

Scholarship Reconsidered: Its Impact on the Communication Disciplines

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PUBLISHED in 1990 by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and authored by Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Boyer, 1990) offers a potentially profound new set of directions for the disciplines of communication. In this analysis, attention is devoted to two primary consequences of the report. First, the actual and immediate impact of *Scholarship Reconsidered* on the disciplines of communication are identified. Second, an agenda is outlined which the disciplines of communication might consider in terms of the long-term consequences of the report.

ACTUAL AND IMMEDIATE IMPACTS OF *SCHOLARSHIP RECONSIDERED* FOR THE DISCIPLINES OF COMMUNICATION

Scholarship Reconsidered has not been ignored in the disciplines of communication. The report has at least influenced what we talk about and perhaps even how some of us describe ourselves. For example, shortly after *Scholarship Reconsidered* was published, in February of 1991, the Speech Communication Association published a summary of the report on the front page of *Spectra* (SCA, 1991). Likewise, by the end of 1991, convention programs began to appear at both the regional and national levels devoted to an exploration of *Scholarship Reconsidered* (SCA, 1991). And, the report is now functioning as a reference in communication journals (Brenton & Gray, 1992).

Yet, the summaries of, convention programs about, and published references to *Scholarship Reconsidered* do not provide a coherent set of reactions in terms of how the report has, should, or can affect the disciplines of communication. For some, the significance of the report resides in the fact that it recommends that the scope of scholarship be expanded

(Spectra, 1991). For others, the power of the report resides in the fact that it advocates that research and teaching should be equivalent in status (SCA, 1991). Others have reported that departmental attempts to expand the definition of scholarship and create equality among the published research, teaching, applied research, and interdisciplinary studies are still challenged in traditional research journals (Brenton & Gray, 1992).

This survey provides a foundation for three interim conclusions.

First, time may be a factor affecting the potential reception and impact of the report. More time may be required before it can reasonably be expected for *Scholarship Reconsidered* to exert an influence upon the disciplines of communication or any other discipline. For example, at the most basic level, it remains unclear if most faculty members have had the time to read *Scholarship Reconsidered*. More profoundly, in terms of time, the report calls for a major reconception of scholarship which ultimately requires that virtually all evaluative schemes, including tenure and promotion systems, be reconceived. Institutions of higher education are not known for their speed in implementing new conceptions.

Second, the scope of issues and topics considered in *Scholarship Reconsidered* is complex, and it invites a wide range of responses. Some may find the new definition of scholarship to be paramount. Others may react to the proposal for creativity contracts, while yet another group may find the conception of the new generation of scholars to be centrally important. Finally, some may find the renewed commitment to a scholarly community to be critical. Given the diverse set of topics it considers, the report encourages this wide range of responses. In this sense, *Scholarship Reconsidered* dilutes its own power, or at least delays the potential concerted impact which it may have.

Third, the actual and potential impacts of *Scholarship Reconsidered* have yet to manifest themselves in the disciplines of communication in cohesive and significant ways. The impact of the report, if any, will apparently be created by those who decide to socially construct an educational reality shaped by the new standards and systems proposed in *Scholarship Reconsidered*. In other words, at this point in time, we must decide whether or not the report will influence our decisions, and if so, in what ways.

SCHOLARSHIP RECONSIDERED AS AN AGENDA FOR DISCIPLINES OF COMMUNICATION

Educational policies within the disciplines of communication have not traditionally been shaped by a single, national and coherent agenda. This agenda is solely mine, but I would invite participation in its proposed projects. I would suggest three initial steps.

First, the disciplines of communication need to debate the proposals contained within *Scholarship Reconsidered*. For some, the conceptions posited by the report provide long-overdue recommendations. But, do note that the literature of the disciplines of communication contains direct and powerful denials of the visions contained in *Scholarship Reconsidered*. Consider the question of whether or not teaching should be considered a form of scholarship. Burgoon (1989) pointedly argued that researchers "must dictate what is taught and how it is taught," because "Speech teachers" constitute "a non-disciplinary, ascholarly entity" (p. 303). Likewise, in 1991, Berger argued "the production of textbooks that aid in the teaching of skills . . . should not be valued as highly as original contributions to theory and research" (p. 105). In the disciplines of communication, then, one cannot assume that all agree that research and teaching should be viewed as co-equal or even that teaching itself should be valued as a form of scholarship. If equality is to be achieved between research and teaching, and if the definition of scholarship is to be extended to include teaching, several issues should be confronted within the disciplines of communication. In other words, we still need to debate the proposals contained in *Scholarship Reconsidered*.

Second, the disciplines of communication need to consider specific proposals to create

equivalencies among research, teaching, applied research, and interdisciplinary scholarship. It is not enough to decree that equivalencies exist among these four activities. Specific actions need to be taken which establish the equivalencies of these four activities.

Initially, in the context of a major reconception of scholarship, specific meanings need to be attributed to research, teaching, service, and interdisciplinary activities if each is to be understood as a form of scholarship. It is clear in *Scholarship Reconsidered* that scholarship is to be employed in a much broader fashion and as a concept unifying research, teaching, service, and interdisciplinary activities. It is unclear, however, how the redefinitions and realignments of activities proposed by Boyer constitute a unique understanding of each of these activities. For example, teaching has been redefined in *Scholarship Reconsidered* in the following fashion:

As a *scholarly* enterprise, teaching begins with what the teacher knows. Those who teach must, above all, be well informed, and steeped in the knowledge of their fields. Teaching can be well regarded only as professors are widely read and intellectually engaged. One reason legislators, trustees, and the general public often fail to understand why ten or twelve hours in the classroom each week can be a heavy load is their lack of awareness of the hard work and the serious study that undergirds good teaching.

Teaching is also a dynamic endeavor involving all the analogies, metaphors, and images that build bridges between the teacher's understanding and the student's learning. Pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined, and relate directly to the subject taught. Educator Parker Palmer strikes precisely the right note when he says knowing and learning are communal acts. With this vision, great teachers create a common ground of intellectual commitment. They stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers, and with the capacity to go on learning after their college days are over.

Further, good teaching means that faculty, as scholars, are also learners. All too often, teachers transmit information that students are expected to memorize and then, perhaps, recall. While well-prepared lectures surely have a place, teaching, at its best, means not only transmitting knowledge, but *transforming* and *extending* it as well. Through reading, through classroom discussion, and surely through comments and questions posed by students, professors themselves will be pushed in new creative directions.

In the end, inspired teaching keeps the flame of scholarship alive. Almost all successful academics give credit to creative teaching—those mentors who defined their work so compellingly that it became, for them, a lifetime challenge. Without the teaching function, the continuity of knowledge will be broken and the store of human knowledge dangerously diminished (pp. 24-25).

While a vivid "defense," few of Boyer's claims about the nature of teaching are new to members of the academic community. Nonetheless, within the academic community, teaching is seldom valued as much as research is, especially in terms of tenure and promotion

decisions. More to the point, as characterized by Boyer, the exact ways in which teaching is to be reconceived as scholarship remains ambiguous. Virtually each of the descriptions attributed by Boyer to teaching is currently classified under the head of “good teaching.” It remains unclear why each of these descriptions of teaching should be recast as a form of scholarship. Perhaps the most compelling motive exists for a reclassification of teaching as scholarship when Boyer maintains that teaching is a form of knowledge transmission which involves a transformation and extension of knowledge. However, as described by Boyer in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, this redefinition of teaching functions as a series of assertions. The unique cognitive processes involved in the teacher-student relationship, as a scholarly activity, are simply not articulated.

Additionally, the new meanings attributed to and the new configuration of research, teaching, service, and interdisciplinary activities would seem to require specific leadership and adaptation in each discipline. In each discipline, guidelines—perhaps in the form of national policies initiated provided by national professional education associations—might well be needed to suggest how each of these four activities can and should function as equivalent forms of scholarship.

Subsequently, individual departments of communication would also need to adopt such guidelines as their own definition of scholarship. Departments would undoubtedly have to adopt more precise operational definitions of each of the four forms of scholarship, especially in terms of tenure and promotion procedures. In all, expanding and redefining the scope of scholarship will not happen by decree. The disciplines of communication will need to consider specific proposals which create equivalencies among research, teaching, applied research, and interdisciplinary activities as forms of scholarship. Third, beyond these redefinitional issues, the practical issues involved in implementing the recommendations of *Scholarship Reconsidered* need to be explored. Let me illustrate by turning to the creativity contracts recommended by Boyer. As part of the effort to define faculty workloads, the Department of Communication at Indiana State University recently adopted the creativity contracts proposed in *Scholarship Reconsidered*. But, it is one thing to adopt a proposal, it is quite another to implement the proposal. By way of example, at least four implementation questions are involved:

First, should a department attempt to approve and provide for a contract with its own resources? Creativity contract can be expensive propositions. If a faculty member contracts to reduce his or her teaching load, adjuncts must be hired to teach these courses or the department’s enrollment declines. Additionally, to preserve independence, a department might opt to make—as the Department of Communication at Indiana State University did—the creativity contracts a solely departmental decision. In such a context, a creativity contract thus becomes a contract created with a single contracting faculty member and the rest of the faculty. If creativity contracts are solely a departmental responsibility, the department itself must assume all of the costs involved when a contract is finalized.

Second, will a department’s productivity decline while a creativity contract is in effect? Yes. If faculty are already working full-time, the decision to approve a creativity contract means that total departmental productivity will decline while the contract is in effect.

Third, what is the relationship between a creativity contract and the traditional faculty leave? Creativity contracts duplicate many of the features of a faculty leave. Creativity contracts can be designed for multiple ends beyond the traditional research and publication ends which characterize a faculty leave, but nonetheless the apparent duplication does require explanation and justification.

Fourth, will departmental creativity contracts be approved conceptually and in practice by higher levels of the educational administration? At this point in time, I cannot answer this question, for no such decisions are available to report.

In all, implementing the recommendations contained in *Scholarship Reconsidered* re-

quires that an entire series of questions be addressed, and these questions can be answered in several ways, with several different implications.

CONCLUSION

We have a long way to go before the recommendations of *Scholarship Reconsidered* can exert a profound and significant impact upon the disciplines of communication. Indeed, in my view, we are only at the inception of the process of dealing with the proposals contained in this report. Boyer himself has reported that it took American higher education some 350 years to pass through the three stages which have brought us to our current approach to learning and scholarship. The meaning and scope of scholarship will not be redefined within a five-year period. Yet, we need to begin the process of reconception now, seeking ways of implement the proposals recommended in *Scholarship Reconsidered*.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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