

**CANR Initiative: Strengthening faculty scholarship across the mission 1/25/08
(revised)**

Background

During Fall Semester 2007 there was a robust discussion of scholarship – what it is and how it might be evaluated – in our College. This discussion was prompted by a call from the Dean's Office: the need to sharpen our ability to fulfill mission-related obligations as we do a better job of acknowledging and rewarding faculty for the work they do.

While faculty at MSU and CANR are expected to make contributions through research that move the frontiers of knowledge in their respective fields, they also undertake a variety of other work –undergraduate education, graduate education, and an array of Extension outreach and engagement responsibilities, on campus, around the state, across the nation, and all over the world – that often falls outside of the conventional way that we acknowledge and reward faculty for work in the research domain. It appears to some that research has become (or is becoming) the primary frame of reference for evaluating and rewarding faculty work. At issue, then, is how do we judge the quality of work undertaken across the mission (not just in research)? And, what does scholarship look like when it is expressed outside of research?

While these are important questions, it became apparent quickly that there are differences of opinion about what scholarship is and how it might be evaluated across the mission. For example, some saw virtually any work undertaken by faculty members – when that work is prepared and deployed thoughtfully (e.g., teaching an undergraduate class) – as scholarship. Others saw teaching classes as an important scholarly activity, but not as scholarship, which they saw as creating something new for a body of knowledge through peer-validation.

In addition, two primary concerns were expressed about the discussion of scholarship, generally. First, there were concerns that these discussions might lead to "one size fits all" metrics across CANR –applied to everyone, everywhere irrespective of potential differences in the work they do (e.g., teaching a study abroad course vis-a-vis involving students in an engagement experience overseas). In other words, while there is not likely to one answer to any core question (e.g., What is quality of Extension work), there probably are multiple answers to any question, with each answer fitting the nature of the work undertaken and/or the academic context in which it is being exercised. Second, concerns were expressed that emphasizing scholarship across the mission might diminish the value of work associated with teaching classes, doing Extension, and undertaking other non-research roles. If we were to emphasize work associated with scholarship in teaching, for instance, would that emphasis diminish the value of teaching classes? If so, then it might be better to have these discussions at all.

Points of Agreement

Interestingly, while no consensus emerged about how to frame the discussion, including how to define basic terms, there was general agreement about a framework— advanced in first form in September that stayed intact as the semester-long discussion unfolded: **1) for evaluating the quality and impact of teaching, research, and Extension-outreach-engagement activities; and 2) for defining and evaluating the quality and impact of scholarship associated with teaching, research, and Extension-outreach-engagement.** Both outcomes seemed to be worthy in intent and outcome. The dual focus is expressed in the text that follows.

In all activities associated with teaching, research and Extension-outreach-engagement, faculty members undertake work that is informed by an academically recognized body of knowledge, undertaken in a scholarly manner, and evaluated as having quality with impact.

Scholarship across the mission – irrespective of whether it is associated with teaching, research or Extension-outreach-engagement – involves creating something new and valuable (that is, makes a contribution) in a disciplinary, professional, multidisciplinary, or interdisciplinary field; having the work validated such as by peers; and making the work “public,” that is, is available in an academically legitimate location for use in teaching, research, or Extension-outreach-engagement work.

Undergirding this two-pronged framework—again without much disagreement, although with interpretive differences— were statements authored at various times by faculty committees at the University and CANR levels, respectively.

From MSU policy:

<http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/facacadhandbooks/facultyhandbook/index.htm>.

Through its faculty, MSU will create knowledge and find new and innovative ways to extend its applications, to serve Michigan, the nation, and the international community. The faculty must infuse cutting-edge scholarship into the full range of our teaching programs. At MSU, faculty are expected to be both active scholars and student-focused, demonstrating substantial scholarship and ability to promote learning through our on-campus and off-campus education and research programs. The essence of scholarship is the thoughtful discovery, transmission, and application of knowledge, including creative activities, that is based in the ideas and methods of recognized disciplines, professions, and interdisciplinary fields. What qualifies an activity as scholarship is that it be deeply informed by the most recent knowledge in the field, that the knowledge is skillfully interpreted and deployed, and that the activity is carried out with intelligent openness to new information, debate and criticism.

From CANR Promotion and Tenure Committee Policy:

In order to evaluate a faculty member, the Committee defines scholarly achievements as a creative work that is peer reviewed and publicly disseminated. As such there are six forms of scholarship: discovery of knowledge; multidisciplinary integration of knowledge; development of new technologies, methods, materials or uses; application of knowledge to problems; dissemination of knowledge; and interpretation in the arts. This definition can be applied to teaching, research, extension/outreach, service and administration duties. The Committee is interested not only in how faculty invest their time, the activities in which they participate, and who they reach, but also in the short, medium and long term results and impacts of the faculty's scholarly efforts.