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## ‘Scholarship Reconsidered’ as Tenure Policy

In 1990, Ernest Boyer published *Scholarship Reconsidered*, in which he argued for abandoning the traditional “teaching vs. research” model on prioritizing faculty time, and urged colleges to adopt a much broader definition of scholarship to replace the traditional research model. Ever since, many experts on tenure, not to mention many junior faculty members, have praised Boyer’s ideas while at the same time saying that departments still tend to base tenure and promotion decisions on traditional measures of research success: books or articles published about new knowledge, or grants won.

*Scholarship Reconsidered* may make sense, but the fear has been that too many colleges pay only lip service to its ideas, rather than formally embracing them — at least that’s the conventional wisdom. Indeed, a trend in recent years has been for colleges — even those not identified as research universities — to take advantage of the tight academic job market in some fields to ratchet up tenure expectations, asking for two books instead of one, more sponsored research and so forth.

Western Carolina University — after several years of discussions — has just announced a move in the other direction. The university has adopted Boyer’s definitions for scholarship to replace traditional measures of research. The shift was adopted unanimously by the Faculty Senate, endorsed by the administration and just cleared its final hurdle with approval from the University of North Carolina system. Broader definitions of scholarship will be used in hiring decisions, merit reviews, and tenure consideration.

Boyer, who died in 1995, saw the traditional definition of scholarship — new knowledge through laboratory breakthroughs, journal articles or new books — as too narrow. Scholarship, Boyer argued, also encompassed the application of knowledge, the engagement of scholars with the broader world, and the way scholars teach.

All of those models will now be available to Western Carolina faculty members to have their contributions evaluated. However, to do so, the professors and their departments will need to create an outside peer review panel to evaluate the work, so that scholarship does not become simply an extension of service, and to ensure that rigor is applied to evaluations.

Lee S. Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (through which Boyer did much of his work), said Western Carolina's shift was significant. While colleges have rushed to put Boyer's ideas into their mission statements, and many individual departments have used the ideas in tenure reviews, putting this philosophy in specific institutional tenure and promotion procedures is rare, he said. "It's very encouraging to see this beginning to really break through," he said. What's been missing is "systematic implementation" of the sort Western Carolina is now enacting, he said.

What could really have an impact, Shulman said, is if a few years from now, Western Carolina can point to a cohort of newly tenured professors who won their promotions using the Boyer model.

John Bardo, chancellor at Western Carolina, said that a good example of the value of this approach comes from a recent tenure candidate who needed a special exemption from the old, more traditional tenure guidelines. The faculty member was in the College of Education and focused much of his work on developing online tools that teachers could use in classrooms. He focused on developing the tools, and fine-tuning them, not on writing reports about them that could be published in journals.

"So when he came up for tenure, he didn't have normal publications to submit," Bardo said. Under a trial of the system that has now been codified, the department assembled a peer review team of experts in the field, which came back with a report that the professors' online tools "were among the best around," Bardo said.

The professor won tenure, and Bardo said it was important to him and others to codify the kind of system used so that other professors would be encouraged to make similar career choices. Bardo said that codification was also important so that departments could make initial hiring decisions based on the broader definition of scholarship.

Asked why he preferred to see his university use this approach, as opposed to the path being taken by many similar institutions of upping research expectations, Bardo quoted a union slogan used when organizing workers at elite universities: "You can't eat prestige."

The traditional model for evaluating research at American universities dates to the 19th century, he said, and today does not serve society well in an era with a broad range of colleges and universities. While there are top research universities devoted to that traditional role, Bardo said that "many emerging needs of society call for universities to be more actively involved in the community." Those local communities, he said, need to rely on their public universities for direct help, not just basic research.

Along those lines, he would like to see engineering professors submit projects that relate to helping local businesses deal with difficult issues. Or historians who do oral history locally and focus on collecting the histories rather than writing them up in books. Or on professors in any number of fields who could be involved in helping the public schools.

In all of those cases, Bardo said, the work evaluated would be based on disciplinary knowledge and would be subject to peer review. But there might not be any publication trail.

Faculty members have been strongly supportive of the shift. Jill Ellern, a librarian at the university (where librarians have faculty status), said that a key to the shift is the inclusion of outside reviews. “We don’t want to lose the idea of evaluations,” she said. “But publish or perish just isn’t the way to go.”

Richard Beam, chair of the Faculty Senate and an associate professor of stage and screen in the university’s College of Fine and Performing Arts, said that the general view of professors there is that “putting great reliance on juried publication of traditional research didn’t seem to be working well for a lot of institutions like Western. We’re not a Research I institution — that’s not our thrust.”

— [Scott Jaschik](#)

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