LINDA MCMILLIN

Creating the "Complete Scholar"

Academic Professionalism in the 21st Century

Colleges and universities are also centers of creativity that enrich our world in multitudinous ways

IN "MAKING A PLACE for the New American Scholar," Gene Rice outlines a lofty goal for all of us who would call ourselves academics: that of becoming a "complete scholar." This is "a career objective that unfolds over a lifetime of scholarly work." He goes on to describe a complete scholar: "Faculty moving toward becoming complete scholars would have a sense of the whole, with a wide variety of choices and options across the life span of a career, and the capability of responding to shifting institutional and societal needs." Stated succinctly, a complete scholar cultivates "a multidimensional sense of the professional self."

Becoming a complete scholar is a worthwhile pursuit—even if it is one that few of us may fully realize. I have a senior colleague who is as near the embodiment of this ideal as I can imagine. His thirty-five year career has been rich and varied: an award-winning teacher, an effective dean, and a well-respected historian. He has managed to constantly reinvent himself and adapt to changes in theory and methodology, in pedagogy and student expectations, in institutional mission and resource availability—all with grace and wit and modesty. But what most strikes me about my colleague is in fact his "multidimensional sense of [a] professional self." His professional identity is complex: He sees himself as an historian and a teacher with a place both in the professional community of Susquehanna University and in that of higher education as a whole.

I suspect that most campuses could come up with a candidate for the complete scholar title. But can any of our campuses take credit for these outstanding individuals? One hopes that there have been particular institutional spaces, opportunities, and supports afforded these colleagues to successfully construct a complex professional identity. However, many of us might be afraid that they have become complete scholars in spite of, rather than because of, their institutions.

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Generational shift

My interest in this nature vs. nurture question—the impact of "environment" in creating the complete scholar—has immediate applicability. My institution, like many others, is moving through a great generational shift. I have many junior colleagues—recent arrivals, freshly scrubbed, with newly minted Ph.D.s. They are so young and excited, so full of energy and potential. My hope for them is that they all will grow up to be complete scholars—like our senior colleague. And I want our institution to do everything we can in the coming years to increase the likelihood that they too might cultivate "a multidimensional sense of the professional self."

When I place my senior colleague on one side and my junior colleagues on the other and try to construct a bridge between them, I am overwhelmed by their differences. The former is the quintessential professorial stereotype—white, Protestant male, whose wife has always put his career first; the latter are the new faculty, many female or from traditionally underrepresented groups, all having partners with their own professional agendas. They are already the lucky few survivors of a cutthroat job market where many equally talented grad-school mates are subsisting as adjuncts. Technology has shaped the way they do their work—both teaching and research—and will continue to in ways that are unforeseeable at present. Moreover, they are beginning their careers at a time when expectations of higher education are growing—to educate more students, better,

with fewer resources—and societal support for this enterprise has declined.

Despite these differences, however, I am confident that the next generation of complete scholars will share much with the current generation. A multidimensional sense of a professional self will be even more necessary for this new generation if they are to develop the flexibility needed to adapt to the rapidly changing environment of higher education. Like our senior colleague, they will need a professional identity that is rooted in and committed to a discipline, to students, to a local institution, and to higher education as a whole. Furthermore, they will need to be able to hold these commitments in tension so as to reinvent themselves and to shift their balances over the span of a career.

My goal here is to outline some ideas about what our institutions can do to create spaces where these young professionals can nurture these commitments. In each of the four areas—discipline, teaching, local institution, and larger higher education landscape—faculty and administrative colleagues can systematically engage new faculty and invite them into the academic profession in ways that will increase the likelihood of creating complete scholars.

Cultivating a stake in a discipline

Most new faculty come to their first job with a strong stake in a particular discipline. In fact, sometimes the biggest adjustment in their first year on the job has to do with adapting this commitment to make room for the variety of tasks that professors undertake—including teaching and service. Our institutions recognize and foster disciplinary commitments, especially in their reward systems. Publish or perish continues to be the mantra of our profession. Indeed, from community colleges to research universities, there is a direct correlation between one's publication record and one's paycheck. As we have ratcheted up our expectations in this area, many institutions have made further investments in faculty research, providing funding for start-up costs, research grants, travel support, sabbaticals, and pre-tenure leaves. And the clamor to lighten teaching loads is heard throughout the land. Since institutional rewards and institutional reputation seem to follow research productivity, such supports seem both fair and prudent. At the same time, however, there are voices that question how well some commitments to research align with institutional mission.

I am not suggesting that institutions lessen their support for faculty research. Higher education as a whole has a strong commitment and obligation to put the best minds of our society to work on the creation of new knowledge and its application to solve any number of societal ills. Colleges and universities are also centers of creativity that enrich our world in multitudinous ways. However, the resources that are committed to scholarly activity in any given institution should go to support those projects that have a strong connection to the institution's mission. For example, Susquehanna's undergraduate focus has led many of our scientists to reconceive their research agendas to incorporate undergraduates. For many this has meant a rethinking of methodology and a scaling back of their timelines to accommodate the learning curves of their student researchers. In some cases this has even meant changing focus to work on more accessible projects. Such accommodations are not confined to the sciences. In most departments undergraduate research has become an important endeavor. But at tenure time questions remain as to just how much collaborative research with students should "count." If, however, such disciplinary work is mission driven, it should be recognized and rewarded as scholarship rather than simply layered on top of other obligations.

Most institutions also force new faculty to think more broadly about their disciplines than the specializations of graduate school. This happens from the start, as new faculty must stretch to create introductory courses. In my experience as a historian, this has meant being conversant in several civilizations across multiple centuries as opposed to the one village during a single decade that is the stuff of dissertations. Such stretching can be intimidating. Yet, this imperative to broaden one's disciplinary perspective and even to venture into the borderlands of interdisciplinary collaboration is essential to our institutional missions.

Other stretches come when new faculty are asked to put their disciplinary expertise in the service of the local community. Municipal projects, social service agencies, and schools are often looking for academic partners, and making these connections can be an important part of our institutional missions. However,

the popular wisdom is to "protect" younger faculty from such endeavors—keep them focused on traditional research and not let them branch out until after the tenure decision. Yet the truth is that if new faculty are not finding ways to make their research accessible to students, serving the local community, and building some interdisciplinary connections before tenure, they will rarely do it after.

The challenge is to find the right balance for new faculty and also to make sure reward systems in the area of scholarship are broad enough to include the work most connected to institutional mission. By doing this, we can give new faculty a supportive and flexible space in which to cultivate the first dimension of academic professionalism—connection to discipline.

Cultivating a stake in students

In recent years, increased attention has been paid to the fact that graduate schools do not prepare their students to be teachers. AAC&U's Preparing Future Faculty program and the Reinventing the Ph.D. projects have done a wonderful job of explicating and beginning to remediate this problem. Indeed, I increasingly find that when reviewing candidates in job searches, many will have included a teaching portfolio and sample syllabi. Nevertheless, new faculty often have a great need for good mentoring around teaching in their first few years.

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New faculty need to work through a variety of pedagogical approaches and find a range of formats and options that match their disciplines and their students. In addition, they need a safe place for sharing syllabi, strategies, problems, triumphs, and failures. One approach that Susquehanna has found useful is the formation of teaching cells—informal groupings of four to six faculty from a range of disciplines and ranks that come together to discuss pedagogy on a regular basis. The program has been voluntary and the focus on formative rather than summative assessments. More recently, we have taken this format and applied it directly to new faculty orientation with the creation of mentoring circles that meet throughout a new faculty member's first year. Each new faculty member is part of a group of four, along with two second-year faculty and a tenured faculty member. Thus, in the second year, faculty members continue to be mentored by senior faculty even while they are also becoming mentors to a new cohort. While this mentoring circle is aimed at orienting new faculty to the institution as a whole, conversations about teaching are a key part of the project.

Knowing our students means constantly evaluating and reevaluating not only pedagogy but also curriculum. New faculty often are given a strong voice in the shaping of disciplinary curricula—they are rightly perceived to be those most in touch with new trends and methodologies. But they also need to be invited into conversation about general education. New faculty are often asked to teach a course that is part of a core curriculum without ever knowing such a larger context exists, much less how their particular course fits into the whole. New faculty (and sometimes older ones as well) need to be challenged to think not only about their bit of turf in general education, but also about what it means to be liberally educated and to take responsibility and ownership of the whole program.

New faculty need to understand as well the particular students they are teaching. Of course, we all want to work with the best and the brightest students; after all, these are often the easiest people to teach, mainly by just getting out of their way. But the greater challenge is to meet all students where they are and create a learning environment where they might be both challenged and successful. This involves understanding who our students are, their backgrounds, their learning styles, their work habits, and their "other" life outside the classroom, factors that may enhance or impede their learning.

Recently, our student life staff did a fall workshop using CIRPs data to present a profile of Susquehanna students as compared to the national picture. An interactive session, it challenged faculty with a series of multiple choice questions to see just how well they knew their students. The results were not pretty! This experience illustrates how important it is to recognize that faculty are not the only academic professionals who work to create a learning environment for students. New faculty need encouragement to collaborate

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with and to learn from the expertise of colleagues in student life, admissions, career services, the library, and athletics. Space needs to be created for faculty and students to interact outside as well as in the classroom. Both e-mail and the proliferation of coffee bars on our campuses have done much to facilitate such interaction.

Institutions need to set up mission-consistent expectations for new-faculty engagement with students. Once again, faculty doors closed to students before tenure will rarely open after. But in this second dimension of professional identity, new faculty also need to be mentored—by both faculty and staff colleagues—and given access to relevant information about the specific students they will serve.

Cultivating a stake in one's local institution

When I think about the stake faculty have in a local institution, tenure comes immediately to mind. Indeed, the willingness of an institution to make a lifetime guarantee of employment to a faculty member would seem to give that person a very large stake in the fortunes of the institution. It also confers an obligation to understand and work toward strengthening that institution. One of the damaging consequences from increasing dependence on part-time and adjunct faculty is that an institution will have fewer and fewer individuals to do the important work of institution building—from student recruitment and curriculum design, and student advising and institutional governance, to staying connected to alumni.

Of course, "service work" is often perceived to be the bane of faculty existence: something to be avoided if possible, and if not, minimized to the bare essentials.

In *A New Academic Compact*, the Associated New American Colleges' faculty work project argues for developing a different model of service work: the notion of institutional citizenship. There we sketched out a model of those areas from where faculty voices should be dominant to those areas where faculty should be part of the conversation. In all cases, however, it is important that the service work that faculty are asked to do be consequential, that it make a difference, and that it be recognized and rewarded.

Once again, the popular wisdom is to protect untenured faculty from service work for as long as possible, and then to have them serve on the most inconsequential committee that takes up the least amount of time. I would argue that this leads to tenuring a cohort of faculty who are not well versed in the obligations of institutional citizenship and who often spend their careers ducking rather than pitching in—creating the apathetic faculty that so many administrators complain about. As a senior colleague said to me, right before he nominated me in my second year for the campus-wide curriculum committee, "If you're going to be on a faculty committee, you might as well be on one that does something!"

Susquehanna recently engaged in a self-study for our Middle States reaccreditation review. As we set about recruiting task force and subcommittee members, we purposefully made

sure that junior faculty were involved at every level. We made this a widely collaborative process that fed directly into our next strategic plan. This was an opportunity for an entire cohort of new faculty to be involved in consequential work that had them digging into all areas of the university and making substantive recommendations for our future. We are about to come out the other side, not just exhausted, but having created an institutional culture where collaboration on consequential university work is expected. And our newer faculty have had a crash course in how Susquehanna operates—something others have taken years to uncover and understand.

Not all new faculty are lucky enough to arrive in the midst of accreditation work! However, the earlier in one's career a faculty member is invited to work on university projects of consequence, the more likely that person will be to become a good institutional citizen. In cultivating this dimension of professional identity, there is no substitute for simply getting involved. However, I would add the caveat that such experiences will end up being formative: If the experience is frustrating and produces nothing of consequence or if the recommendations made languish on the desks of administrators forever, the end result will be to create cynicism and apathy in a new generation of the faculty.

Cultivating a stake in higher education

The last piece of professional identity involves the ways in which institutions connect their faculty to the larger context of higher education. The best place to gain this context is by attending regional and national meetings and workshops sponsored by the many higher education organizations. Unless invited to do so by their institutions, faculty rarely move outside their disciplinary organizations. But much is gained when a faculty member is persuaded by an administrator to consider such a venture. Faculty come to understand how their institutions are like and unlike others—even within the same educational niche. This may mean going home with new ideas for solving old problems or with a new appreciation for their own institution's strengths. It allows faculty to place what had been perceived as unique or idiosyncratic challenges into larger trends with larger possible solutions. And when faculty are part of a team, the gains are even greater as the group is afforded time and space away from campus to work together—and often drink and eat together, creating stronger bonds that translate into greater collaborations upon return.

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While our day-to-day focus is on our own research, students, and institutions, we need collectively to become a part of dialogues about higher education in our society, about its place and value in our culture, and its obligations to think together about the larger issues of access, funding, K-12 collaborations, student learning, and so on. The Greater Expectations project, for example, represents one of those collective dialogues that illustrate the stake we all have in articulating what we do and why it is important to our society. This final dimension of professional identity connects new faculty to the larger obligations of citizenship and vocation.

Space for balancing and reinventing oneself

The greatest challenge in constructing a multidimensional sense of the professional self is figuring out how to integrate these various dimensions into a whole and not to be torn apart by them. The complete scholar learns to balance these commitments and to move among them over the course of a career in ways that are appropriate to individual talents and inclinations and to institutional circumstances and needs. It is also clear that we cannot expect new faculty to be complete scholars when they walk in the door. But we can think carefully about how to give them the opportunities early in their careers to cultivate a full professional identity—with a stake in a discipline, in students, in our local institutions, and in higher education as a whole—so that some thirty-five years later they too will be celebrated as complete scholars. □

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