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## HOW *SCHOLARSHIP RECONSIDERED* DISRUPTED THE PROMOTION AND TENURE SYSTEM

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Many years ago for my doctoral dissertation, I studied college and university campuses that revised their promotion and tenure policies to reflect Ernest L. Boyer's broader definition of scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Shortly into my defense, a spirited debate emerged in the room regarding one of my engaged scholar participants. I was asked, "Would the broader definition of scholarship and revised tenure policy have been important if the scholar in question had completed the requisite number of journal articles or books *and* was involved in the scholarship of engagement on top of [his or her] traditional work? In other words, was Boyer simply trying to make an argument for faculty who could not 'cut it' as traditional scholars?"

I share this story because the question gets to the heart of Boyer's contributions to the national conversation about scholarship and reward systems. I pose several questions:

- Did Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* influence what actually counts as scholarship for tenure and promotion?
- Did Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* add to the legitimacy of forms of scholarship, other than discovery, within academic reward systems?
- What key point did Boyer make that has received little to no attention in substantive efforts to reform faculty member roles and rewards?



- What contexts threaten the continued impact of Boyer's broader definition of scholarship? What contexts offer hope for its adoption and expansion?

Since Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* was published in 1990, there have been several pieces of work trying to extend and fill out Boyer's framework and definitions of scholarship,<sup>2</sup> as well as studies investigating the impact of this work within academic cultures and reward systems.<sup>3</sup> Overall findings suggest that the scholarship of discovery endures as the most "legitimate and preferred form of scholarship," though Boyer's work has added to what is counted as legitimate scholarship.<sup>4</sup>

Although Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* is a widely read and cited work and has led to some important changes in academia, it could not overcome generations of academic socialization privileging the scholarship of discovery.<sup>5</sup> The privileged position of the scholarship of discovery is maintained through graduate student socialization and also through market forces across higher education institutions that maintain traditional forms of scholarship as the strongest, portable currency and form of transferrable social capital.<sup>6</sup> Such a market is maintained by routine practices such as job searches, criteria used in annual *US News and World Report (USNWR)* rankings, disciplinary awards, and social networks, and hidden controls within reward systems that reproduce narratives regarding the primacy of traditional scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

However, it is also true that the faculty roles and rewards reform movement led by R. Eugene Rice and Russell Edgerton (formerly of the American Association of Higher Education [AAHE]), Lee Shulman of the Carnegie Foundation, and Ernest Lynton of the New England Resource Center of Higher Education spurred hundreds of college and university campuses to reform promotion and tenure language to include a broader definition of scholarship. I studied such reforms in my dissertation,<sup>8</sup> with Rice through case studies of individual campus reform processes and outcomes,<sup>9</sup> and through a survey of four-year university provosts.<sup>10</sup> Provosts who implemented these reforms at their campuses were more likely than provosts at campuses that did not put these reforms in place to observe faculty member acceptance of multiple forms of scholarship.<sup>11</sup> Provosts who initiated reforms reported faculty members engaged in alternative forms of scholarship had better chances of being successful after the promotion and tenure reforms were put in place.<sup>12</sup>

These same provosts also noted such policy changes helped their campuses become more distinctive rather than mimicking the faculty standards



at aspirational peers. Such findings are important to understanding the potential benefits of reward system reform as suggested by Boyer. Yet, they are limited. For example, there is not a national database of the number of engaged and teaching scholars who went up for promotion and tenure in the twenty years since such policies were put in place. As such it is not clear how many faculty members succeeded or failed in “making their case.”<sup>13</sup> We also do not know which engaged faculty members left their respective institutions or stayed based on what was in those reformed guidelines.

Given the rate of promotion and tenure is relatively high for those who make it to the tenure decision (seven in ten in research universities and higher in most other institutional types),<sup>14</sup> it could be argued that the issue is less whether publicly engaged scholars and teaching scholars are tenured in reformed reward systems and more whether their careers overall are thriving as much as those of traditional scholars. To understand this, we might identify a group of engaged graduate students who want to be faculty members. One example would be the Publicly Engaged Graduate Education program of Imagining America. This group could be paired with a control group of more traditionally minded academics who want to be faculty members and track both group’s recruitment into faculty positions, retention to tenure decision, retention to promotion to full-professor status, awards, grants, and other career outcomes such as satisfaction with career.

What we know from analysis of promotion and tenure policies in four-year universities is that Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* changed what many universities codified in policy as “counting” as legitimate knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, one of Boyer’s greatest contributions to higher education was legitimacy for a new way of understanding scholarship.

Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* added legitimacy to engaged, interdisciplinary, and teaching scholarship within and across higher education institutions. Scott notes legitimacy is “not a commodity to be possessed or exchanged but a condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support, or consonance with relevant rules or laws.”<sup>16</sup> As cultural resource-driven organizations, higher education institutions maintain and reproduce a currency of legitimacy, prestige, and reputation.<sup>17</sup>

Boyer added legitimacy to forms of scholarship other than discovery by breaking a long silence regarding alternative views of how to define and assess quality scholarship.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, Boyer disrupted the dominant narrative that there is only one kind of scholarship and one way to assess its quality. In other words, Boyer disrupted what Rice,<sup>19</sup> and later I,<sup>20</sup> referred to as the “assumptive world of the academic professional” by



critiquing its very operating assumptions. By positioning scholarship as work that involves faculty expertise, peer review, and impact, rather than simply work that is published in specific journals and book presses, Boyer opened up possibilities and discussion about other forms of scholarly expression and products.

Boyer also added to the legitimacy of multiple forms of scholarship by contributing language. One of Ernest Boyer's greatest legacies was providing a foundational language for defining what scholarship is (and is not) that did not exist before *Scholarship Reconsidered*. This language of discovery, integration, teaching and transmission, and application (later changed to engagement) of knowledge remains in hundreds of promotion and tenure policies, candidate dossiers, national associations, and research today.

By providing a language for scholarship, and one that presented the different forms of knowing as equal and complementary, Boyer provided an opening, a public space, and an opportunity for higher education scholars who wanted to argue that there were more kinds of scholarship, more ways to assess quality. Boyer used his own bully pulpit as well, a strong voice coming from a major foundation president saying that there are other multiple, legitimate ways of knowing and being a scholar. The gifts of language, public space, and credibility to claim another view of knowledge making conferred legitimacy on those who had long been involved in alternative forms of scholarship without a voice and without credibility.

One of the reasons alternative forms of scholarship were marginalized at the time *Scholarship Reconsidered* was written was that these activities were considered unskilled work. Skilled work has always received greater status within organizations than unskilled work.<sup>21</sup> At the time of *Scholarship Reconsidered's* release, research was the primary form of skilled work—for which there is a lengthy and specific doctoral training with clear measurable outputs. By contrast, teaching and service had fewer legitimate knowledge communities and few measurable outputs.<sup>22</sup> Those engaging in the scholarship of teaching and engagement did not have mature professional communities to socialize new scholars, present their work and receive peer review, provide consensus around quality and mediocre work, and confirm awards. They thus had few measurable outputs.

An entire movement has arisen from Boyer's early efforts to professionalize and increase the stature and assessment of engaged scholarship, the scholarship of teaching, and interdisciplinary research and training. Key actors in this movement include the Carnegie Foundation, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education, Imagining America, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, CIRTLL, and the



International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSCLE). Scholars involved in newer forms of scholarship rolled up their sleeves and created professional networks for faculty members and administrators, graduate school training, journals, and recognition systems. They began to form knowledge-sharing and knowledge-creating professional communities that provide recognition and legitimacy for this work.

Boyer also provided higher education faculty members a language for talking about inequalities that exist within reward systems. This was also a disruption. Jencks and Riesman had warned of the dangers of isomorphism in higher education in which every four-year university tries to mimic the standards of Harvard and in doing so loses its distinctiveness.<sup>23</sup> Boyer's work ignited conversations on college and university campuses about the kinds of scholarship that were being valorized within institutional reward systems and those that were being marginalized. Boyer pointed out that many of the forms of knowledge making that were being marginalized were those that were most communal and collective in nature. Competitive individualism and elite notions of appropriate university research had taken over reward systems to disenfranchise knowledge making that was collaborative, interdisciplinary, engaged with public problems, and in partnership with students. Although Boyer advocated that faculty members be able to engage in all kinds of scholarship, including discovery, he made the argument that the purposes of higher education were not served by a singular, individualistic form of scholarship or inequalities in how these different kinds of knowledge making were legitimized, valued, and rewarded.<sup>24</sup>

The contribution that Boyer made to the legitimacy of newer forms of scholarship cannot be overestimated, and I think they will stand the test of time. To me this contribution stands beside the work of Barr and Tagg<sup>25</sup> in providing language for a shift from a teaching to a learning paradigm and the work of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in getting higher education to understand the value of "high-impact practices" for students. They are contributions that we cannot forget or retreat from but reside in our collective consciousness as a form of accountability and claimed intellectual space.

Despite the fact that Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* was closely read, influential on policy, and is one of the mostly widely cited pieces of scholarship on higher education, several important points made by Ernest Boyer were not given the attention they deserved. The most important of the overlooked points, in my view, is the idea that reward systems need to be reformed so that faculty members get more credit for the



work that they do every day that is not scholarship. Boyer makes the point that mentoring, effective teaching, and shared governance, for example, are all critical to the ongoing development and excellence of higher education.<sup>26</sup> Each time a faculty member sits with a student in a coffee shop for two hours helping him or her discern a career direction, supervises a program's accreditation process, deliberates over general education requirements, or mentors other faculty members, he or she contributes to his or her institution's goals.

It is not only the research our higher education faculty members engage in that has made the American system of higher education one of the best systems in the world but also our systems of shared governance and commitment to a holistic development of students. A concrete application of Boyer's admonition to recognize nonscholarly tasks would have been to reform promotion and tenure so that the portion of scholarship required (that is, any scholarship) is less and teaching and shared governance count more. This has not been done for many reasons.

There are many forces that have threatened and will continue to do so the long-term impact of a broader definition of scholarship in higher education institutions; I will mention only a few here. First, national and world ranking systems that emphasize faculty member publications, citation counts, fellowships, and more traditional indicators of faculty research productivity create a disincentive for valuing nontraditional scholarship in faculty member reward system.<sup>27</sup> Second, efforts by institutions to "strive," to move up in rankings and prestigious membership associations, threaten more regional connections between universities and communities and between students and faculty members who produce excellent engaged scholarship and teaching scholarship.<sup>28</sup>

The greatest threat to the idea of faculty members being rewarded for a "mosaic of talent" in knowledge making has been the rise in non-tenure-track faculty member appointments and the unbundling of faculty member roles. There are many concerns about working conditions and academic freedom for non-tenure-track faculty members that have emerged with the increase in these positions. However, I speak specifically here about the amount of time that non-tenure-track faculty members have built into their workload to devote to any scholarship, much less engaged, interdisciplinary, or teaching scholarship. Boyer critiqued higher education faculty members for focusing more on their scholarship than on undergraduate education, public engagement, and the development of campus communities, but Boyer did not want an employment system where a portion of the academic workforce was not given time for



scholarly learning and scholarly contributions. As such, those interested in advocating for multiple forms of scholarship will need to work on multiple fronts simultaneously—continuing to try and expand what counts for tenure and promotion and finding new ways to carve out time and support for scholarship of all kinds for non-tenure-track faculty members.

To end on a more positive note, there is much hope to be found for assimilation of the broader definition of scholarship into the fabric of higher education because of the interests and passions of the newest generation of scholars.<sup>29</sup> Much research shows a growth in interdisciplinary majors and dissertations. National Science Foundation (NSF) programs such as IGERT, CIRTLL, and AGEP PROMISE are preparing graduate students with interests in the scholarship of teaching and interdisciplinary and engaged scholarship. Imagining that America's PAGE program and NERCHE's Next Generation Engagement program are helping to prepare graduate students to navigate the academy while remaining true to their commitments to engagement reveals an emerging generation of scholars who may be able to change the strong norms and structures of disciplinary fields and higher education organizations through critical mass, persistence, and excellent scholarship in new forms.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* played an important role in reframing discussions about faculty member work. Hundreds of institutions have used the Boyer framework to revise their promotion and tenure guidelines, expanding the definition and criteria of what counts as scholarship within their reward systems. Boyer played a critical role in adding to the legitimacy of engaged scholarship and the scholarship of teaching by providing language and encouraging the development of networks and professional communities to evaluate and advance newer forms of scholarship. Today this legacy lives on in vibrant knowledge communities committed to newer forms of scholarship and to continuing to reform faculty member roles and rewards.

