

# Teaching Learning Institute

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The Teaching and Learning Institute is dedicated to fostering a learning-centered culture at Central Florida Community College.



## Directions

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**Vision Statement:** Energetic, purposeful, creative, Central Florida Community College promotes learning in an open, caring, inclusive environment which encourages individual an community development, inspired by shared values of integrity, service, responsibility and dignity.

## The Community College as Servant

by Dr. Charles Dassance, President

For some reason, perhaps a mid-life crisis, I feel compelled to write a few lines for Directions. I will probably be cured soon, but for now I want to share a couple of things.

Next year will be the 100th anniversary of the public community college in America. The concept of the community college is America's contribution to education in the world, as it was truly a unique idea. There are many things embedded in the community college concept, including a philosophical underpinning of democratic and humanitarian values. But, I think what sets the community college apart from other institutions is its strong commitment to serving others, most especially students.

The university, as a concept, came from a very different tradition than the community college: the German research university. This model, with its focus on research, has served our nation well. The university role emphasizes expanding knowledge within the various disciplines, an admirable and necessary endeavor.

The community college, on the other hand, has focused on serving society in a different way. The community college has focused on consistently improving the teaching/learning process itself. In short, the community college has focused on serving students by helping them learn.

The generation of new knowledge, an important role for faculty, particularly at the university, is not necessarily a smooth and linear process. "Experimentation," whether in scientific or other disciplines, leads to a constant reassessment of existing assumptions and theories. We think it quite natural that theories which are tested will often be changed as a result of the results.

At the community college, we also have an important task, but the experimentation process has a different focus. In our case, we are not changing abstract theories through our experimentation, but

theories about the learning process itself. It takes courage to challenge our long held assumptions and beliefs about how students learn best, but such courage is part of the tradition of the role of educator.

At CFCC, there seems to be a strong cultural commitment to making student learning our primary focus. Many faculty are willing to experiment with new student learning techniques and, depending on the results, adjust their thinking about what teaching approaches are most effective. Of course, not every new approach works better, and some "fads" pass away, much like what happens with other types of research efforts.

I believe that the important thing is the journey, not the destination. Our journey, collectively and individually should be dedicated to the continuing exploration of how we can serve our students better—how we can help them learn in ways we can observe, in ways that will enrich their lives. To do otherwise is to betray our responsibility as educators; to do otherwise is to assume that we already have all the answers. And while having all the answers may have some appeal, it would really be quite boring. Our journey of on-going discovery, even though frustrating and even painful at times, is a journey that is fulfilling and meaningful for our professional as well as our personal lives.

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