

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, MONA CAMPUS, UWI

PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Our Commitment

The Faculty of Social Sciences identifies “excellence in teaching” as a key element of the UWI mission. The FSS is committed to facilitating its students and supporting its staff in line with the UWI’s aim to produce a distinctive graduate (as the desired outcome of the teaching and learning process) with the set of attributes outlined in the 2012-2017 Strategic Plan and set out below¹. In seeking to achieve its goals the FSS recognises the importance of monitoring and evaluating processes as the basis for on-going improvements in teaching and learning within the Faculty.

- Critical and creative thinker
- Effective communicator
- Good interpersonal skills
- IT skilled and information literate
- Innovative and entrepreneurial
- Globally aware and grounded in his/her regional identity
- Socially, culturally and environmentally responsible
- Guided by strong ethical values; with special emphasis placed on:
 - Leadership
 - Goal setting and
 - Ability to significantly contribute to new knowledge in the case of graduate students.

The FSS strives to create an environment, which fosters self-reflective teaching and learning in which its staff members are committed to linking teaching with research, participating in the scholarship of teaching, and adopting innovative methods that meet the full range of learning needs of a diverse student body. Teaching and learning is seen as a shared responsibility between students and teachers, which is enhanced by the full integration of and cooperation between all those involved as instructors within a collegial atmosphere that achieves an appropriate balance between the role of the individual instructor and that of the department, faculty and wider University community including the specialized units such as the Instructional Development Unit, Students Services and Development, AQAC, the Deputy Principals Office and OBUS. The FSS is firm in its view that students must show a readiness and openness to learn, be active in the teaching and learning process, and take part in the assessment of the learning process.

The FSS sees itself as an integrated learning community which values both disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies and encourages students to take advantage of the insights and skills that can be gained from a range disciplines, including those outside of the faculty, and from an active participation in co-curricular activities, internships and other enrichment opportunities.

The Enablers

The implementation of this philosophy is dependent on a shared vision, adequate infrastructure, appropriate workload allocations and suitable requirements of and opportunities for instructional skills development, as well as a comprehensive set of administrative and academic support for staff and students. An effective recruitment process for instructors and students must be in place along with schemes for the professional development of staff; and students must be able to access effective counselling, academic advising and remedial services as needed. All instructors including part timers require adequate orientation and Heads of Departments must provide clear directions regarding teaching expectations to new recruits; monitor their progress and afford them mentoring opportunities where appropriate. Students have different learning styles and strengths to which we must cater. We must identify students with special needs (e.g. social, learning and psychological) and pay attention to those

¹ See UWI strategic Plan 2012-2017, p. 31 (UWI Mission) and p. 34 (Attributes of the Distinctive UWI Graduate). An appendix is to be prepared illustrating the educational philosophies that link to these attributes

who are doing poorly as well as those who are doing exceptionally well so that all groups may be supported to achieve their true potential.²

Quality Assurance

An integral element in the promotion of teaching and learning excellence in the FSS involves seeking to make the best use of the UWI quality assurance activities. Quality is maintained by continuous review of teaching and learning strategies, programmes and courses – based on feedback, including that from institutional research; student assessments; peer reviews; external examiners' reports; departmental self-studies; analyses of international best practices and surveys of employers and graduates. Monitoring mechanisms, utilizing a user friendly format, have been designed to track the implementation of recommendations arising from quality assurance reviews along with any alternative approaches designed by the departments in response to reviews.³

Teaching in Academic Staff Evaluation and Promotion

Teaching performance is an essential domain within which to evaluate academics. No matter the excellence in the other domains (1] research, publications and scholarship and 2] contribution to University life, public service and professional activities) promotion must depend on meeting an agreed standard of quality in teaching. Colleagues are expected to draft their own teaching philosophies and an assessment of teaching checklist is being developed to aid evaluation.⁴

Assessment of and for learning

There must be a clear link between learning outcomes, stated in course outlines, and assessments which should be both “of learning” and “for learning”. The former evaluate the degree to which students have learnt and are the basis for final grades. The latter allow for feedback to benefit instructors and students as they seek to assess the extent of learning and adjust instructional and study strategies. In both roles, assessments are pivotal in teaching and learning and therefore require the attention of departments and the Faculty, which must ensure that instructors have the appropriate competencies and that responsibilities are shared in a collegial manner.

Assessments must be aligned within the context of programmes to ensure that those higher order skills associated with the attributes of the distinctive UWI graduate are tested utilizing a wide range of methods, within a system which preserves an incontestable reputation of probity and sanctions dishonesty.⁵ Cross cutting curriculum strategies such as communicating across the curriculum are valued and every effort is made to foster the students' sense of enquiry, encourage their intellectual curiosity and promote autonomy, while directing them towards closer involvement with the evaluation of their learning, and that of their peers.

Conclusion

We have a professional and civic responsibility to our Caribbean people to ensure that future leaders are equipped with tools necessary to secure the sustainable development of our region. To fulfil this responsibility, we must do all in our power to ensure that while pursuing their degrees within the Faculty, our students acquire the attributes of the distinctive UWI graduate, which will equip them to play their role as future leaders within (and beyond) the region.

² This can be seen in the application of a policy on disabilities and the newly proposed Special Honours Degree.

³ See relevant OBUS Quality Assurance documentation. FSS constantly seeks more effective assessments of teaching and learning outcomes (see for example, FSS Enhancing Student Learning Committee's Draft Peer-review document and the format for tracking the implementation of recommendations arising from Quality Reviews).

⁴ See FSS(M)P. 18¹ Promotion and Evaluation Standards Academic Staff

⁵ Reference can be made to the literature on Bloom and subsequent taxonomies of learning domains.