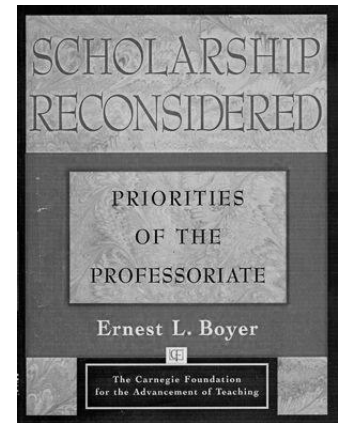


# Book Review

## *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*

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As a new faculty member in a new optometry program I quickly became eager to develop and refine my understanding of optometric and vision science as well as academic and professorial dogma. I recognized that one does not become an academic optometrist by simply being an optometrist employed by an academic institution. A new set of skills, a novel array of experiences and a unique vocabulary must also be developed. I turned to *Optometric Education* to expedite this process and perhaps discover the scholarly canon upon which experienced faculty have founded careers. I discovered several articles referencing Ernest L. Boyer's book "Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate."<sup>1</sup> Although it is not a new publication (first published in 1990), introducing — or reintroducing — its topics and principles can be beneficial as new personal and academic cultures are being defined.

In his preface, Boyer states that it is an important obligation of colleges and universities "to break out of the tired old teaching versus research debate and define, in more creative ways, what it means to be a scholar. It is time to recognize the full range of faculty talent and the great diversity of functions higher education must perform." For some, this may be too big of a jump to take. In his first chapter, "Scholarship over Time," Dr. Boyer illustrates that education has always been an industry comfortable with shifts of this magnitude. He explains that our cur-

rent education system blossomed from colonial colleges established before the American Revolution whose goals were "building character and preparing new generations for civic and religious leadership." Our system today is filled with universities, colleges, junior colleges, liberal arts colleges and technical schools, all designed to provide knowledge, experience and guidance through a myriad of potential career paths. With each change, education has not abandoned any of its ideals but has added more. This has translated into more being required of faculty. These requirements demand dynamic individuals with innumerable skill sets and large capacities for comprehension.

It seems only appropriate that such a dynamic body be defined and evaluated by accomplishments in several areas of scholarship instead of just one. Boyer has outlined these areas as: 1) the scholarship of discovery, 2) the scholarship of integration, 3) the scholarship of application, and 4) the scholarship of teaching. If these categories sound familiar it is likely that you have read them on ASCO's website within the publication guidelines of *Optometric Education*.

The scholarship of discovery is the noble pursuit of new knowledge. Although Boyer in his book is attempting to redefine scholarship, he does not lessen the emphasis placed on research. He quotes medical writer Lewis Thomas when he observes, "It was basic science of a very high order, storing up a great mass of interesting knowledge for

its own sake, creating, so to speak, a bank of information, ready for drawing on when the time for intelligent use arrived." Discovery is an essential part of the learning process.

Not only is discovery required of faculty, but also of our students. Early in the optometric curricula we present students a large amount of information, the fruits of discovery, with the hope that it will be called upon later for "intelligent use." It is easy to see with this illustration, that knowing is simply not enough. The knowledge gained must be effectively utilized.

Yet no one can predict what change will result in academic or clinical environments from the discovery of new knowledge. For that reason, Boyer states, "We strongly affirm the importance of research - what we have called the scholarship of discovery. Without the vigorous pursuit of free and open inquiry this country simply will not have the intellectual capacity it needs to resolve the huge, almost intractable social, economic and ecological problems, both national and global. Nor will the academy itself remain vital if it fails to enlarge its own store of human knowledge. But to define the work of the professoriate narrowly — chiefly in terms of the research model — is to deny many powerful realities."

The scholarship of integration in the words of Boyer is "Interpretation, fitting one's own research — or the research of others — into large intellectual patterns." By finding and defining

these connections, more windows open to unique research in the area of overlapping specialties. “Multidisciplinary” has become a trendy term in academia, including in health care. If there is one good thing that comes from systemic pathologies, such as diabetes, it is that they have the ability to create collaboration between healthcare providers. This allows professionals with differing specialties an opportunity for common ground and to treat the patient as a whole. The scholarship of integration is becoming more and more important as we are constantly reminded that no organ is an island.

The scholarship of application is the process of using knowledge to engage an institution or a problem. Not all knowledge is appropriately applicable, and sometimes it requires application to reveal this. Boyer mentions that new intellectual understandings can arise out of the very act of application, whether in medical diagnosis, serving clients in psychotherapy, shaping public policy, creating an architectural design, or working with the public schools. In activities such as these, theory and practice vitally interact and one renews the other. Boyer also asks a very profound rhetorical question: “Can problems themselves define an agenda for scholarly investigation?” This statement highlights the fact that knowledge does not always first need to be discovered then applied, but that one can be the inspiration for the other.

The scholarship of teaching indicates that teaching both “educates and entices” future scholars. This skill has its

place among the other three as, according to Boyer, “the work of the professor becomes consequential only as it is understood by others.” The communication and relay of information is a mere facet of teaching, which also requires engagement, understanding and knowledge. Advancements in the technique of teaching have the potential to help thousands of students and potential scholars.

Teaching is a unique skill required of faculty, and because of this Boyer recommends that even as early as graduate school, students who are likely to go on to academic careers be introduced and instructed on classroom techniques and course administration. He also recommends that in order for this redefinition of scholarship to have long-staying power the scholarship of teaching needs to be “vigorously assessed.” Whether by peers, self or students, critique of teaching ought to be performed. He does not mention one specific method for doing this, but notes that course items such as class goals and procedures, course outlines, descriptions of teaching materials and copies of evaluation tasks should all be assessed. His hope in this scholarly pursuit is one shared by Kenneth E. Eble, a University of Utah academic whom he quotes: “Do less counting of our own and our colleagues’ publications and more thinking about what we do day-to-day which will never be published. Do less longing to arrive at the higher goals of academe and more about making wherever you are a livable and interesting and compassionate community.”

Dr. Boyer recognized that a serious commitment from those in charge of structuring contracts (and therefore expectations) would be required for this definition of scholarship to be accepted and properly utilized. He advocates that there be “career paths that provide flexibility and change” as “faculty renewal is essential.” He also proposes that faculty expectations and related evaluation not only be broadened but that they be individualized and continuous as well. And “if faculty are to build on their strengths and contribute constructively to the institutions where they work, evaluation criteria must be tailored to personal talents, as well as campus needs.”

In all, “Scholarship Reconsidered” does not shine a light on where academia is, but where it should move. I’m motivated that this book has been recognized by authors in the journal of *Optometric Education* and that the field is already seeing its impact. I look forward to my career as an academic optometrist and am thankful that inspiring texts such as “Scholarship Reconsidered” exist to help illuminate and direct my scholarly efforts.

## Reference

1. Boyer EL. Scholarship reconsidered: priorities of the professoriate. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.; twelfth printing, 1997.

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