The lack of reward mechanisms for public scholarship severely limits the future of public engagement in the academy.

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Scholars are increasingly expected to consider the wider public in their teaching and research activities, but with little to negative promotion incentive. In fact, finds Christopher Meyers, much of what academics do does not fit into the standard boxes of teaching, scholarship and service. Perhaps it's time to replace these categories with a single holistic and qualitative standard: High quality teacher-scholars, wherein all of one's professional activities are judged per their contribution to the academy's mission of educating, advancing ideas, creating an intellectual environment, and bettering the lives of others.

Writing this essay is a luxury that an untenured colleague likely could not afford. Unless a positive review is already a lock, she would be far better served by devoting her scarce research time to landing a peer-reviewed essay, grant, or book contract. And that's a real shame: If circulation estimates are even reasonably accurate, this blog entry will be read by a good 100 times more people than will the original peer-reviewed article that motivated its invitation. Circulation is not, by any means, the only or even most important way to judge a work's academic value; peer review, prestige of the publication site, and future citations are all at least as significant. Peer review historically has been, with good reason, the gold standard; it is the most objective mechanism we have for judging quality.

Lacking such, blog entries are among the many faculty activities that fall into a kind of tenure void — they are generally not recognized as scholarship, but neither do they qualify as teaching or align with typical service duties. Thus they are frequently ignored come review time, even though many play a major role in fulfilling the academy's mission of educating, advancing ideas, creating an intellectual environment, and bettering the lives of others. In fact, many do a far better job of fulfilling that mission than, say, publishing a minimally read essay in an obscure but nonetheless peer-reviewed journal, or serving, often in name only, on yet another campus committee.

I must stress, though, that I am *not* arguing for a reduction in research and scholarship; without it, universities are little better than trade schools. Further, the corporatizing pressures are wholly in the other direction, pushing faculty toward heavier teaching loads, burgeoning student/faculty ratios, and demands for accountability and evidence of added-value.

Thinking, though, about examples like this essay and hearing stories like the one out of Columbia University from a few weeks ago should motivate reconsideration of the ways academic work has traditionally been classified and valued. It turns out, in fact, that *much* of what we do does not neatly fit into the standard boxes of teaching, scholarship and service. Some examples: Is a lower-division textbook better deemed teaching or scholarship? Where should a well-reviewed but unfunded grant proposal get placed? What about working closely with a colleague — cleaning up arguments, assisting with writing, challenging data sets — to help them land an eventual publication? Doing the same so a student's paper gets accepted at a conference? Acting as a campus grievance officer to mediate disputes between faculty and administration?

All of these are vital to a university's mission but even a cursory consideration of the abilities and intellectual work involved reveal how each could be included in at least two of the three standard categories, or none of them. And yet, come review time, candidates are told to arbitrarily pick one of those boxes, or include it as some kind of tacked-on 'other'.

These categorization problems apply all the more to *public scholarship*. Despite increasing awareness of its importance, the academy has not determined how to count it. Per reports from colleagues all across the United States, it is most often placed under "service," where, given that category's relatively lower tenure weight, it is at best marginalized. And yet such work is often incredibly demanding and deeply mission fulfilling: Consider, as but one example, the intellectual rigor, multi-disciplinary knowledge and communication skills needed for clinical ethics consulting. Despite this, such work likely won't be counted toward tenure (unless, of course, it is one's primary job assignment), and thus junior colleagues are (wisely) encouraged to minimize their involvement until they receive tenure and promotion.

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Again, while public scholarship is the exemplar, the argument here is that the traditional categories are in fact arbitrary, with artificially delineated distinctions that do not rationally align with much, maybe even most, of what faculty do day after day. Given this, people are increasingly calling for a scrapping of those categories, replacing them with a single holistic and qualitative standard: *High quality teacher-scholars,* wherein *all* of one's professional activities are judged per their contribution to the academy's mission of educating, advancing ideas, creating an intellectual environment, and bettering the lives of others.

Hurdles assuredly abound in making such a change, not the least of which is that faculty are deeply conservative, loathe to tinkering with tradition. Conservatism, though, is of course not a good reason to resist change, especially not if, per the argument above, the existing system cannot effectively account for the range of important faculty work.

Better reasons for resisting include that much of public scholarship and other non-traditional faculty work is tough to quantify and even harder to externally review. While quantification can become a crutch for avoiding the challenging — intellectually and emotionally challenging — task of qualitatively evaluating a colleague's work, it also serves as a guidepost for candidates and it discourages vindictive or resource-driven reviews. But such quantification is wholly possible: How many consults did one perform? How many op-eds or other popular works did one get into press? How many students were placed in good graduate or professional programs or landed high quality jobs? Were one's efforts successful in changing corrupt or outdated policies?

External review is tougher, especially when one the public scholarship occurs in an environment in which such review is not a cultural norm. But, again, it could be managed: Decades of effort committed to standardizing the

faculty evaluation process have produced procedures and practices that could be easily enough tweaked to acquire valid (e.g., confidential, even anonymous) external reviews. (See also the range of excellent suggestions produced by the Imagining America coalition in Ellison and Eatman, 2008, "Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University".)

I would close by noting that one of my academic mentors, many years ago, suffered by the lack of a clear mechanism for valuing his non-traditional work. Hired by one dean on the (verbal) understanding that he would do extensive public philosophy, he was nonetheless released when a new dean deemed he did not have enough publications. Surely we are smart and creative enough to come up with procedures to make sure future public scholars do not experience the same fate.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our Comments Policy if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

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