Toward a Unified View of Scholarship: Eliminating Tensions Between Traditional and Engaged Work

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Abstract

Motivating faculty to engage with the community requires overcoming a variety of obstacles. For many, the reluctance reflects a prevailing view that engaged work is less scholarly than traditional research. The devaluation of community-based activities can be traced to uncertainties in three areas: defining, assessing, and documenting engaged scholarship. The present paper seeks to clarify these elements in order to reduce the tension between proponents of traditional and engaged scholarship. Aided by a rich literature, universities can articulate a single set of standards applicable to all work and help faculty document the scholarly content of their activities. Judging all scholarship by the same criteria should effect significant change both internally and externally: in a university culture that views engagement as secondary to the "real" work of the institution and in a public that increasingly perceives academic interests as disconnected from societal needs.

Introduction

The recent Kellogg Commission *(1999)* report on "The Engaged Institution" has sparked a new interest in university-community partnerships. While outreach, or service, to the public has a long tradition, the idea of faculty and community collaborating as equal partners is a less familiar model. Yet such relationships have already served not only to help the community, but also to enrich faculty scholarship *(Checkoway 1997; Ramaley 1998)*.

The issue of engagement is particularly salient for this country's public research universities. For example, the Community and Urban Initiatives Task Force at the University of South Florida (USF 2000) recently urged the administration to "set as one of its highest priorities the meaningful integration of the University with its external community . . . Such partnerships will not only benefit the external community but will also enhance and invigorate the University through new knowledge gained from the efforts." The task force statement is important for recognizing that research and engagement are not competing, or even independent, efforts and that urging our universities to be good citizens does not compromise scholarship but enriches it.

However, motivating faculty to engage with the community requires overcoming a variety of obstacles. For some, the issue is simply a "how to" problem. Engagement does not simply mean using citizens as subjects and organizations as laboratories. Rather, the participants formulate a set of shared goals and a common agenda, a process that requires faculty to relinquish much of their control as independent researchers. For others, the reluctance reflects a prevailing view among academics that engaged work is less scholarly than traditional research. Addressing the latter concern is the focus of the present paper.

> *". . . research and engagement are not competing, or even independent, efforts and . . . urging our universities to be good citizens does not compromise scholarship but enriches it."*

The relative devaluation of community-based efforts can be traced to uncertainties in three areas: defining, assessing, and documenting engaged scholarship. Definition problems arise because collaborations between faculty and nonuniversity entities receive a variety of labels, among them outreach, professional service, and engaged scholarship. Often the terms are used interchangeably, leading to skepticism about the scholarly content of the work. Assessment is difficult because the process of community-based scholarship does not resemble research as taught by most disciplines *(Checkoway 1997; Diamond and Adam 1995)*. The activity involves nonacademic partners; is often multidisciplinary; and is usually problem- rather than theory-driven. Finally, the dissemination of results can also yield products that are new to evaluation committees; standard indices of quality such as federal grants or publications in mainstream disciplinary journals do not always apply. Because the criteria for judging scholarship are often implicit and discipline-specific, faculty whose work takes unconventional forms find themselves at a disadvantage *(Diamond and Adam 1995, 2000; Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff 1997)*.

However, the distinctions that universities implicitly or explicitly make between work undertaken in the laboratory and the community are unnecessarily divisive. Aided by a rich literature, universities can articulate a single set of standards applicable to all work and help faculty document the scholarly value of their activities. The aim here is not to provide an exhaustive review of the relevant literature but to offer a starting point for institutions in their efforts to recognize and reward engaged scholarship.

Defining Scholarship

At its core, scholarship is original work that utilizes one's disciplinary or professional expertise *(Boyer 1990).* Engaged scholars use their expertise to address community issues and needs, and this focus on community leads some to view engagement as distinct from scholarship *(Silka 1999).*

The problem stems in part from the tendency to label all faculty duties as research, teaching, or service, as if the three were mutually exclusive. Community-based research, which often defies easy categorization, risks being pigeonholed as service, along with responsibilities that clearly do not fit the definition of scholarship. As Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff *(1997)* explain in *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate,* "all too frequently, service means not doing scholarship but doing good; citizenship is not scholarship. To be considered scholarship, service activities must be tied directly to one's special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity."

In his seminal work, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate,* Boyer *(1990)* spotlights the inadequacies and inequities of the research/teaching/service classification scheme. He notes the tacit assumption that basic research provides the starting point for all new knowledge and thus represents the only true scholarship. Teaching and application are thought to benefit from scholarship but not to contribute to it.

Arguing that in fact teaching, research, and application each produce knowledge that profoundly influences the others, Boyer proposes a less restrictive and less hierarchical paradigm. He offers a new taxonomy of scholarship that includes four elements:

1. Discovery—similar to the traditional notion of research; reflects the investigative traditions of academia
2. Integration—making connections across disciplines
3. Application—related to engagement; reflects the application of knowledge to social problems
4. Teaching

Boyer acknowledges that institutions and departments will vary in their relative emphasis on each aspect of scholarship. He also recommends that universities allow faculty the flexibility to change their individual emphases during their academic careers.

Noting that faculty learn to define scholarship from their disciplines, Diamond and Adam *(1995, 2000)* summarize the views of sixteen professional associations in two volumes of *The Disciplines*

Speak: Rewarding the Scholarly, Professional, and Creative Work of Faculty. Disciplinary societies representing the sciences, social sciences, humanities, fine arts, business, and journalism all agree that the present reward system regards faculty responsibilities too narrowly and should be more inclusive in its definition of scholarship. Six characteristics of scholarly work in any discipline are identified:

1.   The activity requires a high level of discipline-related expertise. Engaged scholarship "should differ from routine consulting or practice by offering the potential for deepening a discipline's understandings and expanding the scope of their applications."
2.   The activity breaks new ground, is innovative.
3.   The activity can be replicated or elaborated.
4.   The work and its results can be documented.
5.   The work and its results can be peer-reviewed.
6.   The activity has significance or impact.

Assessing Scholarship

Once institutions agree that the long-standing definitions of scholarship are too restrictive, the problem of how to evaluate new categories of scholarly activity remains. Fundamental to the process is the recognition that all scholarship shares certain qualities. Rather than perpetuate divisions between traditional and engaged faculty by evaluating them according to different criteria, universities can formulate standards to which all scholarship should adhere.

> "*Engaged scholars use their expertise to address community issues and needs.*"

Scholarship Assessed (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff 1997) has guided many universities in these efforts. The authors underscore the difficulty of the task, noting that standards for traditional research come from the various disciplines, while standards for engaged scholarship "vary greatly by project and profession. . . . This fragmented paradigm reflects the differential respect accorded research . . . and applied scholarship at most institutions."

Synthesizing a range of university guidelines on hiring, tenure, and promotion, along with assessment information from granting agencies, editors of scholarly journals, and directors of university

Figure 1.   Standards of Scholarly Work from *Scholarship Assessed* (Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff 1997).

Clear goals
- Does the scholar state the basic purposes of his or her work clearly?
- Does the scholar define objectives that are realistic and achievable?
- Does the scholar identify important questions in the field?

Adequate preparation
- Does the scholar show an understanding of existing scholarship in the field?
- Does the scholar bring the necessary skills to his or her work?
- Does the scholar bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward?

Appropriate methods
- Does the scholar use methods appropriate to the goals?
- Does the scholar apply effectively the methods selected?
- Does the scholar modify procedures in response to changing circumstances?

Significant results
- Does the scholar achieve the goals?
- Does the scholar's work add consequentially to the field?
- Does the scholar's work open additional areas for further exploration?

Effective presentation
- Does the scholar use a suitable style and effective organization to present his or her work?
- Does the scholar use appropriate forums for communicating work to its intended audiences?
- Does the scholar present his or her message with clarity and integrity?

Reflective critique
- Does the scholar critically evaluate his or her own work?
- Does the scholar bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to his or her critique?
- Does the scholar use evaluation to improve the quality of future work?

presses, the authors conclude that all scholarship can be evaluated along six dimensions. Figure 1 details the qualities that each comprises:

1. Clear goals
2. Adequate preparation
3. Appropriate methods
4. Significant results
5. Effective presentation
6. Reflective critique

One institution whose tenure and promotion guidelines are consistent with the ideas expressed in *Scholarship Assessed* is Portland State University. In 1996, this institution (classified as a Doctoral/Research University—Intensive; *Carnegie Foundation 2000*) revised its policies so that all scholarship would be evaluated according to common criteria.

The university's manual on *Policies and Procedures for the Evaluation of Faculty for Tenure, Promotion, and Merit Increases (1996)* states:

> Faculty and departments should evaluate a faculty member's community outreach accomplishments creatively and thoughtfully. Contributions to knowledge developed through community outreach should be judged using the criteria for quality and significance of scholarship. It is strongly recommended that the evaluation consider the following indicators of quality and significance:
>
> 1. Publication in journals or presentations at disciplinary or interdisciplinary meetings that advance the scholarship of community outreach
> 2. Honors, awards, and other forms of special recognition received for community outreach
> 3. Adoption of the faculty member's models for problem resolution, intervention programs, instruments, or processes by others who seek solutions to similar problems
> 4. Substantial contributions to public policy or influence upon professional practice
> 5. Models that enrich the artistic and cultural life of the community
> 6. Evaluative statements from clients and peers regarding the quality and significance of documents or performances produced by the faculty member.

Currently, traditional and engaged faculty expend a great deal of energy arguing about whose work is more valuable. While traditional researchers regard their contributions as cutting-edge scholarship that adds to the knowledge base of a field, engaged scholars see themselves as tackling complex societal problems that do not conform to narrow disciplinary models. In truth, the success of our metropolitan research institutions depends on both approaches. Regarding them as different manifestations of the same standards of scholarship should end the divisiveness and open new avenues for collaboration.

Documenting Scholarship

With uniform assessment guidelines comes responsibility for clarifying the scholarly content of one's activities. This is particularly critical when the process and products of those activities are new to evaluators. In *Making the Case for Professional Service,* Lynton *(1995)* provides sample faculty portfolios from a variety of disciplines and specifies the components a portfolio should contain:

1. A personal statement describing the problem under investigation, the methods used, and their relation to the scholarly expertise of the faculty member; the narrative should also describe the effect of the work on the scholar's subsequent teaching, research, and engagement
2. Work samples and products with a discussion of their impact on the intended audiences
3. External evaluations of the process and products by qualified judges; these may include both academic and community experts.

Driscoll and Lynton's *Making Outreach Visible: A Guide to Documenting Professional Service and Outreach (1999)*, a companion volume to *Making the Case*, offers a comprehensive discussion of the documentation of engaged scholarship. The authors recommend that a portfolio include:

1. Description of the activity, noting purpose, goals, participants, and stakeholders
2. Context for the activity such as setting, available resources, constraints of resources and/or time, and political considerations
3. Faculty member's expertise and prior experience, connection of the current activity to the faculty member's future and past scholarly agendas
4. Choice of methods along with the literature base and hypotheses that directed those choices
5. Evolution of the activity based on ongoing monitoring and reflection
6. Outcomes and impact on stakeholders and what the faculty member learned; attach evidence of the effectiveness of the project such as monographs, newspaper reports, policy changes, funding of related projects, or legislation
7. Mode of dissemination to the profession or discipline.

A bibliography of publications that address the documentation and assessment of scholarship is included in Driscoll and Lynton's work. Among these are references from ten universities. One of them, Michigan State University, has labored since 1988 to develop "an institution-wide realignment process aimed at broadening, strengthening, and more fully integrating outreach as a primary mission of each of its major academic units." A Carnegie *(2000)* Doctoral/Research University—Extensive, Michigan State is also a land-grant institution with a deep commitment to outreach. The university continues to update its promotion and tenure policies in accordance with its engagement mission.

The Michigan State guidebook, *Points of Distinction: A Guidebook for Planning & Evaluating Quality Outreach (1996)*, contains a bibliography of publications that discuss portfolio development and describes the contents of an "outreach portfolio":

1. Career background/context
2. Personal narrative
3. Activities

This last should include, among other indicators, a narrative describing how the activity contributed to the individual's scholarly advancement; the significance of the activity to the stakeholders and to the profession/ discipline; the impact of the activity; and the scholarship of the work, including any peer reviews of the activity and its results.

Conclusion

How each university approaches engagement will depend on a variety of factors, including institutional mission and structure, programmatic opportunities, and departmental foci. Creating a truly inclusive view of scholarship requires expanding the discussion from the campus to external entities such as disciplinary associations, funding agencies, and accrediting bodies *(Diamond and Adam 1995, 2000)*.

As universities reconsider and re-assess scholarship, future studies will need to examine the impact of these changes on faculty roles and rewards. Articulating clear standards for scholarship and incorporating them into evaluation and reward structures will potentially benefit the laboratory researcher as much as the engaged scholar. The researcher learns about new methodologies and alternatives to conventional means of dissemination (e.g., museum exhibitions,

documentaries). The engaged scholar acquires the tools for documenting the scholarly value of work, even when it cannot be neatly tagged as research, teaching, or service.

A broadened view of scholarship will help shift the view of faculty responsibility from engagement *and* teaching and research to engagement *in* teaching and research *(Finkelstein in press; Kimsey Simon 2000)*. By incorporating the community into all endeavors, universities can effect change both internally and externally: in an academic culture that views engagement as secondary to the "real" duties of the university and in a public that increasingly perceives faculty interests as disconnected from societal needs *(Mathews 1996; Rice 1991)*. The result will be greater respect and rewards for scholarship in all its forms, more productive interaction among faculty across disciplines, and a stronger sense of universities as research centers committed to their communities.

> "*Creating a truly inclusive view of scholarship requires expanding the discussion from the campus to external entities such as disciplinary associations, funding agencies, and accrediting bodies.*"

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Marcia A. Finkelstein is professor of psychology and director of the Center for Engaged Scholarship at the University of South Florida, where she has served on the faculty since 1981. Until 1995, she conducted research in the area of visual psychophysics. At that time, in an effort to more directly connect her work with issues outside the laboratory, she began a research program in social psychology. In August 1999, Dr. Finkelstein became the first director of the Center for Engaged Scholarship in the College of Arts and Sciences. The Center's primary purpose is to provide mechanisms that encourage faculty to extend their research and scholarly expertise beyond the university. Center activities advance faculty scholarship while addressing community needs.