

Faculty Conference--September 20, 2000
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Good Morning. It's a pleasure for me to be invited today to speak in relation to the topic of this year's forum. It's an important one, and one that is crucial to the nurturing of scholarship and creative expression of all kinds on this campus.

The title of my remarks--"The community of scholarship"--is meant to invoke the theme of the activities slated for the month of October this year--in which we will be considering various aspects of the ideas of "university and community." It should also call to mind the characterization of universities in general as "communities of scholars."

What I'd like to do today is explore what that means in relation to how one both respects and assesses the contributions of a community of scholars--and the communities of scholarship.

The text we've all been given for today's forum, Scholarship Assessed, is an excellent one in its attention to the four dimensions of scholarship--the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of application, and of teaching. Its ideas about how to assess and evaluate those dimensions go the heart of the issues of equity and appropriate reward for the various faculty roles at a university such as ours--and I know your other panels and discussions today will explore those ideas critically and in greater detail.

What I'd like to do in my remarks, however, is to focus on what the authors of Scholarship Assessed call "the ethical imperative" of scholarship. I must confess that I found their chapter on "the qualities of a scholar" to be particularly interesting and compelling.

In a sense, their thesis runs counter to the conventional wisdom of what should be part of a discussion of the assessment of scholarship. In my many years as an academic officer, I was reminded often of the injunction in the university's policy and procedures manual that, in the retention, tenure and promotion process, personality characteristics of the individuals being considered should not be factors at all in the assessment of their work. Basically, the university was reminding itself that assessments of teaching, research and service should not be filtered through considerations of whether or not the individuals involved were liked--whether or not they were agreeable people to have around the department.

Being a community of scholars, in other words, doesn't necessarily mean we should expect to be a community of pals. We can respect each others' work and contributions to the vitality of our department or university without being identical to each other in our lives, our personal likes and dislikes, and our personalities.

In Scholarship Assessed, are the authors saying that is wrong? That personality characteristics should matter in assessments of achievement in the various dimensions of scholarship?

Obviously not. I take their point to be a larger one about the ethic of what it means to be a part of the university tradition--what personal characteristics are essential to being able to present ones' work for consideration in the various public forums that are encompassed in the four dimensions of scholarship.

It might help to recall specifically what they said on this point:

In summarizing the qualities of character that they say scholars should have (integrity, perserverance, and courage) as well as the goals that should be present in all dimensions of scholarship, the authors conclude that

“...evaluation and all activities connected to scholarship, including faculty development and self-enrichment, have a moral dimension. The university, for all its concern about the intellect, must never lose sight of the ethical imperative by which it should be guided.”

They go on to say, “...if higher education is to continue to help lead the nation, then surely its scholarly accomplishments, as laudable as they are, must be grounded in principles that speak to mankind’s noblest aspects.”

Now, this all sounds very fine and uplifting, but what are they really saying? I think they are reminding us that the ethic of scholarship is really about the purpose of scholarship and scholarly pursuits in society.

They are casting in new words the observation made by a national study of higher education a few years ago: that scholarship cannot be seen merely as a private benefit to those who engage in it; it must be understood first and foremost as a public good. This doesn’t mean--and won’t mean--that scholarship of any of the four types if done well shouldn’t be rewarded more than scholarship that is done badly, or that individuals engaging in useful and productive scholarship of whatever kind should not enjoy some sort of personal recognition and compensation for achievement in the scholarship area of their choice. It doesn’t mean, in other words, that you shouldn’t get what you deserve monetarily and for advancing in your career, if you are making documentable contributions in the dimensions of scholarship you have chosen to emphasize and pursue.

It does mean, however, that in assessing those accomplishments, and their role within the community of scholars more generally, we must always be mindful of why we are scholars--why we are publishing in whatever form is most appropriate to our scholarly concerns. It means keeping in mind the purpose of the university as we try to

assess our purpose and achievement within the university tradition--the tradition of a community of scholars, and of scholarship.

So--what is the purpose of the university? This, obviously, has been the topic of many books and treatises. A few observations from that literature may help generate some discussion.

A. Bart Giamatti, for example, focuses on the dimensions of the public good that take precedence over considerations of private benefit. There are some clearly debatable propositions within his definition--and I invite you to take them on--but his overall point is well worth considering here:

“A college or university,” he says, “is an institution where financial incentives to excellence are absent, where the product line is not a unit or an object but rather a value-laden and life-long process; where the goal of the enterprise is not growth or market share but intellectual excellence; not profit or proprietary rights but the free good of knowledge; not efficiency of operation but equity of treatment; not increased productivity in economic terms but increased thinking about who we are and how we live and about the world around us.”

Giamatti juxtaposes the every day work and concerns of the world with an ideal for a community of scholarship essential as a value and end in itself, and also for the sake of bettering the everyday world and its concerns.

Inherent in most definitions of academic life is also an acknowledgement that it must encompass many different points of view, many different approaches to thinking about who we are and how we live, and the world around us. It encompasses those many different dimensions because life has those many dimensions. I have always told my students in advanced research methods courses that “your choice of a research

method is a profound philosophical choice.” It is a reflection of one’s epistemology: how one knows about the world, and what is possible to know.

Because there is no one way of knowing, and--I would argue--no one way to truth, a university ideally respects those different epistemologies, and the different disciplines and forms of scholarship that they represent.

Cardinal Newman called a University “the home...the mansion-house of the goodly family of the Sciences, sisters all, and sisterly in their dispositions,” --that’s “sciences” in the broadest sense historically--and had this to say about the need for inclusion and mutual respect in the academy:

“What an empire is in political history,” he says, “such is a University in the sphere of philosophy and research. It is, as I have said, the high protecting power of all knowledge and science, of fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery, of experiment and speculation; it maps out the territory of the intellect, and sees that the boundaries of each province are religiously respected, and that there is neither encroachment nor surrender on any side. It acts as umpire between truth and truth, and, taking into account the nature and importance of each, assigns to all their due order of precedence. It maintains no one department of thought exclusively, however ample and noble; and it sacrifices none. It is deferential and loyal, according to their respective weight, to the claims of literature, of physical research, of history, of metaphysics, of theological science. It is impartial towards them all, and promotes each in its own place and for its own object.”

That a university was to be open to all, and a free marketplace of ideas was revealed in the early history of the modern university tradition in Europe, as historian Thomas Bender has described. And with that tradition came another dimension of

openness--an acceptance of the imperative of publication of some kind--that is, of the fact that knowledge must be shared and diffused in some way.

Jaroslav Pelikan relates this imperative of scholarship to the value the university tradition places on free inquiry. This, he says, carries with it “the moral obligation to convey the results of research to others.” Free inquiry, he argues, is one of the great “intellectual virtues” of the university. It is, I would add, a obligation of the university as well as of the scholars who practice within it.

Why is the tradition of free inquiry so important to society?

Scholarship Assessed quotes an answer provided by the American Historical Association:

“The preeminent value of all intellectual communities is reasoned discourse--the continuous colloquy of diverse points of view. A commitment to such discourse makes possible the fruitful exchange of views, opinion, and knowledge.”

Academic community as a place of reasoned discourse accepts the winnowing power of discussion and debate. It also expects that scholars working within the university will demonstrate in their work, and in their approach to it, clarity of presentation and expression. It recognizes that without that clarity, precision of thought and discourse is not possible.

All of this has a contemporary and practical application beyond publication in journals and so forth. A recent millenium essay in the journal *Nature* by Raul Camba, an inorganic chemist at Oxford, calls for scientists who do so to “stop isolating themselves behind walls of jargon.” A similar caution might be given to those outside the sciences. “If scientists are to communicate effectively, then a well-rounded scientific education

ought to include courses on how to write an article and give a presentation. Once they can understand scientists, the public will naturally become more informed and more willing to support initiatives. Furthermore, fewer students will be intimidated by unnecessarily complex language, and cross-fertilization between disciplines will increase ... Scientists who are conscious of language can do more justice to their disciplines.”

This has implications as well for the scholarship of teaching. A recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey notes that of all possible goals for undergraduates, developing the ability to think clearly is thought either essential or very important by 99.6 percent of participating college and university professors--by far the leading option. This acceptance rate runs throughout the disciplines.

Although this is so--and admirably so--we are aware that to “think clearly” will have many different nuances of meaning depending on whether one is a “rational choice” political scientist, a deconstructionist literary critic, a mathematician, a reading specialist, a cosmologist, a management expert, a cognitive neuroscientist--and the list goes on. Clearly we don’t all hide behind language, but we all can use it to the good of our disciplines and how they might contribute more to the life of the University. We can advance knowledge in this fashion without blurring the precision of what we wish to say. That is an important part of what Habermas calls “communicative rationality.” It is vital to a fully functioning and unified community of scholars, and it does have an ethical dimension for individual scholars.

This is inherent in the personal qualities singled out as essential in Scholarship Assessed--qualities that uphold the principles and the practice of free inquiry:

1. Integrity--fairness, truthfulness and civility.

2. Courage--the willingness to be candid, to risk disapproval, to take on unpopular or difficult ideas or new ideas and questions; and
3. Perseverance--a lifelong commitment to honing one's skills as a scholar, to refining one's craft.

For what purpose? Herein lies the second reason why reasoned discourse and free inquiry are so vital to the university tradition and to society. Ideas, questions and discoveries must be tested, defended, refined and ultimately applied (in some way, but not all in the same way) to the important questions of society, in order to advance our understanding, as Giamatti says, of "who we are, how we live, and how we deal with the world around us." Universities are particularly well suited to the advancement of knowledge because of the exercise of open debate and free inquiry.

Derek Bok argues, "Universities may not have any special capacity to prescribe solutions for the nation's ills. But they are better equipped than any other institution to produce the knowledge needed to arrive at different solutions and to prepare the highly educated people required to carry them out."

Donald Kennedy, former president of Stanford University, anchors the contributions of scholarship in eight general academic duties: to teach, to mentor, to serve the university, to discover, to publish, to tell the truth, to reach beyond the walls, and to change. He rightly says:

"Responsibility to students is at the very core of the university's mission and of the faculty's academic duty. In recent times, however, research and innovation have been assuming larger roles in the American university. This probably represents a transitional state, and will be followed by the gradual achievement of a new balance in which the university's primary products are people, with technologies secondary, and in which research and scholarship are more tightly interwoven with our responsibilities

for educating ... men and women. Of the many expectations that society has of the modern university, the most important is that it will teach well.”

Central Washington University has the “hard-earned” good fortune--and the ethical dimension--of teaching well, and of remembering our responsibilities to our students. This is our tradition and greatest heritage. It has been heartening for me to learn that fact many times over as I have talked with students, alumni, and conference participants in my first weeks and months as president here. This should continue to be our constant--well-assessed and well-acknowledged--as the serious challenges and opportunities of the new millenium emerge.

That heritage takes on greater significance as we set about the task of assessing the quality and the contributions of the four dimensions of scholarship--in all of which Central faculty can be expected to excel. All scholarship, ultimately, is teaching--whether to one’s students, one’s colleagues in one’s discipline, or to society. This moral obligation to share knowledge, to articulate and open our ideas to debate and definition is enriched by a broader sense of purpose and community. It is grounded, as Scholarship Assessed concludes, “in principles that speak to humankind’s noblest aspects.” That broader sense of purpose and community will enhance the links to our students, the communities from which they come, and the multifold communities in which we all make our lives.

I wish you success as you set about your task of exploring these issues today. Thank you for joining together in this important endeavor.