

Faculty Spotlight: Sheila Barrett

In her 36 years at Campion, Sheila Barrett has helped literally thousands of students either as a teacher or in her role as Dean of Discipline, and now as Dean of Studies. Many who used to quake in their shoes after a “talk” with her, now attribute their success to her stewardship and have become her good friends as they moved into adulthood.

Miss Barrett joined Campion in 1974 to teach History to 3rd to 5th form and Economics to 6th Form. Following the merger of Sts Peter & Paul High and Campion in 1976, she was made Assistant Dean of Discipline and Head of the History Department and, soon after, was promoted to Dean of Discipline. With the opening of the new 6th Form Building in the '90s, Miss Barrett assumed leadership of the 6th Form Program and the Business Department and continued to teach Economics. Then, in 2000, she gave up her teaching responsibilities when she was appointed Vice Principal and Dean of Studies, a post she continues to hold today.

Unfortunately, Miss Barrett currently suffers from renal failure due to hypertension. Although she goes for dialysis twice per week, this certainly doesn't slow her down and Campion's academic results continue to improve every year under her oversight. Recently, Miss Barrett reflected on the success of Campion in a system beset by challenges.

I think there are many factors that account for the success of Campion, but one of the major ones has been that the school has been blessed in having a cadre of excellent teachers who have given many years of dedicated service—two of our teachers, who recently retired, gave over 40 years each! These teachers have blazed a path and established a culture of excellence that influences those who come after. The school has also had excellent principals who have proven to be superb administrators. They showed vision in instituting many changes over the years to make the school relevant and meet the needs of changing generations of students. From very early, Campion recognized the importance of using data to chart the way forward and so each department is required to analyse both their internal and external results to identify areas of weakness and strengths and to develop strategies to deal with any weaknesses perceived. This process is also supervised by a Dean of Studies who gives general oversight to the educational programme at Campion.

Another important facet of our programme is the consultation sessions after school that our teachers provide to their students. Our teachers are, of course, also motivated by the fact that they have good material to work with and are committed to helping them succeed throughout their high school experience.

Looking to the Future

Campion's pass rate in the external examinations has been superb both at the CSEC and CAPE levels. The focus, therefore, has been to improve the spread of the grades and this has met with great success especially at the CSEC level where in 2009 the number of students getting one's increased between 11-20%. My challenge now is to see the same movement in the CAPE examinations.

We have also been expanding our curriculum with the addition of new subjects at both the CSEC level (Economics and Additional Mathematics) and CAPE level (Law and Geometrical and Mechanical Engineering Drawing) but space is proving to be a problem.

With the changing demographics of the student population and fewer students having the required resources to access information, it is imperative that Campion realizes its dream of a library media centre and invests in other facilities and resources that will support the teaching and learning process. This, combined with a strong scholarship programme, will ensure that our most vulnerable students have the same chances as any other student at success.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the future though is for the school to be able to replace those of our teachers who are now reaching the age of retirement with others who are as capable and committed to their profession, in a time when the brightest and best are no longer attracted to the teaching profession.

This is an exciting time to be a teacher, though, and I am excited about the technological changes which makes it so much easier for students to learn and access information.

Fondest Memory

Many years ago I was challenged by a student about an issue in history. The point was debatable it led to an exciting and lively debate. It brought to life my belief that education is not something that you simply receive, but that I should be able to learn from my students, and they from me.

Exceptional Students

A few stand out—David Brown (Class of 1980) was never afraid to express his opinions and even challenge me; Douglas Robinson (Class of 1999) the only student to whom I gave an Economics essay and in return received a Mathematical solution as the answer; and Jodi Black (Class of 2002) a very astute and brilliant student who came fourth in the world in Advanced Level Economics.

Advice to Parents

Parents need to be involved in their child's daily education, monitoring them to ensure that they do their work and keeping in touch with teachers. It is the child whose parents are involved in their education, who are the ones excelling at school.

Advice to Teachers

Know your subject matter well and be passionate about your subject. Try to be creative and innovative in class, always remembering that students do not all learn in the same way. Allow your students to actively participate in the lesson and always encourage discussion and questions.

My Treasures

I treasure each of the letters or cards that my students have sent me and I have kept them all until this day. Recently, a student visited me and he said something that I will never forget: "you were the only teacher who believed in me."

Finally, surprise us...

My students would be surprised to learn that I am a fun loving person at heart who loves music and to dance and can be found at every major show where "good" music is played.