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# Scholarship Reconsidered: A Reflection

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**S**CHOLARSHIP *Reconsidered* was an attempt by Ernest Boyer (1990) to redefine the role of the professoriate in terms of the concept of scholarship as perceived and enacted within the academy. The purpose of the special report was to provide a clearer meaning of scholarship within the academy itself. He recognized that the mission of American higher education had changed dramatically over the past four decades. And, yet, the expectations of the professoriate held by the members within the academy, that is, faculty and administrators, had not always kept pace with these changes.

Boyer (1990) noted that the reward system in higher education was under attack. Critics inside and outside the academy questioned the way professors were evaluated and the lack of balance between faculty research and teaching duties. As a result, under present conditions “students all too often are the losers because teaching is not rewarded” (p. xi). And “faculty are losing out, too,” because the present system “restricts creativity rather than sustains it” (p. xii). The primary thesis of the special report was that the “way scholarship is defined and, ultimately, rewarded” will determine to a considerable extent our ability to improve higher education (p. xiii).

Hunt (1993) noted that there are differences between the role behavior of faculty as defined in national discussions and that which is actually taking place on college campuses. In order to explore the impact of such a redefinition, I believe there are certain features of the academy that we need to examine prior to reaching any conclusions regarding the impact of such changes. First, the academy discussed by Boyer (1990) is not representative of higher education institutions in general.

1. Scholarly achievement is not the highest priority at most post-secondary institutions.
2. Scholarly achievement is not the highest priority with most professors and students.

There are 3,389 higher education institutions in this country (Parnell, 1990). Community, technical and junior colleges constitute 1,367 or 40 percent of all postsecondary institutions; doctoral granting universities constitute 213 or six (6) percent; comprehensive colleges constitute 595 or 17.5 percent; and liberal arts colleges constitute 572 or 17 percent. An additional 18.5 percent of the institutions are specialized, such as schools of medicine or law. Doctoral granting universities and public/private research institutions do place research as its highest priority for its professoriate and use their record of research as the primary assessment criterion. On the other hand, two-year and technical schools place little or no emphasis on scholarship, particularly as it relates to the more traditional definition of research. Tenure and promotion are rarely, if ever, impacted by assessments of a faculty member's record of scholarship. In most comprehensive and liberal arts colleges, teaching is generally stated publicly as having the highest priority. And, in most cases, scholarship defined *only* in the traditional sense plays rhetorically a secondary role to teaching in tenure and promotion decisions. However, there is considerable variance across these institutions in terms of the actual weight given teaching and research as tenure, promotion and/or merit criteria.

As Andersen (1993) asserts "higher education has increasingly moved away from an emphasis upon educating undergraduate students to an emphasis upon the professoriate conducting research and publishing the results as a condition of tenure, promotion, and merit salary increases" (p. 1). Regardless of the stated weighting of evaluative criteria, I believe it is correct to assert that research/scholarship has become the determining criteria for most final personnel decisions, regardless of the priority or weighting given the criteria of teaching or research/scholarship. The use of the research record as a determining criteria may be more a function of reviewer's confidence and/or ability to measure the criteria in an empirical fashion than the stated institutional priorities or mission; this is particularly true in the case of comprehensive colleges. When the evaluation rhetoric communicated by administration and faculty regarding institutional priorities is inconsistent with the behavior of the faculty reviews, it most often leads to the faculty frustration noted by Hunt (1993). Unfortunately, the frustration often times leads to conflict, bitterness and animosities between the faculty member and his/her reviewer(s).

More recently, a paradox has developed between comprehensive and liberal arts institutions and research universities and their expectations regarding faculty research and teaching. Today, research universities are reemphasizing teaching. Today, in our professional journals, books and magazines, presidents of Stanford, Harvard and Yale frequently are quoted for their support of college teaching. In *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Donald Kennedy asks us "to reaffirm that education — that is, teaching in all its forms — is the primary task of higher education" (p. 1). On the other hand, comprehensive and liberal arts colleges which are primarily teaching institutions are emphasizing more research on the part of faculty.

3. Teaching is the highest priority at most academic institutions.

4. Teaching is the primary role for most of the professoriate.

The professoriate described by Boyer does not represent the majority of teaching faculty. A large percentage of all teaching comes from non-tenured, non-tenure-track personnel who are not "research" scholars or have as a primary role research or any form of scholarship outside of teaching. If we are to significantly improve the quality of our instruction, we must first answer the question, Who really is teaching our undergraduates? George Keller (1991) noted that a large percentage of all undergraduate instruction is performed by part-time faculty (25%); TAs and graduate students who may teach as much as one-quarter of all first- and second-year courses at graduate and doctoral universities; part-time specialists who

teach adult education, summer teacher programs, youth and minority summer programs and advanced professional programs such as business, and criminal justice; remedial/developmental specialists who teach underprepared, academically and/or teaming disabled, at-risk students of which the majority are minority students. None of these teachers are full time or find themselves in tenure-track positions. The assessment of these institutions is based almost entirely on their performance as teachers; teaching is their primary role. Keller (1991) noted that "what is happening is that regular, full-time, tenure-track teachers-scholars are becoming a less significant factor on the undergraduate scene" (p. 54).

Boyer (1990, pp. 43-44) even noted that teaching is the primary emphasis at most post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, the primary and overwhelming interest (70%) of full-time, tenured faculty is teaching. With the most interest shown at the two-year institutions (93%) and the least at research institutions (33%).

The interest and priority of teaching also is reflected in the workload differences across the categories of institutions. The two-year college faculty average five (5) courses a semester, while the comprehensive colleges and research universities average four (4) and one to three courses (1-3) respectively each semester. Most faculty are hired as teachers. However, few are trained as teachers. Graduate training rarely focuses on teaching, particularly at doctoral universities. There is too often a narrowness of vision regarding the role of the professor which emphasizes research.

Jacobson (1992) observed that the "legislative interest in how faculty members spend their time has put advocates of public higher education in an uncomfortable position" (A17). Legislators and public alike are questioning the productivity of faculty. These groups do not have a clear understanding of the actual workload of faculty, particularly as it is translated into instructional functions such as class preparation, advising and counseling. Unfortunately, faculty lack the data base from which to provide an accurate picture of their own workload. As a result, public higher education personnel are now attempting to devise consistent measures of what faculty members do. As Shirley M. Clark, vice-chancellor for academic affairs in Oregon's state system of higher education states, "We must move on this agenda ourselves, because failure to do so only invites micromanagement" (Jacobson, 1992, A18).

Today, there is in our desire to market excellence and quality among colleges and universities motivation to improve teaching, but also to emphasize research. Comprehensive colleges created after World War II have attempted to shift their emphasis from being primarily teaching colleges in order to gain prestige. There has been an upward drift in the mission of these institutions in order to look more like the elite institutions. One of the consequences has been the upward ratcheting of promotion criteria which creates assessment problems for faculty and their reviewers. Many young faculty also believe that the competing obligations of teaching and research reduce the quality of teaching (43%) (Boyer, 1990, p. 45).

If we are to create the paradigm shift in the reward system called for by Andersen (1993), it will require the faculty to take the leadership in acting as agents of change. On campuses of all kinds, faculty frequently are in opposition to any sudden or dramatic change. There is an aversion to any change impacting on faculty which has as initial source administrative initiatives. Too often reform never proceeds beyond the talking stage. Most campus governance committees make as few changes as possible, hoping for a return to better times. Faculty and administration must work together to provide the leadership to create a unifying vision of the institution's mission and goals which are congruent with the reward system.

Academicians are quick to point to the differences between institutions and strict categorical classifications exist to distinguish the approximately 3,400 colleges and universities across the United States. We must as Andersen (1993) suggests "accept the reality that the mission of different institutions vary" and at the same time not view these mission differences designating qualitative differences (p. 4). Personally, I'm not convinced that we need to

rebalance the academy. Rather, we need to accept the “diversity of [faculty] roles and the necessity of those diverse roles in the department that is to accomplish its mission” (Andersen, 1993, p. 5).

Chesebro (1993) noted that adopting a different perspective regarding the concept of scholarship in the disciplines of communication could have a profound impact on our departmental practices and the activities pursued by faculty members. However, he observed that over the three years since the publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered* and numerous discipline programs and publications referring to the report, it has had little influence upon our discipline.

Recognizing correctly that creating change in any academic environment is an arduous task requiring considerable time, he proposed a national agenda to facilitate such a process change. Such an agenda would call for a broad-based discussion of the critical issues posed in the report. Such discussions would need to, more precisely, define the forms of scholarship. Most importantly, the distinctions between teaching, research and service, as scholarship, would need to be made by the academic community. He recognized that given the differences among the communication disciplines, it would be crucial for each discipline to operationalize the scholarship type. Finally, he questions whether changes made at the department level in response to the report’s recommendations will be accepted by senior campus administrators.

The final step in establishing and implementing a new scholarship agenda in communication disciplines may on a practical level be the most critical. If we are to operationalize the forms of scholarship and, as a consequence, modify our evaluative processes of faculty, there must be some assurance that reviewers outside the department will accept the conclusions of personnel reviews within the department. It would be administratively foolhardy for any department chair or department review committee to forward to a higher review level a recommendation based on an unacceptable application of evaluative criteria. Using a broader based definition of scholarship for the purpose of reappointment, tenure, promotion and/or merit will require acceptance at all review levels of the changes in application of the evaluative criteria to documented faculty activity. A major change in the definition of existing evaluative criteria as envisioned by Boyer would never be successful without the approval and acceptance of both senior administrators and faculty reviewers.

The critical issue may not even be a question of redefinition as suggested by Boyer. The real issue may be the willingness on the part of faculty to require that teaching be evaluated in a more valid fashion. I would argue that teaching is not considered as important in the review process principally because we either cannot or will not properly review a faculty member’s teaching record. We know what elements are needed to create a record which can be subjected to such an evaluation, but too often we find excuses for either not requiring or adequately reviewing the evidence. Too often the evidence submitted by candidates for review is limited both in scope and value for the reviewer. The responsibility for changing the methodology used to evaluate teaching and requiring sufficient information to complete a valid review of teaching resides with the entire departmental faculty. And in many cases responsibility for guaranteeing the collection and presentation of the evidence in a useful form resides with either the department chair or a specially designated faculty mentor or review committee. Redefinition may increase the weighting placed on a particular evaluative criteria or faculty task, such a teaching, but, without the appropriate evidentiary measures, scholarship will continue to be the determining factor for merit tenure, promotion, particularly at the highest level.

Boileau (1993) recognized that some faculty members in the communication disciplines have difficulty with the present scholarship definitions. He notes that performance, production and applied studies activities on the part of faculty are not always accepted by other disciplines as legitimate or highly valued forms of scholarship. As a consequence, he has described one strategy for displaying a faculty member’s record, the teaching portfolio,

which could provide a more effective and systematic basis for evaluating teaching as scholarship. Portfolios also can serve a formative role, suggesting areas for improving a faculty member's teaching performance. By broadening the definition of teaching, he suggests it will require a broader list of items that must be examined in a review of teaching. And, finally, such an effort would expand "the ways to document what we do to help students learn" (p. 10).

## CONCLUSION

The recent national discussions regarding the role of faculty have been based on assumptions that apply only to a select group of full-time faculty who are found primarily in our doctoral or research universities and a number of comprehensive colleges and universities which have grown dramatically in size and influence since World War II. However, the concerns expressed by Boyer (1990) regarding the role of faculty in these institutions for the future are valid. It is time that the campus mission, priorities and evaluation criteria are matched consistently in the personnel evaluation process. At the same time we need to continue providing maximum flexibility to institutions to define the role of faculty in terms of its own needs and expectations. It is also critical that faculty be aware from the beginning of the role expectations and how they will be operationalized in the evaluation process.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, higher education has come under considerable scrutiny by federal and state legislatures and the public at-large. Critical assessments have followed our efforts in the areas of undergraduate education, multiculturalism, political correctness, abuses in athletics, research overhead costs, faculty workloads, increasing tuition and fees, administrators and student services. Much of the negative criticism has been warranted. And we have done very little to persuade those outside the academy that significant change will take place in a reasonable time frame. Among academics, there continues to be a general paranoia over state inquiries and a continuing failure to respond to abuses in the workplace by colleagues. We are quick to criticize others, but lack the will or desire in most cases to exercise the same assessment qualities upon ourselves. None would argue with Boyer (1990) when he states that "We need scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action and inspire students" (p. 77).

It is critical to align an institution's reward system with the fulfillment of its articulated mission. Rhetoric by faculty and administrators regarding a need for the appropriate consideration of research, teaching and service in personal decision-making will achieve nothing if the real institutional reward system points toward other stated ends. We need to guarantee to our faculty that the priorities and mission of our institution are reflected in the workload, personnel actions and salary awards within our colleges and universities. Flexibility and autonomy can be maintained. However, we must exercise our own authority in governance to redefine the role of professor to fit the tasks within our own institutions.

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

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