Faculty Members’ Scholarly Learning Across Institutional Types

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges to Faculty Scholarly Learning</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to Support Faculty Scholarly Learning</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancing Scholarly Learning Across Institution Types</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monograph Purpose and Guiding Questions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monograph Overview</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptualizing Scholarly Learning and Boyer’s Forms of Scholarship</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Learning</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Scholarly Learning</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Scholarly Learning in the Academic Career</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Boyer’s Forms of Scholarship</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Connecting Scholarly Learning, Boyer, and</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Universities</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Research Universities and Their Students and Faculty</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lack of Resources 66
Opportunities for Faculty Scholarly Learning at Comprehensives 66
  Broadening Views of Scholarship for Comprehensive Faculty 66
  Developing an Infrastructure of Support 67
Conclusion and Implications 68

**Liberal Arts Colleges** 70
Defining Liberal Arts Colleges and Their Students and Faculty 70
  Mission 70
  Students 72
  Faculty 72
  Challenges 75
  Summary 76
Faculty Scholarly Learning in Liberal Arts Colleges 76
  Scholarship of Discovery 77
  Scholarship of Teaching 77
  Scholarship of Engagement 80
  Scholarship of Integration 80
Barriers to Faculty Scholarly Learning in Liberal Arts Colleges 81
  Inaccurate Assumptions About Academic Work in LACs 82
  Inadequate Faculty Development Supports 83
  Disconnect Between Expectations and Reward/Incentive Structures 83
Opportunities for Scholarly Learning in Liberal Arts Colleges 84
  Redefining Faculty Learning in LACs 84
  Modernizing Faculty Development Supports 85
  Aligning Policy and Practice 85
Conclusions and Implications 86

**Community Colleges** 88
Defining Community Colleges and Their Students and Faculty 88
  Mission 89
  Students 90
  Faculty 90
Challenges 93
Summary 94
Faculty Scholarly Learning at Community Colleges 94
Scholarship of Discovery 95
Scholarship of Teaching 96
Scholarship of Engagement 98
Scholarship of Integration 99
Summary of Faculty Scholarly Learning in Community Colleges 100
Barriers to Faculty Scholarly Learning at Community Colleges 100
Heavy Teaching Loads 101
Narrow Views of Scholarship 101
Limited Resources and Infrastructures 102
Opportunities for Faculty Scholarly Learning at Community Colleges 103
Reducing Teaching Loads 103
Expanding View of Scholarship 103
Enhancing Resources and Infrastructures 104
Conclusion and Implications 105

A Call to Action: Advancing the Study of Faculty Scholarly Learning 107
Synthesis of Key Findings and Implications 107
Barriers to Scholarly Learning Across All Institution Types: Implications for Research 111
Narrow Views of Academic Work and Scholarship 112
Contradictory and Unclear Faculty Evaluation and Reward Systems 113
Limited Organizational Support and Infrastructures 113
Workload Issues 114
Opportunities to Support Faculty Scholarly Learning Across All Institution Types: Implications for Practice 115
Broadening or Expanding View of Scholarship 116
Executive Summary

In a relatively short period of time, the professoriate has experienced dramatic changes including the erosion of tenure (Nelson, 2010), a rising contingent workforce (Kezar & Maxey, 2012), threats to academic freedom (Reichman, 2015), and a push for faculty members to manage academic work in a more entrepreneurial way (Givens, 2011). As researchers and practitioners of higher education analyze and address the implications of these changes for higher education and its faculty and students, a significant component of the professorial career often gets overlooked—that of faculty members’ scholarly learning. Conceptualized by Anna Neumann (2009a), scholarly learning, briefly defined as a faculty member’s deep engagement in and commitment to a subject matter, is considered the very reason that draws most faculty members into academia. Yet, scholarly learning has been and continues to be largely understudied and misunderstood; oftentimes scholarly learning is only studied in the context of research universities (Neumann, 2009a), thereby failing to acknowledge the ways in which faculty scholarly learning is enacted and supported across institutional types.

In this monograph, we studied more than 400 books, book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, and empirical research studies written about scholarly learning or related content between 2000 and 2016, with an emphasis on four institutional types: research universities, comprehensives, liberal arts, and community colleges; thereby broadening the discussion of scholarly learning beyond the one context of the research university. In order to frame our literature review of scholarly learning at these four institutional types, we employed the work of Ernest Boyer’s (1990) Scholarship Reconsidered and situated the
available literature on faculty learning in his four forms of scholarship: discovery, teaching, engagement, and integration.

The following questions guided this monograph:

- What does scholarly learning, as conceptualized by Neumann (2009a), look like at different types of institutions?
- What contexts and/or supports hinder or help faculty members’ scholarly learning at the different institutional types?
- What challenges are noted in the extant literature on faculty work around further study or better understanding of faculty members’ scholarly learning across institutional types?

Grounded in these questions, this monograph contributed to the discussion on faculty work by (a) highlighting literature that defines scholarly work and what it looks like across a full range of institution types including research universities, comprehensives, liberal arts, and community colleges; (b) reviewing empirical and practitioner studies that note the best ways to support and advance faculty members’ scholarly learning across institution types; (c) expanding the narrative on where scholarly learning takes place beyond the current focus on major research universities and recognizing that scholarly learning occurs in different genres and for different aims (Boyer, 1990); and (d) recognizing the challenges of better understanding scholarly learning at the full range of institution types by highlighting areas for future research and improved practices. This monograph will serve as a resource for current and aspiring higher education researchers, faculty members, professional development practitioners, and academic administrators who are interested in better understanding and supporting the core of academic work—faculty members’ scholarly learning.

In the first chapter, we briefly discuss the current state of higher education, particularly in relation to the professoriate. We introduce the notion of scholarly learning and discuss the associated challenges and opportunities. In the second chapter, we define the monograph’s conceptual framework of scholarly learning, as viewed through work by Neumann (2009a).

In the third through sixth chapters, we focus on scholarly learning in each of the following institutional types respectively: research universities,
comprehensives, liberal arts, and community colleges. To summarize our findings on research universities (third chapter), we note that the scholarship of discovery (i.e., traditional research) is emphasized per the mission of research universities and increasing expectations for research and funding productivity. We also acknowledge that tensions exist around faculty members’ time allocations and the valuation of teaching and service at this institutional type, as well as alignment between faculty members’ scholarly interests and workload demands. Our findings on comprehensives note that this institutional type is facing confusion around its mission and identity because of continued interest in the scholarship of engagement and teaching, while simultaneously rising expectations around the scholarship of discovery. In regard to liberal arts colleges, this institution’s tradition of leading in the scholarship of teaching remains; however, the potential for leadership in other forms of scholarship exists but often remains unknown. To summarize our findings for community colleges, we find that although community college faculty identify as teachers, they also engage in other forms of scholarship.

In sum, an overarching finding of this monograph is as follows: Although mission and academic cultures and norms influence the forms of scholarship engaged in or valued by faculty members across institutional types, our review of the literature highlights that faculty scholarly learning is complex and cannot be described in generic overviews by institutional types. In other words, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners cannot overlook the scholarly interests and passions held by faculty for their own learning and their knowledge expansion and construction (Terosky & Gonzales, 2016), regardless of their employing institutional type. The last chapter discusses if and how the current literature on faculty work expands the notions on where scholarly learning takes place beyond the current focus on major research universities and that scholarly learning occurs in different genres and for different aims (Boyer, 1990) and highlighted areas for future research and improved practices that advance faculty members’ scholarly learning across institution types.
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BURTON CLARK (1989) in his book, *The Academic Life: Small Worlds, Different Worlds*, was one of the first to write about how the work engaged in by faculty members varies greatly by discipline and by institutional type. Building on the importance of context for how faculty go about their work, in this monograph, *Faculty Members’ Scholarly Learning across Institutional Types*, authors Vicki Baker, Aimee LaPointe Terosky, and Edna Martinez revisit and apply Clark’s work by looking at the content of what it is that faculty do and also the setting in which they work. The monograph is framed using Neumann’s (2009a,b) construct of scholarly learning—a concept that highlights the engagement and commitment to developing faculty expertise—as a way to think about faculty work. Using Ernest Boyer’s (1990) broadened definition of scholarship (discovery, teaching, engagement, and integration), the monograph authors make sense of the varied and complicated lives of faculty members within different contexts. The monograph is organized using the scholarly learning construct as expressed through Boyer’s views of scholarship and also focused on how faculty work and scholarly learning are manifested in different institutional types. Briefly defined, scholarly learning is faculty engagement in and commitment to their subject matter. It is typically the attraction to developing disciplinary expertise that draws faculty to life as scholars. Regardless of the area of work (i.e., teaching, research, and/or service), faculty members rely on their areas of expertise to contribute to their institutions. Faculty are hired for their disciplinary expertise. A scholarly learning orientation focuses on keeping faculty engaged and committed to the ongoing development of their expertise. Part of retaining the best and brightest
in higher education is having robust mechanisms for faculty development, support, and recognition. The significance of scholarly learning is its connection to keeping faculty engaged and generative across career stages and across all areas of work. A scholarly learning framework, as presented by the authors in this monograph, is one that is relevant for institutions to maintain so they can not only recruit but also retain high-quality and diverse faculty. Expertise needs to be nurtured. Too often support for faculty is related to early career; a scholarly learning approach is one that cuts across the career and also in all areas of faculty work. Readers will find information in the monograph that provides a helpful way not only to think about faculty work from a conceptual standpoint but also, more importantly, to look at ways for institutions to support faculty and create environments that recognize and reward learning-oriented perspectives.

The monograph is particularly timely given the neoliberal context of faculty life where there are more faculty working in short-term and nontenure-track appointments and where faculty are increasingly called upon to do more with less. Faculty in all sectors of higher education feel the pressure to be increasingly productive, competitive, and ultimately self-supporting; cumulatively the pressures associated with contemporary faculty life can threaten creativity and the very productivity that is the goal. A cornerstone of faculty life is engagement, learning, and development. In this monograph, the authors detail what faculty work looks like in different settings. Something we really like about the monograph is how useful it can be to help frame conversations that are taking place at institutions across the country that are trying to maintain the values of traditional academic environments (i.e., learning, creativity) at the same time that it is necessary to acknowledge the fiscal realities that require new and creative ways to stay viable. Faculty play a key role in institutional vitality. It behooves institutions to adopt a scholarly learning orientation as a way to support teaching, promote research, and enhance service.

The monograph is sure to be of interest to those who study the academic career, as well as professional development practitioners and academic administrators who are interested in better supporting the needs of their faculty members. Researchers focused on faculty as well as teaching and learning