

Community college faculty are urged to play a central role in the current dialogue about changing faculty roles through expanding definitions of scholarship to include teaching. Suggesting a provisional definition of scholarly teaching, the article explores the current shape of the community college professoriate and how scholarly teaching might clarify the academic function of its faculty, strengthen ties between two and four year faculty, and enhance community college faculty's response to a changing world.

The Community College Professoriate: *Expanding the Dialogue about Faculty Roles*

Across the country, faculty and administrators are rethinking the traditional form and function of faculty roles, critically self-reflecting on the extent to which they exemplify espoused ideals and speaking more realistically about the shape and dimension of faculty lives and work. Although the dialogue about changing faculty roles is still in its beginning stages, it was begun in part as a response to critiques of undergraduate education. Perhaps more importantly, the current dialogue was sparked by *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Ernest Boyer's simple yet profound challenge to rethink faculty roles by enlarging and making more flexible definitions of scholarship. Boyer suggests that scholarship takes many important forms beyond the traditional boundaries of research and journal publication. Of particular concern here is Boyer's call for an expanded definition of scholarly teaching and of scholarly service.

To date, discussions of this issue have centered on the role of faculty in four year institutions. Simply put, the dialogue holds that faculty roles (and the reward systems which maintain them) over-emphasize producing original research and under-emphasize teaching, particularly teaching undergraduates. The solution, it is suggested, is to develop mechanisms that honor and reward scholarly teaching and service in a way similar to the approval now bestowed on research published in refereed journals. When the dialogue is framed from this vantage point, any inclusion of a community college perspective seems misplaced. The central tenets of the argument for changing the role of four year college faculty do not seem to apply to commu-

nity college faculty. Virtually no community college faculty face a publish-or-perish mandate, and community college faculty efforts are overwhelmingly directed towards teaching undergraduates. Yet it is the intent of this article to exhort community colleges to both pay special heed to this conversation and to acknowledge the special role they should play in shaping its eventual outcome. The current debate about how and whether to reconceptualize the roles of faculty holds promise for community college faculty by providing alternative perspectives from which to create a new level of clarity about their distinctive role in higher education.

This article will begin with a suggested definition of scholarly teaching. It will go on to discuss the current parameters of the community college professoriate and some of the influences which have resulted in its current configuration; how scholarly teaching might strengthen ties between two and four year faculty; the unique contribution community colleges can make to the debate about faculty roles; and how changing these roles responds to a changing world.

Defining Scholarly Teaching

Community college faculty have been hired, promoted, and evaluated primarily on the basis of "excellent teaching." But the way in which teaching is actually described, analyzed, or observed has not been carefully constructed. It is variously measured by self, student, peer, or supervisor evaluations, but there are no clear, nationally recognized, or systematically applied evaluative standards of college teaching.

As conceptualized in this paper, scholarly teaching would be one component of teaching excellence. Excellent teaching is always a fluid dynamic between a faculty member, a particular class, and individual students. It is spontaneous, perhaps part theater, and traverses an affective as well as a cognitive domain. The term scholarly teaching is not meant to encompass all of these dimensions. It is still an elusive concept, one whose outline is only beginning to emerge within the context of the current debate. However, while there has not been sufficient dialogue at any level to promulgate a singular or consensual definition, it seems clear that scholarly teaching would have the following characteristics:

- it would display evidence of creative and original thought;
- as reflected in information which is uniquely synthesized or applied;
- expressed through original pedagogical techniques or unique synthesis or application of disciplinary content;
- embodying both current research and thinking within a specific academic discipline and current scholarship on teaching;
- containing some element of critical self-reflection and self-assessment, including data collection regarding levels of student learning;
- and which is observable (perhaps by means of a syllabus, student portfolios, or classroom exercises).

If scholarly teaching is defined by some combination of the foregoing basic building blocks, the second task of a definition would be to begin to articulate how such a process might be measured. Any attempt to codify scholarly teaching could be neither simple nor simplistic. Again, as a point of departure, measurement of the concept might involve:

- a set of faculty-derived flexible criteria;
- which are applicable to both quantitative and qualitative experiences in teaching;

- with a range of acceptable examples or bodies of evidence, including faculty and student work;
- which documents an original contribution.

The assessment of scholarly teaching would need to be placed within a reasonable framework. It would not be appropriate, for example, to expect faculty to recalibrate each class every semester to reflect an original re-thinking of the product or process of the course. But it would be reasonable to expect that faculty could develop teaching portfolios that gave evidence of the best examples over recent semesters.

Assessment of scholarly teaching requires that faculty work closely with each other; a peer review process would be critical in the measurement of scholarship. A new, more explicitly rewarded level of applied scholarship might move teaching from its private confines. Perhaps, as Pat Hutchings points out in another article in this issue of *Metropolitan Universities*, it could diminish isolation within institutions across disciplines, as faculty begin to speak openly about their teaching scholarship, guided by a clear set of defined parameters.

This paper is not concerned with scholarly service in which the professional expertise of a faculty member is applied in real world settings. However, it is viewed as an important and related concept, and would need to be outlined with a similar set of definitional requirements and assessments.

For the purpose of this article, therefore, conscientious or consistently excellent teaching should be distinguished from scholarly teaching. The operative definition is that scholarly teaching reflects the presence of an original and creative mind whose work is focused on the kind of teaching which makes a unique contribution. The teaching is critically self-reflective, can be assessed by peers over several dimensions, and has a real impact on how or how much students learn. These ideas form the basis of the discussion to follow.

Defining the Community College Professoriate

Among the many possible factors which have shaped the current-day dimensions of the community college faculty role, this article hypothesizes that four are relevant here. The first factor which has influenced the definition of the community college professoriate is that, chronologically, four year institutions in the U.S. preceded community colleges by at least two hundred years. It is no wonder that community colleges derive their model of faculty roles from these institutions, despite their distinctive two-year institutional mission. Like four year institutions, community college faculty are assigned to departments based on academic discipline, teach a proscribed number of college courses, usually within a semester framework, and are expected to be academic citizens who participate in creating curriculum, degree requirements, and academic policies.

There has been scant wrestling with the substance or texture of excellence in the community college professoriate that differentiates it from the four year model. However, despite the incredible variety of the nearly 1,000 public two year community colleges, the identification of teaching as the central institutional activity is universal. The new discussion about scholarly teaching might clarify the role of the community college professor by encouraging strong academic practices and reinvigorating disciplinary focus among community college faculty which differentially respond to the needs of the students they teach and the kinds of curriculum they require.

In his 1985 book *In the Words of the Faculty*, Earl Seidman suggests that the strong identification of community faculty as “teachers” is sometimes equated with secondary school practices, because we have models of high school faculty who *teach*, and college faculty who *conduct research*. Most universities equate good research as that which is evaluated through the scrutiny of a peer review process, leading to publication in specified journals. No similar structure exists for scholarly college teaching, whereby a consensual standard might be applied by outside expert peers. Thus, it can be argued that although community college faculty claim that their primary mission is to be excellent teachers, there is no way to evaluate them within that model in a systematic way through adherence to external standards or credentials.

A second factor to be considered which influences the development of the role of community college faculty has been a variety of common administrative practices which sometimes de-emphasize disciplinary expertise. As indicated in a recent book by Dennis McGrath and Martin Spear, much of the literature by and about community college teaching focuses on methodology and minimizes deep immersion in a discipline. Institutional practices, such as faculty evaluation or professional development activities, rarely challenge community college faculty to maintain strong intellectual contact with the content of their academic discipline. A mechanism which rewards faculty who remain wedded to an academic discipline in way different from an on-going research agenda might assist community college faculty to fashion a strong, distinctive definition of their role.

A third factor which may have influenced community college faculty roles, perhaps indirectly, is the relative lack of focus and attention to academic rigor or singular teaching scholarship in introductory classes. Overwhelmingly, community college faculty teach introductory courses. It is not unusual for a long time community college faculty member to teach the introductory course for the fortieth time, or only to teach introductory courses in a given semester. There can be a strange disjuncture between knowledge on the cutting edge of one’s discipline and the teaching of one’s introductory course, where new knowledge is often relegated to little more than a footnote at the end of a chapter.

If scholarly teaching could be clearly defined and sought at all institutions of higher education, a consensual standard for teaching introductory courses might emerge. It could make evident that these courses require highly trained faculty, deeply immersed in the discipline and able to translate the complex issues into understandable components. Such standards might exemplify how to evaluate syllabus development, classroom interaction, assignments, labs, and examinations as integrated practices that strengthen students’ intellectual connection to the whole of a discipline. Introductory courses might then require a seasoned faculty member to organize his or her embracing knowledge of the whole of a discipline, developing perspectives that stretch into every corner, and help beginning students understand the inter-connections that are usually left as unstated loose ends. In doing so, the distinct role of the community college professoriate might be validated in its function of promoting the highest levels of intellectual development among beginning students.

A fourth factor that will influence how all faculty roles are envisioned and structured is the building push for change generated by technology. The faculty member of the 1930’s who literally embodied the knowledge gained from exotic dusty tomes in forgotten libraries is now competing with full-text library access on a global scale. Faculty must now teach students not only how to acquire knowledge,

but how to think about that knowledge, to apply it, and to synthesize information between fields. Faculty at community colleges share these concerns with faculty at all other institutions.

Strengthening Ties Between Two and Four Year Faculty

Historically, and I would argue currently, a sometimes profound lack of trust can exist between faculty at two and four year institutions. Some faculty at two and four year institutions may hold each other in high regard, reciprocally valuing the other as equal collaborators in the process of educating students. More typically, however, if any relationship exists at all between the two faculty groups, it is likely to be characterized by mistrust, power inequities, and assumed functional differences. With community college faculty teaching nearly 50% of all students enrolled in higher education in the U. S. , the discord and perceived inequities diminish all of higher education. The discussion about scholarly teaching might build trust between community college and university faculty at a time when a fuller partnership between the two is critically needed.

The friction between faculty in these two sectors may stem from presumptions that teaching at two and four year colleges is directed toward very different goals at dramatically different levels of academic standards and intellectual requirements. But it may become apparent that faculty at all institutions are fundamentally the same, if definitions of scholarly teaching articulate the way in which teaching deeply touches the transcendent nature of our human existence by cultivating the life of the mind. If “knowing”, as Parker Palmer asserts, is a profoundly relational act, then exemplary faculty at every level call themselves deeply into scholarship when they recognize the need to synthesize, apply, and teach in creative and original ways.

A fresh definition of faculty which prizes in public ways the scholarship of teaching, and develops mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of scholarly teaching through a peer review process, would allow community college faculty and colleagues at four year institutions to overcome isolation from each other. It might help campuses move toward a campus culture which expects and looks for scholarship in teaching. Promotion and tenure committees might function within a culture that values scholarly teaching as a bona fide standard of scholarship.

Another potential cause of friction between the two faculty is a history wherein higher education sometimes differentially values the most selective institutions as being bastions of the best education *because* they house the best researchers. Most research universities structure educational delivery systems in ways that reproduce these assumptions. While innovative universities which value teaching struggle over who should teach large introductory courses -- the renowned scholar or the second year graduate assistant -- most colleges and universities “save” their best scholars for upper division and graduate education. From this model, it is difficult not to equate faculty at community colleges with that second-year graduate student. A more integrated sense of “faculty,” regardless of whether employed on a two year or four year campus, might be possible if we strive for a deeper and more careful dialogue about the best way to teach undergraduates, and to create public discourse and recognition about scholarly teaching.

The Contribution of Community College Expertise

In the efforts to produce more inclusive definitions of the role of college faculty and to codify scholarly teaching, the unique experiences of community college fac-

ulty are critical. Community college experiences with diversity and with students whose learning must be integrated with a lived reality are but two significant areas of expertise.

In community colleges today, the most vibrant mix of students of different ages, ethnic groups, and economic levels ever educated together sit side-by-side in community college classrooms. At the same time, many four year institutions still struggle to achieve minimal levels of diversity. When community college faculty come to grips with the pedagogical and social requirements of their students' diversity, they will craft curricula which advance a new kind of appreciation and understanding of diversity in America. More and more students in all of higher education begin to look like community college students. Throughout the system, student bodies are increasingly non-traditional in age, prepared at various academic levels, part-time, female, poorer, and more ethnically diverse. Community college faculty are in a unique position to identify practices which enhance effective teaching which respond to and acknowledge this diversity which is essential to the conversations about scholarly teaching.

Community college faculty have frequently constructed teaching as strongly tied to application, often using the community as the site of reciprocal learning *and* service. Community college faculty have, of necessity, helped students to enter the academic world while remaining deeply rooted in their community. Thus, the ability to tie educational practices to real social needs can be easily activated on a community college campus, and might provide a provocative basis upon which to begin to define scholarly service as well as scholarly teaching. These experiences are pivotal as we grope toward the vision of a community of dedicated and committed practitioners where scholarly excellence is identified and celebrated through deep immersion in a discipline, a highly refined practice of teaching, and the solid achievements of students.

While community college faculty may be able to contribute a uniquely heightened awareness of how diversity and applied learning add to the notions of scholarly teaching, they could also derive unique benefits from the discussion. A 1987 Report prepared for the Ford Foundation by Peter Bittenweiser shows that researchers have consistently found community college faculty members expressing a sense of inferiority. Community college faculty often stay at one institution for their entire career, in part because there is little external mobility available to the seasoned professor. Community colleges have no way to systematically evaluate the contribution of scholarly faculty members, nor assess their impact on the community college. Virtually no community college hires faculty at the associate professor or professor level; typically, these levels are achieved only through promotion at a single institution. A clear definition of a scholarly teacher, and an understanding of how such an individual impacts a campus, might cause community colleges to seek them out.

Responding to a Changing World

A clearly defined expansion of the roles of faculty might assist all of higher education as we continue to wrestle with how to craft effective teaching for future generations. All professors must nurture thinking and intellectual analysis as an act connected to the community in which students live. The dialogue about the scholarship of teaching and service challenges faculty to conduct research about their own students at their own colleges, and to develop explicit standards to include student voices.

A re-thinking of faculty roles and rewards has suggested “unit” levels of responsibility and accountability, typically referring to departments or programs. Thinking of responsibility for educational excellence across institutions is a different way to envision collective responsibility, but may form the next level of integration. Our students are mobile; transcripts often bear evidence to the use of several institutions on the way to a degree. Faculty must find common ground upon which to embrace all students within the higher education community as our students, and to develop educational integration out of the crazy quilt of courses patched together from different two and four year institutions.

The call for a renewed focus on teaching and service seems to have touched a deep longing to return to an academy that honors teachers. Through thoughtful analysis, faculty at all institutions might reclaim a community of teachers by rekindling dialogue between caring peers about the meaning and value of good teaching, and by reclaiming the primacy of our roles as teachers and intellectual leaders in our communities. Perhaps, through a more active participation in the debate about the reforming of faculty roles through the inclusion of the scholarship of teaching, community colleges can bring the same vision and practicality they have brought to the idea of access, and help to shepherd in the next generation of college teaching.

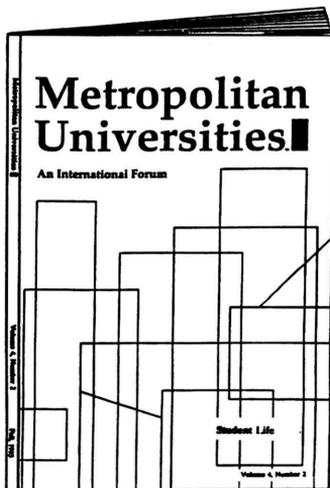
Suggested Reading

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