

Scholarship Re-conceptualized: An Evaluative Perspective

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Abstract

Annual reviews of college faculty performance have traditionally focused on three major faculty roles – *Teaching*, *Research* and *Service*. However, the evaluation *scholarship* (represented by the *Research* role) has always posed a complex problem - especially in the arts. In order to facilitate its evaluation, the role of *Research* (as an expression of *scholarship*) is expanded to the more inclusive *Scholarly and Creative Activities* – which is defined in terms of four forms of scholarly expression: *Proficiency*, *Discovery/Creation*, *Dissemination* and *Translation*. Re-conceptualizing scholarship in this way greatly facilitates the measurement and evaluation of the full spectrum of scholarly activities including *Research*.

Annual reviews of college faculty performance have traditionally focused on three major faculty roles – *Teaching*, *Research* and *Service*. A great deal of literature exists relative to the evaluation of *Teaching*, while the evaluation of *Service* is, in large measure, a function of how a department or college chooses to define it. However, the evaluation of the *Research* role (as the primary expression of *scholarship*) has always posed a complex problem within the context of an overall faculty evaluation system.

The conventional approach has been to base the evaluation of *Research* on the number of publications. Usually articles in refereed journals are valued more than those in non-refereed journals, with books, monographs, and other such publication outlets valued to differing degrees. This approach often produces considerable concern among faculty in those disciplines in which such publications are either more difficult to attain, or not necessarily deemed to be the best indicator of scholarly achievement (such as can sometimes be found in the arts). For this reason, many institutions have chosen to expand the definition of the role of *Research* into the broader and more inclusive *Scholarly & Creative Activities*.

From an evaluative perspective the components of the role of *Scholarly & Creative Activities* are *not* identical to the components of *scholarship* as defined by Boyer (1997) (i.e., *discovery*, *integration*, *application*, and *teaching*). In the Boyer model *teaching* is seen as an expression of scholarship in that it serves to increase the scholar's knowledge level (Boyer, 1997, p.24). However, from the perspective of a comprehensive faculty evaluation system, *teaching* is considered a separate, identifiable activity with the student at its center. That is, *teaching* is seen as an activity that involves not only *scholarship* (in the sense of knowledge and expertise in one's content field) but also a variety of *additional* professional skills and expertise not necessarily related to a scholar's area of expertise (Arreola, 1995, 2000).

In this context, the members of the professoriate are seen as belonging to a *meta-profession*. That is, a profession built *on top* of a faculty member's knowledge and expertise within their chosen discipline. From this perspective scholarship is a *prerequisite* to entry into the *meta-profession* of college professor. Knowledge and expertise in one's academic field is seen as a *necessary but insufficient* condition for excellence in *teaching*. The *meta-profession* concept assumes, as its base, the knowledge and skills associated with the traditional concept of scholarship, but adds equally high professional levels of skill, knowledge and performance in the areas of *instructional design*, *instructional delivery*, and *instructional assessment*, not to mention *management*, *group process*, and *mentoring* (Arreola, R., Aleamoni, L., and Theall, M., 2003, 2001).

By keeping the roles of *Teaching* and *Service* separate from the broader role of *Scholarly & Creative Activities* we can define its components in a way that is more amenable to evaluation. Briefly, *Scholarly & Creative Activities* or *scholarship* can be classified into the four categories of *Proficiency*, *Discovery/Creation*, *Dissemination*, and

Translation. Keeping in mind that the primary intent of this classification is to facilitate the evaluation of faculty performance within the context of a conventional annual review process, these categories may be defined as follows.

Proficiency

Proficiency speaks to the issue of a faculty member maintaining currency within their chosen academic area. That is, a faculty member must continue to keep abreast of the latest research findings or developments in his or her field with concomitant enhancements of their professional ‘practice’ or ‘clinical’ skills as appropriate. Such ‘practice’ or ‘clinical’ skills will, of course, vary according to the academic field of the faculty member. For a chemist it might mean learning a new lab technique resulting from research in the field. For a sculptor it might mean learning how to use new tools to shape some newly developed plastic or artificial granite. For a musical composer it might mean learning how to use new computer programs that synthesize music in ways never before possible.

In addition, the pursuit of advanced degrees, certification, post-doctoral study, internships, fellowships, professional workshops, etc., may be seen as appropriate evaluative indicators of this area of *Scholarly & Creative Activities*. In short, *proficiency*, from an evaluative perspective, speaks to the activities and accomplishments of a faculty member in both achieving the highest levels of professional expression in their field, and maintaining a continuing effort of personal professional growth commensurate with the growth of knowledge in that field.

Discovery/Creation

Discovery/Creation speaks to the issue of conducting any form of research that is appropriate to a faculty member’s discipline. However, it also speaks to creative (artistic) endeavors that produce new styles or modes of expression. The activities associated with *discovery*, or *creativity*, may be messy and appear initially inconclusive. Some faculty may engage in research or creative endeavors that are time consuming and, although they may eventually result in a definitive product or finding, demonstrate both knowledge of the field, high levels of skill, and innovation in strategy and thinking. The evaluation of *discovery/creation* therefore, involves peer review of *process*, as much as *product*. Thus, as contrasted to the conventional *Research* category in which anonymously peer-reviewed publications of research findings are the primary evaluative indicators, *discovery/creation* requires a more local, collegial, qualitative assessment of the *ongoing research and discovery activities* of the faculty member.

Dissemination

Dissemination speaks to the issue of transmitting and sharing information about one’s field of academic expertise. For the purposes of evaluating this expression of *Scholarly & Creative Activities*, we can easily see the relevance and value of the publication of peer-reviewed articles. However, we can also expand it to include a broader, and more useful (from an evaluative perspective), set of professional activities. Such activities must simply meet the criterion of serving to disseminate information concerning one’s academic field not only within the professional community but throughout the general society as well. Thus, a more complete list of activities that may be considered appropriate within the evaluative category of *dissemination* might include:

- *Publishing articles (refereed & non-refereed)*
- *Publishing books, monographs, pamphlets*
- *Paper presentations at national professional meetings or conferences*
- *Making Keynote or Invited addresses*
- *Writing articles for the popular press*
- *Television and radio series (e.g., Carl Sagan’s Cosmos Series)*
- *Artistic exhibitions, performances, displays*
- *Conducting professional workshops or seminars*

This list is by no means exhaustive but is intended merely to suggest, from an evaluative perspective, a broader range of legitimate forms of the *Scholarly and Creative Activity of dissemination*. Each academic discipline would need to determine for itself the full range of possible means of *dissemination* appropriate to the discipline. Note, however, that *dissemination* is *not* defined as being identical to, or congruent with, *teaching* - although some of the skills involved in *dissemination* may be used in *instructional delivery*.

Translation

This category speaks to the issue of translating research findings into new products, services, or artistic expressions of benefit to the larger general society. Academic health science institutions have long recognized this form of *Scholarly & Creative Activity*. For example, as when a faculty-researcher is able develop a technique for mass-producing a newly developed drug so as to make it available for large-scale patient care. In fact, some health science centers apply considerable resources to centers for translational research – that is, research on how to take research findings in the basic biomedical sciences and turn them into beneficial treatments, drugs, or medical procedures of benefit to patients.

However, the *Scholarly & Creative Activity of translation* has equal application in all academic fields, not simply the health sciences. In physics, for example, the discovery of the laser was a significant achievement within the field and resulted in many peer-reviewed articles and publications. However, the development of laser-based applications such as DVD players, CD burners in computers, laser leveling devices used in construction, not to mention the use of lasers in vision correction surgery, plastic surgery, sculpting, holography, etc., are all expressions of the scholarly activity of *translation*. It is true that some of these developments may be carried out in industrial or commercial settings rather than within the strictly academic environment. However, to the degree that a faculty member is engaged in the process, it is a legitimate expression of *Scholarly & Creative Activities* from an evaluative perspective.

In Conclusion

The annual evaluation of faculty performance can often be a confusing and complex task owing, in part, to the wide and varied forms of professional expression in which faculty engage in order to keep the academic department running. In addition, under the traditional *Teaching, Research, and Service* faculty role model, the task is made even more confusing when there is no clear delineation of the specific activities that constitute one or the other of these major areas of faculty performance. One way to reduce some of the confusion, if not the complexity, in a faculty evaluation system is to replace the traditional faculty role of *Research* with the more inclusive and appropriate *Scholarly & Creative Activities*. The division of the role of *Scholarly & Creative Activities* into the four categories of *Proficiency, Discovery/Creation, Dissemination, and Translation* can serve to clarify not only the evidence required for evaluating faculty performance within this role, but can also serve to guide faculty professional growth and development. The specification and development of the precise evaluative techniques and tools appropriate to the components of the role of *Scholarly & Creative Activities* is an ongoing process requiring further study. However, by identifying, defining, and assigning an evaluative value to this broader range of scholarly expression (other than just research), faculty may be encouraged to more fully capitalize on their talents to the benefit of our students, our profession, and our society.

References

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