made a failed bid to overturn the Arts Students Association elections at a meeting on Wednesday.

Lorraine Mitchell said she was shocked to learn that some individuals who ran and lost in the council race ran concurrently for executive positions and won by acclamation.

Although running in both races is constitutional under ASA rules, Mitchell finds the practice "hypocritical".

She feels that since "Arts students rejected those people as candidates," they should resign as executive members.

ASA executives that would be affected by such action are services co-ordinator Scott Day, social convenor Rod Boyle and secretary

But she did acknowledge the difficult situation professors are in when they are expected to achieve at high levels in both areas.

Craig was careful not to single out the U of A and said instead, the problem affects the entire modern university system. Because we are part of this system "to a considerable extent we alone cannot solve the problem" he said.

However, he did think there were several ways we could improve the situation and mentioned two:

"We should begin by making a commitment to qualitatively assess both research and teaching," he said, "and we must continually ensure that teaching and research are given equal support."

Brenda McDonald. McDonald is the only one of the three who ran successfully for students' council.

Mitchell suggested the ASA call another election or have a yes/no ratification vote, but the approximately 40 people at the ASA meeting agreed it was too late and would take too much time to do so.

"We agreed it was too late in the year and that we should start talking about the issues (facing arts students)."

Some points on the ASA agenda are plans for next year are how to increase student participation. There was also a suggestion to establish an Arts Action Committee to look into ways to raise funds for the association.

The next ASA meeting is scheduled for 12 noon, April 1 in room 219 of the Humanities Centre. All arts students are welcome.



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