The Professorial Balancing Act: Traditional Academic Values and Expectations for Accountability

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Challenges for Management

Achieving a balance:

• Traditional academic values
• External demands for accountability

In the context of:

• Increasing diversity and massification of higher education
• Competitive research environment
• Reduced funding opportunities
The Idea of a University
(Newman, 1960)

• A place of learning
• A community of educated persons
• Devoted to the pursuit of intellectual truth as an end in itself
• Fulfilling a central and ethical role for society at large through the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge
The University as an Institution

Historically, the professoriate defined its role, disciplinary contributions, and societal responsibilities—universities were loosely coupled associations of elite scholars.

Increasingly, the professoriate is accountable for the social good, a knowledge economy, and an educated citizenry—the university has taken on new organizational structures as workplaces that function as centres for knowledge production through research & knowledge dissemination through teaching.
The Academy’s Role & Responsibilities

**Research:** Uncover/discover new knowledge

**Teaching:** Transmit new knowledge beyond ourselves

**Service:** Responsibility for contributions to the attainment of university goals and to society
Why Highly Skilled Researchers?

According to a recent Vitae report, it is well-recognised that a supply of highly skilled researchers will be important to:

• Sustain and build the UK research base
• Drive the economic prosperity and international competitiveness of the U.K.

Expanding the idea of ‘service’: University responsibilities to the community

**Impact** outcomes:

- Research-led outreach to industry
- Talent and skills needed by society
- A “steady flow of workers into the creative industries”

Universities Scotland/Universities UK (2010). *Scotland’s Creative Economy: The role of universities.*
Scholarship of Engagement (Boyer, 1996)

Four interlocking functions assigned to the professoriate:

1. The scholarship of **discovery**: basic research, extending the frontiers of knowledge

2. The **integration** of knowledge: placing discoveries in larger context and initiating interdisciplinary conversations leading to new paradigms of knowledge
Scholarship of Engagement (cont.)

Four interlocking functions assigned to the professoriate:

3. The scholarship of **sharing knowledge**: Teaching as recognition of the communal nature of scholarship, acknowledging wider audiences for scholarship than just one’s scholarly peers

4. The **application of knowledge**: Service as reflective practice in which theory and practice inform one another
Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate (Boyer, 1990)

The scholarship of engagement connects the rich resources of the university to address our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems
Public education for the social good: Graduate Attributes

For a university, teaching is intended to develop **graduate attributes** beyond acquisition of disciplinary content knowledge and ‘competencies’ specific to courses.

**Graduate attributes** are specified across disciplines and degree programs for educated citizens who can think critically, problem-solve, and add value to their communities.
The Critique of Today’s University

- Student learning is ‘managed’ within ‘real world’ courses expected to lead to employment
- Economic rationality demands that qualifications pay for themselves
- Profit motive influences academic decisions within the university
- Research expected to result in new income not just new knowledge
The Existence of the University

“Albeit somewhat grudgingly, society has nevertheless accorded [professors] a level of respect, privilege, and comfortable financial support, evidenced by the existence of the university as a “sanctuary’ (Sassower, 2000) that has endured since the 9th century. The very essence of the university is as a bastion for unconditional pursuit of esoteric interests” (Meyer & Evans, 2003, p. 153).
What is the Role of the Professoriate?

- Largely based on custom and practice for teaching, research, and service—not universally agreed principles and expectations
- Straddles simultaneous demands for intellectual rigour and public accountability, but the individual has been favoured over collective contributions
- Reflects institutional pressures for academic (even managerial) leadership alongside collegial participation in university governance
- Hierarchically ordered but underdeveloped and largely informal academic career responsibilities for the nurturance of the academic community
New mandates: Are they a bad thing?

New developments and challenges are commendable, reflecting social responsibility and enhanced access to knowledge (Meyer & Evans, 2005):

• Universities expected to generate a public good with broader goals and purposes—not higher education as a private good or elite refuge for a privileged few

• Capacity development must respond to new productivity expectations and functions for knowledge and talent flow

• New mandates require re-examination of roles and responsibilities for professors as well as those of academic managers and faculty members
What if no one cares about what I care about?

Should universities support all disciplines and personal interests? Why? When?

Are some fields more relevant than others, and are some fields no longer relevant? Why? Which ones?

If we believe in the value of something, how do we persuade others to support it and us?
Two Simple Questions:

Does the University ‘add value’ in educating the next generation of scholars who will create and transmit new knowledge?

Or, is the University content to ‘select’ talent based on existing skills and expertise to create and transmit knowledge?
Are faculty members and professors: 

**Victims of Change**  
or  
**Agents of Change?**

Doring (2002)
Academic and Institutional Leadership (Kogan, 1999):
The official literature lacks an effective statement of the role and identity of the individual academic
Leadership should be an essential requirement for professors, who must “have a concern for the advancement of the skills and reputations of their more junior colleagues” (p. 10)
What junior academics need from senior academics:

• Mentoring on the rules of the game
• How to strategise research priorities
• How to write grants—and help doing so
• How to publish—and help doing so
• How to respond to reviews
• Offers of and referrals for opportunities
• Support for when to say “no”
Emphasis on Research Productivity:

Increased pressure to publish in A level and international journals

Requirements to source external funding and win research grants

Assumption of objective “peer review” may rather reflect “situated decision-making” reproducing the cultures from which it emanates (White, Carvalho, & Riordan, 2011, 181)
Research Assessment Mechanisms

Recognition and reward—for the individual and for the university

Researcher career development—guidelines, values, expectations

Communicated priorities—research & research outputs, not collaboration nor mentoring

Side effects of message—*Do your own work*
What is the role of the Professoriate in Researcher Career Development?

Responsibilities for researcher career development—for the institution, research manager, supervisor, principal investigator, research team leader, research directors, heads of schools/departments—even the individual researcher

Mentors mentioned as ‘supporters’ but not formalised within the professoriate role—move beyond being something ‘special’!
Key Elements of New Zealand’s Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF)

PBRF funding formula to universities based on 3 output measures:

• Quality evaluation: assessment of individual academic staff Evidence Portfolios (60%)

• PG research degree completions (RDC): number of PG research-based degrees completed at university (25%)

• External research income (ERI): amount of income for research purposes from external sources to university (15%)
First EP Component: Research Outputs

Quality ROs must meet the PBRF definition of research, be peer-reviewable, accessible, and embody “the findings of research and generated out of research activities” including:

- Printed academic work
- Published and unpublished work
- Work published in non-print media
- Other outputs such as patents, materials, products, performances, and exhibits

“The absence of peer review will not of itself be taken to imply low quality.”

Quality assurance processes include peer-review, referees, and commissioning processes.
Second EP Component: Peer Esteem

Evidence of recognition of research by peers such as:
• Research-related fellowships, awards, invitations to present research at academic conferences
• Attracting PG students into higher-level research qualifications, positions, or opportunities
• Research-related citations and favourable reviews where quality matters, including journal impact factors/grades (e.g., ARC) and individual h-index
• Participation on editorial boards
• Ability to attract professional engagement, awards, scholarships, invited memberships of boards and reference groups based on expertise as a researcher
Contributions to the Research Environment (CRE)

The development of research students, new and emerging researchers, and high-quality research environments

• Research & disciplinary leadership
• Supporting & mentoring PG student researchers
• Supporting research development within & across institutions, networks
• Context & connectivity including engaging profession, industry, community
Third EP Component: Contributions to the Research Environment (CRE)

At all levels of the professoriate, individual responsibility to not only do research and teach about the findings of research—but also contribute to the research environment.

Professors expected to support the research capabilities of students, junior colleagues, & the university.
Research & Researcher Development

Developing agency and responsibility for the ideals of the university starts with all of us, and at all levels.

Universities should be about academic lifestyle and career development—but not at the expense of fit for purpose.

Change is not only possible, but good for us and for the future of the university.
The University Matters:

Research isn’t a butterfly collection: Scholarship is shared, and research has impact.

Universities are about building on the past and present to enhance the future.