



# Spadoni College of Education Biddle Center for Teaching and Learning

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## Leadership for Scholarship: Perspective from a Department Chair at a Comprehensive University

Faculty members at comprehensive universities face many unique challenges. As opposed to working at primarily teaching or research institutions, faculty at comprehensive universities must themselves be very comprehensive, or balanced, in their productivity (see Henderson, 2007). That is, to advance professionally, they must be solid if not better-than-average at teaching, service, and scholarship. The most challenging area for faculty to achieve and maintain in this balance is that of scholarly production. This *Brief* provides strategies for academic leaders, specifically department chairs, to promote scholarship among faculty members at a comprehensive university.

### Challenges to Scholarship at the Comprehensive University

It is helpful to recognize and/or reaffirm the forces that, at times, seem to work against faculty scholarly production. Several of these forces exist concurrent with increased expectations for scholarship. First (and most obvious), faculty members at comprehensive institutions traditionally maintain fairly high teaching loads, generally between three and five courses per semester. While there may be some reduction in load for certain activities, this reduction generally does not come on a consistent basis. Second, many institutions have been trending toward increasing expectations for faculty members in the area of community service. Eager to prove their merit in societal outlets and increase their visibility and role in the community, institutions are asking faculty more and more to deliver or extend public engagement or service learning projects to the community. Third, at most institutions there is an increased emphasis on student satisfaction and retention. Institutions are increasingly pressured to retain students and be accountable for student success and satisfaction. This often translates to faculty members to try and/or document new instructional strategies and more extensive approaches to student advisement. Fourth, there are growing opportunities, rewards, and sometimes expectations, for units and/or faculty to become more self-sustainable via grants and/or external funding. Finally, faculty at most comprehensive institutions increasingly work with a dynamic leadership with Provosts, Deans, and Chairs serving shorter terms. As such, both faculty and chairs are subject to almost predictable changes in expectations and priorities. Some faculty members have come to see the challenge of addressing the emphasis in scholarly production and other expectations as trying to hit a “moving target.” Indeed, it is the case that the rules may have changed, or be changing, for some faculty. Remaining cognizant of these forces, academic leaders, in particular department chairs, need to work within them to effectively promote faculty scholarship. In doing this, three primary strategies should be considered.

### Strategy 1: Put the Right Person in the Right Place

While easier to suggest than do, most department

chairs do have opportunities to hire new tenure-track faculty, and the care needed in this process, particularly as it relates to future scholarly productivity, clearly does not get the attention that it deserves. Excellence in hiring is a quite complex matchmaking process. I have had the opportunity to help hire six new faculty members in my five year tenure as chair (all currently remain at my institution). Of critical importance, I believe, is the match needed between institutional (and unit) mission and the faculty member. Too often, considerable attention is given to the scholarship, publications and grants record listed in the faculty candidate’s vitae, when the primary question should be “Can this individual be successful here?” Essentially, to be successful, the faculty candidate must have the right balance, both in skill and attitude, among teaching, scholarship, and service. Determining whether or not this balance exists takes extensive research and background checking. However, in the long run, this research is time well-invested. Finding the match also requires a deep understanding of one’s own institution and its reward and support systems. Once a deep understanding of both is acquired, then the matching can commence. This matching, however, does not run counter to my philosophy to always seek to hire someone better

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than those in the existing faculty group, but also, to seek in new faculty members individuals that are more balanced and a better fit with institutional and unit expectations than those presently in the academic unit.

What else is important in finding the right person for future scholarly productivity in the comprehensive institution? First, look for a person who is already an effective communicator and teacher. While important, mentoring a faculty member to be an effective teacher is difficult and time-intensive, and the time spent doing this, ultimately, might actually undermine scholarly productivity. Second, look for a person with a collaborative spirit. Education is a people business and successful faculty members are those who recognize the importance of working with and supporting others. Third, look for someone with the personal qualities of perseverance, flexibility, and intellectual curiosity. These characteristics will serve the new faculty member well when attempting to balance the comprehensive expectations, in particular, when leadership and rules may

change. Finally, I have found it helpful to reconsider, from the comprehensive perspective, the line of research of some faculty candidates. While it may be productive, often a line of research that is too focused, or too narrow, may not match the balanced expectations of the institution. While scholarly productivity may not be the issue, other challenges may arise with lines of scholarship that are too narrow or too tightly focused.

### Strategy 2: Collaborate, Collaborate, Collaborate

Few things predict scholarly productivity better, at least at comprehensive institutions, than collaboration with other faculty. One of the problems with too narrowly focused lines of research is that they may not lend to collaborative work with other faculty. In a recent hire, we decided to pursue a person with a focused line of research. However, this faculty member had a reputation for working with other faculty in conducting related studies, and also stepped outside of his line of research to publish in their discipline. Since his arrival, he has involved two other faculty members in his scholarship, and his research holds the potential to engage other faculty in the future. The fact that many high level funding agencies (e.g., NIH) now require interdisciplinary collaboration for grant proposals suggest that chairs should deliberately seek ways to promote collaboration.

One way to encourage collaboration is through intentional means. Several articles have been written that strategize for both inter and intra-disciplinary collaboration (e.g., Doprano, et al., 2005). Specific initiatives such as mentoring plans and writing circles are examples of successful efforts. I also have found success in promoting collaboration, and ultimately scholarship, through unintentional means not necessarily labeled as scholarship. For example, several faculty from the disciplines of sport management, exercise science, physical education, and health promotion are involved in the delivery of a comprehensive youth sport program. We are soon to embark on a coaching education conference where the faculty experts from our different disciplines will share important knowledge with youth and scholastic coaches. They need to collaborate in order to refine their disciplinary content to where it is usable for practitioners. Our institution's internal Celebration of Inquiry conference offered the opportunity for faculty from psychology, exercise science, physical education, and sport/fitness management to discuss the concept of motivation in sport and exercise from a cross-disciplinary perspective. These collaborative efforts have begun to be converted to peer-reviewed scholarship. It is important to note that scholarship was not the primary objective of these efforts, but, instead, emergent as a natural byproduct of collaboration.

### Strategy 3: Find (and Reward) Scholarship Wherever Possible

Most comprehensive institutions reward a wide variety of scholarship, as long as it is peer-reviewed or refereed. This

should be encouraging to both chairs and faculty. In this vein, broadening the concept of scholarship (and rewarding it) is worth the effort. Service-based scholarship has been promoted by others (e.g., Feingold, 1997), and is a way for faculty to connect scholarship to other efforts. For example, one faculty member embraced the institution's mentoring initiative in which college students mentor at-risk students in local K-12 public schools. The mentoring is tied to course objectives and is designed to benefit both university and K-12 students. When the faculty member finally realized the potential to convert the mentoring initiative in her classes to scholarship, she became motivated to present and publish her work in appropriate disciplinary outlets. Ultimately, she found scholarship in her passion for teaching and serving through mentoring. Another faculty member thrived on taking students to national professional conferences. We began to discuss ideas about the process of encouraging and facilitating this valuable initiative and eventually co-authored a refereed article on the topic in a professional journal. This faculty member found scholarship in a place labeled service. As a final example, our exercise science lab conducts fitness tests as part of a community fitness testing service program. This program generates traditional data sets and attractive cross-sectional or longitudinal comparisons. Faculty members are currently collaborating to structure the data collection to hold more potential for future scholarship. It should be clear that valued scholarship in most comprehensive institutions is not restricted to traditional, data-based research publications. Some of the most effective and sustainable scholarship is scholarship that links faculty strengths and/or interests in teaching or service to the scholarly artifact.

While challenges to scholarly productivity are no doubt found at all comprehensive universities, there too is considerable opportunity, in some cases flexibility, and reward for chairs to help faculty members succeed in such a unique, balanced and dynamic environment. Without question, success is possible.

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