

Categories of Professional Academic Work  
and its Evaluation in the Graduate School of Education

Scholarship  
Professional Service  
Teaching

Criteria for Evaluation

Within a major public research university, scholarship will always be the key factor in the evaluation of the performance of all faculty. Within the Graduate School of Education, a professional school with clear and significant responsibilities to the field, attention to all of the categories of scholarship, professional service, and teaching is desirable. We anticipate that quite different individual profiles of accomplishment in these separate areas might equally merit favorable evaluation. What is clear is that **outstanding** performance in at least one of the areas of scholarship, professional service, or teaching will be required for promotion.

There are three criteria for documenting excellence in these categories:

1. **Quality** of the work;
2. **Relevance** of the work to the candidate's field, to the broader professional community of educators and educationists, and to the Graduate School of Education;
3. **Impact** on the field and the broader professional community.

There must be in the candidate's dossier clear, ample, reliable documentation of quality **and** relevance **and** impact. Overall, intellectual quality and originality of the work are of primary importance in decisions of appointment, promotion, and tenure. In addition to the traditional evidence provided by publication, externally sponsored programs are another way of documenting evidence of quality, relevance and impact. Projects that have no impact on others similarly engaged or create an impact based upon inferior but popular work on a trendy issue do not merit favorable evaluation.

Scholarship

Scholarship in a major public research university professional school of education takes three related forms:

1. **Original Research**

Research is to be understood as systematic investigation leading to the discovery of new knowledge. Such knowledge might take the form of scientifically verified empirical findings, theoretically justified conceptual insights, or methodology for analysis and interpretation.

Examples of research might include: an experiment yielding results suggesting class size has a direct effect on school achievement in a given population; a series of clinical cases providing evidence that previous learning disabled diagnostic categories were inadequate and misleading;

a persuasive and useful new way of explaining the causes of the rise of bureaucracy in 19th century New York public schools; a cross-national study of the relations between various kinds of entrance exams and exit exams and state economic policies.

Quality of original research is assessed in terms of originality, intellectual rigor, and breadth. Judgments of quality and impact are based primarily on consideration of the candidate's most important publications. (The counting and weighing of routine scholarship--or professional service--carries little weight in decisions of appointment, promotion, and tenure.) Such consideration takes into account the source of publication, citations of the research in the work of other scholars of repute, as well as expert opinion solicited by the department or the dean. These data will also tell much about the relevance of the research to the field and the broader educational community.

## **2. Integration and Synthesis of Existing Knowledge**

Integration and synthesis are the products of analyzing and presenting knowledge in new and effective ways.

Examples include: software designed for teaching; a critical overview of the current state of work in a field of study; a textbook written from a fresh perspective; case studies and related materials that illustrate important issues; books and articles that improve lay understanding of some aspect of education.

Even though didactic in purpose, this kind of intellectual work can be assessed for originality and effectiveness in approach, and success in better communicating the content of a discipline. Authors must demonstrate mastery of the research done by others, and beyond that, skill in fitting the pieces together so they form a whole, a pattern, or a trend, which is within the grasp of their readers. Again, source of publication, citations and reputation in the field are indicators of quality, impact, and relevance.

## **3. Application of Research to Consequential Problems**

Application requires the judicious evaluation of available research both for quality and appropriateness to the issues in question and the technical ability to make the research work in a practical context.

Examples of application might include preparing carefully annotated policy documents; testing new materials, procedures, techniques, etc., against established standards; evaluating programs of teaching, learning, counseling for their effectiveness; creating a new test or assessment procedure; or designing new programs in the light of new understanding.

Evaluation in this area is perhaps more directly pragmatic than the others. The successful use of research to solve a problem means that one actually solves the problem. Or, upon failing, one can say how and why the research was inadequate to the purpose or was not successfully applied because of external constraints. Relevance may be assessed by the importance of the problem addressed and impact by the extent to which the solution has wide applicability.

## **Professional Service**

Professional service here is expressly limited to mean work that draws upon one's professional expertise, aimed at improving society's welfare, and should not be confused with "service" activities, such as departmental or Graduate School of Education committee membership. The

aims of professional service are similar to those of teaching and the application of research, but the audience may be different.

Typical examples include: serving on a national or state commission or task force; consulting with or providing technical assistance for social or governmental agencies; doing clinical work with individuals; providing staff development; offering instruction in the form of workshops and other forms of continuing education; editing journals, magazines, newsletters; holding office in a professional organization.

An important, though perhaps indirect, indication of quality in professional service is the choice of client and project. The degree and extent of impact can be discerned by the level of importance of the service, e.g., national, state, local, and by how long-lasting such client satisfaction and peer recognition turn out to be. A long disparate list of routine service activities will not be weighed as heavily as a lesser amount of sharply focused, original, widely-recognized work. Finally, GSE must determine the relevance of the work to the mission of the School.

### Teaching

Teaching involves, at a minimum, making good decisions about how students learn. Graduate students depend upon their professors to direct them to the best examples of current theory, research, and professional practice in their field, and to guide them in the interpretation of these materials. Teaching, of course, is not limited to the classroom, and classroom teaching is no substitute for the personal guidance of an experienced mentor in preparing students to become independent scholars. An important form of teaching, therefore, is the supervision of independent study and research.

Two major aspects of teaching--process and content--should be evaluated. Process--getting the message across to students--is perhaps best evaluated by student assessment. Evaluation of the quality and relevance of content will depend considerably upon evaluation of the teacher's own scholarship, be it in research, integration and synthesis, or application. Impact is more difficult to assess in teaching, but some indicators such as student publications and presentations, and the employment of advisees may help.

All teachers should, of course, meet classes as scheduled, present an organized, intellectually appropriate course of study in a manner that can be understood by students, be accessible to students during posted office hours, carry an appropriate number of advisees, and contribute to the shaping of curriculum in areas of one's expertise.

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In addition to distinguished performance in one or more of the categories of professional academic work just described, regular service is expected of all faculty as part of what it is to be a member of GSE. Such service may be concentrated in, or distributed among the departments, GSE, the university, the local schools and other social service institutions of Western New York. Such service contributes to the good of the whole. However, it cannot substitute for the professional academic work described above.

April 8, 1992