

R. Eugene Rice

# The New American Scholar

## *Scholarship and the Purposes of the University*

*This is a call for a broader view of scholarship: one that is congruent with the rich diversity of American higher education; one that is more appropriate, more authentic, and more adaptive for both our institutions and day-to-day working lives of faculty. Building on the recent inquiry into how knowledge is acquired and utilized—different ways of knowing—the polarities in the contemporary setting are set aside and an alternative perspective is proposed.*

*Focusing on the comprehensive university, particularly, questions are raised about the changing role of scholarship in a pluralistic democracy.*

In 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson presented to the “president and gentlemen” of Harvard’s Phi Beta Kappa Society his famous address “The American Scholar.” In that provocative statement described by Oliver Wendell Holmes as America’s “intellectual Declaration of Independence,” Emerson articulated a vision of the role of the scholar in the new democracy. He called for the rejection of a past that was alien and debilitating and for the adoption of a new approach to scholarship and the role of the scholar in society—a role that would be vital and self-confident, in his words, “blood warm.”

Emerson’s address was not so much an assertion of intellectual nationalism as a statement of his own struggle with the problem of vocation, with the nature and meaning of scholarly work in a changing society. It is this same issue—what it means to be a scholar in an evolving democracy—that confronts faculty in American higher education today.

Just as Emerson’s American scholar was struggling to break away from the dominance of “the learning of other lands,” from patterns of deference that engendered self-doubt and the depreciation of new, adaptive roles, so the majority of faculty in today’s colleges and universities are wrestling with a conception of scholarship that is much too narrow and singularly inappropri-

ate for the rich diversity—the educational mosaic—that has become the hallmark of American higher education.

Higher education in the United States emerged from its time of rapid expansion following the Second World War with two primary strengths, characteristics that have become the envy of the world:

- a research capability in almost every academic specialization, second to none, and
- a richly textured diversity in its educational system that opened opportunities for advanced learning to most of the nation's people.

These primary strengths have been praised widely and emulated where possible.

The expansion of specialized research and the focus on the role of the scholar as researcher was triumphantly celebrated. Academic hierarchy took on new meaning and prestige ranking grew in importance. So significant was this change that, in 1968, Christopher Jenks and David Riesman could claim, in good faith, that an “academic revolution” had occurred.

There was not just one academic revolution, however; there were two. And, the second was every bit as significant and, certainly, as dramatic. An already diverse system of higher education exploded with growth, innovation, and responsiveness; there were major changes in size, complexity, and mission. Regrettably, these two revolutions, as admirable as they were, encompassed serious contradictions. In *The Higher Education System*, Burton Clark writes about the “paradox of hierarchy and diversity” endemic to the system of American higher education. The two strengths pulled in opposite directions, and the enormous incongruity between the two produced serious role strain for faculty and organizational fissures that cut across our institutions. And at the heart of the tension is the meaning of scholarship and the role of the faculty member as scholar.

What has evolved is a hierarchical conception of scholarly excellence that is tied to the advancement of research and defined in zero-sum terms. This restricted one-dimensional view places research in competition with other important scholarly responsibilities and leads to their devaluation. Faculty find themselves divided within, set against one another, and profoundly disheartened when confronted with the disparity between the mission driving the institutions of which they are a part and their own professional self-understanding.

What is needed is a broader conception of scholarship: one that is congruent with the rich diversity of American higher education; one that is more appropriate, more authentic, and more adaptive for both our institutions and the day-to-day working lives of faculty.

## Scholarship and the Comprehensives

It is the comprehensive universities that have struggled most with the established definition of scholarship and the hierarchy that reinforces it. Sixty percent of the public universities are in this category, and almost all were created or designated as universities during the postwar period. Many private institutions have moved recently into this general classification as they have grown and changed. These are the institutions that serve the great majority of students and where the sharing and transfer of knowledge through teaching and practice must be honored. The recent emergence of these institutions and—ironically—their success in terms of growth and prestige, have blurred their mandate and sent confusing signals to faculty; there is no clear indication of what is valued. Faculty morale is often low and the protective appeal of collective bargaining most popular. It is here, also, that a broader definition of scholarship promises to make the biggest difference.

The comprehensive university, as in no other institutional setting in higher education, opens opportunities for faculty to work on a wide range of scholarly activities, building on their individual strengths and realizing their own special contribution to a broad-based institutional mission. The comprehensive university could be the sector in higher education where the opportunities for scholarly accomplishments are greatest and the morale is highest, not lowest.

Frank Wong aptly summarized the current plight of comprehensive institutions at a recent conference on that topic at the University of the Pacific. In a speech entitled "The Ugly Duckling of Higher Education," Wong, vice-president for academics at the University of Redlands, said:

There was no definitive model of the comprehensive university. And somehow, the models that existed, those that faculty intuitively turn to, were a poor fit for the assemblage of activities and dynamics that are found at the comprehensive university. Because that specie of institution is so poorly defined and ill understood, those of us at such universities need to create their meaning and interpret their significance.

Central to this quest for meaning and significance is the conception of scholarship and the faculty activities that are valued and rewarded.

### *Toward a Broader View*

This is a particularly propitious time for the reevaluation of what is meant by scholarship. The structural diversity of higher education has created a press for change, and the recent research on the American professoriate and the undergraduate experience have demonstrated the need. In The

Carnegie Foundation's report, *College*, Ernest Boyer drew national attention to the widespread confusion about the role of faculty and the narrow conception of scholarship dominating the profession. He writes:

Scholarship is not an esoteric appendage; it is at the heart of what the profession is all about. All faculty, throughout their careers, should themselves, remain students. As scholars they must continue to learn and be seriously and continuously engaged in the expanding intellectual world. This is essential to the vitality and vigor of the undergraduate college.

Ernest Lynton and Sandra Elman, in their recent call for *New Priorities for the University*, press the argument further, urging that special attention must be given to the scholar's role in, and the university's responsibility for, the application and the utilization of knowledge. It is now time to reframe our thinking about scholarship, challenge the faculty evaluation procedures and reward systems that are presently in place, and replace the current vertical arrangement that devalues the work of the majority of this nation's faculty with a broader view.

To move beyond the current impasse, we need to be willing to take a fresh approach and think in new ways about what it means to be a scholar in the contemporary context. The language and polarities that are used to frame the present discussion need to be set aside. The old teaching-versus-research debate is especially tiring—minds are closed, not opened.

### *Different Ways of Knowing*

If we build on the recent inquiry into the structure of knowledge and alternative approaches to learning, a different configuration, a more constructive way of framing the discussion, emerges. A review of the literature on the various dimensions of learning reveals two fundamental polarities.

***The Concrete-Abstract Polarity.*** The first polarity deals with how knowledge is perceived. At one pole is the abstract, analytical approach usually associated with traditional academic research. This learning orientation strives for objectivity, requires high levels of specialization, and takes pride in its claim to being "value-free." At the other end of this first continuum is an orientation that begins with concrete experience and what is learned from contexts, relationships, and valuing communities. This is a very different approach to knowing, one that builds on connection and relationship, where values reveal, rather than mask, what is worth knowing. Recent literary studies that attempt to understand literature in terms of time and place would be found here. Ethnic studies and women's studies, in their struggle for legitimacy, have helped us recognize the power of context, relationships, and community in our approach to knowing and learning. Certainly, knowledge comprehended through objective reasoning and ana-

lytical theory-building must be acknowledged and honored, but knowledge apprehended through connections grounded in human community—relational knowing—also must be seen as legitimate.

**The Reflective-Active Polarity.** The second basic dimension of learning has to do with how knowledge is processed. Do we learn best through detached reflection and observation or through active engagement? The liberal arts tend to be more reflective, with an emphasis on learning for its own sake. In contrast, so many of the more recent developments in American colleges and universities and, particularly, the comprehensive institutions, have moved toward the more active pole—toward active engagement with the world, making a difference. The new programs in business, computer sciences, and communications are found here. The emphasis is on learning that is instrumental, a means to a more practical end. Again, we want the approaches to learning represented at both poles of the continuum to be recognized and honored. Certainly, knowledge rooted in scholarly reflection and observation has its place, but so does knowledge generated out of active practice.

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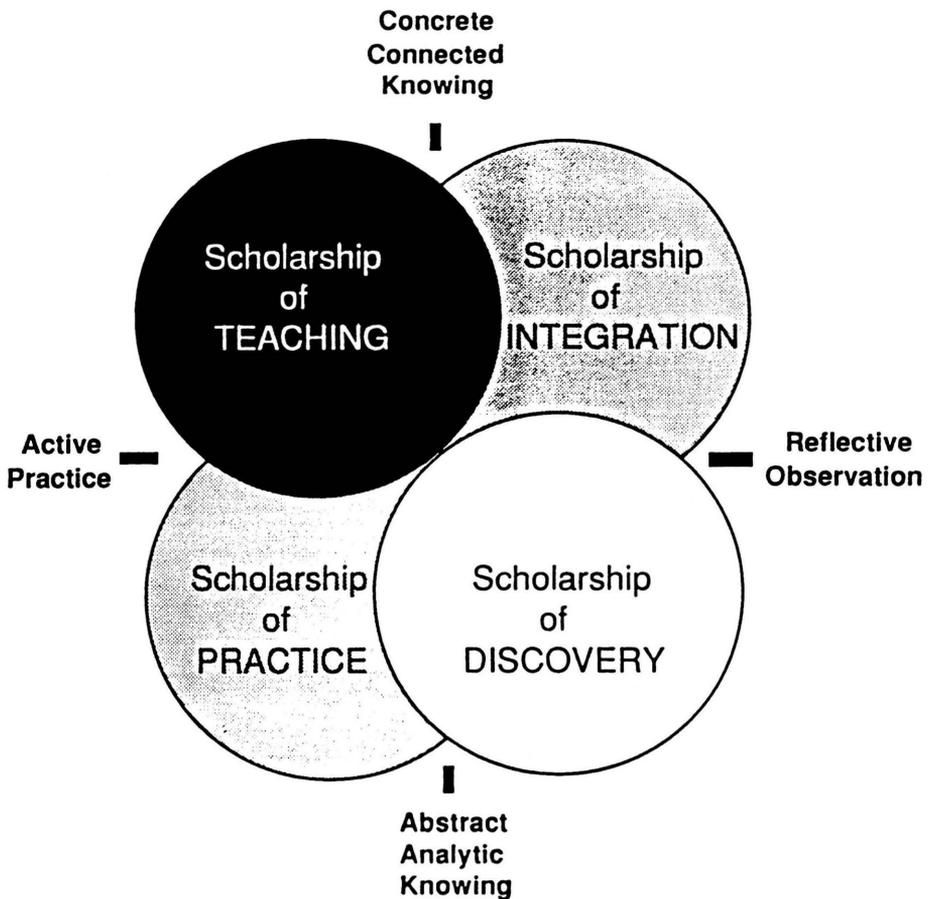
David A. Kolb (see Suggested Readings) and others have taken these two basic dimensions of learning—how knowledge is perceived (concrete-abstract) and how it is processed (reflective-active)—and constructed a learning model that is particularly helpful in our effort to define scholarship more broadly. Just as learning can be characterized as a multidimensional process involving different styles and approaches to learning, so our broader conception of scholarship can be depicted as an interrelated whole with distinctive components and different approaches to knowing (see Figure 1).

### *The Forms of Scholarship*

Enlarging our understanding of scholarship became a central concern of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching during the two-year period between 1988 and 1990. Drawing heavily on the previous work of Ernest Boyer, Ernest Lynton, Lee Shulman, and others, four forms of scholarship were identified.

**The scholarship of discovery.** The first element in this broader conception of scholarship—still a key element—is the discovery of knowledge. On this facet, everyone agrees. And, in no way do we want to be perceived as detracting from the significance of specialized research. If that were the result of this effort, we would have been seriously misunderstood. The place of pure research, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, needs to be assiduously defended, particularly in a society primarily committed to the

Figure 1: A Broader Conception of Scholarship



pragmatic and too often concerned more with whether something works over the short term than with whether it is of lasting value.

In 1919, in his famous address on "Science as a Vocation," Max Weber acknowledged that the Western world had entered into a phase of specialization previously unknown and that in his words:

Only by strict specialization can the scientific worker become fully conscious, for once and perhaps never again in his lifetime, that he has achieved something that will endure. A really definitive and good accomplishment is today always a specialized accomplishment.

The contention of this noted German scholar is persuasive. There is no disputing that, if scholarship is to be sustained in our day, the specialized advancement of knowledge is required. In fact, we should urgently insist

that scholarship have as one of its anchor points the discovery of new knowledge—what has traditionally been known as original research.

***The scholarship of integration.*** The extension of the frontiers of knowledge is, however, not enough. The second element in scholarship is the integration of knowledge, an undertaking as critical to the understanding of our world as the discovery of knowledge that is new. In fact, the extension of specialization itself requires new forms of integration. Without the continual effort at reintegration, we have fragmentation. It was also Weber who warned of the possibility of a modern world filled with “specialists without spirit, and sensualists without heart.”

The integration of knowledge requires a divergent approach to knowing—a different kind of scholarship—one that reaches across disciplinary boundaries, and pulls disparate views and information together in creative ways. Scholars are needed with a capacity to synthesize, to look for new relationships between the parts and the whole, to relate the past and future to the present, and to ferret out patterns of meaning that cannot be seen through traditional disciplinary lenses.

It is through integrative inquiry that ethical questions will be raised in a natural and systematic way. We will not have to suffer through the ethics spasms that now grip higher education about every decade, triggered either by a Watergate or a scandal on Wall Street. This is not a call for the “gentlemen scholar” of an earlier time, or the dilettante who dabbles here and there, but broadly educated men and women who are serious about making the kinds of scholarly connections so much needed in our time.

Clifford Geertz, the anthropologist, writes about shifts in the world of scholarship as fundamental changes in “the way we think about the way we think.” The older disciplinary boundaries are being challenged on every hand; knowledge constantly spills over; and the strength of our disciplines is often more political than intellectual.

***The scholarship of practice.*** The third form of scholarship is the most distinctively American. The great land grant institutions were established during the nineteenth century precisely for the purpose of applying knowledge to the enormous agricultural and technical problems confronting society. These schools and their utilitarian missions matched the mood and needs of an emerging nation. In the academic profession today, however, there is a disturbing gap between what is valued as scholarship and the pragmatic needs of the larger world.

This ironic development in American higher education has multiple roots, but one important strand can be traced back to the emergence of professional education and, specifically, to the impact of the Flexner Report on medical education (incidentally, one of the first of Carnegie-commissioned studies). The major effect of the Flexner Report was to move

medical education into the research university and greatly increase its scientific component. The other professions followed medicine's lead. Practical competence became professional when grounded in systematic, preferably scientific knowledge. The application of knowledge took on value—rigor and prestige—when derived from original research. In the most pragmatic

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society in the world, scholarship was conceptualized as independent of, and prior to, practice.

Professional schools now are beginning to challenge this hierarchical conception of scholarship that makes the application of knowledge derivative, and consequently, second-best. Donald Schön's work on "the reflective practitioner" (see Suggested Readings) calls for a reassessment of the relationship between scholarship and practice—a new "epistemology of practice." His work is especially influential in the field of architecture, where the relationship with the research university and its established definition of scholarship has been one of perpetual tension.

Even in medicine, the connection between basic research and practice is being realigned. Harvard Medical School has instituted a New Pathways Program that attempts to build clinical practice into medical education from the very beginning. Ernest Lynton, Sandra Elman, and others are raising a whole range of important questions about the relationship between scholarship and professional service. Should not the application of knowledge to the problems of society be acknowledged as a scholarly endeavor of the first order?

***The scholarship of teaching.*** This brings us to the fourth dimension of scholarship—the relationship of teaching and scholarship. This is the most difficult form of scholarship to discuss, because we do not have the appropriate language. In the working lives of individual faculty, scholarship and teaching often are seen as antithetical—competing for one's time and attention. This is a reflection of the way in which we conceptualize both tasks. We want to challenge this understanding and argue that quality teaching requires substantive scholarship that builds on, but is distinct from, original research, and that this scholarly effort needs to be recognized and rewarded. This is a special kind of scholarship that has for too long been implicit, unacknowledged, and virtually unnamed. Some are now willing to talk about "a missing paradigm."

This fourth dimension of scholarship has an integrity of its own, but is deeply embedded in the other three forms—discovery, integration, and practice. In addition, the scholarship of teaching has at least three distinct elements: first, the *synoptic capacity*, the ability to draw the strands of a field

together in a way that provides both coherence and meaning, to place what is known in context and open the way for connection to be made between the knower and the known; second, what Lee Shulman (see Suggested Readings) calls “*pedagogical content knowledge*,” the capacity to represent a subject in ways that transcend the split between intellectual substance and teaching process, usually having to do with the metaphors, analogies, and experiments used; and third, *what we know about learning*, scholarly inquiry into how students “make meaning”—to use William Perry’s phrase—out of what the teacher says and does.

While we want to treat the four forms of scholarship as individually distinctive, we also want them to be understood as interrelated and often overlapping—an interdependent whole, with each distinctive form encompassing each of the other three. For example, scholarship that is primarily integrative also can lead to important discoveries and provide the intellectual undergirding for the best sort of undergraduate teaching.

The view of scholarship being proposed here is more inclusive, reaching out to encompass a wider array of scholarly activities than does the present conception. While being more inclusive, however, this enlarged view has its own boundaries; the four aspects of scholarship are discrete types, but form a conceptual whole that is every bit as important as the parts.

Implied here are assumptions about the kind of scholarship appropriate for the academy—colleges and universities. For instance, teaching that is *not* grounded in the most recent research in the field and is oblivious to the interconnections with other disciplines is not appropriate for a college or university setting. Instruction of this sort might better be found in the corporate classroom or the military. On the other hand, it is important that narrow, specialized research take place in a broader scholarly context—a university—where critical questions are raised and scholars are made mindful by students and colleagues that academic freedom carries with it special responsibilities. The recent debate over genetic engineering underscores the point. As Alfred North Whitehead, in his essay on “Universities and Their Function,” observes:

At no time have universities been restricted to pure abstract learning....  
The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning.

We know that what is being proposed challenges a hierarchical arrangement of monumental proportions—a status system that is firmly fixed in the consciousness of the present faculty and the academy’s organizational policies and practices. What is being called for is a broader, more open field, where these different forms of scholarship can interact, inform, and enrich

one another, and faculty can follow their interests, build on their strengths, and be rewarded for what they spend most of their scholarly energy doing. All faculty ought to be scholars in this broader sense, deepening their preferred approaches to knowing but constantly pressing, and being pressed by peers, to enlarge their scholarly capacities and encompass other—often contrary ways—of knowing.

### *Faculty Scholarship and Institutional Mission*

Institutionally, we have a crisis of purpose in our colleges and universities. Our comprehensive institutions, particularly, are trying to be what they are not, and falling short of what they could be.

Awareness that the dominant notion of scholarship is inappropriate and counterproductive for the majority of our faculty, as well as our institutions, is widespread. The concern runs deep, yet when individual faculty are rewarded and “emerging” institutions launch drives toward higher standards of academic excellence, the older, narrow definition of scholarship as research is reasserted and given priority. As sociologist Everett Ladd points out: “When a particular norm is ascendant within a group and institutionalized in various ways, it is very hard for a member of a group to deny its claim, even if intellectually he is fully convinced of its serious deficiency.” In the recent period of retrenchment, when promotions were being denied and positions eliminated, the older, narrower standard frequently was invoked to rationalize very difficult and often arbitrary judgments. In institutions in distress, it was, on occasion, used as an anesthetic in the management of pain.

What is especially needed is greater congruence between individual faculty scholarship and institutional mission. It is this congruence that gives special meaning to academic work, sustains morale, cultivates commitment, and makes possible a more direct relationship between performance, evaluation, and reward.

An enlarged conception of scholarship would address a number of critical problems currently plaguing both individual faculty and colleges and universities across the several sectors of higher education. It would free us to celebrate individual strengths—the rich variety of scholarly talents represented in the faculty—and make it possible for colleges and universities not committed primarily to specialized research (the majority), to feel pride in their distinctive scholarly missions.

### *Scholarship and Democratic Community*

The audacious title of this paper is taken, obviously, from Emerson’s famous address, “The American Scholar.” That 1837 speech called for a

new approach to scholarship and the role of the scholar, one not borrowed from “the learning of other lands,” but self-confident and fully engaged with the realities of a vibrant, developing democracy.

One hundred and twenty-six years later—scarcely a block from where Emerson spoke—Clark Kerr addressed the future of the American university and identified four challenges that would transform higher education in this country. He told his Harvard audience:

The university is being called upon to educate previously unimagined numbers of students; to respond to the expanding claims of national service; to merge its activities with industry as never before; to adapt to, and rechannel, new intellectual currents.

Kerr then predicted that only when this transformation had taken place would we have “a truly American university, an institution unique in world history, an institution not looking to other models but serving, itself, as a model for universities in other parts of the globe.”

American higher education stands now on the threshold of that transformation. Over the past thirty years, colleges and universities have taken on the diverse challenges articulated by Kerr, and much has been accomplished. Other nations—Asian, European, African—are looking our way for a model, a decentralized but coherent model, meeting diverse societal needs and responding to the call for both equity and excellence. Looming especially large in our immediate future are the challenges posed by the immense demographic changes in our society. The rich racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity marking America from its beginning has taken on new significance as the minorities in our cities, and even states, such as California, become majorities. Diversity, which American higher education sees as one of its primary strengths, has taken on new meaning.

What it means to be a scholar in American colleges and universities must be seen within this larger frame. Not only do our institutions have diverse missions—commitments to serving a wide range of scholarly needs within regions, states, and nation—but there is the special commitment to the education of an increasingly diverse population, to the intellectual preparation of the educated citizenry necessary for making a genuinely democratic society possible. Scholarship, in this context, takes on broader meaning.

We believe that an enlarged view would nurture inclusion, draw together rather than separate, and embrace students and their learning, as well as faculty and their research. This understanding of scholarly activity also

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would acknowledge and build on the relational nature of knowledge, as well as more abstract, objective ways of knowing. The narrower view no longer suffices. For colleges and universities to contribute fully to the vibrant pluralistic democracy this nation is becoming, a vision of the distinctively new American scholar is needed.

### *Suggested Readings*

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