

Assessing and Improving Outreach through Objectives

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Abstract

This paper attempts to marry two new ideas: the assessment of service as scholarship for promotion and tenure and the use of performance-based agreements in tenure decisions. Whereas much has been written in the last few years about how colleges and universities might assess and reward service as a form of scholarship (*Lynton 1995; Driscoll and Lynton 1999*), less has been written about reforming tenure through performance-based agreements, otherwise known as tenure by objectives (*Chait 1998*). This article suggests that by marrying the two, institutions might provide faculty with useful feedback to improve the quality of their outreach, reduce ambiguity about what is expected, and improve the chances that faculty can effectively make the case for service as scholarship for tenure and promotion.

First, a note about definitions. The term *service as scholarship* refers to work completed by faculty members that: (a) is based on their scholarly expertise; (b) contributes to the mission of the institution; (c) benefits an entity outside the institution and (d) yields results that are not proprietary, but public, available, and shared (*NERCHE 1995*). This concept will be explored more later in the paper. The term *tenure* refers to a traditional faculty employment arrangement. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) defines tenure as continuous employment barring just cause for dismissal and academic due process with the purpose of providing academic freedom and employment security to faculty members (*AAUP 1995*). Prior to attaining tenure the faculty member enters into a probationary period, usually six to seven years, for the purpose of “giving faculty members time to prove themselves, and their colleagues time to observe and evaluate them on the basis of their performance in the position rather than on the basis only of their education, training, and recommendations” (*AAUP 1995, 16*).

Tenure by Objectives

What exactly is tenure by objectives (TBO)? Chait (*1998*) first suggested colleges and universities consider awarding tenure by objectives in his New Pathways working paper “Ideas in Incubation: Three Possible Modifications to Traditional Tenure Policies.” TBO

seeks to reduce the stress and anxiety tenure-track faculty experience because of ambiguous standards, vague measures of success, and uncertainty about the appropriate mix of teaching, research, and service by basing tenure decisions on explicit criteria, performance-based agreements, and demonstrated competence (Chait 1998).

How does it work? At the start of a faculty member's first year, the candidate, department chair, and a mentor committee establish a written work plan that describes performance-related goals to be achieved over the course of an identified probationary period. The plan outlines an appropriate weighting for teaching, research, and service, reflecting the tenure candidate's interests and the department's needs and priorities, and outlines what constitutes appropriate and ample evidence of proficiency in each area of faculty work. Candidates submit a portfolio of work samples to substantiate competency and goal achievement in specific areas as part of each annual review. If the department chair and mentor committee or a panel of internal experts are satisfied that competency has

been demonstrated in a particular area, the faculty member becomes "certified" in that area and it is no longer at issue for tenure. Chait (1998) suggested that TBO might be particularly helpful in the areas of teaching and service where the questions "What constitutes good teaching?" and "What kinds of service are most important?" keep candidates guessing in

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traditional tenure systems. It could also resolve confusion in the research arena about the relative importance of quality and quantity, or refereed versus non-refereed publications, and journal articles versus books or book chapters, because the committee's preferences would be carefully laid out in the work plan.

Under TBO, candidates would continue in their positions as long as the department observed satisfactory progress toward their objectives (Chait 1998). Cases with substantial evidence of inadequate progress would lead toward non-reappointment with due notice. An upper limit of ten years might be advisable, but the process would be driven by results rather than deadlines. Not all members

of a cohort would reach the point of tenure at the same time. This option is not unlike doctoral degree programs, which delineate at the outset the requirements for the degree, including the specific mix of courses, comprehensive exams, dissertation proposal, and defensible thesis. Students finish when the requirements have been met. Different components of the TBO system have been piloted in institutions across the country. While this option has flaws, TBO may create a more transparent process and better guidance for junior faculty than traditional tenure systems. Chait (1998) further describes the overall idea of TBO.

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Service As Scholarship?

Community service has been integral to the overall mission of U.S. higher education since the late nineteenth century and the development of land-grant and city colleges (Rudolph 1962; Adamay 1994). However, the concept of faculty service as a form of scholarship has emerged only within the last decade. While Elman and Smock (1985) were the first to refer to professional service “exclusively as work that draws upon one’s professional expertise, and is an outgrowth of an academic discipline,” (p.43) Ernest Lynton devoted the later part of his career to making professional service (also referred to as outreach) viable as a form of scholarship. Lynton (1983, 1994, 1995) argued that higher education needs to take its responsibility for knowledge dissemination seriously and because this responsibility falls upon the faculty, their involvement in this outreach should be recognized and rewarded as part of the spectrum of scholarship. In his groundbreaking work *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Ernest Boyer suggested that the concept of scholarship, the most critical area faculty are evaluated for, be redefined to include four expressions: teaching, discovering, integrating, and applying knowledge. It is in the last expression, applying knowledge, that service could become a form of scholarship. Subsequently, in *Making the Case for Professional Service* Lynton (1995) called for each discipline to define and explore measures of quality for professional service as a form of scholarship. Service scholarship may take the form of technical assistance, policy analysis, program evaluation, organizational development, community development, program development, or professional development. Faculty may conduct

applied research and evaluation, or develop new products, practices, or clinical procedures, as part of their involvement in service as scholarship (Schomberg and Farmer 1994). Not all faculty service is scholarship, and service scholarship is distinct from community service, institutional service, and disciplinary service (Lynton 1995).

In *Making Outreach Visible* (1999) Driscoll and Lynton attempted to further demonstrate how faculty service could be assessed and rewarded. In 1997, I reviewed over four hundred promotion and tenure documents and faculty handbooks to find examples of colleges and universities that were making strides in assessing and rewarding faculty professional service (O'Meara 1997). I found twenty-six four-year institutions that had developed specific approaches to defining, documenting, and assessing faculty professional service, many of which defined service as a form of scholarship. Four years later, many other institutions have amended their tenure and promotion process to include the assessment of service as scholarship.

Measuring Service As Scholarship

How do they do it? The territory of assessing service as scholarship has been described as “soft and mushy ground” because professional service does not occur in “standardized units that lend themselves easily to evaluation” (Edgerton 1995, v). Lynton (1995) suggested that faculty professional service, like teaching and research, should be assessed by the following set of measures: depth of expertise and preparation, appropriateness of chosen goals and methods, effectiveness of communication, quality of reflection, impact, and originality and innovation. In the before-mentioned study of model promotion and tenure guidelines for rewarding faculty professional service (O'Meara 1997), I suggested the same primary criteria for assessing faculty professional service but also suggested that the following secondary criteria be applied: sustaining contribution and leadership, dynamic interaction of service, research, and teaching, responsiveness to the needs of recipients/degree of collaboration, and consistently ethical behavior. Driscoll and Lynton (1999) evaluates the quality of outreach activities in five categories: (a) knowledge generation, application, dissemination, preservation; (b) impact on an issue; (c) sustainability and capacity built; (d) the mutual connections/benefits between the university and the community; and (e) the impact on the university.

Of all the areas in which tenure-track faculty must demonstrate competence, and in some cases excellence, outreach is among the most difficult. What is considered adequate or excellent faculty outreach? Faculty who choose to make the case that their service

is a form of scholarship must tackle an even higher hurdle. Often these “service scholars” are among the first faculty on their campuses to “make the case” that their service is scholarship and that they should be tenured or promoted based primarily on their excellence in this area. Unfortunately, their peers, including the promotion and tenure committee who will evaluate them, may have very little knowledge of how to assess their work. Consequently, service scholars enter their promotion and tenure review with very little idea of what will happen.

Assessing Service As Scholarship through Tenure by Objectives

A more effective way to assess outreach and to handle tenure and promotion review in general might be to develop objectives, or performance-based agreements, over the tenure or promotion period. Let us take for example a fictitious character, Dr. Molly Schreier.

Dr. Molly Schreier is an assistant professor in adult and continuing education with Grace College. She is interested in linking her scholarship on how adult students most effectively learn in nontraditional classrooms with the needs of some local community organizations. There are a number of opportunities. For example, she is asked by a women’s shelter to help design a “free university curriculum.” The shelter is

looking for guidance in how to develop needs assessments, design the curriculum, structure the classes, recruit the faculty, and evaluate the program’s success. The innovative aspects of the project will involve curriculum development, the design of interview

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protocols to assess student interests and faculty expertise, and the assessment of outcomes for a unique population of students. Dr. Schreier will need to draw upon her understanding of adult student development, women’s development, college teaching, the research on transformative learning in nontraditional educational settings, and expertise in both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Dr. Schreier sat down with her “mentor committee,” five colleagues who agreed to mentor her continuously over the next six years. At least one member of the committee was skilled in the area of outreach scholarship. In their first few meetings, Dr. Schreier

and her committee developed work plans in teaching and university service. Then they spent most of their time refining the details for a work plan in the area of service scholarship. It was agreed she would spend 50 percent of her time in this area.

Grace College's promotion and tenure policy has identified five criteria for scholarship in any area based on Boyer's (1990) and Lynton's (1995) work. These criteria are depth of expertise and preparation, appropriateness of chosen goals and methods, effectiveness of communication, quality of reflection, impact, and originality and innovation. Therefore, Dr. Schreier and her mentor committee developed a work plan that identifies several ways that she can become "certified" in each of these criteria, given her plans to work with the homeless shelter and several other community organiza-

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tions. For example, in order for Dr. Schreier to demonstrate the depth of her expertise in outreach scholarship she would submit (a) five published articles or chapters based on different stages and findings from her case study research of the free university curriculum, (b) interview

protocols, (c) conference papers and presentations, (d) curriculum materials, (e) evaluations, and (f) an external report of her work from the shelter. In demonstrating effectiveness of communication she would submit materials from three graduate classes (revised in order to link her teaching and research), grants written for the shelter to support their work, newsletter articles written for the shelter's students explaining her findings, and short thought pieces for practitioner journals on working with diverse populations and community organizations on transformative education.

This is just an example of the kinds of documentation Dr. Schreier could provide to demonstrate competency for two criteria. Dr. Schreier and her mentor committee would develop specific goals to document proficiency in each criterion. Each year, Dr. Schreier and her mentor committee would come together for her annual review. At this time, Dr. Schreier would present a portfolio of work samples to substantiate goal achievement in one criterion or another. If her committee agreed she had mastered one of the criteria, she would be certified, and continue pursuing outcomes that demonstrated proficiency in the remaining criteria. Dr. Schreier would be able to

convene her mentor committee up to three times a year for advice on publication outlets, counsel on the direction of her projects, or any other aspects of her scholarship. Ideally, her mentor committee would provide useful feedback which she could apply to improve the quality of her scholarship.

In the example above, Dr. Schreier submitted several traditional research articles as part of the portfolio substantiating the scholarship in her outreach. This leads to the question, can service as scholarship also result in some more traditional, published prod-

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uct? And if so, what is the difference between traditional scholarship and service as scholarship? None of the academic leaders and/or scholars who have studied, written about, or encouraged service as scholarship have stated that this work must end in traditional research articles in order to be considered scholarship (Diamond and Adam 1995; Lynton 1995; Driscoll and Lynton 1999; Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff 1997). Rather, they all point to the importance of service as scholarship resulting in multiple products for multiple audiences. Peer review and demonstration of significance and impact could be achieved through conference presentations and other unpublished outlets. Dr. Schreier’s portfolio is described here with more traditional research outlets for two reasons. First, the area of engaging in and assessing service as scholarship is a new frontier. Consequently, it seems politically wise for faculty engaged in this kind of work to at least initially link their outreach to more traditional research outlets, at least for some projects. Second, it is the author’s opinion that the best strategy for faculty and for institutions in general, is for teaching, research, and service to be woven together, and so the example describes a faculty member linking these three roles so they are somewhat indistinguishable from each other, unless taken apart for the purposes of a traditional faculty evaluation.

Making the Case for Assessing Service as Scholarship through Objectives

“After two decades of research on early-career faculty, perhaps higher education’s real problem is not that we don’t know what to do, but rather that we don’t do what we know” (Rice, Sorcinelli, and

Austin 2000, 22). This quote reminds those of us who work in higher education that powerful forces are maintaining the status quo. After three years of research on organizational change in faculty employment, Richard Chait has observed, “there is no internal mandate for reform.” There is strong resistance to reform from those who are now advantaged by the current system, unfair and ineffective as it may be. Despite this fact, I believe there are at least three important reasons for institutions to consider assessing service as scholarship through objectives.

“... assessing service as scholarship through objectives might be particularly useful to women and faculty of color, who report engaging in more outreach than their male counterparts ...”

First, it will provide critical feedback for faculty on how to improve their outreach, feedback that is currently lacking and desperately needed. The assessment of service as scholarship needs to include an element of faculty development so that faculty understand “which behaviors to improve and which to re-

tain” (Braskamp and Ory 1994). More experienced and senior faculty should take leadership in mentoring junior faculty in engaging in and documenting service as scholarship for promotion and tenure. “By not mentoring we are wasting talent. We should be concerned with capitalizing on young professionals’ talent” (Wright and Wright 1987, 207). Service scholars need help in clarifying their scholarly questions, identifying the literature and conceptual framework used in descriptive terms, documenting their service as an ongoing process rather than as the discrete outcomes of different activities, documenting individual contributions and expertise instead of the entire project’s impact, and locating scholarship in the department and institutional mission.

Second, it has the potential to make reward systems fairer and more just. When an applicant accepts an offer from a college or university to join the faculty, the institution and the new faculty member enter into a contract. Many faculty experience this contract as “archery in the dark” (Rice 1996) as they try to determine the institutions’ rules and expectations through hallway conversations and senior faculty comments at department meetings. There seems to be an assumption in the academic world that since the reward system has always operated this way, junior faculty should figure

out the rules just as everyone else did. Often there is an assumption that the current system is the most effective one for encouraging excellence in faculty scholarship. Maybe it is. However, research suggests that when faculty experience an absence of mentors, sense of isolation, absence of clear feedback, ambiguity about their role, and ambiguity about what activities their institution values (Whitt 1991; Sorcinelli 1992), the outcomes for institutions include decreased organizational commitment, job involvement, and job performance and increased turnover (Fisher and Gitelson 1983; Tierney and Bensimon 1996; Sorcinelli 1992).

There is no doubt that during the probationary period faculty feel that the criteria and expectations for their performance are vague in all areas of their work (Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin 2000; Tierney and Bensimon 1996), just more so for outreach. Studies have shown that as much as 50 percent of faculty believe tenure should be modified (Immerwahr 1999). Critics of expanding the definition of scholarship have argued that this kind of modification to traditional tenure systems waters down standards. Assessing service as scholarship through objectives would not necessarily make it “easier” for faculty to achieve promotion and/or tenure; it would just make the path clearer and help junior faculty feel more in control of their journey.

“A reward system is a college or university’s choice of how to live.”

Third, assessing service as scholarship through objectives might be particularly useful to women and faculty of color, who report engaging in more outreach than their male counterparts (Antonio, Astin, and Cress 2000; Bellas and Toutkoushian 1999) and who leave the tenure track prior to the tenure decision in a higher proportion than their white counterparts (TIAA-CREF 1999). Creamer (1998, 4) has stated:

The profile of faculty across this country has remained so stubbornly homogeneous because of the reluctance to relinquish traditional measures of faculty productivity. A narrow definition of what constitutes a contribution to knowledge represents only a fragment of academic discourse, and it awards the privilege of an authoritarian voice to only a few scholars. Expanding the definition of scholarship will benefit minority, female and male academics alike.

By assessing service as scholarship the important contributions of women and faculty of color in these new forms of scholarship may be honored and rewarded more effectively. By assessing service scholarship through objectives a faculty member's work might be improved, and the road to tenure and promotion made clearer.

Conclusion

C. Wright Mills (1959) said that "scholarship is a choice of how to live, as well as a choice of a career." A reward system is a college or university's choice of how to live. Reward systems are artifacts of values and beliefs (Schein 1992). Colleges and universities that choose to assess their faculty members' service as scholarship through objectives would send a message to their faculty and other constituencies that (a) they value outreach as a form of scholarship and an integral part of their university mission and (b) they value their faculty and want to create a just, productive work environment for them.

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