VICE CHANCELLOR'S TALKING POINTS AT THE STUDENT PORTIFOLIO PRESENTATION AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2010, DAVIS LECTURE THEATER

BACKGROUND

Makerere University has made a strategic decision to implement student centered education. This decision has implications on curriculum design, choice of content, learning strategies, the learning context and environment, monitoring and assessment of learning and on governance. The move to student centered learning will also require a change in the teachers` conceptions of teaching and professional identity.

The Role of Assessment

Student centered education is focused on learning other than teaching and as such monitoring students` progress towards stated learning objectives is a key issue. To effectively do this, learning should be individualised and made as flexible as possible in order to accommodate the various student backgrounds and characteristics (Individual learning styles). Different assessment strategies and tools other than the traditional tests and exams need to be used to monitor student learning.

The Role of the Portfolio

The Portfolio has developed from a briefcase showcasing the work of an artist, designer or architect to an internationally acclaimed instrument for learning. Its now used to promote reflective learning, self-directed learning, and development of professional conduct. The portfolio is also the instrument of choice for formative assessment. It provides opportunities for mentoring, coaching and giving immediate feedback to learners.

The portfolio has also been used to develop a different relationship between the teacher and the learner, one in which the student is given voice, is guided and provided with immediate and constructive feedback.

The Role of Tutorials

This is where the learner is challenged by a learning problem, case or scenario to think, brainstorm, develop concepts and reflect. The learner's prior knowledge is activated; they are forced to recognize what they know and what they don't culminating in definition of their learning objectives. The learner then proceeds into self-directed search for information to fill the knowledge gaps.

Small group tutorials have been used to give voice to students, cultivate a cordial relationship between teachers and students, one in which the former act as facilitators, coaches and collaborators in learning.

In the move from teacher to student centered learning therefore both the students and staff need to fully understand the tutorial process, the roles of the students and teachers

during the tutorial and how to use the tutorial motivate learning, and develop attributes like leadership, time management, team work, transparency and professionalism.

Student centered learning is based on a constructivist theory of learning, under which learning is viewed as active, collaborative, self-directed and contextual. This has implications for curriculum design and implementation. Furthermore both the teachers and students should fully understand these principles so as to uphold them at all times.

The Learning Environment
One of the key elements for successful student centered education is a learning environment that is open, dynamic, trusting, respectful, and promoting the natural desire and curiosity to learn.

The context of learning should promote knowledge construction, integration of theory and practice as well as provide experiences which both challenge and inform the students` prior knowledge, values and belief systems so as to foster personal and professional development.

Context can be created through learning problems, scenarios, and simulations, but more profoundly the context should be real life through service-learning, and community/industrial attachments or internships.

Conclusion
There are three strategic advantages in Makerere which we need to strengthen and use profitably to ensure our continued role as the premier institution of higher learning in the region. First is the decision to adopt student centered learning this needs to be actualized and institutionalized. Second is the existing practice of field attachments, these need to be strengthened and rolled out. Finally we now have the opportunity to the first institution to use the portfolio to promote learning.