Reflections on Scholarship From the Liberal Arts Academy

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The authors reflect on "Scholarship in Psychology: A Paradigm for the Twenty-First Century" (D. F. Halpern, 1998) from their perspective as liberal arts college professors. They applaud various features of the report's multidimensional understanding of scholarship, suggest points of clarification and critique, and conclude with a suggestion for defining faculty priorities and rewards.

Kudos to Diane Halpern (Halpern et al., 1998) and her gang of 18 for informing and stimulating our reflections on how to define scholarship in ways that respect the interests of students, faculty, and their institutions and communities. In their report we find much to appreciate. We find points worthy of critique. And we see a constructive implication for defining faculty priorities and rewards.

First, our applause. We were intrigued to learn that (a) the identification of scholarship with research is a post-World War II phenomenon, (b) even in research universities most faculty and administrators agree that research is overemphasized and teaching underemphasized, and (c) nine other disciplinary bodies have published documents that similarly advocate a multidimensional definition of scholarship.

We found helpful the attributes of scholarship—as activity that requires expertise, breaks new ground, has significance, and can be replicated, documented, and peer-reviewed. When evaluating scholarship, we can now ask how well a piece of work fulfills these attributes.

We also applaud the inclusion of the integration and application of knowledge as a significant scholarly activity. Psychological science needs pioneering researchers who will shine a light in the darkness of ignorance and advance our understandings through discovery. But it also needs people who will help us see the contours of the whole forest by integrating research findings into a big picture story and perhaps challenging our preconceptions.

Two recent examples of such synthesis and integration come to mind. Judith Rich Harris (1995, 1998) challenges the nurture assumption—one of popular psychology's axioms—by amassing evidence of minimal effects of shared home environment and major effects of peer influence. Mark Leary (1999), Robyn Dawes (1994), and Baumrind, Smart, and Boden (1996) similarly challenge another axiom of popular psychology—the presumption that high self-esteem entails many benefits and that we should therefore work to boost people's self-esteem. Although debate over the importance of parental nurture and personal self-esteem has only begun, we can credit these scholars for creatively synthesizing myriad findings in ways that challenge us to rethink what we have always believed.

Textbooks should be less provocative—their purpose is to synthesize and distill established knowledge and perspectives. But many a text author will confirm that the intellectual task of filtering and synthesizing knowledge is, for them, more demanding than the challenges of original research. Given the significance of text distillations both for public education and for a field's understanding of itself, we agree that textbooks, trade books for the general public, and other forms of writing that "give psychology away" can represent credible scholarship. So do innovations in pedagogy, including those that harness new technologies.

Finally, we concur that when defining faculty success and merit we should keep in view the human purposes of our institutions. Depending on where we are situated, our mission is some mix of advancing knowledge, educating and preparing students for life, and other services to the communities whose taxes and donations help fund our work. Yes, scholarship, broadly defined, feeds teaching. But teaching excellence is what students, their parents, and our external constituents most expect when supporting our work.

The task force's (Halpern et al., 1998) concerns about "teachism" and its advocacy of "increased recognition and reward for high quality teaching" will elicit many nods of agreement from those in student-centered institutions. But such will require assessment strategies that discriminate levels of teaching excellence. Some years ago, one of us (Dave) served on a college committee that decided merit pay raises for all faculty, based on the department chairperson's assessments of teaching, scholarship, and service. Although our espoused priorities were clear—teaching was of first importance—an after-the-fact regression analysis revealed that scholarship ratings were the better predictor of faculty raises and faculty salaries. A closer look showed why: Department chairs found it easy to differentiate their

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colleagues from weak to superior on scholarly productivity, but tended to rate them all as “good” or “excellent” teachers. The lower variability in the teaching ratings helped make the more variable scholarship ratings a better predictor of pay decisions.

**Distinguishing Scholarship and Teaching**

We reflect on “Scholarship in Psychology: A Paradigm for the Twenty-First Century” as faculty who have spent our careers in liberal arts colleges. The reality, as Pellino, Blackburn, and Bobberg (1984) discerned in their study of over 1,000 faculty from 24 colleges and universities, is that most faculty outside research universities are not engaged in research leading to publication. Yet more than 90 percent report engaging in activity they consider scholarly. Is it? The task force report helps us grapple with how best to define the teacher-scholar role in ways that affirm the past, reflect the present, and anticipate the future of our discipline.

In much of higher education, the notion that scholarship equals published research no longer holds sway. Increasingly, the academy is coming to question publication lists as an indicator of scholarship and to value other activities that enhance faculty members’ professional development and competence (Lacey, 1990). Moreover, academics are perceiving that much research published in proliferating lower quality journals has minimal impact. According to an Institute for Scientific Information analysis, less than half of the articles published in nature and social science journals ever get cited. Less than one fifth get cited more than once. Many citations are self-citations by the authors in their later publications (Daly, 1994).

The task force (Halpern et al., 1998) responded to these concerns by broadening “scholarship” to encompass “scholarship of pedagogy” (research on teaching and learning, and the development of new media and “scholarship of teaching in psychology” (synthesizing and presenting information). Project Kaleidoscope (1991), a National Science Foundation-funded effort to develop an agenda for undergraduate science, agrees that “scholarship must be viewed broadly, including creativity in educational endeavors as well as in traditional academic research” (p. 82). On reflection, however, we question the “scholarship of teaching in psychology” category, which seems merely to assign a new label to the existing faculty teaching responsibility. Given that most of our institutions evaluate both teaching and scholarship, it would seem more helpful to differentiate teaching and scholarship than to equate them (“Quality teaching... is substantive scholarship”). Imagine a future “Task Force on Teaching in Psychology.” Would it not want to include the continuing reading and reflection that underlies up-to-date teaching as a vital aspect of teaching? When evaluating “teaching” and “scholarship” where shall we say scholarship leaves off and teaching begins?

**Scholarship Strengthens Teaching**

We agree that the definition of scholarship should support institutional goals. Plater (1995) is one of many voices arguing that twenty-first century faculty research will be less a matter of personal discretion and more reflective of the institution’s mission. Rather than imitate research university faculty, liberal arts college faculty can take pride in their institution’s strengths and view scholarship as fuel for the teaching-learning enterprise. Scholarship is not a privileged appendage of academia, it is at the heart of the educational experience.

Many of our liberal arts institutions struggle more with a problem of “scholarshipism” than with “teaching.” In the liberal arts academy, where teaching is highly prized, active scholars are often seen as less than fully committed to teaching and committee work. Thus for some liberal arts institutions the challenge is to remove the stigma against scholarship by emphasizing the mutuality of scholarship and excellent teaching.

Scholarly activity also has important benefits for faculty morale. Parilla (1991) noted that faculty who perceive themselves as scholarly have more positive self-images. With greater intellectual self-esteem, their resulting vigor can infuse teaching and inspire their students. Informed and creative teachers—teachers whose own reading, thinking, and research are cutting edge—exemplify lifelong learning. They model intellectual excitement and communicate a love of learning. Research and study replenishes their own wells and helps make their institutions into genuine learning communities. Without scholarship, teaching can therefore suffer, as Robert Pirsig (1974) cynically explained in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

At a teaching college you teach and you teach and you teach with no time for research, no time for contemplation, no time for participation in outside affairs. Just teach and teach and teach until your mind grows dull and your creativity vanishes and you become an automaton saying the same dull things over and over to endless waves of innocent students who cannot understand why you are so dull, lose respect and fan this disrespect out into the community. The reason you teach and you teach and you teach is that this is a very clever way of running a college on the cheap while giving a false appearance of genuine education. (p. 129)

Actually, many teaching colleges have excelled as communities of learners. Graduates of America’s liberal arts colleges “earn PhD’s in science and mathematics at over twice the national average,” notes Project Kaleidoscope (1991) citing National Research Council data. Their graduates earn natural science PhD’s at twice the rate of the baccalaureate graduates of doctoral universities. One reason for the productivity of liberal arts colleges is that the symbiosis of research and teaching that has made U.S. universities an international magnet for graduate education is focused in liberal arts colleges on their unique mission—undergraduate education. In these institutions one finds faculty committed to the combined role of teacher and scholar and administrations committed to consistent support of a natural science community of learners. ... In liberal arts colleges [teaching and research] are essential and natural allies. (p. 83)

In the undergraduate liberal arts context, research typically engages undergraduates as research apprentices and often as collaborators. Courses sometimes have lab sec-
tions that form students into research teams, in which they conduct faculty-guided original investigations. One-on-one mentoring is commonplace. Thus, without blurring the definitions of teaching and scholarship, liberal arts colleges value each and harness their synergy. At their best, they exemplify the task force's view of the teaching–scholarship mutuality.

Replication as Scholarship

"A replication of an experiment is not scholarship, even if published, if it is not innovative or does not advance the field" (Halpern et al., 1998, p. 1295). We agree that a class demonstration that reproduces a novel finding is not scholarship. We worry, however, that the task force underappreciates the essential place of replication in establishing the reliability of possibly anomalous findings. Because replication helps strengthen the foundation under our knowledge, it should be encouraged, not discouraged. Indeed, some academicians contend that novel findings should be reported in class and in textbooks only after replication.

Replication is also a deterrent to intellectual fraud. The knowledge that provocative findings are subject to replication motivates honesty. As McBurney (1998) points out, "When word gets around that a certain person's experiment could not be replicated by several laboratories, that person loses credibility. Eventually the work is quietly forgotten, and the person fades into oblivion" (p. 351). For these reasons, defining scholarship in a way that deprecates the perceived value of replication may ultimately prove detrimental for the discipline.

Encouraging the Scholarship of Pedagogy

We applaud the task force's (Halpern et al., 1998) inclusion of the scholarship of pedagogy. Faculty should indeed be encouraged to collect data on their student learners and to use this information to improve their own pedagogy in the next student generation. In the words of Patricia Cross (see Boyer, 1990), faculty should become "classroom researchers"—scholars involved in evaluating their own teaching and their students' learning as it takes place.

We long to see, for instance, evaluative research on new multimedia instruction. How much do students enjoy and feel engaged by it, relative to other learning experiences? Do they learn and retain more when supported by technology? What sort of multimedia activities are most effective, and for what goals? How does use of teaching technology affect faculty—their workload, their other research, their morale?

The reality, however, is that we faculty are trained primarily for scholarship in our disciplinary subspecialties, not for pedagogical research. Moreover, the career rewards for the scholarship of pedagogy are more limited. Institutions should therefore explicitly encourage scholarship that explores the learning process. Teaching institutions, especially, should prize such scholarship as pertinent to their mission. When soliciting materials for promotion and tenure, assessments of the effectiveness of one's pedagogical innovations should be welcomed.

Implication: Toward More Flexible Loads

In addition to broadening our working definition of scholarship, the task force report (Halpern et al., 1998) implied the value of modifying faculty reward criteria to match priorities and more flexibly defining individual faculty assignments and expectations.

The report rightly reminds us that "no individual faculty member can be expected to excel at every type of scholarship" (Halpern et al., 1998, p. 1293) and that "the nature and scope of their contributions are likely to change over the course of a career" (p. 1294). Some faculty excel in front of large groups, others in advising and mentoring, others in research (and a few in all of these ways). Also, at various times in their careers, faculty will contribute in different ways. As they cycle through the professional seasons of their lives, their interests and gifts will evolve.

Most of us will nod our heads, agreeing that different gifts comes in different faculty packages. Yet our expectation–reward systems typically fail to respect this diversity. Instead, they define the same load and set the same criteria for everyone: Teaching 6 or 9 or 12 hours a week, advising so many students, serving on so many committees, and doing so much research. But the task force (Halpern et al., 1998) compels us to contemplate an alternative system, one that might better harness faculty gifts and boost faculty satisfaction while enabling departments to more fully realize their missions. Why not have flexible loads? Why not enable faculty who love and excel at teaching and the scholarship of teaching, but who enter the laboratory only to satisfy administrative demands, to focus their energies more exclusively on teaching, perhaps with larger classes or an "overload" (and to be rewarded for their teaching excellence)? If there are others in a department who long for more time for research, who give promise of using such time productively and in mentoring relationships with students, and who are willing to accept heightened accountability for research productivity, why not at least slightly redefine their loads accordingly? At the end of the day, the redistribution of responsibilities could yield the same amount of department teaching and research, with people spending more time on the things they do best—and therefore taking greater satisfaction and pride in their work.

Would "teachingism" disadvantage those who focus relatively more on teaching so that others might focus relatively more on scholarship? Would it inevitably create first- and second-class department citizens? Not if we indeed prize teaching and have operating criteria that reward and publicly celebrate teaching excellence.

Would "scholarshipism" disadvantage those who focus relatively more on research? (Would they be disheartened for "not carrying their load"?) Not if we value and reward the advance of knowledge and an active community of learners.

Would recognizing the diversity of gifts and the seasons of life with a flexible load system be less rigorous? Not if faculty members set goals and face raised expectations appropriate to their job descriptions.
Some institutions have successfully pioneered individualized development plans (IDPs) or what Boyer (1990) terms "creativity contracts." IDPs are "growth contracting" faculty development plans, enabling each faculty member to develop specific goals for a given year within the context of a five-year development plan. IDPs propose methods for accomplishing goals and assessing accomplishments. A faculty advisory committee approves yearly plans and monitors achievements.

Since 1976, 75% of Gordon College (in Massachusetts) faculty have regularly participated in a voluntary IDP program. The positive results of the Gordon program, both in faculty morale and efficiency, helped inspire similar programs at Furman University (South Carolina) and Austin College (Texas). Although most IDPs allow only for individualization within each major area of faculty responsibility, they could also allow for a redistribution of responsibilities among faculty and for career flexibility appropriate to a faculty member's evolving career. Boyer (1990) reports that 53 percent of faculty under age 40 agreed that "my job is a source of considerable personal strain." IDPs could keep the demands of the early career manageable for younger faculty and help prevent their burnout, while also allowing senior professors flexibility as their gifts and interests change. The goal is not to license erratic activity or unaccountable individualism, but to realize the task force's vision—to enable communities of scholars to better achieve their collective mission while supporting and renewing the diversity of their members' gifts.

REFERENCES


