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Scholarship Unbound: Assessing Service as Scholarship for Promotion and Tenure—A Book Review

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Abstract: KerryAnn O'Meara studied the practices of promotion and tenure committees assessing school of education faculty from four universities that used service as scholarship work as a component of the review process. Learning from the promotion and tenure committee members, higher education administrators, and candidates for promotion/tenure, O'Meara outlines some common themes in using service as scholarship for academic advancement. Understanding these expectations can help Extension professionals in charting and conducting their service as scholarship work.

Introduction

The idea of scholarship is not a new one, and is the topic of several excellent articles published in the *Journal of Extension* (e.g., Culp, 2009; McGrath, 2006; Smith, 2004). Unfortunately, ambiguity related to scholarship in Extension is also not new. Astroth (2003) discusses challenges related to scholarly work by Extension 4-H professionals. Alter (2003) presented scholarship shortcomings at the 2003 Galaxy Conference and offered six challenges for Extension professionals in his related *JOE* article.

KerryAnn O'Meara (2002) explored academic reward systems within four colleges of education as they struggled with the inclusion of faculty professional service and teaching in balance with traditional scholarship activities for faculty seeking promotion and tenure in her doctoral research. In her book, *Scholarship Unbound: Assessing Service as Scholarship for Promotion and Tenure*, she

describes how the selected colleges defined scholarship and assessed faculty professional service as scholarship. She analyzed how professional service was evaluated and ultimate outcomes for faculty members seeking promotion and tenure with a service as scholarship portfolio. Reviewing the similarities among these institutions, the individual test cases, and the author's suggestions for rewarding service as scholarship work through the lens of a county-based Extension agent offers some suggestions for how to "sell" outreach and engagement work as scholarship in Extension.

Discussion

O'Meara (2002) explored the process, procedures, outcomes, and culture of "exemplary programs for assessing service" for four colleges of education within the pseudonymous institutions of MidWest State University, Patrick State University, Erin College, and St. Timothy. These institutions were identified as being exemplary for their attempts to assess multiple forms of scholarship for promotion and tenure. Each had revised their promotion policies to include an expanded definition of scholarship, based on work described in Boyer (1990).

One area of ambiguity for academic professionals in the schools of education was whether the service was "scholarship" or whether it was "civic engagement." In each of the studied institutions, the promotion and tenure committees felt the burden of proving service as scholarship was the candidates' responsibility. The expectation was greater for candidates for full professor than for associate professor. Committees looked for successful service for associate candidates, while the candidates for full professor should have outstanding service. Promotion committees also wanted to see national over regional impact/dissemination for higher promotion attainment. Finally, more empirical evidence (qualitative and/or quantitative) of impact/effectiveness was expected for full professor candidates.

The criteria shared by the four institutions were similar and included: professional/academic expertise, peer review, evidence of impact/effectiveness, dissemination, originality and innovation, and connecting teaching and research. The skill of the candidates in satisfying these criteria and telling a compelling, interconnected story was important in portfolio preparation and committee deliberation.

Service as Scholarship Review Criteria

Professional/Academic Expertise

Committee members wanted to see evidence of the academic knowledge, theories, or research applied in the service venue. The candidates needed to correctly identify the scope of the problem, research potential solutions or theories in the literature, and apply those findings or test the applicable theories in service work. Evidence of this might be in a bibliography, curriculum guide, or other service products. Lacking these, the candidate needed to include this in their reflective essays in their portfolio.

Peer Review

The peer review of service as scholarship work is an important one for the committees. The committees felt that service should be open to the public for scrutiny and evaluation. However, differing opinions were uncovered as to the qualifications of the peer reviewers. At one institution, peer review was evaluated higher than practitioner reviews. For example, a local schoolteacher's review of the work may differ from an education faculty member's review of the same project. Some faculty handbooks did discuss appropriate peer reviewer credentials as evaluators of service projects, making the subject less nebulous.

Evidence of Impact/Effectiveness

Committees were interested in seeing evidence of impact at the local, state, and national levels. They preferred "ongoing relationships over one-shot-deals" when evaluating partnering organizations. Specific evidence of impact presented was discipline-specific; however, the development of effective programming and ability for this to be replicated was important for committees in their evaluation of portfolios.

Dissemination

Related to impact and effectiveness was how this was shared with other professionals. How widely the results were disseminated was a component of how committees valued the service work as scholarship or as civic engagement. There was a continuum or hierarchy of dissemination: refereed journal articles, invited national conference presentations, and other published work like curriculum, textbooks, reports, videos, manuals, conference proceedings, grant proposals, and newsletter articles. The committees did exercise flexibility about how the dissemination took place and were open to multiple forms of dissemination, just so it was accomplished. All of the committees viewed the dissemination piece as a way that the faculty and the institution increased their prestige.

Originality

Service that is scholarship contributes to the field. The ingenuity of how the service contributes is unique to each educational professional. The committees looked for evidence of original, innovative work in which the reflective, analytical, and systematic mind of the scholar is evidenced. They wanted to see good ideas, intellectual rigor, and critical analysis that were characteristic of academic scholars. Successful candidates articulated how their service responded to scholarly questions, conceptualizing how that work attempted to answer questions in their chosen field.

Connection to Teaching and Research

Committees wanted to see clear connections in all portions of the candidate's employment expectations. Some committees wanted to see recent service work in connection with research efforts, while others wanted to see a longitudinal approach over a career of service, teaching, and research. Most committees wanted to see seamless connections among research, service, and teaching responsibilities across the breadth of a candidate's career.

Implications for Scholarship in Extension

Reviewing the research conducted by O'Meara (2002) in her dissertation considers how Boyer's concepts were practiced in four schools of education in promotion and tenure decisions. Understanding the criteria for assessing service as scholarship for education faculty can be an important guide for organizing and populating Extension candidate portfolios.

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