



# Towards Equity in Educational Scholarship: Academic Advancement in Higher Education

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**July 2012**

**CAA Quality Series No. 3**

# Introduction

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**CAA Quality Series No. 3**  
**ISSN 2227-4960**  
**ISBN 978-9948-16-699-3**  
**© 2012 Commission for Academic Accreditation**  
**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
**POBox 45133**  
**Abu Dhabi**  
**United Arab Emirates**  
**www.caa.ae**

## Abstract

As higher education has undergone major change within the last three decades, there is little doubt that the role of faculty has mirrored this change. Faculty have become major stakeholders in developing competent professionals, prime instigators and developers of educational change, and key to the future development of higher educational institutions.

As the higher educational institutions recognise the importance of the faculty educator, they need to explore the way that these key members of the institution are recognised and rewarded through faculty advancement schemes.

This discussion paper considers the present system of academic advancement for faculty and explores a scheme, based upon a defined track system for faculty educators, that allows equity in recognising the quality of education and equality with the usual method of academic advancement through research. The paper does not attempt to undermine the importance of research for higher educational institutions. On the contrary, it places education and educational scholarship on an equal footing with research scholarship, in the hope that through discussion, it may be accepted as a credible activity towards career advancement.

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## I Introduction

Higher education has undergone many changes within the last few decades; a move to outcomes-based education; student-centred learning; the creation of newer models of teaching, learning and assessment based upon sound educational theory and supported by evidence-based research; life-long learning through continuing professional development; social accountability of educational establishments and most importantly the placement of education as a credible and important specialty within its own right.

This blossoming of education as a credible academic activity has promoted debate in many educational organisations, frequently in tertiary establishments such as universities, where historically the teaching and learning activities of faculty have not been given the credit that they deserve, especially in the area of academic advancement. Similar debate has arisen as to what it means to be a faculty member and the roles that this entails; roles that have frequently increased in number, complexity and responsibility. In essence, faculty and to a lesser extent universities are attempting to achieve a balance in scholarship.

"Balance" is a blessing that many faculty seek in their professional lives, but it is one that few believe they can achieve without serious risk to the advancement of their academic careers. Balance is an elusive idea with physical, political, judicial, organisational and moral overtones; frequently overturned by external forces counter-productive to individual ideal. John Ruskin, creator of artistic opinion in 19th-century England, once declared: "*In all perfectly beautiful objects, there is found the opposition of one part to another, and a reciprocal balance.*" (Ruskin 1856) Perhaps it is naive to hope for balance in a 21st-century academic world, where professions are valued so unevenly. But the recent movement to broaden the idea of scholarship in academia is beginning to bear fruit and show that differently balanced careers can indeed be designed and pursued successfully, even in tertiary education

A vigorous debate has arisen since the early 1990s, when Ernest Boyer urged that the nature of academic scholarship be "*creatively reconsidered.*" Convinced that a narrow focus on research productivity had unbalanced the work of the academy, Boyer and his colleagues argued that colleges and universities would not be able to fulfill their traditional missions unless "*they began to expand the definition of scholarship to cover a wider range of faculty activity.*" (Boyer 1990) Thus began the debate as to what constitutes scholarly activity and scholarship and can scholarship be based upon teaching and learning activities rather than the historical model based mainly upon research.

Higher education's teaching and service performance will be strengthened, Boyer suggested, if faculty are encouraged to approach their work in classroom and community with the same care and curiosity that they bring to library, laboratory, studio, or field. Scholarship Reconsidered ( Boyer 1990) proposed "*creativity contracts*" that would make it possible for faculty to progress through activity periods where they would select their focus for inquiry and development according to their own interests and departmental or unit needs. Faculty who take advantage of the

opportunity to develop varied scholarly interests and talents, the report concluded, will enjoy more balanced professional lives, and hence, based upon motivational theory, be more productive in their academic positions.

These ideas, made over twenty years ago, still retain their appropriateness, timeliness and appeal. Market pressures continue to raise the bar for entry to and success in the academic profession, pushing research productivity to new heights, while at the same time new students, new technologies, new education and new needs require more systematic and greater attention to teaching and learning, and closer engagement with the larger community. (GCSA 2010) In this recent era, many tertiary educational institutions have revised their guidelines to include a wider range of scholarship in their systems for faculty roles and rewards. However, the question remains as to whether faculty, departments, and institutions will actually take the risks that embracing new work inevitably entails, effectively exchanging old models of academic advancement for new and taking the opportunity to recognise the growing importance of teaching.

Much work has already taken place in the field of recognising education as a scholarly activity, but an important step forward has been the recognition that teaching and learning has gone "meta" (Hutchings and Shulman 1999). That is, teaching and learning that involves intensive inquiry into learning, is researched and based on established theory, and is being made public in a way that can be critiqued, reviewed, built upon, and improved. Like any body of creative intellectual work, however, this scholarship is varied in content and form. For some, it involves reflection on and documentation of teaching and learning in their classrooms, shared and discussed with campus colleagues; one would consider this to be scholarly activity rather than scholarship. But for faculty who have achieved national prominence in teaching and learning, it also includes well-documented classroom innovation, curriculum development, new resources for students and colleagues, obtaining grants, publication in peer-reviewed journals, presentations at conferences and other universities, Web activities, workshops for fellow faculty, participation on national panels and in curriculum projects, as well as elaborations, collaborations and creating new and innovative initiatives and curricula programmes; many would consider this scholarship. (McLean et al 2008, McGaghie and Webster 2009, Lieff 2010, Steinert 2010, Steinert 2012)

The demands upon faculty created by the increased complexity of education is perceived as challenging, and many faculty feel that they are not being provided with enough support, nor afforded the academic credibility they need, to maintain their role, especially within the competitive environment of a tertiary educational organisation where, historically, research has frequently been the main and sometimes soul important aspect of career advancement.

Since its inception in 1997, the University of Sharjah's vision has been to be a leading higher educational institution, distinguishing and differentiating itself by the quality of its educational programmes. What has been achieved over the last fifteen years has exceeded what was originally expected. The University now has 10,000 students in 14 colleges, distributed over three campuses, together with the development of varied

and innovative programmes leading to the acquisition of master and doctoral degrees. Establishing the medical campuses in 2005, with its colleges, institutions, training centres and attached hospitals has created a great impact on health professions education, training and research. The medical college has distinguished itself by adopting a total integrated PBL curriculum.

All universities will have in their mission statements clichés of excellence in education, research and community services. The problem is how to translate these meanings into a strategic direction, actions, programs and cultural changes within the academic environment.

The University has to mobilize its key assets, namely its faculty, its students and its organisational management, through the creation of an “ownership” quality that allows a sharing of the implementation procedure. The University must nurture an all-inclusive environment whereby all feel a sense of belonging and empowerment. Already written into the University regulations is the need for faculty to be excellent in education, research and community service, in order to fulfil the mission and vision. Concurrent with this and in keeping with an “ownership” quality expected of faculty, is the need for the University to actively provide support in these three areas.

Most faculty, and this is evident in many parts of the world, are driven by their internal motivation to succeed in their specific area(s) of expertise, inspired by their strengths and interests, and driven frequently by external forces that support and encourage their actions. Each faculty has specific interests, some are excellent teachers, others excellent researchers, some excellent service providers, whilst some are combinations of all three. Frequently the pressures exerted in an academic environment drive faculty down just one of these three avenues. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and now more than ever before, any educational institution needs to recognise this trichotomy of interest, and, in doing so, recognise, support and address the complexity of faculty roles and responsibilities.

At the present time, all University of Sharjah faculty are judged for academic advancement mainly on their research ability. This paper does not wish to play down the importance of research: it recognises how any subject advances through research. However it wishes to raise the importance of teaching and learning as a credible academic activity and suggests that the University, as well as all other institutions, now have a responsibility to give credit for that activity. This credit should be able to be judged of high enough merit to form a basis for career advancement.

We would wish that other higher educational institutions consider this discussion document in the light of their situation and contribute to the wider debate on this matter.

## 2 Aim

Although this paper concerns all faculty and places equal importance on teaching within all subjects, the authors' main field is in healthcare in general and medicine specifically. Hence the following suggestions for an academic track in education refer directly to the faculty within a College of Medicine and Health Sciences. However, it is equally possible that the model of academic progression described below can be applied to other university faculties and institutions – indeed to all offices of higher education.

The paper will compare the traditional model used presently in most medical schools and colleges and demonstrate how that model must change to provide support for its faculty who are providing an excellent service in teaching, learning and assessment, providing scholarship within their speciality of education and maintaining a high educational profile amongst their peers.

## 3 Traditional Model for Career Advancement

As alluded to previously, the traditional model seen in most medical schools and many universities demonstrates and supports a strong emphasis on research and research publication. Faculty are expected to garner research funding from high profile sponsors, and expected to publish in recognised journals, being frequently judged on the impact factor of the journal rather than its relevance to the field of interest. This model of achievement and hence academic progression is in stark contrast to the core purpose of the medical school, which is to produce high quality graduates through top quality teaching, learning and assessment activities. It equally fails to recognise that the core income for the school is frequently related to its number of students.

Conflict of interest frequently arises between teaching, research and service leading to faculty having to adopt a hierarchical choice in their career, driven by a promotions policy bias. Hence teaching is not given its proper value or weighting and this frequently means that high quality teachers leave teaching in search of more recognised and better rewarded opportunities.

A strong need by the university to “measure” also adds to the demotivation of its teachers, because research output is (seen to be) the easiest to measure. The attainment of research grants in the area of education is difficult. Publication in educational journals frequently takes a back-seat in terms of impact factor (an important but unfounded marker for universities) because of the newness of the speciality in this early development phase of modern education.

Hence the problems with that system can be placed in distinct categories:

- The development and promotion of a two tier staffing reward and scholarship advancement system between research and education.
- A decrease in the status of education and educators and the development of a second class career choice, because of the lack of opportunities for career advancement.
- Education is not seen as an academic career.
- The limited opportunities for publication are not recognised although the competition for publication in educational journals is as competitive as any other journals, frequently more so.

## 4 The New World of Medical Education

The development seen in medical education over the last twenty years has been tremendous. The philosophy of teaching has changed from taking a didactic approach to teaching to a more inclusive approach to student learning. This places greater emphasis upon student-centeredness and student empowerment and ownership. The teacher becomes equally more important and responsible: becoming more of a facilitator for effective learning, playing a greater role in and having more responsibility for the final graduate product and becoming more accountable to the community at large. Greater emphasis is given to the different teaching methods and modalities, all underpinned by theory and evidence-based research. Assessment has become equally important, again using multiple modalities and creating assessment methods to measure true competence in the real world of the workplace, with high importance given to effective feedback in driving assessment for learning. This again places the teacher in a very important, influential, accountable and strategic position.

This recognition of the importance of education can be judged by the following:

- Most university schools or colleges of medicine have incorporated a department or Institute of medical education within their faculty structure. Each of these departments is based upon a traditional academic structure, headed by a professor of medical education and staffed by senior and junior Lecturers in medical education. Frequently external staff are attached in relation to their teaching commitments.
- Chairs of medical education are increasing throughout the world. The holders of the chairs are expected to have higher degrees in medical education.
- There are at present 46 recognised global journals producing high quality papers in medical education research and development. These are competitive in their approach to learning, peer-reviewed and with an increasing impact

factor which will comfort those believing in its value. Their competitiveness is measured by most of them having an acceptance rate of between 10 and 30%.

- The advancement of the science of medical education is through understanding of educational theory with the development of new methods based upon grounded theory and frequently supported by colleagues from education, educational psychology and psychometricians.
- The emergence of high impact, competitive global conferences covering all aspects of medical education and attracting large numbers of participants.
- The development of professional associations providing fora for academic discussion and support.
- An increasing number of providers creating opportunities for educational research grants, although these are likely never to reach the larger amounts of money seen in clinical / science-based research.
- An increasing number of researchers out with the medical community wishing to be involved in medical educational research.
- An increasing number of universities now providing staff development programmes at the master and doctoral levels (presently there are 76 organisations world-wide providing master courses in medical education, a ten-fold increase in the last 15 years) ( Tekian & Harris 2012).
- Many countries, especially the USA, UK and in Northern Europe, are creating teaching fellowships and academic pathways in education for junior graduates in medicine. These give opportunity to parallel track their careers and also improve their basic skills in medical education.
- An increasing number of universities now require teaching qualifications for all faculty engaged with students, thus beginning to demonstrate the importance of education.
- Many regulatory and accrediting bodies are now insisting on a defined educator being the faculty that teaches. This is not only increasing the importance of education but equally placing great responsibility upon and giving recognition to the teacher.

The time has now come for equality in career advancement for those faculty who are involved in the core and very important responsibility of education and of developing the graduates of the future: graduates who are “fit to practice” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a result of high quality education.

## 5 The Faculty Track System for Career Advancement

At present this model has been designed to be used within the university of Sharjah School of Medicine and Health Sciences. However, the authors believe it can easily be adapted for faculty working in other colleges of the University.

### 5.1 *The program outline*

- Faculty will be able to choose which of either research or education they consider or wish to be their main academic strength. This will be decided either on appointment or subsequently at annual appraisal meetings. Faculty will define their expected growth and in which area. These intentions will then be converted into expected and achievable targets.
- Faculty will be able to choose which academic track they wish to be academically evaluated on.
- Research and education tracks will be treated with equal importance
- Faculty therefore will be either Researcher / Educator (in which the faculty's main strength is research), or vice versa, Educator / Researcher in which the faculty member has chosen education as the main parameter through which their academic advancement will be measured. This model accepts that academia is a balance between research and teaching, but allows faculty to maintain and demonstrate strength in one particular area.
- A faculty member can also make a case for inclusion of their clinical speciality as part recognition for career advancement. However, a clear decision must be made as to which category the bulk of their scholarship belongs.

### 5.2 *The Educator / Researcher track*

Since this paper is setting the stage for discussion around academic advancement in education, it will only provide details for the faculty member who has chosen education as their main area of scholarly activity and scholarship.

- The faculty Educator / Researcher scholarship will be considered and measured through a broad approach to their educational activities (teaching and learning plus assessment, plus scholarship in the field ) across five equal domains of key activities:
  - Teaching & Learning,
  - Assessment,
  - Curriculum design, development & implementation,
  - Faculty development, and

- Organisational management within the curriculum.  
(Glassick, 2000, Hamdy & Agamy, 2011)
- New faculty, who have chosen this career track will be expected to begin their careers working in usually one or two domains. As they progress to senior faculty they will be expected to have activities in all five domains, although they may not necessarily be in equal proportions.
- Effort in any domain can demonstrate a scholarly activity that may extend to educational scholarship (see explanation of scholarly activity and scholarship earlier).
- The criteria of Quantity, Quality and Engagement will be used to evaluate each domain
  - Quantity: measurable numbers of scholarly activities (Hamdy & Agamy, 2011).
  - Quality: the level of standard achieved

Faculty in the Educator / Research track will need to be able to provide evidence not only of educational activities (scholarly activity), but be able to demonstrate evidence of impact of their activities (scholarship). Whereas scholarly activities will frequently reflect numerical data (number of lectures / presentations, hours spent in preparation of teaching and assessment activities, laboratory practicals, PBL tutorials etc), quality markers will be used to enhance their importance. Such markers will include:

- the acquisition of high quality knowledge content;
- the ability to apply the knowledge to standard classroom problems;
- the ability to apply the knowledge to novel types of problems and situations; and
- an ability to become self-directed independent life-long learners.

They will be expected to be able to trigger learning through:

- formulation of outcomes, objectives and related learning activities;
- construction of handouts, selection of readings / resources;
- creating innovation in the classroom / learning environment;
- designing assignments and projects;
- providing effective and purposeful feedback to students;
- designing remediation / support exercises; and
- creating novel and diverse methods of assessment.

The Educator / Researcher's personal characteristics should demonstrate:

- a deep knowledge and understanding of the subject matter;
- a strong commitment to teaching;
- an ability to continually seek ways to improve, innovate, and be up-to-date;

- a strong passion for the subject;
- an ability to maintain a high level of enthusiasm for teaching; and
- an ability to appropriately understand and empathise with students.

They should become an inspirational role model to students and be eminently approachable.

The scholarship in education will be represented by evidence shown through an engagement model that demonstrates:

- a scholarly approach to personal learning (learning from literature and using best evidence);
- a scholarly approach to publication and personal profile;
- creation of peer-reviewed, public domain; and
- purposeful publications from which others can learn.

A scholarly approach and scholarship could also be assessed using Glassick's (1997 & 2000) six criteria of:

- an ability to set clear goals;
- recognising adequate preparation in educational activities;
- using appropriate methods in educational activities;
- creating effective and innovative educational presentations;
- producing significant and effective results; and
- having an ability to reflect and critique personal activities.

At a higher level of scholarship will be the impact of the faculty's teaching activities and measuring its effectiveness (Kirkpatrick 2006): the effect of the educational activities and engagement with the broader community of educators and in international recognition, plus publication in global journals in medical education.

It is important that all of these processes of scholarly activity and scholarship are placed under a quality assurance umbrella.

## 7 Summary

This paper suggests that for too long the university structure has based academic performance and career advancement mainly in the area of research. This has created a two-tier system in which the essential and core activity of teaching has taken second place. As the art and science of education has grown, universities are in danger of not recognising the importance of education as a scholarly activity, nor of its scholarship, and are in danger of failing to maintain and retain, through lack of academic recognition, a key cohort of academic faculty who provide an essential activity.

This paper suggests an outline strategy of how a university or other higher education institution can correct this situation through a system of recognising educational activity as a commendable academic activity and using quality markers in education to aid the academic progression of educational faculty.

As authors we hope that this paper promotes discussion within other higher educational institutions, and that recognition for educational scholarship becomes an important issue of debate.

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