

Teaching, Technology, and Tenure: How Are They Valued?

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“Technology-Based Projects in Performance and/or Promotion and Tenure Decisions in Liberal Arts Colleges”

by

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Introduction

Much has been written during the past twelve years on the subject of broadening the range of faculty activities considered appropriate to meet performance and/or tenure and promotion criteria in higher education. Ernest Boyer, Robert Diamond, Eugene Rice, and others have been reconsidering the nature of scholarship used in the evaluation process for faculty at colleges and universities. Their work has prompted others to begin to consider how non-traditional forms of scholarship might be included in the review process for re-appointment, tenure, and promotion of faculty.

Beginning in 1990 with Ernest Boyer’s seminal work *Scholarship Reconsidered*, the academy has been engaged in a struggle to identify scholarship more broadly and define how it will be acknowledged and rewarded. Boyer identified the work of the scholar as four separate yet overlapping functions: a.) scholarship of discovery, b.) scholarship of integration, c.)

scholarship of application, and d.) scholarship of teaching. Boyer stated “Surely American higher education is imaginative and creative enough to support and reward not only those scholars uniquely gifted in research but also those who excel in the integration and application of knowledge, as well as those especially adept in the scholarship of teaching. Such a mosaic of talent... would bring renewed vitality to higher learning...” (27). In the traditional reward model, funding, and therefore support, favors the scholarship of discovery and yet Boyer states “All faculty are often held to the same standard, and yet research support differs dramatically from one discipline to another” (33). Boyer continues “It is unacceptable, we believe, to go on using research and publication as the primary criterion for tenure and promotion when other educational obligations are required. Further, it’s administratively unwise to ignore the fact that a significant number of faculty are dissatisfied with the current system” (34).

Typically, faculty pursue scholarship that is strongly allied with their institutions’ mission (Diamond, 1999, 1). Robert Diamond was an early advocate for aligning faculty rewards more closely to stated institutional missions. As director of the National Project on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards (1994), Diamond gathered together faculty representatives of 15 professional societies and associations (religion, business, chemistry, history, philosophy, political science, sociology, journalism, geography, composition, communication, geology, mathematics, English, language, home economics, and the arts) to discuss the pieces that went into creating an equitable faculty reward system. Among the subjects discussed, none was more controversial than the term “scholarship.” What soon became apparent was that disciplines differ greatly in how they perceive, and therefore, define scholarly activity. The participants concluded:

1. no single model could be developed to describe the range of activities that should be considered scholarly, professional, or creative work
2. redefining scholarship would expand the range of activities considered appropriate to meet tenure and promotion criteria
3. having disciplinary societies establish a full range of activities upon which tenure and promotion decisions could be based would help change the priorities for faculty members
4. having disciplinary society statements should increase the recognition given to the professional quality of applied research, creative work, and interdisciplinary activities (Diamond, 1994).

Significant results of the National Project on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards include recognition of the following facts.

1. Every discipline includes scholarly and professional activities that traditionally have not been recognized in rewarding faculty members.
2. Agreement exists on the characteristics of an activity that can be considered scholarly or professional.
3. The process of expanding the scope of what is considered scholarly or professional work is far more difficult for some disciplines than for others.
4. Significant differences exist among the disciplines in what faculty members do and in how those activities are described and valued.
5. The differences among disciplines have direct and immediate implications for faculty members serving on promotion and tenure committees as well as by candidates themselves.
6. The proposed expansion of activities considered to be legitimate scholarly or professional work will be much easier for some faculty members to accept than for others. (Diamond, 1994)

Project participants agreed with the Eugene Rice and Ernest Boyer model. They conclude: “It is therefore crucial, as campuses consider revamping their criteria for promotion and tenure, that each academic unit be encouraged to define the work of its faculty members and the value placed upon it in the reward structure based on the dictates of the particular discipline” (Diamond, 1994).

The debate is becoming more urgent. Escalation of the importance of the issue is occurring because individual faculty are presenting non-traditional forms of scholarship in promotion and tenure portfolios. Faculty reward structures are still tied to the tri-partite model of

teaching, scholarship, and service. Research about teaching/learning models support a move away from primarily lecture format to collaborative learning, project-based work (i.e., learning communities). External and internal pressure is on faculty to master and incorporate technology into the curriculum.

Faculty are expected to design and deliver an ever-expanding curriculum with numerous components: general education and electives, major courses, community service, independent study, and internships. Faculty are expected to participate in institutional governance – serve on various ad hoc and standing committees. Faculty are expected to remain intellectually vibrant through scholarly activity. All of these expectations constitute faculty workload and affect reward structures.

Background

Cronin and Overfelt investigated the general “feeling” that higher education reward structures are “reluctant to value electronic contributions to scholarship” (1995, 700). Their research attempted to identify how the academy was adjusting to changes in scholarly publication media and practices, in particular e-journals, by examining official promotion and tenure documents from 35 institutions from the top 50 public and private institutions as ranked by the *US News & World Report’s* 1993 guide, *America’s Best Colleges*. Upon examining the official documents they found the medium to be a non-issue. However, “unsolicited comments of administrators and senior faculty . . . suggest that there may be (or, there may be potential for) inconsistencies in interpretation and practice, both within and across institutions” (702).

Two articles are of particular note: one about academic librarians written by Karen Lawson and Nancy Pelzer (1999) and one about education faculty, which was authored by Nancy Seminoff and Shelley Wepner(1997). Lawson and Pelzer conducted a study to assess

how technology-based products were evaluated in the promotion and/or tenure process for academic librarians employed in Association of Research Libraries (ARL) (464). Seminoff and Wepner distributed an 18-item survey to a select sample of teacher educators, which was designed to gather information about what the respondents and their respective institutions are doing to develop technology-based projects (“Are Technology...” 67).

Kenneth Zahorski and Roger Cognard report on the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education’s *Faculty Roles, Faculty Rewards, and Institutional Priorities* grant program (1996-1998), in which they document a significant shift in the academy’s stance regarding faculty work and reward structures. Twenty-two institutions participated in this program whose objective was to bring into alignment institutional mission and existing faculty roles and reward structures. Faculty workload, always a topic for discussion, is at the forefront of the debate regarding the educational mission of an institution. A strong academic infrastructure (facilities and technology, sabbaticals, released time, development opportunities and funds, flexibility in course offerings and scheduling,) must be present. The grantees made clear that “enhancement of learning could not be realized without a new understanding, a new definition, of scholarship, especially as considerations of scholarship impinged on the rewards of the profession, such as tenure, promotion, and merit pay” (33). The rewards for faculty portfolios containing non-traditional scholarship are varied.

Our Research Project

The 2001 *U.S. News & World Report* identifies 218 American liberal arts colleges and defines liberal arts colleges as those higher education institutions as schools who emphasize undergraduate education. *U.S. News* has based their groupings on the Carnegie Foundation

classifications. The Carnegie Foundation, in 2000, redefined a liberal arts school as one that awards at least half of its degrees in the liberal arts – the benchmark previously was 40 percent.

In an effort to assess the value currently being placed on technology-based projects in performance and/or promotion and tenure decisions in liberal arts colleges, we mailed surveys to the chief academic officer of 45 small liberal arts colleges. These colleges were selected because they were a.) ranked among the top fifty national liberal arts colleges in the 2001 *U.S. News & World Report* survey, b.) ranked among the 2001 *Most Wired Small Colleges*, and/or c.) one of the comparison colleges for our employer, Westminster College (PA). Westminster College executive administrative staff selected the comparison colleges for multiple purposes of improving faculty salary, faculty course load, and student faculty ratio.

The survey, based on the work of Lawson (1999) and Seminoff (1997), attempted to answer questions such as: Are technology-based projects valued in the promotion and tenure decisions at your institution? Are they valued in teaching, scholarship, and/or service? How are they valued? What are the qualities that make these activities scholarly? Chief academic officers of twenty liberal arts colleges responded: eight were part of the top fifty national and wired colleges; two were wired colleges - one national, tier 2 and one regional, tier 3; and ten were part of the comparison group – four national, tier 2 and 6 national, tier 3. Nineteen of the twenty survey respondents are national liberal arts colleges.

Conclusions

As an outgrowth of Ernest Boyer's effort to expand the definition of scholarship, several professional associations have revised their definitions of scholarship or developed new criteria that address technology-based projects in the appointments or tenure and/or promotion review.

“The tangible benefits to individual faculty result from institutions amending their policies for tenure and promotion to reflect the changing definition of scholarship” (Zahorski 35).

The conclusions we draw from our study of the promotion and/or review practices at small liberal arts colleges with regard to technology-based projects are:

1. Technology-based projects deserve more credibility in the review process.
2. Technology-based projects are currently being valued in the promotion and/or tenure review process; however, although some projects are valued equal to traditional print products, more of them are valued less than traditional print products.
3. Although technology-based products are factored into the review process, college review documents continue to lack definition, criteria, and value statements about them.
4. The components and criteria used to evaluate the merit of technology-based products is consistent with the traditional criteria currently used in the evaluation of print scholarship.
5. Technology-based projects, when classified, consistently and logically fall into the teaching, scholarship, and service categories used in the traditional review process.
6. For faculty and librarians alike, the primary reason for creating technology-based projects is to improve instruction.
7. Technology-based projects are valued as scholarship for faculty, but not for librarians.
8. While print scholarship traditionally values innovation and cutting-edge research, technology-based projects seem to be valued more for their impact on specified communities and for their practicality.

Recommendations

We recommend that colleges incorporate definitions, criteria, and value about technology-based projects in institutional review documents and base them on the statements generated by the various professional associations. Further, we recommend colleges value technology-based projects, at least equally to print scholarship, when the technology-based project meets the established criteria. And lastly, colleges should value technology-based projects as scholarship for librarians, regardless of whether librarians have faculty status and rank.

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