

# Rethinking the Nature of Scholarship

## Ernest A. Lynton

Ernest A. Lynton is Commonwealth Professor Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and senior associate of the New England Resource Center for Higher Education. He has been senior vice-president for academic affairs in the University of Massachusetts System. E-mail: [lynton@umb.edu](mailto:lynton@umb.edu).

Ever since World War II, American universities have been pulled into two seemingly opposite directions. The extraordinary growth both in absolute enrollment as well as in the rate of participation in higher education among the postsecondary cohort has diversified student backgrounds, preparation, and interests, and created enormous pedagogic challenges. At the same time, a boom in federal support for basic research, most of it going to a limited number of prestigious universities, made all such institutions aspire to share in the wealth. The amount of research support became the primary measure of institutional prestige as well as individual standing.

---

**Scholarship should never have been and certainly no longer can be narrowly defined as consisting only of traditional, basic research.**

---

The imbalance in the resulting tension between teaching and research is probably best indicated by the common habit of referring to “teaching loads” but to “research opportunities.” Periodic increases in the attention paid to instructional activities have occurred over the years. However, until fairly recently, even the strongest advocates of more and better teaching did not really question that the discovery of new knowledge by means of basic research constituted the principal purpose of universities and the hallmark of the scholar. “Research” and “scholarship” were—and often continue to be—used as synonyms. Teaching was not a scholarly activity. And the direct dissemination and application of knowledge to the needs of external constituencies was even lower on the totem pole. It remained lumped with committee work and good citizenship as a quasi-philanthropic “service.”

This attitude has begun to change. Since the early 1980s a growing number of publications and presentations have called for a fundamental reexamination of the intellectual role of universities and their faculties. All invoke a common theme. Universities were and always needed to be

defined as places of scholarship. But scholarship should never have been and certainly no longer can be narrowly defined as consisting only of traditional, basic research. This pivotal argument was articulated with great clarity by the late Ernest Boyer in his influential report—*Scholarship Reconsidered*, in which he described four overlapping and mutually reinforcing dimensions of scholarship: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of teaching, and the scholarship of application.<sup>1</sup> All of these pose major intellectual challenges, all provide opportunities for creativity and learning, all can add to the knowledge base of a discipline or profession.

---

**Since the early 1980s a growing number of publications and presentations have called for a fundamental reexamination of the intellectual role of universities and their faculties.**

---

At the heart of this broader conception is the recognition that scholarship is characterized as much by process as it is by outcomes. It is displayed by the way in which a scholar explores and analyzes a complex situation, using his or her expertise to identify both its similarities and its differences from prior, similar problems, chooses an optimal goal and appropriate methods, pursues the project in a reflective manner, and acquires new knowledge and understanding both from the process and the outcome. These “habits of the mind” can be manifested in equal measure when creating a new pedagogic approach to a complex subject, finding new ways of working with an external client to deal with a pressing problem, or carrying out a basic or applied research project. An individual can demonstrate scholarly qualities in many more ways than by means of traditional research published in refereed journals. Traditional as well as other kinds of teaching, and also professional outreach and applied work can be carried out in a scholarly manner.

Of course this must be demonstrated and evaluated. All the potential manifestations of scholarship must be properly documented, subject to peer review, held to equivalent standards of quality, and then receive equivalent recognition. Hence, a more inclusive view of scholarship requires substantially new approaches to prevailing notions

of faculty roles and faculty rewards.

Much of this will be discussed in a forthcoming report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, entitled *Scholarship Assessed*.<sup>2</sup> A first working draft was generated by this author some time ago, but its further development and the final version has been much delayed by the illness and untimely death of Ernest Boyer. In the mean time, however, the extraordinary impact of Dr. Boyer's earlier report, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, has resulted in much progress in recent years on the reexamination and adaptation of faculty roles and rewards within the framework of a broader conception of scholarship.

At the national level, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) initiated the Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards, which has sponsored four annual meetings with steadily growing attendance; the most recent meeting in January 1996 attracted over one thousand individuals. AAHE is also engaged in several pertinent projects and has published a number of monographs, most of them to date focused on teaching. It has had substantial success in stimulating pedagogic discussions on campuses, and in exploring ways of documenting and assessing classroom work and other forms of instruction. More recently the focus of attention has expanded to include faculty professional service through outreach. AAHE has published a monograph *Making the Case for Professional Service* by this author, who is currently engaged in a project involving faculty members on four campuses in the development of documentation for peer review of such external professional activities.<sup>3</sup>

---

**At the heart of this broader conception is the recognition that scholarship is characterized as much by process as it is by outcomes. It is displayed by the way in which a scholar explores and analyzes a complex situation.**

---

All this has caused much activity on individual campuses. By now, most universities have initiated a reexamination of their system of faculty rewards. In many places the work has not progressed much beyond the level of rhetoric and good intentions: long-established attitudes and perceptions are difficult to change. But significant adaptation is taking place in a growing number of institutions, some of them highly visible and hence good role models for others. From month to month progress appears glacial, but as compared with even as recent a date as 1991, we

have come a long way. There is every reason to hope that by the turn of the century the priorities and the value system of American universities will have undergone a significant and highly necessary change as a result of their reconsideration of the nature of scholarship.

#### Notes

1. Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).
2. Ernest L. Boyer, et al., *Scholarship Assessed* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, forthcoming).
3. Ernest A. Lynton, *Making the Case for Professional Service* (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1995).

### BOSTON COLLEGE PROGRAM SPONSORS READINGS SERIES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The Garland Readings Series in Higher Education will be published in mid-1997. This series of seven volumes, under the general editorship of Philip G. Altbach, includes books on a range of key topics in higher education. All of the books include carefully selected readings on aspects of higher education along with a introduction by the editor of each volume. The series will be available from Garland Publishing, Inc. 1000A Sherman Ave., Hamden, CT 06514. The series includes volumes edited by faculty at Boston College as well as others. The following books are included in the series:

1. *Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, Joseph O'Keefe, SJ, assistant professor of educational administration, Boston College
2. *Latin American Higher Education*, Lewis Tyler, director, Latin American Scholarship Program of American Universities, Harvard University and colleagues.
3. *Graduate Education*, Maresi Nerad, associate dean, Graduate Division, University of California, Berkeley.
4. *Student Development*, Karen Arnold, associate professor of higher education, Boston College.
5. *Organization and Administration of Higher Education*, Ted I. K. Youn, associate professor of higher education, Boston College.
6. *European Higher Education*, Peter Darvas, Soros Foundation.
7. *The Academic Profession*, Philip Altbach, professor of higher education, Boston College, and Dr. Martin Finkelstein, professor of higher education, Seton Hall University.