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Chris LaBelle

Oregon State University, chris.labelle@oregonstate.edu

Mark Anderson-Wilk

Oregon State University, mark.anderson-wilk@oregonstate.edu

Robert Emanuel

Oregon State University Extension Service, robert.emanuel@oregonstate.edu



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Leveraging New Media in the Scholarship of Engagement: Opportunities and Incentives

Chris LaBelle

Lifelong Learning Leader/Director of Non-Credit Courses
Extension and Experiment Station Communications
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon
chris.labelle@oregonstate.edu

Mark Anderson-Wilk

Publishing Leader
Extension and Experiment Station Communications
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon
mark.anderson-wilk@oregonstate.edu

Robert Emanuel

Water Resources and Community Development Specialist
Oregon Sea Grant Program
Oregon State University Extension Service
Tillamook, Oregon
robert.emmanuel@oregonstate.edu

Abstract: This article looks at how Extension faculty and administrators perceive digital scholarship in relation to their institutions' reward systems. Our survey data suggest that even when land-grant institutions have policies in place to reward alternative or new forms of scholarship, these policies are often unclear or inaccessible, are not reflected in job descriptions, and do not provide enough detail to ensure consensus among colleagues. Clear policies that reward digital scholarship and recognize the prominent role of technology in university-wide engagement efforts have become increasingly crucial because of budgetary constraints and the changing behaviors and preferences of Extension clients.

Introduction

This article looks at how Extension faculty and administrators perceive digital scholarship in relation to their institution's reward system. More specifically, we examine the connection between digital scholarship and how Extension faculty use technology for teaching and professional development. Although Extension's mission is heavily influenced by a focus on delivering research-based information for an off-campus audience, the scholarship-related activity of many Extension faculty is often constrained by an antiquated culture of scholarship that does not encourage innovation and favors print-based articles over other forms of communication.

First, we must first define digital scholarship. The term "digital scholarship" is often used to describe academic products that have been produced using new forms of technology such as video or multimedia (Andersen, 2004). However, this term lacks the descriptive power to capture the multifaceted overlap of technology, culture, product, and evaluation that is present when peer-reviewed research is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and delivered using new forms of media. Consequently, some researchers note that evaluating digital scholarship using peer-review carries added challenges and considerations that are not present for print-based publications (Glaubitz Cross, 2008) and that digital scholarship will only find value if it contributes to a larger-scale reformulation of the academic culture (Pearce, Weller, Scanlon, & Kinsley, 2010).

For the purposes of this article, we focus primarily on the production and distribution of scholarship using new media, but recognize that technology is often used in every phase of the academic research process.

Extension and Technology

Extension has a long and distinguished history of adapting its communication and scholarship resources for diverse audiences. Whether it be the Extension trains of the early 20th century that made agricultural instruction accessible to rural farmers (Hurt, 1994) or the technology-enriched 4-H programs of today, Extension's impact has often been measured by how effectively it reaches its audiences and meets community and stakeholder needs. Because of its core commitment to community outreach, Extension is well positioned to be at the vanguard of a larger effort to incorporate digital scholarship into the culture and practices of educational institutions.

In this article, we discuss relevant literature, look for lessons learned from one university's attempt to implement engagement and new scholarship policies, and discuss the results of our nationwide survey of Extension educators and administrators. One of the more striking findings of our survey is that most faculty simply do not know whether digital scholarship policies and guidelines exist at their institution. Where appropriate, we also compare our survey findings to an earlier study on this topic that polled history department chairs about their perceptions of new media scholarship and reward (Andersen & Trinkle, 2004).

Engagement in Relation to Extension Scholarship

Land-grant universities, and their Extension Services in particular, are guided by a mission of public outreach and community engagement. The Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement designation is a recent example of the increasing importance many universities place on their outward- or community-facing activities. Not surprisingly, outreach and engagement have become an even greater priority as a myriad of societal and business conditions have forced Extension to reevaluate its priorities and implement organizational change.

Shrinking budgets and shifting audience preferences have been the two most significant factors in Extension's move toward organizational transformation. Such change is not new for Extension, but as advances in communication technologies become more rapid and budgetary cuts become more severe, using new forms of media to share scholarship with larger and more engaged audiences has become a top priority. Consequently, as Extension improves its efforts to meet the needs of "real-world" and virtual audiences, it must ensure that the appropriate tools and strategies for producing and distributing peer-reviewed research are selected. This in turn necessitates a reformulation of how Extension defines the culture of scholarship and what constitutes valid scholarship.

Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990) provided the groundwork for two decades of focus on the need for a more broadly defined "scholarship of engagement." In short, Boyer states that scholarship should include not just research discovery but the integration of knowledge generation, teaching, and service.

In light of this more multidimensional view of scholarship, numerous articles have attempted to operationalize Boyer's

framework with varied opinions as to what constitutes the most effective approach to produce a scholarship of engagement (Adams, Harrell, Maddy, & Weigel, 2005; Alter, 2003; Culp, 2009; Olson, Skuza, & Blinn, 2007; Vlosky & Dunn, 2009; Wise, Retzleff, & Reilly, 2002). Unfortunately, few of these articles discuss the important role that technology can have in promoting and improving the impact of scholarship.

Adams et al. (2005) touch briefly on the issue of technology-enhanced scholarship: "A crucial component of the scholarship of Extension is the effectiveness of communication that is needed." The assumption is that if Extension faculty make their research-based content more accessible, it is more likely that this information will be applied in ways that matter and can be measured for impact. Accordingly, Adams et al. expand on Boyer's definition of scholarship by encouraging Extension faculty to create a "diversified portfolio of scholarship" that uses different forms of media and technology.

But what kind of technology? How do faculty use technology tools to produce products of scholarship? And how can existing institutional reward policies encourage this approach?

Example: Oregon State University

One attempt to implement many of Boyer's ideas on an institutional level occurred at Oregon State University (Weiser, 1996; Weiser & Houglum, 1998). Key administrative positions were redefined, the promotion and tenure process was modified, job descriptions were rewritten, and county Extension agents were brought into academic homes to align the evaluation process for research, teaching, and outreach activities.

After 10 years, this organizational effort and the modified definition of scholarship within Oregon State Extension were examined by McGrath (2006), who found little measurable change relative to practices in engagement or new media scholarship. His assessment was largely informed by his belief that Extension faculty lack metrics to adequately measure outreach-oriented scholarship activities. According to McGrath, the primary engagement and scholarship interests of faculty remained unchanged even after this decade-long focus on organizational transformation. Regardless of media type or technology used, faculty were concerned primarily (and perhaps exclusively) about attention to rigor and a need to produce articles for peer-reviewed publication outlets because this form of scholarship continued to yield the greatest benefits relative to the existing reward system.

The literature and results of our survey support McGrath's conclusions and point to some specific issues that have contributed to the failure of Extension nationwide to produce a more effective scholarship of engagement that relies on new media and communication-related technologies.

The Failure to Produce Scholarship of Engagement

Even though *engagement* has become an institutional priority on many university campuses, it is "not sufficiently appreciated, valued, documented, assessed, or rewarded, especially with respect to faculty who hold tenured or tenure-track positions" (Peters, 2005, p. 3).

The issues behind the apparent disconnect between scholarship and the use of new media are multifaceted. The most commonly cited barriers to faculty using new media to produce engaged scholarship include time constraints, perceived lack of incentives, and absence of institutional support (Harley, Acord, Earl-Novell, Lawrence, & King, 2010; Olson et al., 2007; Vlosky & Dunn, 2009). It appears that many institutions simply do not provide sufficient guidance to faculty who would like to use innovative communication technologies in ways that qualify as scholarship.

These studies suggest that our land-grant universities are still failing to clearly communicate the requisites for

scholarly credit in relation to engagement and new media that the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (2002) recommended nearly a decade ago.

Opportunities and Requirements for New Media Scholarship

As institutions develop policies and reward systems for using digital scholarship, the question arises as to what support systems would provide faculty the outlet for publishing digital scholarship in ways that meet standards of content accuracy and quality control.

Many academics agree that products of scholarship should eschew neither rigor nor relevance (Ware, 2008). That is, while we must demand greater engagement through scholarship, the products of scholarship must maintain standards of both content accuracy and communications quality, regardless of the medium or method of distribution.

Harley et al. (2010) found that peer review, though flawed, is still viewed as the "primary avenue of quality assessment and control in the academic world" and an "efficient indicator of quality, relevance, and likely impact of a piece of scholarship" (p. 20). Not surprisingly, peer review is now seen as even more important in relation to scholarship "as the information glut increases and scholars demand quality filters to sift through the unvetted detritus on the Web" (Harley et al., 2010, p. 20).

In the traditional model of scholarship, publications undergo peer review. A comparable filter and quality control role for publishing and communications offices may be needed for digital scholarship. Consequently, we suggest that peer review remain the primary criterion used to distinguish new media that qualifies as scholarship from new media that is informational or instructional but that does not qualify as scholarship.

Although the number of outlets for publishing digital scholarship is still limited, there are some viable options. Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) provides a multi-disciplinary venue for online educational multimedia to be shared and peer reviewed. A number of venues also exist specifically for video scholarship (e.g., SciVee). Within the world of Extension scholarship, eXtension serves as an "interactive on-line learning environment" with content vetted by communities of practice (Lambur, 2007).

Oregon State University's Extension and Experiment Station Communications department has developed standards and protocols for Extension faculty to publish new media with the same degree of rigor and peer review as publications (Anderson-Wilk, Ginsburg, Hino, LaBelle, & Kunda, 2010) and serves as an institutional example of providing reward equivalency for digital scholarship.

The examples mentioned in the two previous paragraphs characterize the type of holistic and integrative approaches needed to vet and distribute digital scholarship. These examples also reinforce the notion that sound instructional design must inform the design and development of instructional resources, independent of distribution considerations. In short, the creation of "new" media often relies on "traditional" instructional design principles. While many questions remain, it is clear that opportunities for rigorous, well-designed new media must become better integrated into university reward systems if universities are to remain relevant in the years to come and realize the larger university mission provide effective public outreach and community engagement.

Methodology

We surveyed Extension faculty and administrators at land-grant institutions regarding their perception of incentives and opportunities to use new media in their scholarship and engagement activities. Most of our questions sought to ascertain how Extension faculty and administrators view digital scholarship as it relates to four academic

categories: teaching, professional development, outreach, and research. We used "technology-related communication" as an umbrella term to capture the myriad of Internet-distributed technologies and new media available to Extension faculty e.g., wikis, online videos, blogs, social media, podcasts, smart phone applications, video games, and online interactive environments.

With permission from the authors, we used some questions from a similar survey (Andersen & Trinkle, 2004) that assessed "the degree to which products of digital scholarship are used in the tenure, promotion, and review process of history departments in the United States" (p. 63). We modified questions where appropriate and added 12 new questions. We felt that it would be useful to compare our results to the previous survey's data as our study focus and sample sizes were similar.

We emailed numerous professional organizations associated with Extension and asked Extension administrators to help distribute our email request nationally. Overall, faculty and administrators from 42 different land-grant institutions responded to our survey. Our survey consisted of mostly questions asking for close-ended responses with several questions allowing open-ended comments. One hundred eight respondents began the survey, and 53 respondents completed the entire set of questions. Eighty-nine respondents completed only the first 27 of 36 questions, which suggests a partial nonresponse error, most likely due to the length of the survey.

Findings

Of our respondents, 63 were faculty members and 45 were administrators. Almost half of the respondents (most likely in positions with administrative responsibilities) were responsible for both defining and implementing policies related to their institution's reward system as well as using this system to evaluate others' performance (Table 1).

Table 1.
Respondent Demographics

Question	Faculty Member	Administrator				
1. Which of the following best describes your employment status at your institution? (n=108)	63	45				
Question	Director	Assistant Director	Regional Director	County Director /Staff Chair	Dept. Chair	Other
2. Which of the following best describes your employment	15 (36%)	9 (21.5%)	1 (2%)	3 (7%)	5 (12%)	9 (21.5%)

status at your institution? (n=42)						
Question	Yes	No				
3. Does your position involve defining and/or implementing policies related to reward and/or promotion and tenure? (n=104)	54 (52%)	50 (48%)				
4. Are you directly involved in evaluating another's performance using a framework of reward and/or promotion and tenure? (n=104)	56 (54%)	48 (46%)				

The next set of questions (Table 2) assessed respondents' understanding of their institutions' official reward policy as it relates to technology-related activity and their job performance. A high percentage of respondents (63% and 48%) believe their institution does not have a policy related to how technology-related communication can be assessed or included in annual reviews and promotion and reward deliberations. A combined 73% of respondents responded "no" or said they "don't know" when asked about the use of technology-related communication at their institution as it relates to promotion and tenure policy. The majority of respondents felt that their institutions do consider technology-related professional development, teaching, and research to be forms of scholarship (50%, 65%, and 65%, respectively).

Table 2.
Official Policies

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
5. Does your institution's annual review policy include direction and guidelines for assessing technology-related communication in relation to your job performance? (n=93)	33 (36%)	58 (63%)	2 (2%)
6. Does your institution's promotion and tenure policy include direction and guidelines for assessing	26 (27%)	42 (48%)	24 (25%)

technology-related communication in relation to your job performance? (n=96)			
7. Does your institution consider technology-related professional development as scholarly activity (or a form of scholarship) if this activity is peer reviewed? (n=96)	48 (50%)	16 (17%)	32 (33%)
8. Does your institution consider technology-related teaching as scholarly activity (or a form of scholarship) if this activity is peer reviewed? (n=95)	62 (65%)	8 (9%)	25 (26%)
9. Does your institution consider technology-related research as scholarly activity (or a form of scholarship) if this activity is peer reviewed? (n=95)	62 (65%)	7 (7.5%)	26 (27.5%)

Questions shown in Table 3 sought to assess how clear and accessible reward policies were to respondents and whether or not there seemed to be consensus among colleagues about how these policies applied to the use of technology-related communication activities. Only 22 of 92 respondents (24%) responded that their institutions' policies clearly describe how communication technology is evaluated relative to their job performance. Fifty-nine percent of respondents felt that there was no consensus among their colleagues about how communication technology activities ought to be considered in performance evaluation. Only 22% of respondents answered "yes" to this question.

Table 3.
Policy Clarity and Access

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
10. Are the policies and guidelines used to evaluate your use of communication technology as it applies to teaching, professional development, outreach and engagement, and research clear and accessible to you? (n=92)	22 (24%)	49 (53%)	21 (23%)
11. Do you feel that there is general consensus among your faculty colleagues about how communication technology-related activities ought to be considered in your performance review and/or promotion and tenure process? (n=92)	20 (22%)	54 (59%)	18 (19%)

The next set of survey questions (Table 4) focused on how much institutional support Extension faculty receive related to technology-related communication activities. Responses suggest that the majority of Extension faculty believe that there is sufficient training and technical support. Responses related to financial or grant support for communication technology show that faculty are often not aware of what resources exist in terms of release time, grants, or other forms of financial support. Questions 16 to 20 show that 80% or more of respondents are aware of technology training and technical support. Conversely, question 20 shows few faculty (21%) believe that their university discourages them from publishing or sharing research results in web-based or new media formats as opposed to traditional print-based publications.

Table 4.
Institutional Support

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
12. Does your institution provide release time or financial support to tenured faculty for pursuing technology-related communication research activities? (n=90)	24 (27%)	17 (19%)	49 (54%)
13. Does your institution provide release time, grants or other incentives to untenured faculty for pursuing communication technology-related research activities? (n=90)	24 (27%)	16 (18%)	50 (55%)
14. Does your institution provide release time, grants or other incentives to tenured faculty for pursuing communication technology-based course development? (n=87)	44 (51%)	14 (16%)	29 (33%)
15. Does your institution provide release time, grants or other incentives to untenured faculty for pursuing communication technology-based course development? (n=86)	40 (47%)	13 (15%)	33 (38%)
16. Does your institution provide training support to tenured faculty who wish to use communication technology in their teaching, research, or outreach and engagement? (n=89)	71 (80%)	5 (6%)	13 (14%)
17. Does your institution provide training support to untenured faculty who wish to use communication technology in their teaching, research, or outreach and engagement? (n=87)	71 (82%)	6 (7%)	10 (11%)
18. Does your institution provide technical support (instructional technologists, graphic experts, etc.) to tenured faculty who wish to use communication technology in their teaching, research or outreach and engagement? (n=88)	71 (80%)	5 (6%)	12 (14%)
19. Does your institution provide technical support (instructional technologists, graphic experts, etc.) to untenured faculty who wish to use communication technology in their teaching, research or outreach and engagement? (n=89)	71 (80%)	7 (8%)	11 (12%)
20. Are faculty at your university discouraged in any way from publishing or sharing their research results in web-based or new media formats as opposed to traditional print-based publications? (n=54)	11 (21%)	25 (46%)	18 (33%)

The responses in Table 5 suggest that there is no discernable correlation between career status (whether a respondent is a junior or senior faculty member) and perception of the university reward system relative to use of new media in the area of research and publication. Respondents are relatively split regarding whether or not their universities' reward systems recognize their teaching, outreach, engagement, and research activities when they are

embedded in new media formats. The majority of respondents (69% combined value for "somewhat disagree" and "disagree") feel that their job descriptions do not adequately acknowledge those parts of their job that require the use of new media.

Table 5.
Career Status and Recognition

Question	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
21. Do you feel that your university's reward system disadvantages junior faculty in relation to using new media in the area of research and publication? (n=53)	12 (23%)	20 (38%)	15 (28%)	6 (11%)
22. Does your university's reward system adequately recognize your teaching, outreach and engagement, and research activities when they are embedded in blogs, videos, podcasts or other new media formats? (n=51)	3 (6%)	18 (35%)	14 (28%)	16 (31%)
23. Does your job description adequately acknowledge those parts of your job that require the use of new media? (n=53)	6 (11%)	12 (23%)	22 (42%)	13 (25%)

We looked more closely at those questions focused on the perspective of specific respondent roles and university affiliation: the entire study compared with Oregon State University employees and administrators compared with faculty members (Table 6). To simplify comparisons, we removed the "don't know" response from the reported values. We defined "administrator" as someone who answered "yes" to question 1 and 4. This means that an administrator for the purposes of our survey is someone who evaluates the performance of others using a framework of reward. Faculty were those who self identified as faculty in question 1 and also stated that they do not evaluate the performance of others in question 4.

Our data show that overall, as expected, administrators have a stronger awareness of reward policies and guidelines as they relate to technology-related communication. This disconnect was especially pronounced when comparing administrator versus faculty responses in question 6. Eighty-four percent of administrators stated that their institution provides direction and guidelines for technology-related communication as it relates to job performance compared to only 13% of faculty. Not surprisingly, administrators felt that there was more consensus (40%) among colleagues than did faculty (11%) about how communication technology-related activities ought to be considered in performance reviews.

Interestingly, Oregon State University responses (n=58) did not show greater awareness of guidelines, policies, or resources as related to new media scholarship and reward than compared to non-Oregon State University respondents even though Oregon State had undergone an organization-wide process of policy refinement. Questions 6 and 10 suggest Oregon State University faculty are no more aware of policies and guidelines related to technology-related communication as it applies to their job evaluation than compared to the larger non-Oregon State University sample. This suggests that large-scale transformational efforts aimed at integrating new forms of

scholarship in academic contexts require significant effort to achieve clear understanding of policies by both administrators and faculty.

Table 6.
Comparisons between Respondent Type

Question	Entire Study	OSU	Administrators	Faculty
5. Does your institution's annual review policy include direction and guidelines for assessing technology-related communication in relation to your job performance? (n=93)	Yes (36%) No (63%)	Yes (28%) No (70%)	Yes (45%) No (52%)	Yes (22%) No (77%)
6. Does your institution's promotion and tenure policy include direction and guidelines for assessing technology-related communication in relation to your job performance? (n=96)	Yes (27%) No (48%)	Yes (21%) No (36%)	Yes (84%) No (10%)	Yes (13%) No (50%)
10. Are the policies and guidelines used to evaluate your use of communication technology as it applies to teaching, professional development, outreach and engagement, and research clear and accessible to you? (n=92)	Yes (24%) No (53%)	Yes (10%) No (58%)	Yes (52%) No (34%)	Yes (6%) No (66%)
11. Do you feel that there is general consensus among your faculty colleagues about how communication technology-related activities ought to be considered in your performance review and/or promotion and tenure process? (n=92)	Yes (10%) No (59%)	Yes (10%) No (63%)	Yes (40%) No (53%)	Yes (11%) No (60%)

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on an examination of the existing literature, a large-scale attempt to adopt new media scholarship policies at Oregon State University, and our survey of Extension faculty and administrators, we make a number of conclusions.

- Our survey data as well as the Andersen & Trinkle study (2004) suggest that faculty often have sufficient access to technology training.
- Many Extension faculty believe that technology can enhance their engagement and scholarship efforts.

- We found no visible response variation relative to tenure versus non-tenure track status as it relates to Extension faculty and their use of digital scholarship.
- Adoption of new media technology for engagement is constrained by a number of factors, the most important of which is a faculty member's institutional support, or perception of that support.
- Perhaps one of the most serious problems identified in our survey, the Oregon State case study, and the Andersen & Trinkle study (2004) is the lack of awareness among faculty regarding institutional policy as it relates to technology and scholarship. Because our study allowed us to separate faculty and administrator responses, we were able to verify that administrators (84%) are more aware than faculty (13%) of the existence of these policies.
- When comparing our survey results to the Andersen & Trinkle (2004) survey data, the most visible overall difference is that the number of "no" responses to questions polling awareness of policy, resources, and guidelines is much higher among history department chairs. For example, 94% of history department chairs responded that their institutions do not have a formal, written policy for assessing technology-related activities in the tenure, promotion, and review process. Only 52% of Extension administrators answered "no" to this question in our survey. While history departments and Extension programs vary in significant ways and 5 years separate the two surveys, our survey data suggest that Extension as a whole may be better positioned to validate and adopt digital scholarship practices that can then be shared with other departments or programs on campus. Extension's ongoing commitment to outreach and engagement only strengthens this potential.
- To help strengthen communication between administrators and faculty, more strategic partnerships are needed on campus. These partnerships may be developed in part by ensuring professional and tenure-track faculty can submit their scholarship to Extension publishing units or journals that provide equivalency for scholarship products using alternative media.

In conclusion, faculty need to be willing to use new forms of technology for communication and be assured that their efforts be fairly rewarded, especially as it relates to scholarship expectations. The institutional reward system must by default support both innovation and reliability, and reinforce faculty efforts to reach a broader audience with the quality products of new media scholarship.

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