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Jerry Samples, University of Pittsburgh - Johnstown

JERRY SAMPLES is Professor of Mechanical Engineering Technology and the Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown (UPJ). He holds a BS ChE. from Clarkson College, and MS and Ph.D. in ME from Oklahoma State University. He taught at the United States Military Academy for 12 years before joining UPJ in 1996. His recent work has been in the area of foundations of good teaching and development of advanced teaching methods.
Leadership 104: the Teacher-Scholar Culture

Abstract

The Carnegie Classification of colleges and universities presents a natural divide between those that are “teaching” focused and those that are “research” focused, with shades of gray sprinkled in between. This divide provides the basis for commentary such as, “we are a teaching school” or, “we are a research university” with no implied ties to the other function: scholarship or teaching.

The teacher-scholar model is one implied in Boyer’s book *Scholarship Reconsidered* [1] where scholarship is divided into four discrete types with the “scholarship of teaching” set forth as an acceptable form of scholarly enterprise. The model is further described as a method whereby scholarship informs teaching, currency informs teaching, and pedagogy is developed or improved and turned into scholarship so that new pedagogy is available to other educators.

Building a culture where “teaching faculty” accept the notion that scholarship is an important element in their role as a faculty member is one focus of this paper. Of equal importance is a culture where “research faculty” accept the notion that good teaching is an important element in their role as a faculty member is the second focus of this paper. Together these roles form the teacher-scholar as a necessary condition of the culture of the college or university. Formation of teacher-scholars is the responsibility of the leadership within universities and will be briefly discussed since without leadership, the teacher or scholar divide can become the preferential culture. It is common practice to accuse the “research” focused universities with forsaking teaching but it is just as easy for the “teaching” focused colleges and universities to forsake scholarship. A look at the necessary steps to achieve the teacher-scholar culture will compare the extremes perpetuated by the Carnegie Classification of colleges and universities.

Motivation

The term leadership inspires the vision of a senior faculty member or an administrator whose wisdom permeates a meeting and from whom lofty decisions come down. Or, it is the person stuck with the role as department chair for the next three years because no one else will take on the responsibility. Actually, leadership is nothing more than influence applied to a group of people in hopes of getting them to move one way or another. In the collegial atmosphere of a College or University, influence can be exerted by anyone—even tenure-stream faculty: thus, the term leadership in the title of this piece.

The teacher-scholar culture is one that has been growing legs since the publication of Boyer’s book in 1990. Even before 1990 there was consideration of the need for teaching and scholarship in the academy but often as distinct ideas conjoined by tenure. The teacher-scholar model is not about tenure; rather, it is about overall excellence within the academy. A quick survey of the net reveals drafts recommendations, policies, and planning documents about teacher-scholar models at various institutions of higher learning. For instance, the teacher-scholar model at the University of Michigan - Dearborn is endorsed over a research-scholar
model. They state: “We seek faculty who value and are committed to excellence in teaching and research. We believe the two are inextricably linked, and that on-going research contributes to the intellectual vitality characteristic of quality classroom instruction.”[2] Clearly, there is a concern as to the relative importance of teaching compared to research, and at other school, research compared to teaching. Excellence can be defined as teaching and research at equal levels.

This then is not a paper that simply states that research faculty should pay attention to teaching, or that teaching faculty need to do research – it is a discussion about the changing of culture, the decisions to be made by new faculty, and the how leaders at all levels influence the result.

**Why bother with a model anyway?**

This is really a great question since we can select the type of school – teaching or research – that we like and just go with the flow. That is the easy answer or at least it was. With the renewed interest in student learning and assessing that learning there are new pressures to ensure that the classroom experience has value. Similarly, as we evaluate academic institutions we are now concerned about the faculty’s currency in the discipline. So, researchers have to teach and teachers have to research – but we already knew that. There must be something else to this model idea.

Before discussing the model further it is important to set the maximum and minimum parameters on the two functions of interest – teaching and scholarship. There is a difference between research and scholarship as research actually begets scholarship. Unfortunately, we have classified institutions of higher education by teaching and research, where scholarship is the deliverable of a research project. Similarly, we have divided the primary parameter, teaching, along the same lines. It is not unusual for a faculty member at a “teaching” college to carry a 4 to 5 course per term teaching load. This equates to 12 to 15 hours in the classroom, at least a one-to-one preparation time and time required for grading, etc. Many faculty members spend 50 – 60 hours a week at work, most of that is used teaching, preparing and grading leaving little time to mount a scholarly agenda. There is, of course, a requirement to prepare scholarly works both in the discipline and about the pedagogy of teaching. At the “research” university the teaching load is considerably less – 2 courses per term perhaps as few as 3 per year for incoming tenure-stream faculty and buy-outs if there is grant money available. So, the faculty’s opportunity to teach is reduced and the demand to perform sponsored research is increased. Scholarship is related to the money brought in, the number of graduate students and a lot of work. Again, there is the 50 – 60 hour work week but now the focus is on research instead of teaching.

Here is where decisions are made that define the direction of individual faculty. Lowman [3] discusses the anxiety that many faculty face in trying the get to the point of tenure. He begins by pointing out the freedoms of a faculty member and the problems inherent with making ones own schedule. “Not enough time can become a convenient rationalization for not becoming a better teacher or scholar. Some new instructors who are anxious about their teaching (especially if it is not initially easy or satisfying) denigrate its importance: “Why should I break my neck for the students? They don’t give me tenure!” Others throw themselves into teaching to side step the
pressure to conduct important research or bring in a big grant. They can then explain their failure to complete dissertations, produce publications, or obtain tenure as rising from their choice to pursue teaching excellence.” Lowman goes on to say: “Such “champions of good teaching” often fail to notice that some colleagues can balance the competing demands on their time and do well in both teaching and scholarship. It is this balance that is reflected in the teacher-scholar model.

The next concern is why worry about teaching at all. In their paper, “How important is effective teaching to engineering faculty and administrators?” Brawner, et.al. [4] studied the responses of faculty who were asked about teaching. They report; “In 1999, the survey respondents rated the importance of effective teaching to themselves very high, averaging 6.5 on a 7.0 scale. They rated its importance to their colleagues, department heads, deans, and top institutional administrators significantly lower, with the averages ranging from 5.1 to 5.6. Their ratings of the importance of effective and innovative teaching in the reward system were still lower—3.7 and 3.5, respectively. Significant differences in ratings were found by gender, primary academic function (teaching, teaching/research, and administration), involvement in SUCCEED, rank, and Carnegie Foundation classification of the institutions.” Clearly, the faculty surveyed felt that the administration did not see teaching as important and that the reward system, tenure, also failed to recognize the importance of teaching. So, it may not be that research faculty need to teach more, it may be that the emphasis is such that they need not teach nor do it well. With this in mind, Wankat and Oreovicz [5] may be correct when they say that; “However, a professor ignores the established reward system at his or her peril.” This further establishes the reward system as the culprit when teaching is neglected. Similar circumstances occur at teaching colleges where research is in the way of teaching excellence. As indicated by Lowman, the quest for teaching excellence can be an excellent excuse for performing no research and not engaging in scholarly pursuits. Personal experience at two teaching colleges bears out this line of thought. Wankat and Oreovicz [5] contend that; “Ideally, research or other scholarly activity reinforces teaching and both teaching and the research improve.” So, it is possible that the teacher-scholar model could work in both teaching and research institutions.

Models

There are many teacher-scholar models, in use and being put into practice. The following excerpts demonstrate the variety of models at a cross-section of universities.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville posted a draft of a “Teacher Scholar Philosophy” in October 2007 [6]. In it they state that the teacher should be a scholarly teacher and go on to define that as, “…mastery of the discipline along with the development and application of effective educational practices, pedagogies, and learning strategies appropriate to the discipline.” Further, they state that the scholarly teacher should be engaged in scholarship as set forth in the Boyer paradigm. Lastly, they insist that balance is best and must include teaching, scholarship and service.

Cal Poly in their draft recommendation to revamp their teacher-scholar model and to reduce concerns about a possible move from “teaching” to “research” recommend the following verbiage: “Specify approximate percentage of time/value faculty are expected to devote to
teaching, scholarship, Cal Poly service, and community & professional service activities. For example, the university might stipulate that untenured faculty devote approximately 60-70% to teaching, 20-30% to scholarship, 5-10% to service, and tenured faculty devote more time to service and less to teaching. Although faculty might choose different emphases at different times in their careers, it is not recommended for faculty members to "specialize" in just one area (e.g., teaching, research, service). Such specification can eliminate anxiety and focus the efforts of tenure-stream faculty – the only question to be resolved – What is expected in the 20-30% scholarship? How does this translate into scholarly works? These are questions that need to be answered by the leadership.

The University of Saskatchewan had four goals in its Framework for Planning, [8] including:
1. improving the quality of instructional programs
2. increasing research intensiveness
3. fostering the teacher-scholar model
4. responding to the needs of aboriginal peoples

When reviewing these goals they found, “Though “fostering the teacher-scholar model” was the third goal on this list, it may be seen in some ways as a goal which overarches and links both “improving the quality of instructional programs” and “increasing research intensiveness.”” They go on to describe their model as:

“Major universities, like the University of Saskatchewan, are not research institutes, degree factories, or simply storehouses of knowledge. They acquire their distinctive character by their capacity to unite scholarship with teaching. Scholarship involves the discovery of new knowledge, its integration and synthesis, and its application to new or persistent problems. Teaching requires not just the effective communication of this knowledge, but the creation of a capacity for criticism and self-examination. Given this University's strong commitment to research, and its equally strong commitment to a broad range of educational programs, it makes sense to place a high value on research that has an impact on the learning experience of students, and a high value on teaching that is informed by scholarly activities.”

Further they feel that the model has “sufficient flexibility to be appropriate to all disciplines within the University.” This is an excellent definition that places both teaching and research in the spotlight.

Finally, the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) Faculty Professional Development Committee provided another excellent definition: “The Teacher-Scholar is someone who understands the subject matter deeply enough to structure, select, and organize it in order to effectively communicate to students and whose scholarship and service to the university and community demonstrate a commitment to creating new knowledge, to applying knowledge to solving problems, to synthesize various strands of knowledge, and to understanding how students learn.”[9]

The teacher-scholar model has been developed - defined in many ways – but who will take on the leadership role in making the model work?
Leadership – who is in charge here?

The results of the SUCCEED survey indicate that the faculty want to include teaching but that they feel that the administrators and the rewards system value teaching at a lower level. Wankat and Oreovicz warn that there is peril if the rewards system is ignored. Lowman says that faculty members tend to steer clear of those work functions that they don’t like – it may be either teaching or research. Wankat and Oreovicz state that scholarship informs teaching and that both can be done simultaneously, and well. At the same time there is great concern for student learning and the value added in higher education. To complicate matters there is a national push for accountability in higher education. So, who will lead us through all of these challenges? The answer is the faculty.

The authors of the teacher-scholar models previously presented are faculty groups. They may be faculty groups responding to questions by administrators, they may be defining the model to ease the uncertainty of the tenure process, they may be addressing concerns from accreditation agencies, or they may be doing the right thing to set the standard for what they perceive is the environment in which they work and in which students learn best. Whatever the reason, the bulk of the work is accomplished by faculty. They then become the leaders – as do the faculty influencing the direction of any university. A change in culture of a university cannot happen by fiat – it must be vetted through every level of the leadership and certainly with the faculty and its leaders.

New educators often shy away from the limelight in situations where there is a need for leadership and there is a risk associated with being the leader. New educators have the perfect training for being in the mix – they have no old habits to overcome – they have just come from another learning environment and may have reasoned opinions based on their limited experience – some come with the notion of the model already – and most want to know exactly what they need to do to get tenure – so they are perfect for the leadership role. No, it is not that easy and to be cavalier about the risks of leadership would indicate a lack of perspective. However, some of the most reasoned arguments in favor of the teacher-scholar model come from new educators who have been taught the importance of good teaching and quality scholarship. They have not been jaded by the views of those who don’t like to teach and the assertions that teaching is not an important part of the job, nor have they been told that teaching is the panacea and that research is not necessary. They come ready to do their best and that is all that can be asked.

Steps toward making the model work

The most reasonable way to make a teacher-scholar model work is for every faculty member to be a teacher-scholar. The demonstration of teaching excellence, informed by scholarship, will be immediately recognizable to students, colleagues and administrators. A real teacher-scholar is efficient in both research and teaching. They are easily identified by their output and the way students speak of them. To change a culture requires that the people within the culture shift to a new way of doing business. The shift of energy will be noticed by the leadership, and unless there are other outside pressures, leaders certainly will respond positively to better teaching and research. The first step is to demonstrate the model.
The second step is to recruit like thinking faculty. Many faculty feel that the teacher-scholar is the way to go. The evidence comes from the SUCCEED reports and the number of teacher-scholar models that are being proposed in institutions across the country. Find like thinking faculty and form a group, have meetings and promote the model.

The third step is to disarm those who are naysayers. At teaching schools there are always people who resist research in favor of the cause of teaching excellence and student learning – as mentioned by Lowman. In today’s world, it is important to stay abreast of the academic discipline and one of the best ways is to be engaged in scholarly activities. Remember, scholarship is broadly defined and at teaching schools the broad definition is widely accepted. So disarm them not by argument but by deed. Do what is necessary to be a teacher-scholar – reap the rewards and enjoy a productive life.

The fourth step is to look at the rewards system. If the only system is tenure, then look at it carefully. Is the process for tenure current, and does it reflect what is actually going on at the college or university? If changes have been made to the reward process they should be made known. In some cases the changes do reflect the need to be a teacher-scholar in order to get tenure, at least at the margin. If more changes need to be made – suggest them.

The fifth and final step is to put the program in place. Here there are many leaders involved. Faculty and administrators need to see this as a positive direction for the organization. They must agree on the definitions, the process for implementing the model and the rules for the rewards system. Changing culture can be risky – making a positive change is cause for celebration.

This is not an easy or even rapid process, but it s a worthy one that is necessary in today’s academic world. New educators can demonstrate the model and encourage the administration to move. Junior faculty studies are often the basis for change, especially when the university is moving forward to a new academic level. Be a voice, use technology, demonstrate excellence in teaching and scholarship – this is leadership and it will be recognized.

Conclusion

In McKeachie’s book [10] he provides an excellent summary to the whole argument for a teacher-scholar model. He states: “As a result of the debates about Boyer’s proposal, there is increasing acceptance of the idea that good teaching involves much scholarly activity. Find out what the local norms are, and if you feel a conflict, choose the balance that suits your own talents and interests with an informed awareness of the likelihood of support for that self-definition. Whatever your choice, it is likely that teaching will be a part of your role. Teaching skillfully may be less time consuming than teaching badly. Teaching well is more fun that teaching poorly. Moreover, you will be better able to focus on your research if you are not worrying about teaching.” The direction of this focus on teaching can be reversed to focus on research for those at teaching schools. In either case, teaching well and efficiently or researching well and efficiently will lead to less stress and better results.
Lastly, if you are in the wrong place – change. Do not stay where you do not fit as this will lead to a miserable existence. You can still be a teacher-scholar – just with a different emphasis on the results.

References