

JACA
2(1997): 149-153

Teaching versus Research: An Imbalance of Importance?

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INTRODUCTION

THE 1995 Speech Communication Association Convention in San Antonio, Texas, had "Unifying Teaching and Research" as its overarching programmatic theme. Believing that this concept was both more controversial and complicated than the convention theme implied, the four of us opted to consider the theme's components in the form of an academic debate.

Sponsored by the Association for Communication Administration, the theme was considered via the following topic—"Resolved: that teaching and research are mutually-exclusive activities." Pruett and Sayer upheld the affirmative position on the resolution, while Mills and Tucker upheld the negative.

The following essays present the major argumentative positions advanced by both teams. Are teaching and research mutually exclusive in today's system of higher education? We'll let you decide.

YES (R. PRUETT AND J. SAYER)

More than twenty years ago, David Reisman and Christopher Jencks (1968) wrote that there is "no doubt most professors prefer it when their courses are popular, their lectures applauded, and their former students appreciative. But since such successes are of no help in getting a salary increase, moving to a more prestigious campus, or winning their colleagues admiration, they are unlikely to struggle as hard to create them as to do other things" (pp. 531-532).

But what are the other things we do or claim we do that detract from a focus on teaching and create what Professor John East (1974) claims to be a "Crisis of Identity" (pp. 127-136)?

Based on this concept, we contend that one of the major factors responsible for this situation is that relating to teaching and research and we uphold the proposition.

Teaching and research, two descriptors of what we do in describing our job, would appear to go hand in hand, but, from a definitional perspective, they are definitely mutually exclusive.

Teaching is the communicating of information, knowledge or skills to one or more individuals. As teachers, therefore, we become the transmitters of knowledge.

In contrast, research, according to Webster (1964), is a "critical and exhaustive investigation or experimentation having for its aim the revision of accepted conclusions in the light of newly discovered facts" (p. 1237), or as Auer (1959) wrote, "research is a means of improving our understanding and way of doing things, through additions to, or adaptations of, present knowledge" (p. 26).

In examining the two definitions, it is important to isolate research from what has been called scholarship. For example, when we refer to scholarship, we agree with Ernest Boyer (1967) when he clearly distinguished between the two in claiming that "scholarship means staying abreast of the profession, knowing the literature in one's field, and skillfully communicating such information to students" (p. 131). Thus, scholarship is inherently a part of teaching because it is included within the concept of transferring knowledge and is distinct from the idea of research.

The second area that needs to be explored is the roles we assume as faculty members, which are our inherent responsibilities. Almost every faculty handbook, department, college or university document, or statement concerning faculty responsibility lists teaching, research and service as our three primary and major concerns. We assume these responsibilities and we are not here to argue that they are not legitimate or reasonable expectations. For example, Ladd and Lipset (1975) remark that faculty function in a number of ways:

1. As socializers who attempt to transmit "values" in their roles as teachers by communicating knowledge;
2. As innovators by advancing knowledge in their roles as researchers; and
3. As advice givers in their roles as "consultants" in applying knowledge and skills for the betterment of the university and community (pp. 10-11).

While we do not necessarily disagree with such roles and/or functions, we do claim that they have been merged into one, making unclear our basic reason for being a faculty member is and, in turn, minimizing the role of teaching.

Opponents will argue that teaching and research are not mutually exclusive, yet the definitions and descriptions provided earlier clearly illustrate they are different. In the traditional sense, it is easy to claim that the function of a professor is twofold: to be an effective and creative teacher and, at the same time, be able to accumulate and disseminate knowledge through research. Separate and distinct functions, yes, but research, which is different from scholarship, should not be equated as being included within teaching. The reality is that no matter what is said, teaching is valued less than research and there is substantial evidence that supports this statement. For example, East (1974) says that "In recent decades the harmony of teaching and research has been disrupted by the downgrading of teaching responsibility and the concurrent exaltation of the research role" (p. 127). Additionally, Boyer (1967) claims that there is a "tension on most campuses over the priorities of teaching and research. Faculty members like to teach and yet the American professorate has been profoundly shaped by the conviction that research is the cornerstone of the profession" (p. 120). In support of his contention, Boyer cited a number of examples from a variety of colleges and universities. A psychology professor noted that "professionals on this campus are pulled in two directions; teaching is important we are told, and yet faculty know that research and publication matter the most" (p. 120). An English professor extended the above in remarking about the conflict when he said: "We faculty members now find ourselves

under attack at the very point which has always seemed most secure to us (teaching), and in which we have taken the most pride" (p. 120). Finally, the editors of *Science* (cited in Sykes, 1988), the official publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, addressed itself to the question "What are Professors For?" and answered in no uncertain terms that the "professor's primary activities should be teaching and research with the priority in that order" (pp. 35-36).

Thus, the roles of teaching and research are not complementary; rather, they are competing. Professor Paul Shore (1992) points out that: "the tension between the competing roles of instructor and researcher not only belie the claim that research enhances teaching, it also produces great strain on the collegiate community of scholars" (p. 93).

Finally, East (1974) clearly demonstrated the harm of this imbalance in stating: "Traditionally, creative teaching has been considered indispensable to quality higher education. This atrophy of emphasis on teaching has contributed to student apathy and restlessness on contemporary campuses, and most importantly, intensifies the crisis of identity confronting the professor today" (p. 127).

In summary, it has clearly been established what teaching and research mean, and, in examining the roles of the profession, it has become most evident how they have shifted. Regardless of what is said, teaching has become subservient to research and, while the responsibility of faculty members is to remain current in their fields, research is a separate activity that does not necessarily make one a better teacher and is certainly is exclusive from the teaching function. One may argue they should be of equal importance—fine! But if they are two of our primary functions, we must establish a priority and not claim that standards by which we are being measured are equal.

The debate that pits teaching versus research is not something new, but in any debate the terms need to be as explicit as possible in order to understand the issues. What has often happened in this debate, however, is reflective of what Karl Marx said about the British and India when he wrote that when they speak of God, they really mean cotton. Too often, when many speak about the importance of teaching, what they really mean is research.

NO (N. MILLS AND D. TUCKER)

Initially, let us go on record as saying that we are not opposed to research *per se*. There is a definite need for research to continue in higher education. We feel, however, that it should co-exist on an equal and level playing field with teaching. Perhaps Volkwein and Carbone (1994) have pinpointed the importance of the coexistence between research and teaching best when they stated that, "when research is combined with teaching, it has a beneficial influence on intellectual growth and academic integrity of undergraduate students" (pp. 162-163). Unfortunately the current system of faculty rewards does not allow for a balanced combination of teaching and research.

The present model seems to have created a two-tiered faculty that is neither good for the faculty nor for the student. Fairweather (1993) noted that rewards for teaching are not nearly at the same level as those for research. In examining all four-year institutions, he found that those faculty spending less than 35 percent of their time teaching had a mean salary of \$56,181. Those who spent more than 72 percent of their time teaching earned \$34,307 (data from the Carnegie Foundation Survey: The Condition of the Professorate: Attitudes and Trends, 1989). Even a less than astute individual will realize that the rewards in higher education are for research and not teaching and adjust his/her schedule accordingly. The result of this research mentality is shown quite vividly by Edgerton (1993) in his article, "The Reexamination of Faculty Priorities." He reported that a survey of 900 faculty members from five campuses of the University of California found that 97 percent of those

polled rated being a teacher as very important, yet only seven percent of the same 900 felt that teaching was rewarded by the University of California (p. 14).

Because of this research mentality, we find a climate in which major professors are doing less teaching, which means that others must cover the classes. James Best (1990), in his article "Miscast Professionals," estimated that 60 percent of classes taught in higher education in his country are taught by part-time faculty (p. 20).

The problem pointed out by Best is further compounded when we consider that graduate assistants at many institutions are chosen more for their research interests and abilities rather than their teaching abilities. Best (1990) concluded that one of the explanations for poor teaching in higher education lies in the predilection of faculty/departments to select students with promise as good researchers rather than good teachers (p. 21).

The devaluation of teaching in higher education can be seen from the faculty perspective. In more recent years this devaluation has led to problems beyond individual institutions. Faculty and administrators alike are now faced with a major public relations problem that has significant implications for the future of higher education. Parents send their children to state-assisted (taxpayer supported) institutions and find their offspring receiving instruction primarily from graduate assistants or part-time instructors. The parents then ask, "Where are the real teachers?" This is usually followed by, "Why is tuition rising at a rate far in excess of inflation?" Or, "Why are student fees so high?" Then the local newspaper runs an article about your highest paid professor who teaches one class per year. Then you have a problem. The perception is that we are not working very hard for our paychecks because we are not in the classroom. This, in turn, makes us an easy target for budget reductions by the governor during times of fiscal crisis. We have no constituency. And, it is our contention that we have no constituency because we have devalued teaching and separated it from research.

Let us conclude by reiterating our contention that over the years a schism has developed in academe regarding research and teaching. It is not our intent to denigrate research as an activity, but rather to bring teaching into a more important and meaningful place in higher education. Undergraduate students at our four-year colleges and universities deserve the best—that's what they're paying for. By bringing teaching more into focus and thus bringing our better scholar/teachers back into the classroom, we can more adequately assure a higher quality educational experience for the undergraduate. It may also provide additional benefits such as improving our public image, rebuilding a constituency and improving funding. We think all the aforementioned ingredients provide a recipe that will result in giving higher education a more significant and proper place in our society.

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