

# Scholarship *Re-reconsidered*: An Alternative Approach to Scholarship for Professors of Education and Applied Disciplines

*Kevin B. Zook*  
*Holy Family University*

*Gwyneth Price*  
*Clarion University of Pennsylvania*

*Amy Rogers*  
*Lycoming College*

*Juliet Curci*  
*Temple University*

**Abstract:** *Although Boyer’s scholarship categories have been widely adopted by colleges and universities to guide the tenure and promotion process, they do not provide generalizable features for the fundamental concept of scholarship and have created confusion regarding the meaning of scholarly activity. This problem is particularly acute for faculty in applied professions such as education, given the wide variety of professional activities in which education professors are engaged. To eliminate further confusion and provide support for significant applied activities, faculty expectations for “scholarship” should be reconceptualized and replaced with expectations for “professional achievement.” Working criteria for “professional achievement” provide clearer*

**Kevin B. Zook** is the Dean of the School of Education at Holy Family University. **Gwyneth Price** is the Dean of the School of Education at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. **Amy Rogers** is Associate Professor in the Education department at Lycoming College. **Juliet Curci** is the Assistant Dean of College Access and Persistence of the College of Education at Temple University.

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*focus for tenure and promotion decisions than current conceptions of “scholarship” and empower professors of education and other applied disciplines to focus their work on a variety of practical and theoretical issues.*

The conclusion is clear. We need scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students. The very complexity of modern life requires more, not less, information; more, not less, participation. (Boyer, 1990, p. 77)

Few university professors and administrators would disagree with this statement from Ernest Boyer’s (1990) landmark book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*. Boyer approaches the “more, not less” problem by expanding the narrow concept of scholarship in higher education to include four ways in which university professors might engage in “scholarly” activity to satisfy expectations for tenure and promotion: discovery, application, integration, and teaching. Although Boyer’s categories have been adopted by a number of colleges and universities (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997; O’Meara, 2015; Santo, Engstrom, Reetz, Schweinle, & Reed, 2009), we assert that they are not exhaustive and do not effectively define the concept of scholarship—particularly for applied professions such as education. Furthermore, the four categories have led to confusion regarding the meaning of scholarship (Braxton, Luckey, & Hellend, 2002; Davis & Chandler, 1998; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Kreber & Cranton, 2000; O’Meara, 2015; Rice, 2002; Rubin, 1999). In this paper, we identify limitations of Boyer’s scholarship categories, outline a working definition of the concept of “scholarship,” and propose “professional achievement” as an alternative approach to “scholarship” for professors of education and other applied disciplines.

### **The Concept of Scholarship: Clear or Cloudy?**

Consider the following four scenarios. According to Boyer’s categories, would each activity qualify as an example of scholarship?

1. An assistant professor of education whose specialization is mathematics instruction co-chairs the mathematics curriculum committee of a local school district in the development of a new

elementary math curriculum that utilizes state of the art research, theory, and best practices. She works tirelessly on the project for months, applying her professional expertise and supporting the committee's decisions with carefully documented references on learning theories, instructional principles, and children's mathematical development from other experts in the field. The finished product is intended solely for the district's in-house use and is not published. The assistant professor is due to be considered for tenure and promotion. Will her work with the school district count as "scholarship?"

2. An associate professor of education teaches courses in educational psychology and instructional design. He is contacted by a local business for advice on developing a training program for the company's sales persons. As he begins to provide consultative services, he finds himself assuming greater and greater responsibility for the program and even makes appearances on the training videos. The company is grateful for his work and credibility because he explains and applies sound principles of educational psychology and instructional design to the development of the training program. The training program is so successful, the company publishes it and makes it available to other similar businesses. The associate professor is planning to apply for promotion to full professor. Will his work in developing the training program count as "scholarship?"
3. A professor of education works with a community agency that promotes adult literacy to obtain a substantial three-year grant to support a new initiative that will create a partnership between the agency and her university. She manages the grant application process, serves as the grant coordinator, oversees the collection and analysis of evaluation data, and takes responsibility for submitting all necessary reports. The professor works for a university that has a "term-tenure" system. Her current 6-year term soon expires, and she will need to apply for another six-year term. At the time she applies for term-tenure, the grant project will be halfway through its second year. Will her grant work count as "scholarship?"

4. Two education professors attend a conference where they attend a session on co-teaching. Intrigued and inspired by the session, they decide to try co-teaching for a semester. They read all the theoretical and empirical literature they can find on the topic and submit a well-reasoned and documented proposal to their Dean, who approves the plan. Throughout the semester, the two professors record their experiences and reflections by journaling. They regularly hold focus group sessions with their students to obtain their reactions and feedback, and they invite other faculty members to observe them and offer their feedback. They have such a positive experience that they plan to write a summary paper to submit to the Dean in which they will request the opportunity to co-teach on a regular basis. The two professors plan to apply for promotion in the following academic year. Does their co-teaching activity also represent “scholarly” activity?

A cursory review suggests that all four of the preceding scenarios include elements that could possibly qualify as scholarship because they appear to reflect characteristics of one or more of Boyer’s four categories:

1. Curriculum development scenario: scholarships of application and integration.
2. Training program scenario: scholarships of application and integration.
3. Grant coordination scenario: scholarship of application.
4. Co-teaching scenario: scholarships of application, integration, and teaching.

Despite demonstration of application, integration, and teaching activity, would all university tenure and promotion committees agree that the four scenarios clearly qualify as scholarship? Would all university administrators agree? For example, peer review and dissemination through journal publication or conference presentation are often explicit or implicit requirements for scholarship. Some may argue, however, that the curriculum (scenario 1) is reviewed by school district administrators and disseminated to teachers for implementation. The training program

(scenario 2) is “published” by the company and disseminated to other businesses. The grant reports (scenario 3) are disseminated to, and critiqued by, the funding agency. The co-teaching experience (scenario 4) is disseminated by means of a summary paper to the Dean for review. We have first-hand experience with faculty members who advocate for these types of approaches to critique and dissemination of their work, convinced that they are consistent with the Boyer model. Whereas some institutions may agree with such faculty perceptions, others may not.

Many university faculty and administrators would likely agree that the activities described in the four scenarios are valuable and important. They certainly reflect application of knowledge, integration of ideas, and exploration of teaching to some degree, and there appears to be some evidence for critique and dissemination, but do they necessarily represent *scholarship*? Unfortunately, Boyer’s (1990) work does not provide clear guidance on this question because he does not articulate the defining features of scholarship itself (Glassick, et al., 1997). In his attempt to push the academy beyond traditional views of scholarship as solely discovery or research, Boyer simply offers three additional examples that can qualify without explaining what makes them scholarship. Does any type of application, integration, or teaching activity qualify as scholarship?

The answer to this question depends on an agreed-upon generalizable definition of scholarship. Roses, daisies, tulips, and carnations are all members of the concept, “flower,” because they all share the critical, agreed-upon features of “flower-ness.” It is inadequate to answer the question, “what is a flower?” by simply asserting that a flower can be a rose, daisy, tulip, or a carnation. That answer still begs the question: So what does it mean to be a flower, and what features do those four particular examples possess that qualify them as flowers? A flower can be defined as the seed-bearing part of a plant that consists of the plant’s reproductive organs (stamens and carpels) that are usually surrounded by brightly colored petals and green sepals. Despite variations from flower to flower, these defining features can be generalized across an infinite number of specific types and instances of flowers.

Similarly, what is the set of defining features for the concept of scholarship that permits us to generalize the category across an infinite number of specific instances of faculty projects and activities? Boyer

(1990) attempts to broaden the definition to include four specific types of scholarship: discovery, application, integration, and teaching. Offering these four examples of scholarship possibilities, however, still leaves us somewhat rudderless because he fails to articulate the defining features that discovery, application, integration, and teaching should have in common as exemplars of scholarship. Roses, daisies, tulips, and carnations all must have petals and sepals to qualify as flowers. What characteristics must all faculty activities such as discovery, application, integration, and teaching possess to qualify as scholarship? Boyer's categories open the door for university faculty to pursue a wide variety of application, integration, and teaching activities. However, it is easy to neglect or ignore the fact that Boyer precedes each of the four activities with "*scholarship of*"—*scholarship of discovery*, *scholarship of application*, *scholarship of integration*, and *scholarship of teaching*.

In the absence of a clear, agreed-upon, generalizable set of defining features, it is impossible to make fair, consistent, principled decisions about the scholarly contributions of faculty activities. Rather than clarifying the meaning of faculty scholarship, Boyer's conceptualization—or perhaps its faulty implementation—has led to what some have referred to as the "scholarship of confusion" (Rubin, 1999). The meaning of scholarship in the academy has become so cloudy that some university faculty and administrators have carved out scholarship niches for themselves by writing scholarly journal articles about scholarship (Diamond & Adam, 2004; Hathaway, 1996; Sorcinelli, 2002). In addition to doing scholarship in their respective fields of expertise, they explore and theorize about the meaning of scholarship. Perhaps Boyer's categories should be expanded to include a fifth: "the scholarship of scholarship."

### **Scholarship Menus and the Scholarship Trap**

With the advent of Boyer's four categories, some colleges and universities have adopted what we would refer to as a "menu approach" to defining scholarship for their faculty (Braxton et al., 2002). The categories suggest a wide range of activities that now qualify as scholarship. From our interactions with colleagues at various institutions and informal review of their expectations for scholarship, we note the following non-exhaustive list of examples of activities that appear on institutional scholarship menus:

- Deliver an invited keynote address;
- Hold office in a professional organization;
- Serve as a consultant in one's discipline;
- Give a presentation on a teaching-related topic for other faculty;
- Engage in a non-critiqued public performance;
- Serve as an expert witness;
- Serve on an external accreditation review team;
- Participate in video, film, internet, and other media projects;
- Create computer programs or develop software;
- Develop new programs within the university or community;
- Develop a new course;
- Prepare a syllabus for a new course;
- Attend workshops, institutes, or seminars related to one's discipline;
- Construct an annotated bibliography for a course;
- Review department and university programs and curricula;
- Write model legislation;
- Participate in professional organizations;
- Develop experimental programs;
- Prepare exam questions requiring higher-order thinking; and
- Prepare new lectures, activities, or class plans for an existing course.

Such lists of qualifying activities may encourage faculty to pursue “scholarship” by simply selecting one or more activities that will be relatively easy for them to achieve, comport with opportunities of which they have recently become aware, or reflect work in which they would normally engage in their roles as university instructors. Under normal circumstances, for example, university instructors are expected to update their courses by preparing new lectures, activities, and class plans. Most faculty typically attend workshops or seminars related to their fields of interest. So items such as these on university scholarship menus become easy choices to engage in “scholarly” activity. Surely this is not what colleges and universities have in mind when they articulate expectations for their faculty to comport themselves as scholars. Rather than widening the range of possible projects that faculty might engage in to advance their lines of serious scholarship, lists of activities give the impression that scholarship is simply a matter of selecting an item from a menu of choices. Faculty activity choices should be driven by scholarly

goals rather than scholarly goals being driven by available activity choices.

Aside from the dubious degree of scholarship involved in such menu activities, two additional unfortunate consequences may occur. First, the tendency for faculty to pick and choose from a collection of unrelated and disconnected menu items creates the potential for their “scholarship,” in turn, to be a collection of unrelated and disconnected activities. Developing a set of new course activities one year, attending a workshop the next year, and then providing some consultative services the following year likely will not help a faculty member establish a coherent program of scholarship and a concomitant deepening of domain-specific knowledge and expertise, especially if those activities have no discernible relationship to each other.

Second, although universities may provide extensive lists of possible scholarly activities, when tenure and promotion committees and academic administrators evaluate faculty, it is unlikely that lack of peer-reviewed publications or refereed conference presentations will be offset by syllabi development, preparation of exam questions, expert witness testimony, workshop attendance, or holding office in a professional organization. Thus, faculty may find that they are trapped in an unwritten disconnect between the Boyer-inspired menu of activities that supposedly count as scholarship and what *really* counts as scholarship.

The reliance on publications and conference presentations is understandable for two reasons. First, they are easy to quantify. Tenure and promotion committees can easily count the number of publications and conference presentations because these activities result in discrete, documentable products. Second, quality control is a built-in feature of each activity. In the case of peer-reviewed publications, tenure and promotion committees can rely on editorial boards to evaluate the quality of the work. The review process helps committees discern between the scholarly merit of a paper published in a peer-reviewed journal and, say, an op-ed piece published in the local newspaper. Documented acceptance and rejection rates of particular journals provide additional quantifiable evidence of publication quality. Similarly, refereed conference presentations provide some degree of assurance that the presentation has been evaluated critically by the faculty member’s peers as opposed to, for example, a professional development seminar

delivered to a gathering of faculty colleagues because the faculty member volunteered to deliver a presentation.

In short, much more effort is required to understand and evaluate the trajectory of a professor's scholarly pursuits when those efforts do not result in quantifiable products such as peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations. Faculty can easily fall into the trap of performing activities from scholarship menus only to find that at the time of critical tenure and promotion decisions, those activities carry less weight and importance than traditional forms of publication and presentation (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Braxton et al., 2002).

### **Toward a Generalizable Conceptualization of Scholarship**

Let us step back from the practical question of what activities “count” as scholarship to the more important, fundamental question of what it means to be a “scholar.” Scholarship is very difficult—if not impossible—to define if we focus on identifying activities that somehow can cut across many different academic disciplines such as chemistry, mathematics, education, literature, music, nursing, art, business, and so on (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Glassick et al., 1997; O’Meara, 2015). How can there possibly be a set of scholarly activities common to knowledge domains that vary greatly in their content, research methodologies, theoretical perspectives, and opportunities for application?

Developing defining criteria for slippery, non-agreed upon concepts often can be facilitated by studying obvious—even extreme—prototypical examples and searching for common features. We utilize this approach as a rational heuristic—a thought experiment—to help us induce a set of potential defining features that are powerful enough to suggest a generalizable working definition of scholarship. The first step in the induction process is to identify some obvious examples of individuals whom we and others would readily classify as scholars. The next step is to think about their work and accomplishments over time and search for commonalities shared by all or most. Consider briefly, for example, the following five prototypical scholars: Galileo, Gregor Mendel, George Washington Carver, Marie Curie, and Thomas Edison.

As a young man, Galileo's curiosity was aroused by a swinging chandelier, which stimulated his experimentation with the variables that influence pendulum movement. As a result, he turned his attention away from medicine to the study of mathematics, physics, and astronomy, eventually hypothesizing, in the face of great opposition from the Catholic church, that the earth revolves about the sun (a heliocentric view) rather than the common geocentric view that the sun orbits the earth. Gregor Mendel became the leading expert and "father of modern genetics" by conducting 20,000 experiments on pea plants to develop the law of inheritance. It was George Washington Carver's curiosity about a crop alternative to cotton that led him to develop numerous practical methods of growing and utilizing peanuts. The results of Marie Curie's systematic studies led to her discovery of two new elements, polonium and radium, and the development of a new theory of radioactivity. Thomas Edison's sustained work with electricity led to his invention of the incandescent light bulb after thousands of failures. The first successful test of Edison's new light bulb lasted only 13.5 hours.

What might the actions, attitudes, and achievements of these prototypical scholars suggest to us about some possible defining features of scholarship? First, it is highly doubtful that any of these scholars realized exemplary achievement because they were simply trying to figure out what might "count" as a qualifying activity for tenure or promotion at a university. Rather, they were driven by an insatiable curiosity about some well-defined aspects of the world that they wanted to improve or understand better. This, we believe, is perhaps the hallmark of scholarship: A natural curiosity and pervasive desire to deepen knowledge, understanding, and perspective. True scholarship, we assert, is not so much a specific *activity* as it is an internal *attitude* of insatiable intellectual curiosity. True scholars do not need scholarship menus or tenure and promotion decisions to motivate their efforts. They simply cannot help themselves but to dive deeply into domains of intense personal interest or value.

Second, our prototypical scholars demonstrate in-depth study of one or more well-defined knowledge domains. Mendel, for example, did not simply explore plants. He executed thousands of tedious, incremental experiments on peas to enable him to extract principles of genetic inheritance. The in-depth expertise acquired and applied by the scholar

moves beyond the common, everyday knowledge and understandings of others who have not immersed themselves in the domain.

Third, scholars stick with it. They plumb the depths of a topic with sustained systematic study, exploration, investigation, theorizing, and application, slowly and methodically peeling away layers and layers of findings and failures until conclusions begin to solidify and dimly understood areas of inquiry begin to come into sharper focus. As Edison famously said, “I haven’t failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” Each new activity builds incrementally on previous work so that over time, a trajectory, or program, of scholarship clearly emerges. The trajectory demonstrates direction, focus, and intention. The scholar’s work is not a random collection of individual activities, but rather a progression of intellectual pursuits that cohere and gradually lead to ever-deepening levels of knowledge, understanding, and appreciation. “Madame Curie didn’t stumble upon radium by accident. She searched and experimented and sweated and suffered years before she found it. Success rarely is an accident” (Forbes, 2016).

Scholars generate new ideas and applications that are of value to their fields or to society in general—a fourth feature of scholarship. Scholars make significant contributions to their fields by theorizing and testing ideas. They also contribute to their fields by working to make their ideas accessible to others who do not share their expertise so that they can use them to solve problems or enrich their lives. As exemplified clearly by Edison and Carver, the value of a scholar’s work also can be realized through direct applied benefits to others, but these benefits accrue only because of the scholar’s deep, uncommon knowledge and sustained, systematic efforts.

Finally, scholars share their work and invite critique. They make their inner theories and ideas public so they can be scrutinized and critiqued by others who share their domain-specific expertise. Scholars also make their work public through applied projects that incorporate their ideas. The value of a scholar’s work can then be judged by other scholarly colleagues or by its practical utility or impact. Sometimes, as in the case of Marie Curie, public scrutiny leads to the Nobel Prize (the first woman to receive the award). Sometimes, as Galileo experienced, pronouncing new theories publicly can lead to hostile opposition and house arrest.

Here, then, is our proposed view of scholarship, based on our thinking about several exemplary scholars. We contend that a productive working definition of scholarship should include the following seven critical features:

1. Insatiable intellectual curiosity;
2. In-depth knowledge or expertise in a well-defined area of inquiry;
3. Sustained, systematic, intentional efforts;
4. Clear patterns, programs, or trajectories of work over time;
5. Generation of new ideas and applications;
6. Value or significance to field and/or society; and
7. Public scrutiny.

Notice that these features do not depend at all on Boyer's scholarship categories. Regardless of the category (discovery, application, integration, teaching), we believe all seven features are relevant and can be demonstrated in a wide variety of specific ways that cut across particular academic disciplines. Our seven critical features share some similarities with the "qualitative standards" induced by Glassick et al. (1997) from an analysis of various sources such as the hiring, tenure, and promotion policies of colleges and universities, grant agencies, scholarly journals, and teaching evaluation forms: (a) goals, (b) adequate preparation, (c) appropriate methods, (d) significant results, (e) effective presentation, and (f) reflective critique. Whereas these "standards" reflect general variables for "a common sequence of unfolding stages" (p. 24) for individual projects, our seven critical features of scholarship focus more on a long-term conception of work that encompasses multiple related projects or activities that, together, demonstrate evidence of deep, directional intellectual vitality.

Are the seven characteristics we induce from exemplary scholars the actual defining features of scholarship? This question is impossible to answer with confidence because scholarship is a slippery, abstract, non-agreed-upon concept. Perhaps, a better question for the academy is simply this: Are these the qualities we want faculty members to demonstrate as they strive to fulfill scholarship expectations? We would answer in the affirmative. Focusing on this set of descriptive qualities will be far more productive than engaging in endless debates over what is—and what is not—scholarship.

## **Scholarship Versus Professional Achievement: An Emergent Model of Faculty Work**

If the foregoing critical features capture the essential characteristics of the concept of “scholarship,” and if these features can be readily affirmed and accepted across the academy, then the focus for faculty engagement should shift to demonstrating those features, and the term used to refer to such activity becomes much less relevant. Furthermore, because the term, “scholarship,” carries so many unavoidable connotations, it impedes our ability to focus on the features of faculty activity that are truly significant and of greatest value to higher education and the society we serve. Therefore, we advocate replacing the term, “scholarship,” with the more neutral and descriptive term, “professional achievement,” defined by the set of critical features that we induced from prototypical exemplars of scholarship.

For tenure and promotion decisions, do faculty members’ activities and accomplishments represent scholarship? That thorny question becomes irrelevant, replaced by a question that is much more meaningful and useful: To what extent do faculty members’ accomplishments reflect the seven critical features of professional achievement? Faculty members, administrators, and committees can stop quibbling about what “counts” as scholarship and focus instead on evaluating evidence that demonstrates the extent to which an individual has purposefully and successfully forged a trajectory of professional achievement consistent with the seven critical features we have identified. Of course, our seven features are also abstract concepts that can—and should—be operationalized differently at individual universities that have varied missions and institutional priorities. We return to this important point later in this paper in the section on evidence and evaluation.

With our proposed conceptualization, Boyer’s goal of broadening the range of acceptable faculty engagement is preserved and strengthened. As illustrated in Figure 1, the central core, or hub, of faculty work is “professional achievement,” which is comprised of seven key features. These features function as spokes on a wheel to guide and support a variety of different types of faculty activities and projects that could take the form of one or more of Boyer’s four categories: discovery, application, integration, or teaching. The seven spokes generalize across

all four categories. Without the seven spokes, the wheel collapses for lack of a coherent, consistent set of core expectations that focus our efforts on the fundamental nature of faculty intellectual engagement. Consistent with Boyer’s (1990) views, the outermost “rim” of the wheel reminds us that the ultimate goal of faculty professional achievement—where the “rubber meets the road,” so to speak—is to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of our academic disciplines and the betterment of our communities and society.

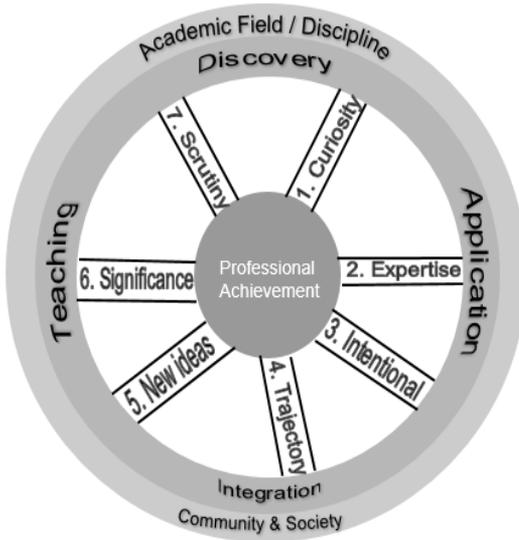


Figure 1. Model of Professional Achievement

Any number of specific activities have the potential to “count” as professional achievement as long as they satisfy at an acceptable level the seven major qualifying characteristics. The burden for documenting and submitting evidence for a coherent program of professional achievement as characterized by the seven critical features rests with the individual professor who applies for promotion or tenure. Individuals can make their cases, with clear guidance provided by the set of seven agreed-upon characteristics—a much more focused and meaningful task than attempting to justify an activity as “scholarship” with no clear sense of what that non-agreed-upon concept means. Focusing on the seven qualities of professional achievement also helps prevent faculty members from engaging in activities primarily to “add a line on the vitae,” with

little purposeful meaning behind the activity described by that vitae entry.

At the same time, our proposed approach also decreases the probability that any one isolated activity on currently pervasive “scholarship menus” can rise to the level of acceptable professional achievement, thereby protecting faculty from falling into the “menu trap.” Doing “scholarship” (even if we could agree on what the term means) is not an end in itself. Engaging in scholarly activities is a means to a greater goal. The goal of the academy should be to support and nurture the intellectual vibrancy of its faculty so they are equipped and empowered to contribute meaningfully to their fields and society. Focus on professional achievement as defined here shifts attention away from specific activities to the ultimate purpose for engaging in those activities—to ways in which faculty work should advance and enrich the life of the mind.

To summarize the foregoing points, the fundamental difference between Boyer’s four categories of “scholarship” and our proposed conceptualization of “professional achievement” is the focus on seven foundational features rather than potentially superficial elements of discovery, application, integration, and teaching found in specific activities undertaken by university faculty. The term, “professional achievement,” as operationalized by our seven critical features, truly opens the door for more varied faculty work that actually rises to the level of prototypical scholarship without the controversial and misunderstood term, “scholarship,” to create confusion. Our seven features of professional achievement provide a common vocabulary to guide the quality of faculty work, rendering the confusing term, “scholarship,” obsolete. Teaching, *scholarship*, and service, the common three-legged stool upon which faculty performance expectations rest, should be repaired and replaced by a sturdier stool: teaching, *professional achievement*, and service.

### **Professional Achievement for Applied Disciplines**

Although we believe a shift to the term, “professional achievement,” and its seven critical features has merit and utility across the entire academy, it is particularly relevant and helpful for education and other academic disciplines that are more applied in nature. Consider, again, the four

scenarios presented at the beginning of this paper. The different scenarios reflect the broad and varied range of applied activities in which professors of education may engage themselves to support and improve schools, community organizations, businesses, and even their own colleges or universities.

To enhance the life of the mind and contribute to a faculty member's trajectory of programmatic professional achievement, must each project culminate with a published paper or conference presentation? No — publication and conference presentation are not found in our seven qualifying features. These two means of obtaining public scrutiny and evaluating the value of one's work are certainly acceptable, but they are not necessarily appropriate or even desirable depending on the nature and ultimate purpose of the work.

How often must faculty members make decisions about investing time and effort on particular projects and opportunities based on the likelihood of publication in a respected scholarly journal or presentation at a prestigious professional meeting to avoid the risk of jeopardizing their own prospects for tenure or promotion? Professors should be free to engage fully, systematically and insatiably in their pursuits without pressure to divert their attention to non-essential activities such as journal publications and conference presentations.

Again, we do not argue against publication and conference presentation as potentially legitimate means for helping to satisfy one or more of the seven critical features of professional achievement. We applaud and support these artifacts of professional productivity when they are appropriate and feasible (Toor, 2019; Washburn-Moses, 2018). We do suggest, however, that the quest for publication and presentation may impede the ability of professors in applied disciplines to immerse themselves in the process of finding solutions to the truly significant, messy practical problems in our local communities and larger society.

### **Professional Achievement: Evidence and Evaluation**

As a practical matter, colleges and universities must establish equitable and transparent procedures for evaluating the professional achievement of their faculty members. Professors should be expected to submit compelling evidence of their professional achievement, and evaluation

committees should be expected to provide structured procedures and criteria that they will use to make principled decisions about the quality of that evidence. Providing detailed examples of possible evaluation systems is beyond the scope of the present paper. We offer, instead, some general preliminary guidelines upon which such systems might be developed.

First, to ensure increasing depth of expertise and programmatic coherence over time, faculty members should be expected to articulate clearly their personal professional achievement agendas. An achievement agenda represents a long-term, sustained effort to focus one's efforts on related professional activities that represent a clear trajectory of programmatic accomplishment and a concomitant deepening of professional knowledge, skill, and expertise. For tenure and promotion decisions, faculty should be expected to provide narratives that not only describe specific projects and activities they have undertaken, but also explain the connections between those pieces of work—to connect the dots, as it were, between activities that otherwise may appear unrelated. How, for example, do the activities build on each other? Do the activities connect as an integrated whole to make a significant contribution to the faculty member's field of inquiry and advance the individual's expertise and ability to continue to make significant contributions? When professors find it difficult or impossible to explain those connections in deep, meaningful, and convincing ways, the reason may very well be that those connections do not exist – an important realization and potential first step in the self-regulatory process of clarifying the precise nature of one's professional achievement agenda.

Faculty should be expected to provide appropriate evidence and artifacts to document the quality of their professional achievements. That evidence should address the seven critical features of professional achievement and must be appropriate for the type of activities undertaken. In some cases, a published paper in a scholarly journal or a refereed conference presentation may be appropriate. In the case, for example, of a curriculum improvement project undertaken with a local school district, appropriate evidence may include a copy of the completed curriculum, documentation of the specific role the individual played in the project, letters from district personnel attesting to the value of the individual's contributions, and perhaps anonymous review by a

professional colleague who can provide an objective evaluation of the degree of professional innovation or application evident in the project. Promotion and tenure committees then have the responsibility to apply consistent, principled criteria to evaluate the quality of evidence presented. Those criteria should correspond to each of the seven critical features of professional achievement. Ideally, written rating scales (i.e., rubrics) should be developed and utilized to minimize measurement error and maximize inter-rater reliability among committee members. Those instruments should be made available in advance to faculty members to assist them in developing their programs of professional achievement and to provide guidance in assembling their portfolios at the time of review.

Clearly, each of the seven critical features of professional achievement represents a matter of degree rather than a simple dichotomous decision of presence or absence. Does, for example, an individual's portfolio of professional achievement demonstrate an "insatiable intellectual curiosity?" The evidence presented will likely suggest to an evaluator the influence of intellectual curiosity to a lesser or greater degree and, therefore, the scale or rubric used to assess the quality of that criterion must be structured to permit such incremental judgment. More specific indicators for each critical feature may need to be identified for inclusion on rating scales to focus evaluators on agreed-upon evidence that is discipline specific and institutionally appropriate.

Finally, evaluation of "sustained, systematic, intentional efforts" must be appropriate for the individual's career timeline. The longer a faculty member's career, the more obvious the programmatic trajectory of professional achievement should become and, correspondingly, the greater the expectations for that particular criterion. Expectations for a junior faculty member undergoing an early or initial review should be adjusted accordingly so that the individual has the opportunity to demonstrate an emerging achievement agenda from fewer specific professional initiatives.

The foregoing general guidelines will require both universities and individual faculty members to invest greater effort in clarifying expectations and providing evidence of achievement. We assert, however, that such effort will result in greater transparency, more equitable decision making, higher faculty morale, and a more

meaningful, mindful approach to faculty evaluation as a key element in the broader scope of professional development.

### **Scholarship or Professional Achievement?**

Now that we have described our reconceptualization of “scholarship” as “professional achievement,” let us return briefly to the four scenarios we introduced at the beginning of this paper:

1. Developing a mathematics curriculum for a local school district;
2. Consulting and helping a business create sales training videos;
3. Serving as a grant coordinator for an adult literacy project; and
4. Reflecting on a co-teaching experience.

Does each scenario represent scholarship? Should each scenario “count” as scholarship in the tenure and promotion process? As noted earlier, although each situation appears to demonstrate one or more elements of Boyer’s categories of application, integration, and teaching, it is not readily apparent that each rises to the level of scholarship. Furthermore, traditional views of “scholarship” may impede our ability to consider certain activities as scholarly. None of the four scenarios, for example, includes a publication in a refereed journal or a peer-reviewed conference presentation. In the minds of some, the lack of publication or presentation may automatically disqualify the faculty work described as scholarship.

Rather than asking if each scenario is an example of scholarship, a more productive question is whether or not each description of faculty work has the potential to represent an acceptable degree of professional achievement, as operationalized by our seven critical features: (1) insatiable intellectual curiosity; (2) in-depth knowledge or expertise in a well-defined area of inquiry; (3) sustained, systematic, intentional efforts; (4) clear patterns, programs, or trajectories of work over time; (5) generation of new ideas and applications; (6) value or significance to field and/or society; and (7) public scrutiny. The answer to this question clearly is *yes*. With appropriate explanation, documentation, and evidence, the faculty member in each scenario has the opportunity to demonstrate that her work does, indeed, reflect each of the seven criteria.

For example, does the development of the mathematics curriculum reflect intellectual curiosity and an element of a larger trajectory of achievement in this area of inquiry? Does the initial foray into co-teaching ignite the two professors' interest and curiosity so that they continue investigating and experimenting with various aspects of co-teaching over time and develop valuable insights that they are able to share with colleagues? Does the educational psychologist help develop the video tape series in a way that also enables him to apply and test various elements of the instructional design process which, in turn, leads to new insights for the field? Is the grant coordinator able to demonstrate long-term engagement with the topic of adult literacy and utilize the grant experience as a springboard for creating a model of adult literacy development that influences the creation of further programs?

The foregoing questions suggest potential directions faculty members might take to strengthen and solidify their work as professional achievement, as guided by the seven critical features. Classifying faculty work as "professional achievement" is not a simple, obvious binary decision. Rather, the seven criteria provide us with a common vocabulary and set of expectations for faculty to plan their work, execute it, and prepare and submit appropriate evidence. Similarly, the seven criteria of professional achievement, provide university review committees with a common vocabulary and consistent principles from which to derive clear expectations and evaluation tools – all without ever needing to justify faculty work as "scholarship."

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have proposed a reconceptualization of "scholarship" within the academy. To avoid further confusion promulgated by the term, "scholarship," and Boyer's four categories of scholarship, we advocate use of the term, "professional achievement," and operationalize that term by inducing critical features from prototypical exemplars of scholarship. With this approach, expectations for professional achievement retain integrity and rigor while also expanding the range of professional activity in which faculty members in applied disciplines may engage. Freed from the baggage of "scholarship," university faculty may be encouraged and empowered to pursue work that contributes significantly to their fields of inquiry, communities, society, and intellectual vitality.

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