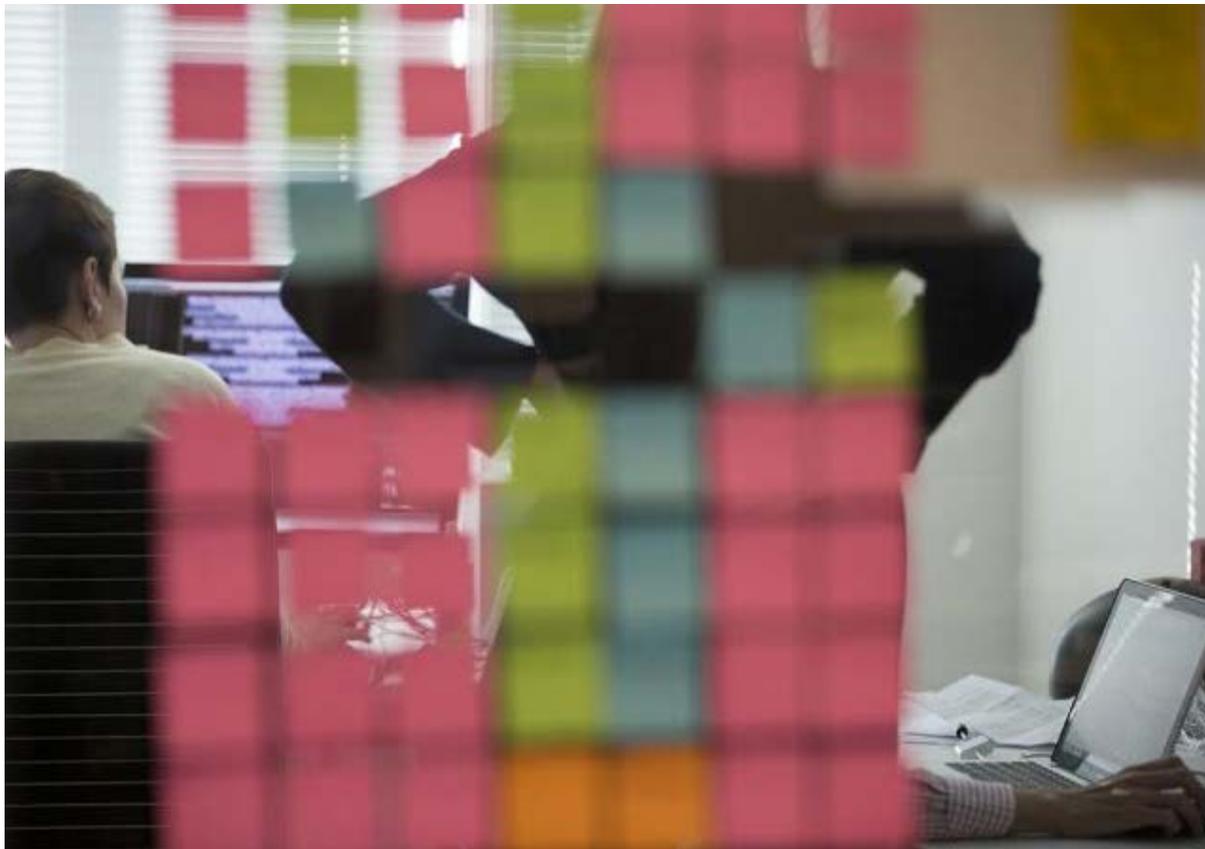


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## Toward a More Inclusive Definition of Faculty Scholarship

November 16, 2015 - 6:02pm

By [Thomas Carey](#)

**A** recent post in Matt Reed's [Confessions of a Community College Dean](#) column raised the question of "how research informs teaching and whether it factors in at the community college level". I think this question is best framed in a slightly more general way: "how can our teaching activity and our scholarly activity complement each other to be mutually beneficial at a teaching-intensive institution". This is of importance at any teaching-intensive institution, particularly one which integrates foundational, vocational and professional programs along with more traditional academic pathways.

Some teaching-intensive institutions beginning to develop... through which faculty in all of these teaching areas could... contributions that further their teaching mission as well... their classroom and curricular activities. That's not to

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choose to engage in such scholarly activity, just that they should see themselves excluded *a priori* just because they teach in a foundational, vocational or professional area.

I see two key developments emerging in this work to move the conversation beyond “research activities” toward a more inclusive “scholarly activities”, that go beyond our classroom and curricular activities without diminishing the primary role of these institutions:

- The best working definition I have seen emphasizes *leveraging our activities as teachers to advance knowledge and knowledge practices in our vocational, professional, and scholarly communities*. For example, the growing emphasis on knowledge mobilization – from scholarly communities into practice – by research sponsors has highlighted how non-traditional roles can complement more traditional scholarship.
- Distinguishing scholarly activity of this sort from other professional activities that benefit our teaching but don’t fall under the definition of scholarly. That doesn’t mean they shouldn’t also be valued, recognized and rewarded within a teaching-intensive institution. But it does mean that our ‘inclusive’ definition of scholarly activity has not become ‘all-inclusive’ .

### **Redefining Contributions in Scholarship**

Our faculty who do not actively contribute to scholarly communities may nonetheless be contributing to advancing knowledge and knowledge practices in other ways that extend beyond our teaching programs. Here are some potential examples where the distinctive mission of a teaching-intensive institution requires non-traditional activities of our faculty members that complement the contributions of more traditional faculty scholars:

- In designing a new course (or updating an existing one), you encounter knowledge and practices which are new to your local professional or vocational community. You develop a workshop to introduce these innovations, which advances knowledge and practice for the participants.
- You contribute your expertise as a professional educator in the redesign of training and professional development activities in your professional or vocational community, in a way that advances how that community engages in ongoing learning.
- Your weblog on innovative developments in professional or vocational practice is a valued source in the personal learning networks of leading practitioners, as a ‘knowledge connector’ resource for keeping in tune with new developments.

But it also can include other activities – related-to but going-beyond teaching – that support the mission of a teaching-intensive institution (especially for a **region-serving institution** called upon to advance **regional social and economic development**).

### **Distinguishing Scholarship from Professional Work**

The second key development noted above is the flip side of this more inclusive definition of scholarly

activity: it can't be all-inclusive if it is to have any meaning and value. Many faculty members will be both professional teachers and also members of scholarly communities; others will be active in vocational and professional communities which their students seek to join. There are other ways in which they engage with their professional, vocational and scholarly communities that may add value to our teaching programs; these activities can be valued, recognized and rewarded for their impacts in teaching without labelling them as contributions in scholarship.

The distinguishing point seems to be whether the engagement of our faculty with their knowledge communities beyond our institution – scholarly, vocational or professional – primarily impacts the knowledge and knowledge practices of those external communities or the learning and learning practices of our students. Here are some examples of activities with external knowledge communities that would likely fall outside the definition of contributions in scholarship because their primary contribution is in teaching:

- *Keeping teaching colleagues up-to-date on emerging practices in our professional or vocational community.* We recognize that such activities may provide significant value to teaching programs by strengthening the quality of **practice-based education**.
- *Contributing with practitioner colleagues to training workshops and professional development activities,* where our role as educators may not add specific value to that community of practice, but our participation could add value for us in our teaching mission by reinforcing our institution's position as at the forefront of professional and vocational practice, enhancing our relationships with practitioners for impacts on student recruitment, experiential learning and career opportunities, etc.). This work may help to enable the achievement of our teaching mission, although its direct outcomes are not part of that mission per se.
- *Serving as a professional consultant on specific areas of advanced practice,* where the context does not provide opportunities for practice-based scholarship as described above (e.g., going beyond established practice or requiring adaptations to fit new contexts). As noted in the previous point, such 'routine' consulting may add value for our teaching programs and could therefore be regarded as part of faculty teaching workload.

Lastly, in any emerging definition of contributions in scholarship we should note that we expect all of our teachers to be professional in their commitment to (1) understanding and mobilizing the knowledge base about teaching in their subject areas and to (2) improving the value they contribute in teaching by continually reflecting on and updating their professional knowledge and the learning experiences and student success their teaching supports.

So if we want to define a particular activity as a contribution in scholarship beyond our assigned teaching activities, then just maintaining currency as professional teachers is not going to quality (and in my opinion any attempt to dress that up as '**scholarly teaching**' rather than labelling it properly as 'professional teaching' debases both the terms *professional* and *scholarly*).

I'm not sure how well this kind of thinking will address the question which prompted Matt's blog post, as it may have been more oriented toward engagement with a scholarly community than with a vocational or professional community. Other faculty may also contribute to advancing knowledge and learning in broader communities, in particular in roles as **public intellectuals**. The examples above do illustrate that it is the Impacts that must be considered in determining the value that such activities contribute to the institution's mission (and where they need to be accounted for in calculating workload and impact).

These emerging definitions also leave in limbo many process-oriented definitions of the *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, a term that I think may well be due for retirement. More on this in a subsequent post...

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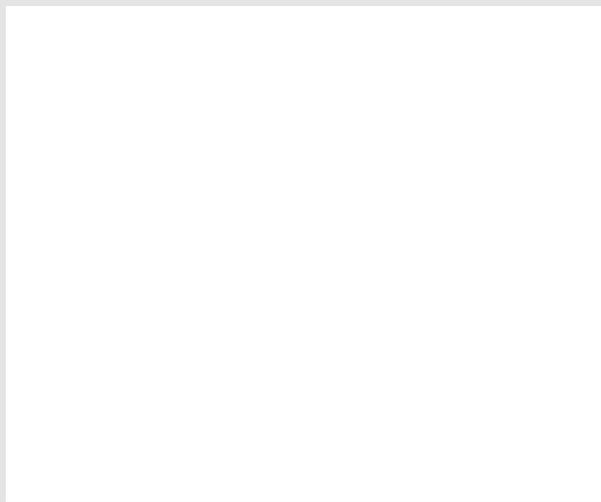
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