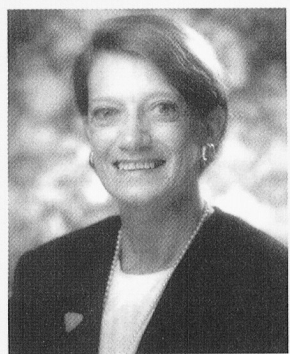


## Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness

THERE IS NO QUESTION *that there has been renewed attention to teaching and teacher effectiveness. Yet, many academic institutions have failed to move beyond review of individual student course evaluations as evidence of the teacher's ability and skills in teaching. We evaluate our students' positive and negative responses and make decisions about the future careers of individual faculty members. My experience is that these evaluations often reveal only the exceptionally bad teacher, rather than the teacher who is mediocre, unchallenging, or even uninteresting.*




**Teaching is an art. Consequently, it should be judged as other art forms are — for the passion and beauty of the performance and the meaningfulness of the message conveyed.**

So, questions remain about how to best evaluate teaching effectiveness. Should nurse faculty be measured on the percentage of students who pass the NCLEX exams? The percentage of students who pursue additional education? Or the percentage of students who publish in professional journals? Or, from a negative perspective, should the faculty member be evaluated as less than adequate if students do not succeed in nursing?

In a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article titled "What Makes a Teacher Great?" (December 12, 2003), it was reported that even "Professors of the Year" had a hard time explaining how they do what they do well. While many teachers can describe their philosophy of teaching, and even more can outline the techniques they use and the skills that are required to accomplish their teaching tasks, it is not easy for even good teachers to describe what makes a teacher great. When in doubt, we often gravitate toward quantification and unidimensional aspects of evaluation, such as student course evaluations.

Teaching is an art. Consequently, it should be judged as other art forms are — for the passion and beauty of the performance and the meaningfulness of the message conveyed. Only occasionally do we judge art by its effect on and effectiveness with the viewers, the public. In fact, many great works of art go unnoticed by the masses, until they are brought to our attention by someone who is knowledgeable about that particular art form.

Many great teachers describe their teaching talents in performance terms. They not only want their students to do well in quantifiable areas that reflect their learning, but they also want to engage their students in the learning process. These expert teachers want to connect with their students in order to help them learn and transform their lives, personally and professionally. They want their new students, uninitiated caregivers who know nothing about nursing and health care, to become accomplished professionals — nurses who are comfortable enough with the basic skills that they can provide safe and competent care — individuals who care deeply about the health and welfare of patients, and their families, and the world.

It is important that we continue to develop better and more comprehensive measures of teaching effectiveness. Yet, it is equally important that we recognize that we may never truly be able to measure the art of teaching in conventional ways. Perhaps it is only through the stories of our students that we can best document teaching as an art form, for they are the performance medium for our works of art. 

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Fitzpatrick".