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The Scholarship of Application

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← PREVIOUS ARTICLE | ↑ ISSUE CONTENTS | → NEXT ARTICLE | +

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The Scholarship of Application

Abstract

In the late 1990s, Oregon State University brought its Extension field faculty into academic departments where they are evaluated for promotion and tenure. This was intended to promote better collaboration and integration of research, teaching, and Extension. Research and teaching faculty, however, continue to respond to the traditional academic reward and recognition system. Newer faculty members are unclear about the meaning of our commitment to the threefold mission. Extension field faculty are frustrated by the apparently incongruent demands of scholarship and public service. This article provides a brief history of the engagement movement in higher education and describes current dilemmas.

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Introduction

The outreach and engagement movement in higher education during the 1990s was stimulated, in part, by the publication *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (Kellogg Commission, 1998). The report shined a contemporary light on the ivory tower syndrome and the lack of engagement of higher education with problems relevant to communities where universities and colleges are located. The Kellogg report argued that, "despite the resources and expertise available on our campuses, higher education is not well organized to apply them to problems of vital significance in a coherent way. Society has problems; our institutions of higher education have academic disciplines."

The outreach and engagement movement calls on publicly supported academics to direct a portion of their attention, resources, and expertise toward solving problems relevant to communities of place. This concept is familiar to Extension field faculty, who see this as the primary mission of the land-grant university system. For reasons that we explore later, campus-based faculty resist calls for a more engaged approach to research and teaching. At the same time, Extension field faculty resist the reciprocal call for a more scholarly approach to engagement.

The engagement movement at Oregon State University articulated by John Byrne, Graham Spanier, Emery Castle, Roy Arnold, Charles Weiser, Lyla Houghlum, and others led to four institutional changes at OSU (McDowell, 2001). The Extension Director was elevated to Dean and now reports to the provost rather than to the Dean of the School of Agriculture. A new definition of scholarship based, in part, on the work of Ernest Boyer (1990) was crafted and placed at the heart of the promotion and tenure process. Research, teaching, and Extension faculty were required to develop position descriptions that describe assigned duties and define expectations for scholarship. Finally, county Extension agents were brought into academic homes where they are now evaluated for promotion and tenure.

County Extension agents were brought into academic homes, in part, to promote greater interaction between research, teaching, and field faculty. OSU central administration at the time hoped that this would lead to greater outreach and engagement by campus-based faculty and a greater institutional commitment to our public service mission. Today, there is limited evidence that the reorganization of Extension changed the behavior of campus-based faculty. We have not resolved the tension between the demands of scholarship, the academic reward and recognition system, and our public service mission.

After 10 years, the integration of Extension agents into academic units remains the number one concern of OSU field faculty (personal communication). Extension agents are frustrated by the apparently conflicting demands of academia for durable scholarly products and the expectations of their clientele for action and impact. They are frustrated by the lack of alignment between a performance appraisal process, which focuses primarily on excellence in the performance of assigned duties, and a promotion and tenure process, which focuses heavily on scholarly accomplishments. Recent events at Oregon State University, including the abrupt replacement of the Dean and Director of Extension, have prompted heated discussions among field faculty about whether or not we should return to a more traditional organizational model.

This article provides a brief history of the engagement movement in the United States. It continues the exploration of the relationship between scholarship, scholarly activities, scholarly products, and the threefold mission of the land-grant university system. The central questions raised by this article are not new; we are still, however, struggling to find answers.

- How do we bring the expectations of scholarship and our threefold mission into better alignment?
- How can research, teaching, and Extension faculty work together more effectively to organize our resources and expertise to address issues of vital significance to local and regional communities where our universities and colleges are located?

The Threefold Mission

When we reflect on the threefold mission of the land-grant university system (research, teaching, and service), most of our newer faculty members and Extension clientele can articulate the meaning and rationale for research and teaching. There is, however, a great deal of confusion about the third mission.

What do we mean by service? Have we completed the third mission when we serve on a departmental committee, serve as an officer in a professional society, or join the local Kiwanis club? If we establish a plant disease clinic and charge the public \$40 dollars per sample, have we completed the third mission? Many hard-working researchers, teachers, and Extension agents believe, and rightfully so, that their work is, in itself, a service to society. Confusion about the service mission exists at high levels throughout our institution.

The Governor's budget document indicates that reductions to the three statewide systems (Research Stations, Extension, and Forest Lab) will limit our ability to conduct research and provide services to citizens. ~ State Legislative Lobbyist for Higher Education

Providing services to citizens does not rise to the level of an institutional mission. Clarity about the service mission is found in the enabling legislation of the Land-Grant College and University System. Although the legislation was written during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it touches on issues that are relevant today (Bushaw, 1996).

Morrill Act 1862: "a land grant from the federal government to the states to promote the liberal and **practical education** of the industrial classes."

Morrill Act 1890: "dollars to be applied only to instruction in agriculture, and mechanical arts, the English language, and the various branches of mathematical, physical, natural, and economic science, **with special reference for their application** in the industries of life."

Hatch Act of 1887 Section 1.(2) "to conduct original and other researches, investigations, and experiments bearing directly on and contributing to the establishment and maintenance of a permanent and effective agricultural industry of the United States, including research basic to the problems of agriculture in its broadest aspects, and such investigations as have for **their purpose the development and improvement of the rural home and rural life.**"

Smith-Lever Act 1914 Section One: "In order to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information . . ." and "to **encourage the application of same.**"

Smith-Lever Act 1914 Section Two: "Cooperative agricultural extension work shall consist of the development of **practical applications of research knowledge** and giving of instruction and practical demonstration of existing or improved practices or technologies..."

Two themes emerge, access and accountability. Access to higher education was a major issue in the late 1880s. Today, students have many ways to access higher education other than attending the local land-grant institution. Accountability, however, remains a hot issue.

The words that jump out from the enabling legislation are "useful," "practical," and the "application of research knowledge." The legislation codifies the expectation that public supported academics

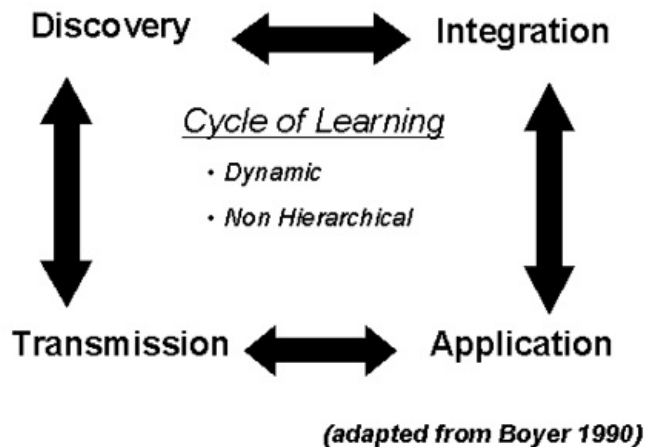
go beyond research and teaching, and apply research knowledge in practical systems for the benefit of the communities that support them.

The sentiment of those times was captured by the Victorian era sociologist, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) who wrote, "The purpose of education is not knowledge; it is action." In the context of those times, the third mission of the land-grant system could be restated as the "application of knowledge in service to society." In Oregon, Extension field faculty say, "Our mission is to put knowledge to work in your community."

The Scholarship of Application

Scholarship and the threefold mission are related, because they have their roots in the cycle of learning (Boyer, 1990). The cycle of learning (Figure One) begins with the discovery of new ideas. New ideas are evaluated then integrated into existing knowledge systems. New knowledge may or may not be applied in practice. Once a new idea is accepted as true and proven useful, it is added to the teaching canons and conveyed to future generations.

Figure 1.
Cycle of Learning



The cycle of discovery, integration, application, and transmission of new knowledge is dynamic and non hierarchical. New theory must accommodate physical, social, and economic barriers to adoption. New theory is integrated into practice with feedback and modification. When we try to apply new ideas, we discover new knowledge. "Knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching. They are tied inseparably to each other" (Bushaw, 1996).

Boyer (1990) argued that discovery, integration, application, and teaching are legitimate forms of scholarship and should, therefore, be recognized by the academic reward system. For the land-grant system, how we define scholarship determines the alignment between the academic reward system and our threefold mission.

Research, teaching, and Extension are related to the scholarship of discovery, transmission, integration, and application (Alter, 2003; Bushaw, 1996). The scholarship of application involves the use of knowledge to solve problems. When the scholarship of application is practiced in a setting external to the university, it is called "outreach." The scholarship of application involves education and service, the application of knowledge for the public good (Bull, 1998).

Boyer's work influenced Oregon State University as it struggled to articulate a definition for scholarship that would recognize and reward the work of researchers, teachers, county Extension agents, visual and performing artists, librarians, information technologists, administrators, and others (Weiser & Hougum, 1998).

Scholarship and creative activity are understood to be intellectual work whose significance is communicated to and validated by peers. As specified in the Promotion and Tenure Guidelines, such work in its diverse forms is based on a high level of professional expertise; must give evidence of originality; must be documented and validated as through peer review or critique; and must be communicated in appropriate ways so as to have impact on or significance for publics beyond the University, or for the discipline itself (OSU Faculty Handbook, 2006).

The OSU definition of scholarship, as it has been incorporated into university promotion and tenure guidelines, draws a distinction between scholarly activities or "assigned duties" and scholarship. Research, teaching, and Extension activities are not scholarship in themselves. They become scholarship when they are communicated to and validated by peers and when they are communicated to publics beyond the university.

Each academic unit and discipline must, however, develop its unique consensus about what constitutes creative intellectual work, who are considered peers, what are legitimate forms of validation, and what constitutes an appropriate level of rigor during the validation process. One aspect of scholarship where we lack agreement at Oregon State University is in how we define the word "communication."

Research faculty members argue that the target audience for the communication of scholarship is the academic peer group; refereed publication is synonymous with rigorous communication and validation. The OSU definition, however, explicitly states that to be considered scholarship, creative intellectual work must not only be original and validated through peer review, but also it must be "communicated in appropriate ways so as to have impact on or significance for publics beyond the University, or for the discipline itself."

By communicating creative intellectual work in a variety of media that are accessible to both peers and clientele, Extension field faculty increase the probability that new ideas will be applied in practice (Adams, Harrell, Maddy, & Weigel, 2005). Much of this written and oral communication, however, is discounted during the promotion and tenure process as lacking rigor. Scholarship should be communicated for both validation and application. Communication of new knowledge resulting in its integration and application is the most rigorous validation of our creative intellectual work (Adams et al., 2005).

Extension field faculty tend to confuse communication to clientele with communication to peers. It is natural for Extension field faculty, who work in collaborative and non-hierarchical learning relationships, to fail to draw a distinction between student and peer. Still, it is important that the creative intellectual work of Extension field faculty be communicated to peers and publics beyond those individuals that directly participate in local Extension programs. This last aspect of scholarly communication has political significance for Extension.

Public value is created when a service benefits society as a whole (Kalambokidis, 2004). A scholarly approach to engagement allows us to explicitly identify public (rather than the individual) benefits of Extension programs for our clientele. This could stimulate them to act politically for us because they see a broader public interest in our work (McDowell, 2004).

Conclusion

Oregon State University continues to struggle to articulate meaningful measures of quality (metrics) for the scholarship of application. We know there is a world of difference between research, teaching, and putting knowledge to work in the community. They involve different methods and produce different outcomes. Metrics for the scholarship of application should reflect these differences.

The scholarship of application should be judged, in part, by outcomes and impacts (Bull, 1998). This metric would help to bring the demands of scholarship and the threefold mission into better alignment. Evaluation, documentation, and communication of impact are not peripheral to our work in Extension. These scholarly activities are central to our mission. We need to go beyond documentation and communication of impact, however, in order for our work to be considered scholarly.

OSU Extension field faculty resist the call for a more scholarly approach to engagement. This makes sense for a variety of reasons.

- Extension field faculty tend to be highly relational and have a strong bias for active rather than reflective learning. They may not have the training or inclination to engage with highly analytical approaches to learning. Scholarly activities may not be the best use of their skills.
- Extension field faculty are committed to inquiry-based, collaborative learning. They argue that if we become too focused on hypothesis testing in the community, we may lose sight of the importance of listening and participating as learners. Extension field faculty members question the value of scholarship to their clientele.
- Community-based faculty live and work in a very distracting learning environment. Regardless of how we define scholarship, it is difficult for county Extension agents to find a quiet place and the quality time needed for reflection, analysis, and writing. They are busy "doing their job."
- Extension field faculty members are overwhelmed by the urgent demands of their clientele and community stakeholders.

Arguments against scholarly engagement may have to give way because the playing field for Extension has changed; it is much more competitive. There are many informal, community-based educational services available to rural and urban communities. Doing "good" in the community is no longer good enough (Sanderman, 2005). Scholarly engagement could distinguish Extension by improving the quality of our programs and increasing the probability that we will generate credible evidence of impact.

In Extension, we need to avoid using "informal" and "collaborative" (non credit and non-hierarchical)

as code words for a haphazard engagement. High-quality Extension work is scholarly. Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) described a scholarly approach to research and teaching; their description could easily be applied to the scholarship of application.

- Review the Literature--Begin new Extension programs and initiatives by reviewing what others have tried; what works or does not work; and what are the current questions being addressed in the field.
- Define Measurable Objectives--Start by articulating measurable objectives and developing a specific plan for measuring progress.
- Choose Appropriate Methods and Analysis--Review the research and education methods that have been used by others in addressing the issue or problem of interest. Be prepared to justify your choice of methods.
- Challenge Your Assumptions--Take an experimental approach. Don't assume that your research or educational approach will work. Test it.
- Reflective Critique--The vital social, economic, and environmental problems that we tackle in Extension are long term and complex. Progress is incremental. At the end of our work, what worked or did not work; what questions remain?
- Communicate Results--Communicate positive and negative results to peers and get feedback. Communicate results to practitioners who may or may not apply your findings.

Campus-based faculty at Oregon State University resist the call for more a more engaged approach to research and teaching. This makes sense for a variety of reasons.

- The reward and recognition system for campus-based research and teaching faculty is still highly biased toward traditional forms of scholarship (publish or perish).
- Campus-based research and teaching faculty prefer reflective learning. They may not have the training or inclination to engage with the local community. They choose to focus on issues relevant to their academic disciplines.
- Campus-based faculty are overwhelmed by their research and teaching responsibilities.

For OSU Extension field faculty, we have addressed some of the challenges to scholarly engagement with position descriptions. Extension position descriptions allocate about 70% of an Extension Agents effort to assigned duties and about 15% to scholarship (Schauber, Markham, Olsen, Gredler, Olsen, & Reichenbach, 1998).

In other words, county Extension agents are still expected to spend most of their time teaching informal workshops and classes, managing programs, conducting informal applied research, developing learning relationships, building learning capacity in the community, and other engagement activities. They are also expected to be involved in at least one well-designed and carefully evaluated program that leads to the documentation and communication of impact, and the articulation of a few scholarly products.

Up to this point, OSU research and teaching faculty have refused to incorporate a reciprocal 15% commitment to scholarly engagement into their position descriptions. It is here that we are stuck.

Extension cannot accomplish the third mission alone. Extension does not have the resources necessary to put knowledge to work in service to the community; it never did. Throughout the history of the land-grant university system, successful Extension programs have involved effective and respectful collaborations between research, teaching, and Extension faculty and practitioners. The scholarship of application requires the commitment and intellectual horsepower of the entire institution.

Extension is not synonymous with the third mission any more than research is synonymous with scholarship. What we need to integrate across our campuses is not Extension, but a clearer understanding and a renewed commitment to our threefold mission. To become great institutions of higher education, the land-grant colleges and universities must fully integrate research, teaching, and scholarly engagement.

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