New Conceptions of Scholarship for a New Generation of Faculty Members

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Scholarship Reconsidered gave us an amplified vision of scholarly work, yet the process of tenure has inhibited the full realization of that vision. This chapter argues that we need to make the tenure process work more effectively and flexibly in order to validate and encourage the multiple types of scholarship Boyer proposes.

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Over the past decade, four-year institutions, particularly research universities and the larger comprehensive institutions with complex missions, have been subject to criticism centering on issues of faculty work. Simply put, constituencies inside and outside universities have argued that faculty members are spending too much time on disciplinary-based research and are ignoring both undergraduate students and the broader society. In 1990, when Ernest Boyer produced his seminal work, Scholarship Reconsidered, it was hailed as a breakthrough in the understanding of faculty work. The goal of Scholarship Reconsidered was to move beyond the debate over “teaching versus research” as faculty priorities in order to give scholarly work a more efficacious and enlarged meaning. Boyer proposed four forms of scholarship that should be valued equally: discovery, integration, engagement, and teaching and learning.

On campuses across the nation, faculty members and administrators have discussed this new paradigm of scholarship with great seriousness. For example, on my own campus I served on a multiyear, campuswide Task Force on Faculty Roles and Rewards, which looked at these different formulations of scholarship and provided recommendations with regard to personnel policies. In addition, national interest has sustained ten years of annual conferences on “Faculty Roles and Rewards,” sponsored by the American Association of Higher Education, as well as a range of reform efforts, such as the scholarship of teaching, the peer review of teaching, the assessment of student learning, and standards for assessing scholarship (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 1997; Hutchings, 1996; Hutchings and Shulman, 1999).
During the same decade, researchers conducted several notable studies of doctoral candidates considering academic careers, graduates on the job market, and new and early-career faculty members in tenure-track appointments (Boice, 1992; Menges, 1999; Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin, 2000; Sorcinelli and Austin, 1992; Tierney and Bensimon, 1996; Trower, 2001). Taken together, these studies suggest that personnel policies and other rewards and incentive systems continue to place a heavy emphasis on research. Although Scholarship Reconsidered (Boyer, 1990) has broadened the debate about “research versus teaching” and has truly influenced the lives of teachers on a number of campuses, discussions with early-career faculty members have revealed that Boyer’s vision of greater parity among the scholarships has yet to be fully realized. Scholarship Reconsidered’s goal of integrating personal and institutional endeavors and providing a wholeness to scholarly work has bumped up against a tenure system that early-career faculty members characterize as “our greatest barrier to a better future” (Rice, 1996).

In this chapter I briefly describe criticisms of the current tenure process and the ways in which the process impedes realization of Boyer’s vision. I then explore some encouraging changes that directly address flaws in the tenure process and work to more effectively and flexibly validate and encourage the multiple types of scholarship that Boyer has proposed.

**Tension Between Ideals and Reality**

Although there have been a number of studies of aspiring and new faculty members, these studies commonly ask one broad question: How do doctoral students and early-career faculty members experience their graduate education, the job search process, and the tenure track? And, in answering, young scholars commonly describe a tension they experience between ideals and reality as they move through graduate school and into faculty posts. They struggle to balance their ideals about life in the academy with tenure and the realities of doing meaningful work and trying to lead a balanced life. Once hired, many early-career faculty members reported experiencing an incomprehensible tenure system, a lack of community, and an unbalanced life. One study (Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin, 2000), which was grounded in structured interviews with more than 350 aspiring and early-career faculty members, focused directly on perceptions of the tenure process.

**Key Concerns with the Tenure Process**

Although many early-career faculty members expressed reservations about the tenure system as a whole, most identified the process of contending for tenure as their most urgent concern (Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin, 2000). Expectations for performance on the tenure track were described as ambiguous, shifting, and inconsistent. Even more worrisome to interviewees were
ever-escalating expectations. Across nearly all disciplines and sectors of higher education, early-career faculty members described a “raising of the bar” and a “ratcheting up” of requirements for tenure, especially in research. Many received little formal feedback or mentoring from senior colleagues. They were disappointed not to find a long-anticipated, supportive community of senior scholars, a department chair, and students. And tenure-track faculty members themselves were reluctant to seek assistance because doing so was tantamount to admitting a weakness.

To compound the problem, the collegial review structure is flawed. The lineup of decision makers includes frequently rotating chairs and a personnel committee with rapid turnover of its members. And although tenure requirements and processes may in some cases be spelled out in policy language, most of those interviewed had no clear understanding of how the actual process worked, exactly who was involved, or how to compile their dossiers.

Finally, the tenure time line has a short-term focus, whereas scholars’ passions require a long-term view. The tenure process was described as inflexible and unresponsive to decreased funding, publication backlogs, the learning curve for teaching and preparing courses, the time needed to exploit the advantages of new technologies, and the personal demands made on scholars struggling to balance their lives.

In sum, the young scholars we interviewed were asking for changes in the tenure process that reflect much of what Scholarship Reconsidered imagined: the conceptualization of teaching and community engagement as scholarly enterprises; rich, public, collegial discourse about teaching, student learning, and civic commitments on- and off-campus; and opportunities to work flexibly and collaboratively, finding intellectual and supportive colleagueship across the disciplines.

**Improving the Tenure Process**

Scholarship Reconsidered opened up the conversation about faculty reward structures in disciplines and at campuses across the country. Indeed, Boyer has directly addressed the tenure process and has urged the academy to encourage and reward all four categories of scholarly work. And although the academy remains firmly committed to research and discovery, it has taken steps to reaffirm its historic mission of teaching and seeking new ways to promote public engagement. Briefly described are some exemplars from campuses that have been developing practices and policies that respond to some of the most fundamental concerns about the tenure process (Sorcinelli, 2000).

**Communicating Expectations for Performance.** Early-career faculty members need to know what is expected of them, and departments, schools, and colleges have adopted various practices to make this information accessible. Arizona State University’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has
instituted a model of faculty work in which responsibilities are negotiable and flexible, and the College encourages the integration of different forms of scholarly work. The College is now developing a formal system for evaluating both individual and unit accomplishments. Portland State University engages its faculty in both the scholarship of teaching and the scholarship of community-based learning and provides models for documenting these new forms of scholarship in promotion and tenure portfolios.

**Giving Feedback on Progress.** Early-career faculty members seek clear and constructive performance feedback. The Promotion and Tenure Committee at Indiana University–South Bend offers voluntary third-year reviews by peers to all tenure-track faculty members to provide confidential, formative feedback at a time when it can be most helpful. One college dean at the University of Wisconsin–Steven’s Point brings pretenure faculty members together annually to solicit suggestions for improving life on the tenure track. Centers for teaching and learning often offer services that help newcomers assess their own teaching and their students’ learning. Our Center for Teaching, for example, offers all first-year faculty members the opportunity to collect feedback from their students at midterm and to begin preparing a philosophy of teaching statement and teaching portfolio (Mues and Sorcinelli, 2000). These initiatives all serve to encourage conversation about career development, to promote informed and supportive peer review, and to advance an amplified vision of scholarship, especially the scholarship of teaching.

**Enhancing Collegial Review Processes.** Early-career faculty members desire more ongoing discussion in the department or college of the tenure process and the values that inform it. A college dean at Drake University annually brings together the probationary faculty members and the college tenure review committee, and committee members share information on their composition, charge, and review process. At the University of Washington, the oceanography department invites junior faculty members to observe tenure reviews in order to demystify the process (“The Future of Tenure: Interview with Richard Chait,” 1999). In a special program for minority faculty members, Eastern Michigan University conducts an orientation in which tenured faculty members of color offer advice to and answer questions from the recently appointed tenure-track minority faculty members. These kinds of collegial discussions make public the process of tenure and allow early-career faculty members and their departments to better assess the progress of their scholarly work, in whatever form it takes.

**Creating Flexible Timelines for Tenure.** Some campuses are beginning to allow some flexibility in the timing of the tenure review. At Marquette University, an early-career faculty member who becomes a parent during the probationary period can “stop the clock” for one year. Conversely, chairs at a range of institutions—such as Northwestern University, College of Charleston, and Saint Olaf College—can “move the clock forward” by
working within the institutional framework to award newcomers credit for prior college teaching experience. These initiatives confirm that scholarly work takes considerable time and effort if it is to embody the dimensions that Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) posited: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique.

**Encouraging Mentoring by Senior Faculty Members.** On many campuses, the interaction between senior faculty members and newcomers has been too limited, particularly around the tenure process. Mindful of this gulf, Colorado College assigns each new tenure-track faculty member to a senior or retired faculty member outside the newcomer’s department, and the two meet monthly to discuss career development issues. At Kean University, new faculty members receive a one-course reduction during the first semester so that they can participate in a mentoring program featuring distinguished senior colleagues appointed as “Presidential Teaching Scholars.” At Brigham Young University, the orientation of new faculty members is a year-long program involving a structured mentoring relationship with a senior faculty member and an intensive two-week learning experience in which new faculty members work individually, with one another, and with experienced faculty members and administrators. These exemplars of mentoring and support encourage the setting of goals among the four scholarships and a plan for achieving them that can be shared in collegial dialogue with mentors.

**Preparing the Future Professoriate.** We need to duplicate for graduate students many of the supportive activities offered to new faculty members. Fortunately, there is a major national initiative involving many of the research universities where aspiring faculty members are prepared. The Preparing Future Faculty project, sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools, cultivates a broader conception of scholarly work. The project has developed a number of model programs to better prepare graduate students interested in academic careers (Tice, Gaff, and Pruitt-Logan, 1998).

For example, Howard University awards a Certificate in College and University Faculty Preparation to those who satisfactorily complete a two-year, faculty-supervised preparatory program consisting of a course called Preparing for the Professoriate, a week-long training in distance learning techniques, and periodic symposia on issues affecting higher education. At the University of Minnesota, the program places graduate students aspiring to faculty careers directly into the different settings in which the profession is practiced. Graduate students are introduced to institutions with different missions, student profiles, and faculty responsibilities. Such “preparing the future professoriate” initiatives allow aspiring teachers to assess the full range of scholarly work in which faculty members engage at community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and comprehensive and research universities.
Recognizing the Department Chair as Career Sponsor. Interviews with early-career faculty members returned repeatedly to the pivotal role department chairs play in the tenure and promotion process. Flawed tenure processes can exact a heavy toll on the candidate, department, and institution. There are a number of recent initiatives that provide chairs with guidance on supporting early-career faculty members and on conducting tenure evaluations that are both thoughtful and fair. Sorcinelli’s *Principles of Good Practice* (2000), which was sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education, offers ten principles of good practice, inventories to prompt academic leaders to examine their individual and institutional practices, and examples of concrete and innovative approaches from a variety of institutional settings. *Good Practice in Tenure Evaluation* (2000), a joint project of the American Council on Education, the American Association of University Professors, and the United Educators Association, provides additional advice for tenured faculty members, department chairs, and academic administrators regarding standards and procedures for tenure evaluation. In addition, institutions such as Kansas State University and professional and disciplinary associations such as the American Council on Education and the Modern Language Association sponsor annual and occasional seminars for department chairs. These programs focus on helping department chairs and other decision makers support the development of new faculty members and rethink traditional notions of faculty work in ways that begin to acknowledge varied ways of being a scholar.

Innovative Tenure and Promotion Statements

Perhaps one of the most exciting outcomes of *Scholarship Reconsidered* has been the enlarged view of scholarly work, as evidenced in new tenure and promotion policies at a number of colleges and universities. Various campuses have reviewed and rewritten policies to better capture and recognize the contributions of early-career and senior faculty members across the four scholarships. For example, Clemson University has installed an electronic faculty reporting system to address concerns about faculty roles and rewards. The system recognizes the need to redefine scholarship and it links faculty evaluation to established university goals. Every college now funds public service and outreach activities, which are part of the evaluation criteria. California State University–Long Beach has developed a new retention, tenure, and promotion policy emphasizing career-long professional development. The policy enlarges the dimensions considered in evaluating scholarship, and it strengthens the peer review of faculty work. The Associated New American Colleges is developing improved policies and practices in a number of areas of faculty work, such as workload differentiation, unit accountability, rewards, institutional service, faculty career stages, and faculty development. Following a needs assessment, working groups are meeting to outline both a vision and an agenda that will begin to incorporate and validate more varied ways of being a scholar, teacher, and institutional citizen.
Conclusion

Over the last decade, *Scholarship Reconsidered* has been widely discussed and has generated a range of policies, practices, and resources for improving the reward structure in general and the tenure process in particular. At the same time, studies of aspiring and new faculty members have identified the current tenure review process as a continuing obstacle to the full realization of a broader conceptualization of scholarly work. In order to move forward, we will need to both improve the tenure process as we now know it and create a new vision for the academy (Trower, Austin, and Sorcinelli, 2001). In the short term, within the confines of the current tenure system, we need to continue to support a broader conceptualization of the scholarly work of early-career faculty members. The aforementioned examples provide us with a starting point for communicating clear performance expectations for a range of scholarly work (throughout graduate school and the probationary years), ensuring orientation, mentoring, and feedback, offering flexibility and choice among various forms of scholarly work (and career tracks), and affording support for ongoing self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues about the kind of work and life we want to have.

Over the longer term, we have a wonderful opportunity to further transform our conceptions of faculty work and of the academy itself. A decade ago, in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer began the search for a new paradigm of faculty work that could meet the diverse and changing needs of our society. In response, colleges and universities have tested a range of new policies and practices that have enlarged our view of scholarly work and have directly addressed the tenure and promotion process. We now need to both institutionalize our best ideas and further articulate possible futures for the academy that ensure the health and livelihood of its faculty, especially its newest generation. The fresh approaches to faculty work generated by the varied and interrelated forms of scholarship proposed in Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* will be an important touchstone in this endeavor.

References


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