

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING:
A CASE OF RETHINKING SCHOLARSHIP

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Editor's note: This is an excerpt from Greg's doctoral dissertation. In these introductory pages he reviews statements by Presidents Hinckley and Bednar, and he asks what it may mean to rethink scholarship. Greg's dissertation won the University of Idaho Adult and Organizational Learning 2004 "Outstanding Dissertation Award," presented to him at the October Idaho Lifelong Learning Fall Conference in Sun Valley.

The First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Board of Trustees of Ricks College announce that Ricks College will change from its present two-year junior college status to a four-year institution. The new four-year school will be known as Brigham Young University-Idaho, with the name change designed to give the school immediate national and international recognition....

BYU-Idaho will continue to be teaching oriented. Effective teaching and advising will be the primary responsibilities of its faculty, who are committed to academic excellence. (Hinckley)

On June 21, 2000, LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley read an official press release making an historic announcement concerning the future of Ricks College. This day marked a new chapter in a long history of educational achievement. The school's commitment to academic excellence was reaffirmed in a statement given by David A. Bednar, President of BYU-Idaho, when he said, "Our primary mission...is becoming a premier institution of learning and teaching" (Bednar, 4). This statement was pronounced by Bednar at the first formal faculty meeting after BYU-Idaho received candidacy status by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities to become a four-year institution. Prior to receiving candidacy status, the former Ricks College was "the largest privately owned two-year institution of higher education in America" (Hinckley, 1). Bednar's landmark address established the vision of BYU-Idaho by outlining the direction of the university and its commitment to scholarly activity by the faculty.

In defining the work of the faculty, Bednar posed the question, "Will we as BYU-Idaho be engaged in scholarship? Absolutely yes. If we are not engaged in scholarship, then we have no business being a university" (5). He explained that this scholarship would not focus on research "in the traditional sense of the term...nonetheless, we should be excellent scholars; and our scholarship should be focused on the process of

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learning and teaching” (5). He then presented a vision of “what it means for a faculty to be focused on the scholarship of learning and teaching” (3) and how the university’s activity should engage “a wide range of scholarly endeavors [in order to] excel in and play a pioneering role in understanding learning and teaching processes” (5). What a welcome direction for the institution!

My own desire to teach is what brought me to this school. Others had often asked me what direction I wanted my career to take. My personal career goals had been to one day teach in a higher educational setting, with a dream to teach and retire from Ricks College. My desire to establish my career at Ricks College had been driven by the school’s strong focus on teaching and helping students. The impending transition from a two-year college to a four-year university caused some initial angst as I contemplated the potential loss of the unique focus on the student, which had been a defining characteristic of Ricks College. I was relieved as I sat in this faculty meeting and my uncertainty was replaced by anticipation and excitement for what this new emphasis on learning and teaching would mean.

Bednar’s remarks included bedrock principles that form a framework upon which both the university and faculty can grow and remain vital in this “new vision of scholarship” (Boyer 1990, 13). The more salient principles he highlighted as governing the scholarship of learning and teaching at BYU-Idaho will be outlined in the following sub-sections.

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ALL SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY FOCUSED ON THE STUDENTS

All research at BYU-Idaho, whether basic, strategic, applied or action, as well as various types of artistic creation, must be rooted in “*doing it with and for the benefit of students*” [emphasis in original] (4). To make this principle clear in the minds of the faculty Bednar continued:

For those who may have the mind-set of *I need my time for my research*, I frankly do not think you fit at BYU-Idaho. There is room for scholarly activity and the kinds of artistic creation that will *benefit students* and help us in achieving our primary mission, which is becoming a premier institution of learning and teaching. But the attitude of “I need my time for my research, and teaching is a hassle; and the more external funding I can get, the more I can buy out my time, the less I teach, and the more ‘real work’ I can do; and what matters to me is my research,” ...does not belong at BYU-Idaho. We are not going there.... Will we be engaged in appropriate kinds of scholarly activity, some of which will be in the form of research? The answer is yes. But such activity should *always* have the basic objective of, first and foremost, benefiting and blessing our students! [emphasis in original] (4-5)

INSPIRED INQUIRY AND INNOVATION

As faculty investigate the processes of learning and teaching we must consider the unique nature of being a religious university. By recognizing the gifts of the Spirit, an important aspect of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint's faith, the faculty were asked by President Bednar to openly seek new processes for learning and teaching through the Spirit. Bednar stated:

The overarching theme for all of our scholarly work at Brigham Young University-Idaho should be *inspired inquiry and innovation*. Let me repeat that: inspired inquiry and innovation. We are not like other institutions of higher education; we have access to the gifts of the Spirit, which cannot be quantified nor counted. There are simply things we cannot adequately define and describe about the processes of learning and teaching with the Spirit. [emphasis in original] (5)

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TWO QUESTIONS FACULTY SHOULD CONTINUALLY ASK

As faculty move forward in their scholarly activity Bednar counseled, “there are always two questions: The ‘what’ and the ‘how.’ The discipline provides the focus for the question of ‘what.’ The processes of learning and teaching provide the focus for the question of ‘how’” (6). The “what” focuses on the discipline and the “how” on the processes of learning and teaching the specific discipline, or how each discipline may most effectively be taught. Bednar continued:

The scholarship of learning and teaching requires a simultaneous focus upon both what we teach and how we teach, what students learn and how they learn. I reiterate again that there is a dovetailing, there is a linking of the “what and the how.” Of course, if I am a biologist or an accountant or whatever my discipline, then I am going to have a focus on the questions that grow out of the discipline—but not in the sense of “I need *my* time for *my* research.” The scholarship we ought to be pursuing should involve and engage and benefit our students. The faculty in biology and various other departments would be the first to tell you that if a student wants to have a chance of being accepted into medical school or some other professional program, he or she had better be engaged in systematic inquiry, in an appropriate form of scholarly work as an undergraduate, or that student will have a difficult time making it into medical and other professional schools. But our motive is not directed at “promoting our personal, professional agenda.” Rather, we are benefiting and blessing students through scholarship, and we as faculty simultaneously are getting better as teachers as a result of what we do. (11-12)

GOING PUBLIC

The final term *Going Public* relates to advancing practice, a term Bednar used in referring to “ways to more effectively share and distribute and disseminate our own inspired innovation on this campus” (7). This is also called public such as going *public* with new insights, methods and strategies for learning and teaching. Bednar suggested:

Please begin to think in terms of what this means for us at Brigham Young University-Idaho: “Public” perhaps referring to a community of scholars on this campus. There are many opportunities for us to more effectively share with each other what we are learning in our classrooms and doing with our students. (6)

The four areas articulated in the first faculty meeting of the newly established BYU-Idaho set the parameters through which scholarly activity would be engaged, represented, and moved forward on the campus.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem addressed in this study was the narrowing definition of scholarship in higher education. Scholarship has been constricted to the point where “when we speak of being ‘scholarly,’ it usually means having academic rank in a college or university and being engaged in research and publication” (Boyer 1990, 15). This narrow meaning of scholarship has stifled legitimate scholarly activity of the professoriate and created a climate where the “faculty role in (the higher education setting) [is] ambiguous at best. Which master [teaching or research] should be worshipped?” is the question with which many institutions and faculties wrestle. Boyer has expressed that “it’s time to move beyond the tired old teaching versus research debate and instead begin to ask the much more compelling question: What does it mean to be a scholar?” (88)

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In August 1990, Ernest L. Boyer, then president of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, concerned about the role of faculty in American higher education, issued a report entitled, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. A major aspect of the report reflected on the role of the professoriate and how it has changed over the years. He reflected on “three distinct, yet overlapping phases” (3) of scholarship in higher education. The first phase was teaching. He noted that when Harvard College was founded in 1636 the focus was on the student and teaching was the central function of the school (Boyer 1992). Boyer chronicled two major shifts in scholarship throughout the following centuries. The first transformation started shortly after the War of Independence when “higher education’s focus began to shift from the shaping of young lives to the building of a nation” (Boyer 1990, 4). This

shift in scholarship, later termed *applied research*, was further established by the aftermath of the Civil War and solidified by the Morrill Act of 1862, later known as the Land Grant College Act (Boyer 1990; Boyer 1992; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff).

The next significant transition in scholarship can be best described as the present day basic research model. Although basic research has its roots in the beginning of the Republic, it did not take hold in university settings until the late nineteenth century (Boyer 1990). Then, in the 1940's, World War II played a significant role in influencing the academic culture, setting up the present day climate and institutional structure. Concerning this transition, Boyer notes:

The stage was set for a dramatic transformation of academic life. At that historic moment [World War II], Vannevar Bush of M.I.T. and James Bryant Conant of Harvard volunteered the help of the universities in bringing victory to the nation. In 1940, Bush took the lead in establishing the National Defense Research Committee which, a year later, became the Office of Scientific Research and Development. Academics flocked to Washington to staff the new agencies and federal research grants began to flow. Universities and the nation had joined in a common cause. (10)

This union between universities and the nation did bring victory to the United States by coordinating scientific research with the development of national defense. However, it also reshaped both the system and the direction of higher education, creating the present model. Boyer recounts:

After the war, Vannevar Bush urged continuing federal support for research. In a 1945 report to the President entitled *Science: The Endless Frontier*, he declared, "Science, by itself, provides no panacea for individual, social, and economic ills. It can be effective in the national welfare only as a member of a team, whether the conditions be peace or war. But without scientific progress no amount of achievement in other directions can insure our health, prosperity, and security as a nation in the modern world." The case could not have been more clearly stated. Higher learning and government had, through scientific collaboration, changed the course of history—and the impact on the academy would be both consequential and enduring. (10)

One of the biggest impacts of this reshaping can be seen in the present role of the professoriate. Boyer (1992) points out that the professoriate has changed from the "gentleman scholar of an earlier generation, when teaching was more highly prized" to the current "scientist" who resides in "academies" which are "home(s) for the professoriate rather than the student" (88). In addition, the university system in America was also reshaped. This dilemma is captured by Boyer (1990) when noting:

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The problem was that the research mission, which was appropriate for some institutions, created a shadow over the entire higher learning enterprise—and the model of a “Berkeley” or an “Amherst” became the yardstick by which all institutions would be measured. (12)

Interestingly, “even schools traditionally structured for teaching—liberal arts and comprehensive institutions—now follow the research model” (Glassick, 8). The system is further complicated by the fact that “while young faculty [are] hired as teachers, they [are] evaluated primarily as researchers” (8). Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff then expressed the problem facing higher education by saying, “The challenge to the academic community was and continues to be the need to expand the definition of legitimate faculty work in ways that put research in proper perspective without doing it harm” (11).

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As BYU-Idaho transitions from a two-year college to a four-year university, an opportunity has been created to study what a university is doing to broaden how scholarly activity is defined and rewarded. This opportunity was created by BYU-Idaho’s decision to make the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning the primary focus of the faculty. ∞

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