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The Scholarship of Application: The Interaction of Theory and Practice

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RESearch is heavily weighted for promotion and tenure in many institutions. Full-time tenure-track positions provide junior faculty with the opportunity and resources to do research and publish (Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993). Scholarship in today's academic environment has increasingly come to mean research and publishing (Boyer, 1990; Boyer Commission, 1997). The effective evaluation of teaching is problematic, at best, so teaching does not have the impact on tenure and promotions that research has (Boyer, 1990; Boyer Commission, 1997; Menges & Exum, 1983).

The application of knowledge, commonly termed service, is the third chord of the scholarly triad. Service is "transforming what we know as a discipline into functionally tools that can affect and resolve societal problems" (Chesebro, 1996, p. 2). The founding principle of The University of Chicago, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and most land-grant colleges, was to serve the concerns of the community at large (Boyer, 1990). On most campuses, the scholarship of application is categorized as a form of service because most tenure and promotion guidelines do not reflect Boyer's four forms of scholarship. Although the guidelines suggest that each form of scholarship is given equal consideration and weight in tenure and promotion decisions, service is rarely accorded the same status as teaching and research (Boyer, 1990). Consequently, scholars who succeed only in service often fail to build successful tenure and promotion cases.

Application stretches beyond committee work and community projects; it integrates theory and practice (Boyer, 1990). Consulting, writing a textbook, translating a book, preparing and delivering a training module, facilitating community forums/meetings, and conducting implementation research for public and private organizations are ways that faculty apply scholarship outside the academic framework. The practical application of theory enables scholars to respond positively to the needs of the community in which they live. The preparation of community projects amounts to a considerable outlay of time, time spent sharing accumulated knowledge and experiences to impact the problems of society (Boyer, 1990; Chesebro, 1996). Serving as consultants, faculty members can use their teaching expertise and research findings to affect the community in which they live.

Because all communication scholars possess an understanding of a knowledge base that embraces concepts crucial to the formation of communities, they can help colleges and universities improve undergraduate as well as graduate education. By applying this knowledge and thereby nurturing the growth of on-campus and off-campus communities, they can also help institutions respond to the needs of their public constituencies.

By using consultants, organizations can secure assistance from highly qualified individuals as needed (Pilon, 1991). Academic consultants could also develop new knowledge, which would constitute the scholarship of discovery, thereby strengthening the concept that theory and practice are integrated (Boyer, 1990). By serving as consultants, communication faculty have the opportunity to practice, apply, and demonstrate the theories and concepts they teach in the classroom. Organizations, health care providers, public agencies, etc., can all benefit from the services of an academic consultant. Two case studies that demonstrate this beneficial role follow.

CASE EXAMPLES

A Need for Change

In 1997, a large government agency in a mid-eastern city was anticipating massive change as a result of both state and federal Welfare Reform legislation. Change and team training for program staff was determined to be the appropriate course of action. A training contract was entered into with the School of Social Work and the School of Communication at the local university to provide such training.

Under the direction of a Project Manager, the faculty of the School of Communication provided extensive training for the service delivery staff of the agency. Professional quality videotapes were produced for future use. All members of the Communication Department participated based on their individual expertise in content, production, or training. The contracted funds paid to the School of Communication were used to purchase new computers for the department, thus resulting in a benefit to all members of the school, not to just one's individual income.

This example of service provided this particular communication faculty the opportunity to integrate theory with practice for the positive benefit of the community in which they lived. Therefore, it supports Boyer's (1990) contention that community consulting impacts societal problems through a sharing of experience and accumulated knowledge.

Voices from Northern Indiana

Since the early 1980s, listening sessions have conveyed the realities of rural life (Higgins, 1996; Schafer, 1994). Organized by farm women in northern Indiana and The Rural Life Conference of the Roman Catholic Church, listening sessions have restored the connections between local people and local places. The sessions invite rural and urban residents who live in the same geographic communities to attend and participate. A moderator encourages all participants to tell their own stories when answering the question and charges everyone with the responsibility of listening to all of the narrative accounts before engaging in any discussion. The sessions employ grassroots narratives because they require that all participants provide first-person replies to a question about a farm-related issue, such as "How does the loss of family farms affect the local environment?"

As a form of bottom-up communication, grassroots narratives counters the effects of top-down communication programs that ignores the realities experienced by local people in local places. Grassroots narratives, like participatory communication programs, were "a set of exchanges comprising a collective 'word' for naming people's realities—a word that by naming a defined and fragmented reality make it visible, identifiable, and meaningful" (Riano, p. 23).

The first of the listening sessions in northern Indiana was held in Donaldson in 1982 during the height of the Farm Crisis (Higgins, 1995, 1996). In addition to local farmers and media representatives, the participants included area business owners, farm leaders, and local bankers who had insisted that the Farm Crisis was not affecting Indiana farmers. After listening to local farmers tell their stories during the session, everyone agreed that farmers in northern Indiana were enduring the same financial stresses as farmers in other parts of the country. By the end of the session, although all of the participants acknowledged that farmers were in crisis, they could not agree on a means of alleviating their distress.

After the listening session, participants continued to share their stories and form their own communication spaces. The participants formed "break-out" or small discussion groups to suggest solutions to the problems Indiana farmers were facing. One of those suggestions, resulted in the formation of the Northern Indiana Farm Task Force (NIFTF). About 30 residents from Marshall and surrounding counties agreed that the best way to help local farmers was through a task force dedicated to the preservation of the family-farm or owner-operator system of agriculture. Through a process of collaborative communication, NIFTF members developed programs to support farmers during the crisis. Between 1982 and 1985, the group hosted monthly educational programs on topics suggested by area farmers, such as record keeping for loan applications. The programs, which were free and open to all area farmers, were well attended. By attending court hearings, NIFTF also engaged in grassroots advocacy efforts for area farmers who faced bankruptcy.

After the Farm Crisis, non-farmers were attracted to NIFTF's monthly meetings. Programs, which often included a listening session, began to focus on topics of mutual interest to rural and urban residents, such as environmental quality or food safety. The meetings emphasized interpersonal communication and the local, current concerns that farmers and city dwellers shared. They have helped rural and urban residents recognize that they are members of one community.

This example does more than offer guidelines for building diverse communities. It reflects the ability of communication scholars to engage in a scholarship of application by serving as listening session facilitators. This work fosters mutual human understanding, prizes the application of knowledge, promotes the work of generalists, and localizes scholarship.

The scholarship of application provides a yield on the investment of faith and finances the members of the public at large place in academic institutions. As Wartella (1993, May) noted, they represent "the public least well served by our work" (p. 3). Communication scholars can remedy that neglect by employing grassroots narratives to build diverse communities in campus and off-campus settings.

STANDARDS OF SCHOLARSHIP

To assure the merits of consulting as a sanctioned form of scholarship, a set of criteria/standards must be developed to evaluate application effectiveness (Glassick, Huber & Maeroff, 1997). Across disciplines, a set of six qualitative standards is used to assess scholarship: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique (Glassick et al., 1997). Academicians accept the applicability of these criteria to "provide a powerful conceptual framework to guide evaluation" (Glassick et al., p. 25).

Before academic consultants can prepare and participate in projects, they must clearly define their objectives. Knowing what questions to ask will help guide a project to its logical end. Clear goals will help give a project structure, help the consultant identify necessary materials, and help to clarify participant expectations (Glassick et al., 1997).

Knowing where a project is going means the academic consultant has set realistic and achievable goals.

Adequate preparation for a project goes beyond being ready to present material on a particular day; the consultant's depth of knowledge and understanding of the content is also vital. The consultant should possess current knowledge in the field, demonstrate a mastery of necessary skills, and be able to acquire the resources needed to complete the project (Glassick et al., 1997). Lack of materials, poor skills, and an outdated knowledge base can result in the failure of a project. In preparing for a project, the academic consultant needs to consider the most appropriate methods to reach the identified goals. The procedures selected should be academically recognized, provide flexibility, and be theoretically sound. The choice of inappropriate methods could lead to the loss of project integrity and a lack of confidence in the results (Glassick et al., 1997).

In determining the effectiveness of a project, one considers its results. Was new knowledge identified, learning stimulated, or, in the case of a community project, a problem solved? The answer to these questions not only impacts project effectiveness but also goal attainment. Significant results indicate the success of the goal-setting process (Glassick et al., 1997). Additionally, the appropriate presentation style enhances the clarity and comprehension of the message. Ineffective presentations can lead to poor project outcomes and an inability to generalize results.

Finally, constructive reflective critique encourages thoughtful evaluation and fosters improved scholarship (Glassick et al., 1997). The appraisal process is ongoing and allows the academic consultant the opportunity to continually evaluate projects. "Careful evaluation and constructive criticism enrich scholarly work by enabling old projects to inform new ones" (Glassick et al., 1997, p. 35). Appropriate and ongoing evaluation provides the scholar with the tools to improve future projects. The use of these accepted standards should help to legitimize consulting as an acceptable form of scholarship.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION

The efforts of communication scholars who participate in projects similar to those described in this paper, though, are often overlooked by tenure, promotion, and merit review committees. Their efforts represent service, the forgotten dimension of excellence in scholarship. Before they can ably serve their public constituents and fully claim a vital role in reinventing undergraduate education, communication scholars must devise a means of redistributing the wealth of current faculty reward systems. Encouraging communication faculty to work in the community as consultants helps (a) to enhance the relationship between discovery, teaching, and application, and (b) to engage community support for the university. It is time for the academy to recognize the interaction of the functions of the professoriate and apply the appropriate weight to each in the granting of tenure and promotions.

However, caution should be taken to balance the various forms of service properly. Writing a book chapter, serving on committees, and consulting are all viable service activities and tenure considerations should include a variety of these functions, not just one. Care should also be taken not to overindulge in the service component. Too much time spent on service activities takes away from teaching and research. Undergraduate students often seek out a certain institution because of the quality of its tenured faculty (Boyer Commission, 1997). Time spent involved in a service component is time spent away from the classroom, thereby adversely impacting student learning. For example, consulting should result in innovative teaching styles and unique research opportunities; however, if faculty members neglect these other activities their teaching could stagnate and their research wane (Glassick et al., 1997). Lastly, if academicians are paid for their service

functions, should these activities also be considered scholarship? By definition, service implies a selfless altruistic act. Therefore, payment derived from the service activities of faculty should be made to the university/college to benefit the appropriate department. Compensation to an individual professor for performing various service functions might be considered “work for hire” or “double-dipping” and is inappropriate. In order to balance service with teaching and research appropriately, it must be validated and standardized.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR APPLICATION**Clear Goals**

- Defined objectives
- Realistic Expectations

Adequate Preparation

- Depth of knowledge and understanding
- Mastery of skills
- Ability to acquire resources

Results

- Goal attainment
- Effective Presentation

Thoughtful Evaluation