

Facing the Crisis in the Academy: Creating a Culture of Undergraduate Research in Contemporary Institutions of Higher Education

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Traditions and Current Problems

Since Boston Public Latin School was established in 1635, the needs of society have dictated areas of emphasis in American institutions of higher education (Boyer, 1994). In colonial times, the academy's main purpose was to train clergy, civic leaders, cobblers, mechanics, tailors, and other trade skills necessary for community viability and growth. Following the American Revolution, the main task of higher education was to build a nation, figuratively and literally. Poly-technical institutes with specialization training in engineering and construction began to emerge as early as 1824. In 1862, Congress passed the Morrill Land-Grant Act linking higher education to the agricultural and mechanical needs of the developing nation. From World War II through the Korean Conflict, the nation's universities partnered with the federal government to enhance national security and advance our technical know-how. Following successful Soviet space flights in the mid-1950's, colleges and universities broadened their emphasis on the sciences. The 1960's brought civic unrest and the civil rights movement. Interest shifted to the social sciences and other disciplines that sought answers to difficult social problems. Throughout modern history, the story of America and an emphasis on higher learning have been inseparably locked; until recently.

Boyer, in his 1994 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, *Creating the New American College*, identifies a growing disconnect between the practical needs of the nation, and the *credentialing* of students through passive learning practices and the self-preserving activities of the professoriate. In his opening statements, he asked, "How can American higher education successfully contribute to national renewal? Is it possible for the work of the academy to relate more effectively to our most pressing social, economic, and civic problems?" (p. A48). Unfortunately, according to many, in its current state

the answer to this question is most likely a resounding "NO." There are some who speculate that American higher education is in a state of crisis (e.g., Lucas, 1998).

Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stevens (2003) echo Boyer and others who write about the modern-day academy, "As American higher education has evolved from the eighteenth century to the present, moral and civic concerns have moved from its center, inherent in the very concept of a college education, to its margins, segregated from the rest of academic life" (p. 25). All too often projects and activities that produce tangible benefits to those outside the hallowed halls of academe are not evaluated as *scholarly* by institution-based reviewers. Those professors who chose to take their knowledge to the people in practical and applied ways may be putting their academic careers in jeopardy. Boyer (1994) and The Boyer Commission (1998) call for major reform in American colleges and universities, with a return to the responsive service-oriented institution where what a student is learning can be applied in immediate and effective ways to make a difference in the world. They are not alone in their pleas.

As institutions of higher learning have evolved from *universities* whose primary role and mission has traditionally been to impart treasured knowledge to those who earnestly seek it, to the *multiversity* (Kerr, 1963) with many different stakeholders and increased demands for accountability from the public sector and legislative *bean counters*, many voices have arisen calling for critical examination of the status quo and reform into a more responsive system. Books such as *Crisis in the Academy* (Lucas, 1998), *The Future of Higher Education* (Newman, Couturier, and Scurry, 2004), *The Responsive University* (Tierney, 1998), *Universities as if Students Mattered* (Scanzoni, 2005) and *Who's in Charge of America's Research Universities* (Tighe, 2003) are but a handful of the volumes calling for large-scale reform and revision of the undergraduate curriculum. Benitez (1993) explains that there are

multiple problems with the nature and style of teaching in many modern institutions of higher education. He laments,

There is too much rote learning, meaningless content, ineffective methodology, and goals that aim at the wrong target. Content is learned for its own sake rather than as a means to think and inquire. Few connections are made between what is taught and what is important to the student, and consequently, the material remains foreign and devoid of meaning. (p. 100).

Scanzoni (2005) asserts that most undergraduate instruction follows what he refers to as the *teaching paradigm* rooted in theological ideals; one simply listens to the clergy expound in a foreign language and then, on cue, gives the appropriate response with little or no indication that learning has occurred. This is more colloquially known as the *sit and git* or the *jug and mug* style of education, where instructors pour information from the proverbial jug into the waiting and passively expectant mug of the students. Professors lecture, while students ingest and then regurgitate by rote. Critics of this type of education are numerous and have complained for decades. Hamilton Holt, President of Rollins College in 1931, once stated, "Lecture is the mysterious process by means of which the contents of the professor's notebooks are transferred by means of a fountain pen to the pages of the student's notebook without passing through the mind of either." This has not always been the case in high education.

Traditions of Applied Learning in Higher Education

Early practices and philosophies in American education emphasized practical applicability, mentoring relationships, and engaged learning experiences through both formal and informal systems. Throughout the ages, master craftsmen and artisans have trained apprentices working under their direction and learning their craft. Rites of passage included demonstration of the skills and abilities sufficient to warrant independent functioning. Scanzoni (2005) asserts that applied mentoring was a main staple in less formal systems of education as well. He noted that historically, boys learned how to farm, hunt, and fight through their associations with adult role models. Girls, on the other hand, learned about child rearing, food preparation, and gardening watching and working along side female mentors. The concept of mentorship and experiential learning has also long been a staple of more formalized education as well. Drawing from the works of John Dewey, Len Vygotsky, Kurt Lewin, David Kold,

Jean Piaget, and others, many educators have utilized mentoring relationships and experiential learning activities to augment undergraduate student learning and address civic and community needs. In reviewing reports by The Boyer Commission and others, Scanzoni (2005) concluded that in order to better prepare students for modern day demands, institutions must use instructional models patterned after a *learning paradigm* rather than the aforementioned and currently popular teaching paradigm. Within this learning paradigm students, to be successful, must demonstrate that they actually possess the *human capital* skills (the capacity to analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and thereby demonstrate problem solving skills) which signify a quality education. As was routinely practiced in earlier times, engaged learning experiences and mentorship with faculty are central to this pedagogical approach. How, when, and why have we moved from these traditions to the current state of affairs?

How did we arrive at our current state?

Tighe (2003) has identified several issues in higher education that have contributed to many of the problems cited above. He notes that institutions are increasingly accountable to external stakeholders who may or may not be familiar with the demands and expectations of faculty at a college or university. These stakeholders may be putting more pressure on faculty in some institutions to *publish or perish* and to obtain extramural funding for their own research programs or to justify their positions. This has created an environment in which devoting time to mentoring, teaching, and supervising undergraduates may actually be detrimental to the career path of the university professor. Currently, many faculty members function as private entrepreneurs rather than as members of a faculty. Their devotion is to their discipline and others interested in the same type of research that they are doing (cooperative interest or competitive interest), reducing their identification with the institution and their willingness to devote precious time, energy, and attention to undergraduates. To save money and other resources, universities are relying more and more on part time or adjunct faculty to teach classes. These adjuncts often have conflicts of interest with other part-time or full-time work places, leaving the needs of students and the institution lower in their list of priorities. Other factors seem to be involved as well.

Referencing climate change due to the greenhouse effect and global warming, Schoppmeyer (1993) argues that the "climate of higher education is being disturbed by what might be termed 'the dog

house' effect" (p. 129). He finds that the control and standards of higher education are "less the property of faculty and more the property of assorted administrators" (p. 129). He believes problems with rank and tenure processes that value publication records over teaching excellence and service to students and the academy constitute a hallmark change in the culture of higher education over the past few decades. He speculates that much of the research conducted within this set of expectations is "carried on largely to satisfy the administrator who never even reads it" (p. 135). Indeed, a large proportion of scientific findings are published in journal articles that draw limited readership, and most of those who are reading these journals are also doing research work in the same area, thereby reducing the general interest of published material.

Lucas (1998) argues that unchecked growth in the number and sizes of institutions of higher education has contributed to the problem. He states in the introduction to his book *Crisis in the Academy* that if there is a *crisis* in American higher education today, it is "chiefly a crisis of purpose within the university" (p. iv). He suggests that overbuilding and over investing in higher education, and the construction of a system of mass postsecondary education that is widely available with low admissions standards have produced a type of higher education whose success has been a mixed at best. Lucas also points out that despite tremendous growth, "the tacit goal (of higher education) always is to preserve the status quo, or, failing that, to modify it as little as possible" (p. xii). Once a teaching paradigm is adopted to help support a mass influx of undergraduate students, this mode of education becomes a solidly established norm.

What is the impact of these "problems"?

Regardless of the origins of these *problems*, undergraduate students in the American system of higher education deserve better instruction than they are currently receiving. Although many schools profess to nourish higher-order capabilities such as critical thinking, reasoning, working cooperatively, writing clearly, and mastering other forms of communication in their mission and vision statements for undergraduate education, they seldom genuinely achieve these aspirations. The learning paradigm methods that most likely lead students toward achieving these lofty goals are not always reflected in institutional artifacts, policies, and practices. Many outside of the academy are taking note of this alarming trend. Scanzoni (2005) cited a recent

gubernatorial address to the schools in the state system of Virginia that included a simple question about graduates from institutions of higher education. "Do the degrees they receive confirm that they are proficient writers, critical thinkers, and ethical citizens? That is, after all, what you contracted to provide" (p. 126). He presumed the Governor's answer to the rhetorical question was "No". The teaching paradigm has chronically left students unmotivated and lacking a passion for learning. The traditional lecture followed by exam format has proven ineffective and inefficient at producing life long learning. As Scanzoni (2005) poignantly puts it, "after upchucking its contents, the vessel is empty" (p. 158).

Some also speculate that corporate America is currently demanding more from their new hires than the current system of higher education provides. R. Crosby Kemper, Chairman of the United Missouri Bank and Sam Walton's personal banker recently stated, "We don't want people who are trained for specific jobs coming out of the college system. We want people who can read and write, who are literate, who are numerate, who have some sense of engagement with the world." (Cited in Scanzoni, 2005, p. 239). Mr. Kemper and others have made no mention of rote memorization, passively listening to lectures, or getting good marks on multiple choice tests as requisite for their new hires. Fortunately, many have offered suggestions and recommendations to address these new requirements.

Proposed Solutions

The Boyer Commission

The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, formed in 1995 and funded through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, conducted a comprehensive study of research universities in the USA. Their 1998 work, *Reinventing undergraduate education: A blueprint for America's research universities*, also noted that American Research Universities are in a crisis state and that our treatment of undergraduates need be "reinvented through radical reconstruction and implementation of a synergistic system where undergraduate students enter a world of discovery in which they are active participants, not passive receivers" and "collaborative learning experiences provide alternative means to share in the learning experiences..." (p. 9). They promote the idea of creating "student-centered research universities" in which faculty and students are learners and researchers, and whose collaborations and

“interactions make for a healthy and flourishing intellectual atmosphere” (p. 9). They relate that while undergraduate tuition dollars typically fund a large part of the financial support for research programs and graduate education, undergraduate students often get less educational attention than they deserve given the social contract they enter into when they enroll in an American institution of higher learning. The report calls for a new model of undergraduate education that reflects a more symbiotic relationship among all participants in university settings. It also contains some specific ideas for change.

The Boyer Commission (1998) made ten process-oriented recommendations for change in higher education. These recommendations apply across disciplines and across a wide variety of institutions, especially those that are categorized as research universities. The first and most pressing recommendation: “*Make research-based learning the standard*” (p. 15). Citing the work of John Dewey, the commission noted that “learning is based on discovery guided by mentoring rather than on the transmission of information” (p. 15). Involving undergraduates in research projects has multiple benefits. The commission continues, “Inherent in inquiry-based learning is an element of reciprocity: faculty can learn from students as students learn from faculty” (p. 15). If, as is presumed, faculty teaching is enhanced by their own research endeavors, why not expect that student learning might also be enhanced by being a part of a research team. The Commission notes that profound changes in the way undergraduate teaching occurs are necessary. They comment that “traditional lecturing and note-taking, certified by periodic examinations was created for a time when books were scarce and costly; lecturing to large audiences of students was an efficient means of creating several compendia of learning where only one existed before” (p. 16). This teaching paradigm delivery system persisted in to the present largely because it was “familiar, easy, and required no imagination” (p. 16). Placing the type of emphasis on undergraduate research the commission recommends, would “turn the prevailing undergraduate culture of receivers in to a culture of inquirers, a culture in which faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates share an adventure of discovery” (p. 16). The remaining nine Commission recommendations are directly or thematically related to this primary finding.

For example, the Commission recommended that each student should experience an inquiry-based freshman year along with a discovery-based capstone experience. All ten recommendations were designed to help students receive a firm grounding in inquiry-

based learning and assistance in transitioning from the passive teaching paradigm they experienced in public K-12 education. To support these changes, the commission also recommend that universities change faculty reward systems to validate efforts to support these activities, and to recognize faculty who engage in these types of efforts. Many in the field have voiced similar opinions (e.g., Benitez, 1993; Lucas, 1998).

Scanzoni (2005) joins this group of reformers and calls for more research opportunities for undergraduates as a means to remain competitive in a global market economy. He notes that as more technical jobs are outsourced to India and other countries where labor is readily available and overhead is much less expensive, American businesses will look for those who are creative thinkers, architects in their field. Students/graduates who can create novel solutions to solve current problems and to anticipate solutions to new problems as they arise will be in high demand. To be competitive in the global market, students will need to development “*Human Capital Skills* (analysis, evaluation, and synthesis)” (p. 4). He refers to the form of education most likely to produce this type of learning and preparation as *discovery-based learning* and that collaborative research with undergraduates epitomize activities that are discovery-based. “Any type of research is, by its very nature, *learning* based on some sort of active inquiry, exploration, or investigation. Hence, by connecting undergraduates to action research we are, at one fell swoop, involving them in discovery-based learning” (p. xii). He asserts that through engaging undergraduates in discovery-based research projects we are better preparing them to meet the demands of the job market and addressing the needs of society.

Implementing Solutions by Changing Institutional Culture

And who will be responsible for implementing these changes? Administration? The public? Legislators? Students? All of these parties will certainly have some influence on the future direction of curricular-based matters. However, faculty are ultimately responsible for initiating and sustaining these types of adjustments. Tighe (2003) notes, “Whether the faculty are paying enough attention to the curriculum and whether the curriculum is meeting the expectations of society may be questioned, but what is not questioned is that we (faculty) must look to the faculty to define the curriculum” (p. 54) (Parsons mine). Although the Provost and Dean may give broad recommendations for curricular

adjustments, core decisions typically rest with the academic department, which is managed by a department head or department chair who, in most situations, has been appointed or endorsed by faculty members themselves. However, recent trends that lead faculty to be more devoted to their discipline than to their institution, have left the door open for central administration, or required central administration to make major decisions regarding the direction and mission of the university. This translates directly to adjustments in curricula. Tighe also argues that universities are increasingly asked to tune their programs to the social and economic interests of their communities, however, faculty are becoming largely preoccupied with their professional interests and detaching themselves from the governance decisions these additional demands place upon the institution. He noted, "Universities are facing difficult dilemmas that are unlikely to be constructively resolved unless faculty take greater responsibility for the welfare of their institutions and contribute what they can contribute" (p. 66). While faculty are not fully responsible for providing conclusive solutions to the problems facing American Universities today, these problems should be squarely faced with full engagement of the faculty.

Psychology faculty are well prepared to take the lead in creating this new learning environment. Scanzoni (2005) not only views the social sciences as a rich proving ground for these types of changes, but also identifies an obligation for faculty members to facilitate them. Rather than pigeonholing faculty as entrepreneurs or credentialers, the *new college* might invite faculty to consider being coaches: teacher-scholars who cultivate students' curiosities and stimulate them to undertake meaningful discovery-based learning. Bringing about such a transition requires slow and sustained change in what is valued, in what is communicated in an overt and in a covert manner, and in what is reinforced systematically. I am speaking of the need for faculty to work along with staff, administration, legislative bodies, and students to create changes in which a culture of undergraduate research and discovery-based learning becomes the norm in our colleges and universities. Psychology departments are a natural place for this type of cultural transition to occur.

Culture in Higher Education

Culture, according to Raymond Williams (1976), is "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language". He continues to explain, "It has come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct systems of thought." (pp. 76-77). Examining *culture*

specific to institutions of higher education is even more difficult (Chidsey, 1939). While there are numerous resources available that focus on management strategies designed to help organizations and businesses better understand and then make desired changes in their cultures, relatively little information specific to higher education exists. However, just as in organizational settings, the culture of institutions of higher education dictates what is valued, embraced, and sought after; what drives the social contracts, rewards, and punishments; and what lends to the institution's stability and a sense of community (Wagener, 1993). Artifacts, values, norms, and assumptions (Keyton, 2005) reflect a university's culture just as they do in a multi-billion dollar corporation. However, some cultural idiosyncrasies are specific to higher education and convolute the picture even more.

Most likely what a university possesses is a *multiple cultural configuration* Alvesson (2002). Within any university cultures overlap across disciplines, departments, areas of specialization, colleges, etc. making it difficult to precisely define the culture of that particular institution. Van Patten (1993a) noted that higher education in general has a culture; however, there are no single models for explaining or understanding what that culture is. Another complicating factor is that the culture of higher education has seemingly been forced to change very rapidly in the last 20 years or so making it more difficult to fully understand. The recent business model in education has created new demands on institutions of higher education that were seldom seen in earlier times. External stakeholders demand measures of output and productivity even as levels of bureaucracy have increased. Lucas (1998), reviewing the nature of American colleges and universities over the last 50 years, discusses the proliferation of administrators while the relative growth of the professoriate has been somewhat flat. These are but a few ways the culture of higher education in our country has been changing.

Finding ways to meet these new demands while maintaining or even improving the quality of our undergraduate education has created a reactive set of cultural changes within departments, colleges, institutions, and systems of higher education. Many are dissatisfied with the current direction these reactive changes have produced. Van Patten (1993b) argues that, "We can no longer do business as usual. Systematic efforts should be made...to assure a positive, healthy, organizational climate" (p. 80). He identifies efforts made to market more aggressively, to adapt new recruiting strategies, to augment student services, and to play to "legislative perceptions of the most effective utilization of resources and social

priorities” (p. 80) as imperative for future decades of higher education. Growing dissatisfaction with the current direction of higher education, especially undergraduate education, suggests a *zeitgeist* currently exists that could facilitate more planned and deliberate cultural change.

Given the paucity of available information on changing culture within higher education, a great deal can be gleaned from the organizational literature and applied to the college or university setting. An organization’s culture is what sets it apart from its competitors. Consumers often decide which fast food restaurant they patronize not so much for the quality (or lack thereof) of the food, but rather for the environment, customer service, and other amenities (playgrounds, etc.) available. Similarly, organizational culture overtly or tacitly influences choices between banks, grocery stores, and home improvement suppliers, all of which have similar product lines. Establishing a favorable culture could be a distinguishing factor for a college or university and a deciding factor in student (consumer) choice. Being able to cultivate a culture of learning in higher education that satisfies faculty, staff, administrators, students, and other external stakeholders may be of benefit to many institutions. To ensure its survival, higher education must become more sensitive to and dedicated to meeting the needs relevant to our day and time. I believe that incorporating a learning paradigm and involving undergraduates in discovery-based learning moves in this direction. As educators, we must change our culture; but how?

Changing Culture in Higher Education

Cultural change is inevitable; whether it is dramatic revolutionary change a la Kuhn, or slow progressive evolutionary change a la Darwin, change happens. Directing the type of culture change that occurs requires active intervention on the part of those whom the change most directly affects. Addressing needed adjustments in higher education, Tierney (1998) argues that “instead of a managerial fix that seeks to reform this or that part of the organization...fundamental change needs to occur” (p. 3). He continues, “Change ought not to come from around the edges, but rather go to some of our core activities.” (p. 3). He recommends a complete realignment of what is valued and what is practiced at the grass roots level.

Recent models of culture change in higher education have begun to emerge. Educational consultants, administrators, and faculty have implemented various programs designed to produce lasting change in the nature and quality (culture) of higher education. These change programs have

included PPBS (Planning, Programming, and Budgeting Systems), MBO (Management by Objectives), TQM (Total Quality Management), and Strategic Planning, among others. Each has addressed specific types of problems, but has largely fallen short of solving the larger demands of complex academic institutions. As Keyton (2005) and Alvesson (2002) observe, culture change programs imposed by higher management often fall short and fail to garner widespread support. Chaffee (1998), Van Patten (1993b), and others call for a more thoughtful reconsideration of quality management philosophies in which a *customer focus* might be what higher education needs in the long run. However, to be effective these change models must be faculty driven, student oriented, and management supported. According to the organizational management literature, this teamwork approach is more powerful and more effective than mandating cultural change from the top down (Alvesson, 2002). Developing a culture in which meeting customer needs is a priority may address many of the problems inherent in modern-day higher education discussed above.

Of course, moving toward a customer service culture requires that many issues first be addressed. Initially we must ask “Who are our *customers*?” Students, potential students, employers in the region, graduate schools, people in the region who benefit from university programs, public citizens whose tax dollars support public institutions, elected representatives, and others are all potential customers of colleges or universities. Research universities have even more complex sets of *customers*. Chaffee (1998) explains that serving people requires two essential ingredients: a service, and someone who wants or needs the service. Knowing and understanding what our customers want will place us at an advantage.

Caring for our customers is critical in a Total Quality Management approach. Establishing a culture in which some of our customers (employers) benefit from new hires (students/graduates) with practical skills and hands on abilities and other customers (legislators) recognize a higher end tax base in return for their investment. This mutually beneficial scenario has the potential to pay large dividends for our institutions of higher learning. Showing students (customers) that learning can be an enlightening, challenging, rewarding, and fun endeavor inspires life long learning, benefits the public good, and may have a positive influence on alumni donations back to the institution. Incorporating undergraduate research and a discovery-based learning mentality into the culture of an institution can be one avenue toward this end. But

how to facilitate this type of cultural movement is the question.

A *golden rule* for changing culture is stamina (Alvesson, 2002). The idea that quick fixes provide long-term solutions to age-old problems is unrealistic. However, stability sufficient to institutionalize a new culture is becoming increasingly rare. In corporate America, as in our institutions of higher education, promotions from within are becoming the exception rather than the rule. Administrators whose ideas and strategies are successful are sought after and recruited to other places, often for a higher salary than their current company or institution is willing and/or able to pay. Faculty members also seek out opportunities in other institutions that offer more opportunities for advancement or better salary. Long-term projects that cultivate a culture of undergraduate research at an institution must have a broad base to be stable and functional. Multiple faculty and administrators with the same vision facilitate the process. In other words, if the proposed change is the pet idea of just a few individuals the movement will likely fade if they should relocate or retire. Successful efforts seek to institutionalize the new culture at all levels; national, regional, university wide, departmental, and course specific.

Some institutions may wish to follow The Boyer Commission's recommendations (1998) and become more student-centered by emphasizing discovery-based learning through undergraduate research. Creating this type of culture in our institutions of higher education will require stamina, energy, commitment, sacrifice, and creativity from many different sources. Students, faculty, staff, administrators, and external stakeholders are all needed to create the norms, values, and assumptions supportive of this new culture. In this book, we examine successful culture change at various institutions across North America. We include examples from a wide variety of perspectives. We examine national and regional university models, departmental models, models for undergraduate research in individual classes, as well as examples of extramural activities and events that perpetuate and support this type of culture. We hear from faculty and students about their individual roles in creating and sustaining this organizational change. Since financial support is necessary for any type of sustained change, we also have included reports from those who have become expert at seeking, receiving, and disseminating funding for undergraduate research and discovery-based learning. Doing research for its own sake is a noble purpose; however, disseminating the findings to larger audiences adds a sense of realism to the project and serves the needs of the

larger community. We hear how dissemination of research findings has become an institutionalized part of undergraduate research culture. As with any program for improvement, no conclusions can be drawn about success or failure without the appropriate assessments. The last section of the book examines several assessment efforts and their findings.

We hope the following examples of undergraduate research cultures that have grown and prospered in various institutions across the country will provide inspiration, a springboard of ideas, rather than proscriptive recipes to be followed. No one approach will work for every institution; however, taken together, the chapters that follow can serve as a framework upon which to build the values, norms, assumptions, and ultimately the practices that promote a new culture in undergraduate education: a culture that better serves our *customers* than many current practices do.

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