

THE NISOD PAPERS



An occasional publication dedicated to topics of interest to community and technical college educators.

Encouraging Scholarship in the Community College

The best description of scholarship in American higher education is found in Ernie Boyer's 1990 book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*. According to Boyer, to understand what scholarship means, it is important to know how it evolved.

A Brief History

Early colonial colleges, with their strong British roots, were established to build character in their students and to prepare new generations for civic and religious leadership. This tradition of American scholarship, one that affirmed the centrality of teaching and learning, persisted well into the 19th century. Faculty members were employed with the understanding that they would be educational mentors in and out of the classroom. Charles Eliot reflected on this philosophy upon assuming the presidency of Harvard College in 1869, declaring that the prime business of American professors must be regular and assiduous class teaching, reinforcing the image of the teacher as a scholar.

The first change in the meaning of scholarship in American higher education occurred with the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862. This legislation established the Land Grant Colleges and expanded the mission of higher education to respond to the very practical needs of our developing American society. This historic act provided federal land to each state with the intent that proceeds from its sale would support liberal arts education and training in the skills necessary for the emerging agricultural and industrial revolutions.

The Hatch Act of 1887 advanced this new practical form of scholarship by providing federal funds to create university-sponsored agricultural experiment stations to provide the benefits of learning to farmers. The idea that American higher education should serve the common good was thus established, adding service as a second form of scholarship.

The added missions to improve agriculture and manufacturing gave rise to the inclusion of applied research as a third form of scholarship. Prior to this time, research was conducted primarily by investigators outside of the academy. In fact, a large percentage of research in some disciplines, such as biotechnology, occurs today outside of our major research universities. Those who equate scholarship solely with research should be reminded just how recently that mission was added to American higher education.

In the 1870s, the universities of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Columbia, and Princeton began offering programs leading to a Ph.D. degree. The University of Chicago, founded in 1891, made the Ph.D. the "pinnacle" of its academic program. By 1895, William Rainey Harper, the president of the University of Chicago and one of the early advocates for junior colleges, required each new university faculty member to sign an agreement acknowledging that promotions in rank and salary would depend chiefly upon research productivity. This establishment of research as the most valued form of scholarship in what would become "research universities" created a need for another kind of institution that would place its highest value on the scholarship of teaching and learning.

That void was filled in 1901 when the doors opened at Joliet Junior College in Illinois, beginning a community responsive movement that has opened access to higher education to the most diverse student body in history. These new junior colleges, first designed to teach lower-division coursework and to send only the best students on to upper-division work in universities, were ultimately shaped by the needs of an evolving American society into today's comprehensive community colleges.

Higher education in America was dramatically redefined in 1947 as a result of the work of President Harry S. Truman's commission on higher education. The Truman Commission report changed the course of the academy from "merely being an instrument for producing an intellectual elite" to becoming "the means by which every citizen, youth, and adult, is enabled and encouraged" to pursue higher learning. The Commission's report marked the first general use of the term "community college."

The Community College

Access to higher learning became one of the first values of the new community college movement. Students no longer had to "go away" to college, as colleges were built in their communities. Since their founding more than 100 years ago, community colleges have spread throughout the United States so that today there are approximately 1,200 public and private community colleges offering lower-division courses, as well as certificate and degree programs. The campuses are located within commuting distance of more than 90 percent of the population of the United States. Today's community colleges are making learning even more accessible by delivering courses through distance education.

Community colleges have traditionally responded to the educational needs of their communities, developing important vocational programs, partnering with local institutions and agencies, and providing contract education and credit and noncredit community service programs. Some colleges provide facilities and support services to incubate new entrepreneurial businesses; others are seen as cultural centers for their communities. A sense of creativity and an innovative spirit extends into the classrooms and student service areas.

To understand how community colleges act as centers for scholarship, it is necessary to recognize its different forms. According to Boyer's previously mentioned *Scholarship Reconsidered*, there are four separate but overlapping forms of scholarship:

- The scholarship of discovery;
- The scholarship of integration;
- The scholarship of application; and
- The scholarship of teaching.

Dr. Boyer argued for a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar, a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through application, and through teaching.

The Scholarship of Discovery. Discovery, of course, is based upon pure and applied research most commonly valued in research universities. Research findings are documented and disseminated through publications and conference presentations. Because of high teaching loads, student advising duties, and committee responsibilities, most full-time community college faculty members do not regularly engage in the scholarship of research. Exceptions are sometimes made when colleges offer sabbatical or professional leave opportunities that give faculty members time to refresh their knowledge in their disciplines.

The Scholarship of Integration. Community college professors who help shape a core curriculum or prepare a cross-disciplinary seminar are engaged in the scholarship of integration. Integration might also include preparing quality computer software, working with a team to prepare an online or video course, or even writing a textbook, a lab manual, or an article for a professional journal based upon the integration of research studies. Practical forms of this type of scholarship also include presentations at professional conferences, exhibits of creative visual or performance artwork, and the publication of essays and poems. Community college professors are very actively involved in the scholarship of integration.

The Scholarship of Application. Faculty members and administrators who work in their communities to help shape public policy or to help advance the economic and/or social standings of their communities, and those who work with public schools, engage in the scholarship of application by applying their knowledge to practical issues in the community. Many community college faculty members and administrators are involved in this form

scholarship by lending their expertise to support charitable causes and to advance cultural and educational levels of their communities through service on committees, boards, and councils.

College committee work may not be thought of as a scholarly activity, but these internal governance and planning activities would benefit from a scholarly approach. Over time, the decisions made by local governing boards and college administrators have dramatic effects on their colleges and the kinds and quality of programs and services provided to students. These decisions and plans should be informed by institutional research and the scholarly minds of the faculty and staff who serve on advisory committees. Currently, several colleges have used internal governance processes to engage in innovative projects such as "guided pathways" that provide support and help new students through the maze of course selection.

The Scholarship of Teaching. Boyer concluded his publication with a discussion about the scholarship of teaching, saying that the work of the professor becomes consequential only as it is understood by others. Further, good teachers must be engaged in the scholarship of learning. They must continually learn how to better promote the learning of their students. It is in this form of scholarship that community college faculty excel, reflecting a unique creativeness and innovative spirit.

The traditional thinking in education is that students learn through attending lectures and completing reading assignments, writing assignments, problem sets, laboratory work, and field work. These traditional methods should be evaluated based upon what is being discovered about human learning. The learning college movement that began in community colleges does not necessarily define traditional methods as "bad." Instead, these methods should not constrain the teacher's thinking about how best to promote student learning.

Evidence from a number of disciplines, however, suggests that material presented orally to large groups of passive students contributes very little to real learning. Covering the material does not really mean students are learning it. Research indicates that faculty members who promote interaction among students in and out of class are rewarded with improved student persistence and success. The scholarship of discovering what works best to promote learning in the disciplines is one that is very well suited to community college faculty. Community college faculty have the ideal laboratory to innovate and to evaluate methods and environments that promote student learning and success.

The most effective teachers are scholars of student learning, examining leading theories of how people learn. Constructivism, for example, holds that people do not just assimilate new information; they build frameworks of knowledge based upon what they already know. In fact, the latest research indicates that people learn by making physical connections in the brain. Experienced teachers know that relating new information to what is already learned is an effective way of teaching.

Effective teachers are also aware of the literature on learning styles and ways of knowing. This has implications for how teachers present information in multiple ways to engage all learners. Studies have also shown that students who are most successful are the ones who have the most interaction with their teachers, inside and outside of class. Here, community college teachers have an advantage over university professors who struggle to find ways to interact with lower-division students in large lecture halls.

In 1985, Uri Treisman, who was then a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, conducted a classic study on the scholarship of teaching and learning. Dr. Treisman was puzzled by the fact that African-American students were rarely successful in his calculus classes, whereas Asian students persisted at the highest rates and, as a group, always received the highest grades. In examining the study habits of different groups of students, Dr. Treisman found that the Asian students studied in groups and were supportive of one another. The African-American and Caucasian students, by contrast, were individualistic and competitive. By forming study groups among his African-American students, Dr. Treisman was able to improve their success rates dramatically. Similar research has shown that faculty members can help their students to be more successful by creating forums to interact with each other and to form support networks. Studies of learning communities also reflect the value of these supportive relationships. Research studies along these lines that advance knowledge of teaching and learning should be shared through publications and conference presentations.

Community colleges should also actively encourage their students to be scholars. Research findings consistently confirm the belief that students persist and succeed at a greater rate if they are truly involved in their subjects. Moreover, courses of study that do not engage higher-level cognitive and affective skills do not have lasting impact. Discipline-based research projects can be designed for lower-division students as a way to involve them in their learning and to convey the excitement of the subjects. Field, laboratory, or library research projects can be developed for every discipline.

Community college faculty members and administrators need to be actively engaged in scholarship, and their activities should be supported and valued by the leaders and policy makers of the institutions. Scholars need forums to interact and to share what they are learning and producing. Campus-based professional development activities, sabbatical leave programs, participation in professional associations, and attendance at conferences are wise investments in the vitality of the institution and in the climate necessary to support student learning at the highest level. Rather than rejecting scholarship as a mission of community colleges, which has all too often been done in the past, community college leaders should embrace a definition that reveals what it really means for community colleges. Contributions to scholarship should be recognized and celebrated on every campus.

George R. Boggs, Ph.D., is Superintendent and President Emeritus of Palomar College, and President and CEO Emeritus of the American Association of Community Colleges. He is an adjunct professor in the community college leadership doctoral programs at San Diego State University and National American University. Email: gboggs@palomar.edu

Editor's Note: This article has been revised and updated by the author from a previously published article: "The Meaning of Scholarship in Community Colleges," Community College Journal, American Association of Community Colleges, August/September 2001, Volume 72, Number 1, pp. 23-26.