

Post-Graduate Research in the Context of the Need for New Norms of Scholarship

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in the Proceedings of the Seminar on Post-graduate Education, University Grants Commission, 2004

Introduction

The theme of the seminar today is postgraduate research in national development. The most important outputs of post-graduate research programs, doctoral research programs in particular, are individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to conduct original research on their own.

In Sri Lanka, demand for post-graduate trainees from research-based programs come from the university system itself. The demand is highest in social science and humanities. A recent analysis of the social science and humanities faculties in our university system showed that 38% of the faculty members in the social science and humanities one university received their bachelor's degree and their highest post-graduate qualification and were employed by the same university, most likely by same department.¹ Seventy Five percents of these academics held no more than a master's degrees as their highest qualification. These data are illustrative of the fact that it is hard for junior faculty in arts, humanities and social sciences to secure places for post-graduate training abroad, and there is dearth of academics who are capable of supervising doctoral graduate work.

Doctoral training requires academic supervisors who are active researchers and can produce works of international caliber. The important criterion here is quality not quantity. The root of the problem may lie with the fact that the university system in Sri Lanka is funded and structured for undergraduate education and we have imposed on top of that system an outdated concept of scholarship which requires that all university teachers have to be active researchers. In a resource strapped environment the end result is an academia that is not performing in either function.

Current thinking in scholarship has moved far beyond narrow definitions of scholarship to recognize and reward teaching-intensive forms of scholarship. In this paper I draw on some new concepts of scholarship and information from other university systems to make the argument that if we are to further the cause of post-graduate training in this country, we first need to give due recognition and rewards to all forms of scholarship, in particular teaching-intensive forms of scholarship, and limit the expectations for supervision of original research to academics who choose to focus on a more research-intensive path of scholarship.

If we do not differentiate between different forms of scholarship, we will continue to have the present untenable situation where those who aspire to be true scholars –whether they are research-intensive scholars or teaching-intensive scholars-- will be frustrated and those who are not overly committed will have legitimate excuses for underperformance.

In the next few sections, I will elaborate on the concept of scholarship, distinguish between the concept of scholarship in teaching-intensive and research-intensive contexts, discuss what we may learn from scholarship as practiced in other countries and how we might go about implementing some of these ideas here in the Sri Lankan university system.

Scholarship in universities, evolution over time

Scholarship in its narrowest sense is the expertise in a subject area. The concept of scholarship in the academia has evolved over time. In the early universities, teaching was viewed as a vocation—a sacred calling—the purpose of which was to build character of the new generations and prepare them for civic and religious leadership. Scholarship then was a teaching-intensive activity.

¹ Gamage, Sujata (2003) Developing an Academic Resource Base for the Arts, social science and humanities Streams in the Universities, Report to University Gants commission, April.

The idea that university teachers should be researchers dates back to the old Humboldtian ideal of the early 1800s. According to the Humboldtian ideal, being a university teacher meant that you were both the discoverer and the disseminator. This ideal was first institutionalized in Germany with the Humboldt University of Berlin in 1810 and in the US with the establishment of the John Hopkins University in 1876. John Hopkins University model gave rise to a series of similar universities that were later termed research universities. In these research universities, the academics concentrated on their research explorations with help of doctoral students, and undergraduate colleges functioned alongside the post-graduate programs. The same academics would teach at both levels. By the late nineteenth century this model of university education had taken firm root in the American higher education system and research productivity had become the yardstick of scholarship in research universities.

Co-existence of research-intensive scholarship and teaching-intensive scholarship

As the research-intensive universities increased in number in the US, there has evolved a parallel universe of teaching-intensive universities. These are mostly private or non-profit institutions. The US News and World Report on Best Colleges for 2004 listed 1362 higher education institutions in the US. Only 248 of those (or 18%) were identified as doctoral institutions or research-intensive institutions, the other 82% institutions being more teaching-intensive institutions.

To see what teaching-intensive or research-intensive means in practice, let us consider a subset of higher education institutions in the US, say, the state of Ohio, one of the 50 states in the US for which higher education data are available on the Web. The higher education system in Ohio is made up of 4-year universities and colleges offering bachelor's degrees and 2-year colleges offering associate degrees. Details for the 4-year degree-granting institutions are given in the Table.

Of the 66 degree-granting institutions only twelve are research-intensive. The research-intensive institutions enroll about 67% of the undergraduate population and account for 98% of the federal research grants coming to the academic institutions in Ohio and 98% of all the academic publications in Ohio. The teaching-intensive institutions enroll 33% of the undergraduate population. True to their mission these institutions maintain a low student to teacher ratio and reward their faculty for teaching related scholarly activities not necessarily their research productivity.

The market for undergraduate students in the US is very competitive—i.e. there are more spaces in higher education institutions than the nationally available pool of degree-seeking individuals. A testimony to the quality of the education offered by teaching-intensive institutions is the fact that families living within the state or out of the state may opt to spend an average \$16,000 per year per student to send their children to these private teaching-intensive institutions. This rate of tuition is lower than the average of \$14,000 charged by the research-intensive universities for out-of-state students. The percentage of in-state students attending these small teaching-intensive universities could be much higher if not for the fact that all the research-intensive universities are also public institutions that are supported by the state and hence are able to offer much lower tuition rates for their in-state students.

TABLE: The Higher Education system in Ohio, United State²

² NOTES

- a) Most of the research-intensive universities are public institutions (10 out of 12) and almost all of teaching-intensive universities are private (51 out of 54).
- b) The stand-alone medical and other professional schools as well theological colleges are not part of analysis. Campuses affiliated to public institutions are considered as 2-year institutions. In total Ohio has close to 100 four-year degree-granting institutions.
- c) Some of the doctoral institutions that accounted for less than 100 publications during 2001-3 are included under the teaching-intensive category.
- d) The total undergraduate enrollment in these institutions in the Fall of 2002 was 324,000.

SOURCES

Ohio Board of Regents, Barron's Directory, 2003, US National Science Foundation Survey of Federal Research Expenditures, 1999, and Science Citation Index, 2002-3

	# of Institutions	Share of Undergraduate Enrollment	Average Cost of Tuition per year	Share of Federal R&D	Share of publications, 2001-2003	Student/Faculty Ratio
Universities (Research-intensive)	12	67%	\$ 14,184	98%	98%	17
Universities (Teaching-intensive)	54	33%	\$ 16,073	2%	2%	13

An important feature in the differentiated system as found in the US, the research-intensive universities play an important role in the maintenance of a parallel system of teaching-intensive universities. Many of the faculty in teaching-intensive institutions holds doctoral degrees from research-intensive universities. The scholarly beginning of academics in the teaching-intensive universities is the research-intensive universities.

Reconsideration of Scholarship, Ernest Boyer, 1990

The 1950s saw the rapid expansion of undergraduate education in the US and by 1980s the research universities were feeling the pressure of balancing the needs of their research mission with their undergraduate teaching mission. Institutions with large endowments somehow manage to keep their undergraduate classes small so that the academics can excel in research and supervise graduate students but pay attention to undergraduate students as well. Most of the public research universities and other less well-endowed institutions are forced to maintain a high undergraduate population to meet the costs of maintaining the institutions and university faculty members often find it difficult to fulfill their dual obligations as researchers and teachers. Given that the yardstick for evaluating performance is research productivity, undergraduate education often receives the short-shrift in these institutions.

A special report authored by Ernest L. Boyer and titled "Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate"³ was a reaction to the situation in the research universities. In his report, Boyer argued:

We believe the time has come beyond the tired old teaching vs. research debate and give the familiar and honorable term 'scholarship' a more broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work. Surely, scholarship means engaging in original research. But the work of the scholar also means stepping back from one's investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively to students. Specifically, we conclude that the work of the professoriate might be thought of as having four separate, yet overlapping functions these are: the scholarship of **discovery**; the scholarship of **integration**; the scholarship of **application** and the scholarship of **teaching**.

A Reinterpretation of Scholarship, UK, 2000-2004

Boyer's ideas were widely acclaimed and quoted repeatedly, but research universities in the US have continued to value research over teaching. One of the reasons why Boyer's ideas did not materialize as new practices is probably because it is difficult to be both a research-intensive scholar supervising doctoral

³ Ernest L. Boyer (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990. 147 pp..

students and a teaching-intensive scholar who pays attention to undergraduate education. A practicable approach to the issue of scholarship is found in the ideas expressed in more recent policy document from the Higher Education funding commission of England (HEFCE).

According to the HEFCE's definition of scholarship,⁴ a scholar is someone with

- Ability for critical appraisal
- Breadth and depth of knowledge about a subject
- Ability to integrate and synthesize knowledge to educate and to apply.

In this more practical notion of scholarship, one can be a scholar without being actively engaged in discovery type research. This notion is in contrast to Boyer's assertion that "[s]urely, scholarship means engaging in original research". Experience with original research is necessary for developing the ability for critical appraisal, but for continuity in scholarly activity, it may be sufficient to keep up to date on the knowledge of the subjects and integrate and synthesize knowledge for education and dissemination.

The impetus for HEFCE policy paper is the realization that research resources are spread thin across the university system in UK and that the benefits of research do not accrue to undergraduates in a significant way. After the polytechnics joined ranks of universities in the 1992, the institutions that considered themselves research-intensive institutions swelled to over 100 institutions granting doctorates. Publish or perish values were now shared by a larger community all in competition with each other to secure external funding for research. A limited amount of money had to be shared among many and the result has been an expanded post-graduate education system that is of lower quality and a weakened undergraduate education.

Lessons for Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka we have a situation where we are trying to maintain the Humboldtian concept of higher education within a system that has expanded without differentiation and without adequate resource inputs for either teaching or research. All 13 universities in the Sri Lankan higher education system are, in principle, universities of equal standing, and any attempt to differentiate among those at this stage would be considered an injustice to the newly established universities. Yet, it would be irresponsible on the part of policymakers to ignore trends world over and continue to perpetuate the myth that all university teachers can be researchers. By continuing to impose unrealistic expectations on our academics we are encouraging poor quality research and discouraging those academics who would otherwise excel as scholars in a teaching-intensive setting.

Some of the actions that can be taken within the current realities can be listed as follows.

- Establish norms for a differentiated system of scholarship for academic staff where research-intensive scholarship is distinguished from teaching-intensive scholarship
- Reward excellence in each type equally
- Leverage additional resources to establish clusters of research excellence and clusters of teaching excellence
- Create the conditions for these clusters to interact with each other and with the larger university community.

A team made up of individuals from the Research Promotion Center at the University Grants commission and the Quality Assurance Committee for the university system could be a vehicle for initiating and implementing these ideas. This team will not be alone in their task. Education systems all over the world are addressing these issues and finding creative ways to define what it is to be a scholar in the universities of today and tomorrow.

⁴ HEFCE Fundamental Review of Research Policy and Funding, Sub-group to consider the interaction between teaching, research and other activities of HEIs, Final report