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# Scholarship Reconsidered: What Boyer's Proposal Means For Communication: A Response

JUDITH TRENT

**W**HEN the 1998 NCA convention program was proposed and I was asked to be a part of it, I readily agreed. I did so in part because I remembered Ernest Boyer talking about the report at the first national Teaching Assistant Conference. (No, I was not there, unfortunately, as a Teaching Assistant but as an academic administrator, one with some responsibility in the education of the next generations of university faculty, doctoral students.) The other reason that I said "yes" is that I have conflicting beliefs about Boyer's reinterpretation of scholarship and about the recent and related report "Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities." Actually, I think my participation was invited because my conflicting thoughts on the two Boyer reports might produce some clash of opinion for the program. And, indeed, it might because, although I believe strongly in many of the ideas espoused in both reports, I also believe that taken to an extreme, they are potentially counterproductive for our discipline.

First, however, let me briefly mention the many concepts with which I agree. Certainly I support:

1. the fact that "scholarship is not an esoteric appendage; it is at heart what the profession is all about."
2. the scholarship of discovery, although contributing to the stock of human knowledge and to the intellectual climate of a college and university, it has been (and is) pretty narrowly defined.
3. the scholarship of integration—if it is defined as "giving meaning to or discovering together isolated facts putting them in perspective"—is critical to the discovery of new knowledge. It is also at the heart of the Communication discipline. In 1990, when the first Boyer Commission added the concept of integration to the definition of scholarship, multi-disciplinarity was not yet as mainstream" as it is in today's research world. Boyer talks about "a sea-change occurring." Well, by 1998 it has

occurred. Teams of scholars who both discover and integrate are what composes all of the really good research centers and institutes. The problem we have as a discipline is that too few scientists, social scientists, and humanists are aware of or understand the way in which the knowledge and skills of communication scholars could add to their multidisciplinary research projects.

4. the application of knowledge; it has, of course, been part and parcel of our discipline since the beginning. In fact, it was the beginning. As a Political Communication scholar, it is difficult for me to not accept "application" into the research fold. But understand that I am talking about the study of research findings as applied on or to a given population. I am not talking about service to any segment of the community.

My concerns with some of the concepts of the Boyer report from 1990 and the one from 1998 are:

1. I do not fully accept the transmission of knowledge to others as scholarship. Effective teaching and mentoring are critically important, but I cannot call it scholarship. Simultaneously, I realize that in many disciplines—and certainly in Communication—there is a good deal of scholarship regarding important aspects of pedagogy.
2. The new report attacks research universities for their lack of educating doctoral students for the full range of what their responsibilities will be if they stay in academia. I agree, and in my own institution I have been on the front lines of the effort to teach would-be teachers how to teach and the preparation of more and more Ph.D.'s. But, at the same time, I would not want, in any way, to undermine the effort to train independent scholars.

Well, what has been the result of the 1990 Boyer Report? Have universities changed their stripes? In terms of research universities—the 125 of them—I would say no:

1. Radical reconstruction has not taken place; changes in promotion and tenure requirements have not really occurred, although there is far more credit for effective teaching and the acknowledgment of it than was the case in even the recent past.
2. Reward structures have begun to change slightly.
3. What has happened in a major way at most universities has been increased emphasis on faculty development in instructional areas, especially in conjunction with technology.
4. In at least 20 Research I universities, there has been some organized attempt to revise the way in which—or at least broaden the way—we prepare our doctoral students.

Let me finally turn to my two concerns with the redefinition of scholarship in terms of the Communication discipline. I see parallel problems. The first is that a reliance on anything other than traditional scholarship could feed old stereotypes, such as "Communication is only a skills-oriented, non-theoretic, non-research discipline." The fact is that, as a discipline, we do publish less than those in most other Arts and Sciences areas. This condition has implications for not only the role played by communication faculty in a research university but also for our success in the traditional academic reward structure. Thus, failure to produce the traditional forms of research and scholarship aid and abate these stereotypes. The second concern is perpetuation of the idea that our departments are service units, not intellectual units. And the proof of the concern is the high number of service courses and sections communication departments deliver. While we are delivering labor-intensive service to the university, other Arts and Sciences disciplines are participating in multidisciplinary research teams in the centers and institutes that are rapidly becoming

major players in the academy. It is the research centers that are becoming the units for new advanced degree-granting authority and for the generation of new resources. And Communication departments are too frequently not participants. Thus, though I agree with major pieces of the Boyer Commission's concepts, I do believe that close and exclusive adherence to them could produce and extend second class citizenship for our discipline.

#### REFERENCES AND NOTES

**Judith S. Trent** (Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1970) is Associate Vice President of Research and Advanced Studies at the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.