

Working Smarter, Not Harder

In a beginning-of-semester state-of-the-university address not too long ago, I spoke about faculty productivity, the use of technology, and “working smarter, not harder.” The faculty response reminded me, as a labor historian for the past forty years, of the tension in the 1890s between George Pullman’s desire to maximize profitability in his Pullman Palace Car Company and the workers’ desires to maintain wages and working conditions on the shop floor. Of course, Pullman also used technology to divide and control the workforce. Although the latter is not what I had in mind when I discussed “productivity,” one faculty member persuaded a local reporter to shadow him for a day so that he could demonstrate the impossibility of wringing another ounce of effort from him. This incident revealed to me, as a university president for the past twenty-six years, that higher education leadership must emphasize a collegial approach (an institution-wide, system-wide effort uniting administration, staff, and faculty on a single purpose) to working smarter, not harder, through the effective use of technology.

To do that, presidents must meet five challenges. First, presidents must demonstrate to faculty that there is a problem and that public, comprehensive institutions of higher education now face more intense challenges and competition than at any other time in their history. Second, presidents must communicate an intent for the campuses to engage collegially in improving their positions in the education marketplace and for faculty to play the central role in that improvement process. Third, presidents

must convince faculty that efforts to improve do *not* include replacing them with technology-delivered teaching, research, or service. Fourth, presidents must recognize that for educational improvement to occur, it must be driven by those faculty—in the system, campus, college, school, and department—who accept the scholarship of teaching and learning and the technology to apply it. Fifth and finally, presidents must insist that the institution’s mission be focused in purpose and that its reward system reflect new approaches to achieving that purpose.

The first challenge involves improving student learning and retention without depending on additional financial resources or additional faculty positions, given declining state support and limits to tuition increases. This reality exists in the face of competition from exclusively online colleges and universities from around the world, of wavering student motivation and preparation, and of increasing external skepticism about and regulation of higher education. Institutional priorities must be set, and faculty must be compensated when they are met. Television is one tool that can be used more effectively to meet this squeeze. Nearly seventy higher education institutions are dual licensees in public television and radio, and even more have access to a cable network. University-licensed public television stations are now digital (four channels). In the 1970s, our main campus had its first televised course—taught by a young lawyer named

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John Ashcroft, now the U.S. attorney general. Today, combined with the Internet, television is an essential learning tool that should be expanded rather than abandoned. For the last six years, I was the only college or university president on the board of National Public Radio. I tried, without much luck, to get its CEO on the agenda of formal presidential organizations to talk about educational uses of public broadcasting.

The second challenge is that presidents, as true believers in the value of education, must assist faculty in expanding effectiveness. They can begin by recognizing that most faculty are hard-working and that to stimulate and maintain interest, motivation, and morale among faculty, institutions must shift the emphasis of their workload rather than adding to it. This can be done through special projects, workshops, networking, consultations, and the establishment of a well-staffed Academic Development Center on campus. In addition, the greatest credit-hour production is in general education courses, where math, writing, critical thinking, and reading skills are developed. Among the helpful tools and approaches, many suggested by Carol Twigg,¹ is the development of these courses using CD-ROMs. All essential information and drills for certain classes should be on CD-ROM. Properly done and supplemented by classroom work, this allows students to improve writing skills by utilizing directed learning outside the classroom. It reduces the time

that teachers spend in the classroom and keeps them in contact with students through the Internet, even though the class itself is not Internet-based.

The third challenge is assuring faculty that technology-assisted techniques will protect their jobs and make them more—not less—valuable to the institution. Faculty must understand that the twenty-first century requires different approaches to their profession, and leadership must define and communicate the scholarship of teaching and learning as a valued form of faculty scholarship, in any field. Following Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered*,² the scholarship of teaching and learning should be detailed in the faculty handbook and recognized in the reward system. Teaching fellowships should be established to allow faculty in selected departments to head efforts to use technology to deliver general education courses. This should lead to focused online programs concentrated on greatest need—perhaps the graduate programs if those students are employed or are required to travel great distances. The market exists: it deserves to be served with high standards; it cannot be served in traditional fashion; and it will be served by some other agency if colleges and universities do not do so.

The fourth challenge is to ensure that “working smarter, not harder” using new tools is driven by faculty and is focused in responsive department and college units. Distance education—the Extended University in its many forms—must work closely with existing departments, utilizing the same standards, and should not be a distinct, competitive, degree-granting unit. Because interpretation and implementation of mission, division of resources, and evaluation and rewards begin in the departments, they must be focused, energized, and effectively led. Training for department leadership must be ongoing and must include an understanding of twenty-first-century

educational tools and the methods to organize courses around them. Students understand that globalization and multiculturalism are not goals but are facts. The international market, bringing students to U.S. campuses, has been slowed by visa restrictions. New tools allow taking U.S. degrees to major markets—China, India, and Latin America—while securing places for American students to study abroad. Advanced courses can be put on CD-ROM, regular Internet contact with U.S.-based faculty can be maintained, and the cost differential can cover a brief trip by faculty to interact with the class and the local supervisor.



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The fifth challenge is to focus the institutional mission and the faculty-reward structure to account for the effective use of the new tools to work smarter, not harder. It is not necessary to replace research and service as primary activities for faculty. On the other hand, because learning rather than teaching should be the central concern and because the new tools relate to this focus, the institution should emphasize learning. In any state, if a college or university receives relatively limited state support per student in comparison with its peers, holds tuition and fees to a moderate level, and can demon-

strate that it is delivering higher quality with fewer resources, the rewards for efficiency and productivity must go first to the faculty who have made this possible. Efficiency and productivity, along with quality, must be worked into the reward system at all levels. Obviously, the new tools are essential for faculty research related to the institutional mission. Less obvious, perhaps, is the opportunity to increase student learning by involving them in related and relevant research through technology. More time will be available for research if the emphasis is put on learning and if less time is spent in the classroom while new tools are used to keep closer contact with students. The resulting grants, contracts, and patents benefit the individual faculty member, the student, and the college or university.

New tools, from the printing press onward, have changed the educational delivery system. All colleges and universities have access to TV channels, CD-ROM production, and Internet course-creation opportunities, and all recognize that these are major learning, research, and outreach tools. Faculty must learn to work smarter, not harder and must learn to use these tools to do so. The primary task of staff, administrations, and presidents—of leadership—is to facilitate that work. Presidents are obliged to have a different relationship with faculty than Pullman did with his workforce, and faculty are obliged to recognize that they share the same collegial purpose as presidents.

Notes

1. Carol A. Twigg, “Improving Learning and Reducing Costs: New Models for Online Learning,” *EDUCAUSE Review*, vol. 38, no. 5 (September/October 2003): 28–38 <<http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm03/erm035.asp>> (accessed May 17, 2004).
2. Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

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