Scholarship and professional profiling: possibilities for promoting quality in higher education

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of scholarly quality from a historical perspective and reflects involvement in affirming scholarly work at two universities in South Africa ± firstly from the experience of a staff developer and, secondly, from the viewpoint of an academic practitioner. The scholarly roles of the academic practitioner as identified by Boyer are explored and linked to at least five reigning perspectives of the concept of quality as well as the notion of standards. Profiling and portfolios are highlighted as important elements of scholarly quality in higher education, particularly in a developing higher education context. Scholarship profiling guidelines, spanning the four scholarly roles of Boyer, are provided, as well as an example of performance expectancies at the professorial level as developed as part of a system for the enhancement of scholarly quality at one university. Finally, the need for proper documentation of scholarly work for quality purposes is proposed.

SCHOLARSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL PROFILING

The word *scholar* first appeared in the English-speaking world in the eleventh century with a strong social, rather than an individualistic component attached to it (Glassick, Huber & Maeroff 1997). According to the *Shorter Oxford English dictionary* (1933) a scholar was typically a student who was in training or had trained with a particular master. By the sixteenth century, the term applied to `a learned and erudite person; especially one who is learned in the classical (i.e. Greek and Latin) languages and their literature'. In modern times, Talcott Parsons (1968) writes that competence in mastering knowledge and the technique of its advancement are of supreme importance for those claiming the privilege of scholarly academic status, and with the competence comes the obligation of integrity, a commitment to the values of the academic profession. Booth (1989) proposes that at the very heart of scholarly quality are personal qualities that he calls `habits of rationality'. These include courage, persistence, consideration, humility and honesty, which are considered virtues of great consequence in shaping the intellectual work and knowledge of the scholar.

Building professional and scholarly profiles are not new to education. They

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have been used for many years to describe the work expected from a person employed by a higher education institution to perform scholarly work and to justify scholarly contributions to the promotion of knowledge and learning (Areola 1995; Boyer 1990; Malik 1996). In the North American context, research universities view their academic staff as professionals who set their own work agendas and participate in setting organisational direction and purpose (Colbeck 1998). In comprehensive universities, academics are treated more like employees and are therefore held more accountable for expected work than research staff.

The concept of a professional profile is used in this article to describe how the evidence of scholarly work, which indicates a standard of professional competence of the academic scholar, might be viewed and documented (Quinlan 1996; Ramsden *et al* 1995; Webb 1994). The term is also used to indicate how new interpretations of the concept of a professional profile have impacted on its modern day composition and how this might be assessed.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

My views as a staff developer and a staff member on scholarly profiling were shaped and influenced by what Redman (1994:12) calls `the five aspects of quality professional portfolio building', namely

1 *Experience*: The *story* of what had happened, what was done, what was seen, heard and made; what was written and what was said.
2 *Learning*: The *discovery* that what had happened has some significance for the future.
3 *Demonstration*: The *evidence* or proof that what was learnt is actually used.
4 *Learning needs*: Taking *ownership* and responsibility for what development takes place and how it takes place.
5 *Learning opportunities*: Signs that *growth* and change have taken place.

In considering what a scholarly professional profile constitutes, I came to realise that it is not merely introducing the contours of the scholarly work an academic has completed. Its value lies, to a large extent, in the processes of assuring quality in scholarly work and its development, whereby not only individual staff members, but also teams and ultimately institutions, benefit (Braskamp & Ory 1994; Chism 1999). Of further significance is the fact that the profiling approach can be successfully integrated into staff development processes and scholarly rating processes such as that of the National Research Foundation (NRF) in South Africa and elsewhere.

Reflecting as a staff developer

My encounters with staff appraisal, staff development and the professional profiling of scholarly work in South African universities started just over 20 years

ago. In 1979, when I was appointed as staff development officer at University A, the institution was a medium-sized South African university, mainly serving students from rural areas in the central part of the country. My first job at University A was to organise a conference for the newly established South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAARDHE). As an inexperienced staff

quite sceptical about using documentation that was `fuzzy' and did not reflect `hard evidence' of quality academic performance and output. All in all the professional profile idea as embedded in the documented portfolio was not well developed and had to be reconceptualised. Staff clearly, at the time, did not `buy into' and participate in the reconceptualisation process whereby the portfolio as a professional assessment instrument was to be re-evaluated.

It was a challenge to me as a staff member to revisit and recontextualise my own view of a number of issues on university life. This was particularly true within contemporary perspectives that view higher education as either primarily an industry or primarily a social institution (Mintzberg, Quinn & Ghoshal 1998; Gumport 2000). According to Gumport (2000:75), it is critical to identify a distinction regarding what may have changed in higher education. Is it the social functions of higher education that have changed within a society which has taken on principally economic functions, and thus abandoning the more comprehensive institutional mandate of performing not only educational, but also socialisation and political functions? Or has higher education indeed become an industry, expecting its institutions to meet economic objectives such as producing human capital, workforce training and economic development? Or is it both?

Against the background of varying perspectives on the university as an organisation, particularly in a South African context, a number of questions about the role and work of the academic scholar and the assessment thereof have occurred to me (also see Fourie & Alt 2000; Hay & Strydom 2000).

Firstly, what constitutes a modern-day professional academic or scholarly staff member? What are the historical and current values closest to the academic profession and how are they to be operationalised in the modern university with its globalised, entrepreneurial and quality-driven character? Secondly, what does quality in the academic profession mean and how should it be evaluated or assessed? Does the scholar's professional profile live up to the expectations of valid, reliable and fair assessment of academic work, and if it does, would staff be prepared to rely on tools like professional portfolios to adequately document scholarly work? Thirdly, would the professional profile and ensuing portfolio fit into the broader ethos of the (devolved) performance management scheme that was to be employed at university B? How would it fit? Finally, would the professional profiling approach suit my own expectations as an academic staff member?

These questions took me to the very roots of the academic enterprise, the question of what scholarship really entails, the question of what accounts for scholarly quality and the question of professional profiling as a contribution to a fair and manageable appraisal and development scheme. It was on these areas, against the backdrop of Redman's (1994) portfolio elements, that I focused my attention.

SCHOLARSHIP: BOYER AND BEYOND

Following a major survey by the Carnegie Foundation in the United States of America (US) in the late eighties to re-examine the roles of academic staff, Ernest Boyer (1990) helped academics to understand the complexities of academic work. He identified and distinguished four key scholarly academic roles, namely the scholarship of

1   teaching
2   discovery
3   application
4   integration

To Boyer, *teaching scholarship* implied transforming and extending knowledge by a process of debate, a continual process of discourse and a challenge of both the content and the form of knowledge. He saw the *scholarship of discovery* (research) as a pervasive process of intellectual excitement rather than just a concern with outcomes in the form of new knowledge. The *scholarship of application* he defined as professional activity in practice and service, which has to be subjected to the same rigour and accountability as teaching and research, while the *scholarship of integration* makes the connections between knowledge and models from different disciplines within a wider context of learning. It is this latter view of scholarship which, according to Boyer (1990), mitigates against rigidity within the system and provides the nodes for growth of new applications.

After Boyer's death in 1995, Glassick, Huber and Maeroff (1997) published a follow-up of Boyer's seminal work. In this publication they attempted to define standards that could be applied to each of the categories of scholarly activity identified by Boyer. They pointed out how the American academic terrain had indeed shifted, how institutions had to make fundamental changes in order to tap the full range of academic talent and how it could be fairly evaluated. A major contribution by the aforementioned authors was the way in which they identified the common sequence of the unfolding stages of all scholarly activity. They maintain that scholarly work of any kind can be appraised by six qualitative standards that need to be explicitly articulated. I shall return to this later.

Taking the discussion of scholarly roles and impact further, Davis and Chandler (1998) argued that despite Boyer's well-intended efforts to foster debate about scholarship, he ignored the socio-economic contexts and historical purposes of universities. According to these authors, Boyer also assumed a reward system to be part of scholarship and ignored the body of research and theory that indicates that rewards and punishment are more closely connected to control than to increasing quality. In contrast to Boyer, Davis and Chandler emphasised the intrinsic motivational aspects of scholarly work and environments where real academic

freedom and socio-economic security prevail. To them, these are more appropriate ways to foster scholarly quality.

Although I see merit in the viewpoint taken by Davis and Chandler, I would like to pursue Boyer's particular notion of scholarship further (also see Johnson 1998), since I consider that to be closer to the reality of scholarly work in a developing country like South Africa.
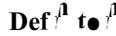
THE QUEST FOR QUALITY

The question of quality in education has been the object of study in higher education for many years (Harvey & Green 1993; Ribier 1995; Van Vught & Westerheijden 1992; Vroeijenstijn & Acherman 1990) and different conceptualisations of quality have been explored. Also in the South African context, the White Paper on higher education RSA (1997:6) claimed:

> The pursuit of the principle of quality means maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of specific expectations and requirements that should be complied with, and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be aimed at. These expectations and ideals may differ from context to context, partly depending on the specific purposes pursued. Applying the principle of quality entails evaluating services and products against set standards, with a view to improvement, renewal or progress.

To draw the relationship between quality and standards, Harvey (1996) proposes a matrix in which five perspectives on quality are related to standards of attainment. I have adapted this matrix to provide a few possibilities in terms of assessing scholarship (Table 1), but the reader will notice that it might not be easy to do this for every particular view of quality.

Table 1: Quality/Standards relationships

	Standards	Professional academic (scholarship) standards	Standards of scholarly competence
Q ᵘᵃ ꙮ	Defⁿ toⁿ	The demonstrated ability to meet specified level of academic scholarly attainment. The ability of staff to be able to demonstrate those things designated as appropriate at a	Demonstration that a specified level of scholarly ability on a range of scholarly competences has been achieved. Competences may include those required by scholarly

	Standards	Professional academic (scholarship) standards	Standards of scholarly competence
		given level of professional performance. Usually, the measured competence of an individual staff member attaining specified (or implied) scholarly aims and objectives, operationalised via performance on assessed examples or artifacts of scholarly work.	competence in discovery, teaching, application and integration of knowledge, skills and values/attitudes.
Exceptional	A traditional concept linked to the idea of `excellence', usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of scholarly achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed.	Emphasis on summative assessment of scholarly work and, implicitly, some `higher-level' achievements. Implicit normative gold-standard as practiced by the `best' scholars in the field. Comparative evaluation of output. Elitism: the presupposition of a need to maintain the highest quality and standards in any education system.	Linked to professional scholarly competence; emphasis mainly on traditional demarcation between academic knowledge and high-level (professional) skills in an elite educational/ research environment.
Perfection or consistency	Focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated ideas of zero	Representative of the notion that peer scrutiny of standards or quality will be undertaken in a consistent manner. Also assuming that scholarly work implies a set process/procedure/convention.	Expectation of a minimum prescribed level of scholarly competence. Assessing for `zero defects' in scholarly work presents huge problems/controversy. Against `the nature' of scholarly academic work.

	Standards	Professional academic (scholarship) standards	Standards of scholarly competence
	defect (perfection) and getting things right first time.		
Fitness for purpose	Judges scholarly quality in terms of the extent to which scholarly work meets its stated purposes. The purposes may be `customer'-defined to meet requirements or (in education) institution-/peer-defined to reflect institutional mission (or peer standards).	Theoretically, standards should relate to the defined and objectives that relate to the purposes of the academic position, academic job descriptions or the aims of the institution/unit of operation. Assessment of scholarship is criteria referenced, although as purposes often include a comparative element (e.g. in mission statement) these are mediated by norm-referenced criteria in a scholarly field.	Explicit specification of skills and abilities related to standardised objectives. Evidence required to at least identify threshold scholarly standards. 1e9 6238 sme-0.03of at

	Standards	Professional academic (scholarship) standards	Standards of scholarly competence
	countability for expenditure. Public services, including education, are expected to be accountable to funders. Increasingly, learners and institutions are considering their own investment in scholarly work in value-for-money terms.	provement. Provide staff with academic experience (qualification, training, personal development) to warrant the investment.	which ensures a return on investment.
Transformation	Sees quality as a process of change/transformation, which in education adds value to scholarly fields of work, institutions and learners through scholarly work. Education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the partici-	Assessment of staff/scholars in terms of the standard of acquisition of transformative scholarly knowledge, skills and attitudes against explicit objectives. Focus on adding value to scholarly environments rather than attaining gold standards. As transformation involves empowerment, formative as well as summative assessment of scholarly work is required.	Continuously add value to scholarly work in a socially accountable and reflexive manner. Provide learners with enhanced skills and abilities that empower them to continue learning into other life stages and to engage effectively with the complexities of the `outside' world. Assessment of scholarly work in terms of the transformative impact they have on fields of knowledge, student learning and institutions.

	Standards	Professional academic (scholarship) standards	Standards of scholarly competence
	pants. This leads to two notions of transformative quality in education: (1) enhancing learning and (2) empowering learners.		

(Adapted from Harvey 1996:209±210)

Although Harvey suggests that the transformative view of quality would be more appropriate for South African education (Harvey 1996), it would be more realistic to claim that in the scholarly profile several quality perspectives might prevail at the same time. It might thus be relatively safe to say that scholarly profiling is usually the result of a multi-perspectivist approach to quality, which, in turn, depends on the aims of quality assurance in a particular context.

PROFILING AND DOCUMENTING SCHOLARSHIP

It might be all very well to understand the elements of scholarship and the quality perspectives by which it is shaped, but how is scholarship to be assessed in practice and more particularly in a developing higher education context? How do the institution and other stakeholders in the academic enterprise ensure that quality results emerge from the money that is being spent on higher education? Should the stakeholders be not too troubled about quality and should scholars in higher education be left alone to employ their knowledge and expertise in ways they see fit? Is the evaluation of academic scholarship, which has to shift the frontiers of knowledge and the authentic application of knowledge, not a contradiction in terms? How could the quality of something be evaluated which cannot be clearly specified or compared to anything similar? Is scholarly work in higher education indeed so unique that it needs special efforts to profile and evaluate it?

To these questions there are no easy answers. Seldin (1994; 1998) believes that there are a number of important elements in any staff profiling system in higher education that should be considered. It might be easier to raise questions about the profiling and assessment of scholarship than to offer answers. Nonetheless, equipped with hindsight and the benefit of research and experience, we know more today that we did a decade or two ago. We know, for example, that

- profiling academic work and scholarship is a complex process, and no single view of scholarly quality is adequate. The combined views of various constituents (students, colleagues, peers, administrators and self) are required for reasonably reliable and valid judgments.
- profiling is an evolving process, and any profiling component infrequently emphasised today may be frequently used tomorrow.
- fairness in profiling and assessment requires the criteria, standards, and evidence used by an institution to be disseminated clearly, fully and in writing.
- staff profiling is both a process and a result ± a way to determine goals, to appraise the processes for reaching them, and to assess the extent to which they have been met.
- staff profiling must be administratively manageable and cost and time efficient.
- the profiling system must provide active support to improve staff performance.
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Table 2: An example of scholarly profiling elements

Profile element	Sample description/Questions
Goal clarity	Does the scholar state the basic purposes and aims of his or her work clearly? Has he or she defined scholarly objectives that are realistic and achievable? Does he or she identify important questions in the field that were to be answered?
Adequate preparation for achievement	Does the scholar have a deep understanding of existing scholarship in the field? In which respects does he or she bring the necessary skills to his or her work? Does he or she bring the necessary resources together to move scholarly work forward?
Appropriate methodology	Does the scholar use methodology/methodologies appropriate to set goals for achievement? Does he or she apply effectively the methods selected? Does he or she modify procedures in response to changing circumstances?
Significant results	Does the scholar achieve set goals? Does his or her work add consequentially to the field? Does his or her work open additional areas for further exploration?
Effective dissemination	Does the scholar use a suitable style and effective organisation to present his or her work? Does he or she use appropriate forums for communicating work to intended audiences? Does he or she present his or her message with clarity and integrity?
Reflective critique	Does the scholar critically evaluate and reflect upon his or her own work? Does he or she bring appropriate breadth of evidence to his or her own critique? Does he or she use feedback and evaluation to improve the quality of future scholarly work?

(Adapted from Glassick, Huber & Maeroff 1997)

I found (Bitzer 2000) that although scholarly profiling cannot be contained in descriptions of job expectations, it might be useful to start with such expectations at hand. These expectations, in developing higher education contexts at least, should not be stated in fixed terms. They should merely provide pointers or indicators of expected performance. Table 3 provides an example of performance expectancies at the professorial level.

Table 3: Example of performance expectancies at the professorial level

Performance area	Expectation
Qualifications	A professor is expected to have at least a PhD qualification plus any additional academic, professional or managerial qualification or experience.
Study record	A professor is expected to have an excellent study record throughout his or her academic career.
Teaching	A professor is expected to • provide proof of instructional leadership by productively integrating his or her teaching with research and community service activities • demonstrate undisputed capability and leadership in curriculum development, programme innovation and maintenance, creation of learning and assessment opportunities for students and the promotion of a culture of learning in a department • promote the strategic learning and teaching priorities of the faculty and effectively guide colleagues on these priorities • establish and promote national and international networks on teaching excellence, which includes acting as moderator or examiner in national and international contexts • demonstrate the ability to reflect critically on his or her own teaching, take steps to continuously improve in this area and also exercise leadership amongst colleagues in this regard.
Research and publications	A professor is expected to • promote, through his or her leadership, the university as a research oriented institution

Performance area	Expectation
	- lead research projects by effectively creating, implementing and managing (a) research plan(s) - join the head of a department in establishing research excellence by promoting, coordinating and monitoring research quality - undertake research which is aligned with the research foci of a research group, department, faculty or institution - stimulate and build research capacity in a department via team research and by involving younger researchers in research projects - maintain a publication output of at least X units per year - provide leadership to identify niche areas for research, to write and facilitate research proposals, to compose research reports and to maintain excellent progression rates amongst postgraduate students.
Community service	A professor is expected to be involved and generally to take a leadership role in local, regional or in national projects which are service-orientated and with high relevance to scholarly activities.
External examiner	A professor is expected to accept invitations to act as examiner or moderator for internal and external papers, theses and dissertations.
Professional associations	A professor is expected to be involved in the activities of national and international scholarly societies, committees and editorial work. National and/or international recognition in this regard will be to his or her advantage in performance appraisal.
Scholarly standing	A professor's scholarly standing is expected to be indicated by - invitations to address scholarly meetings - consultation by professional bodies/institutions - allocation of research or development projects/contracts.

(Source: Bitzer 2000)

A next important step is to document the scholarly profile effectively. This can be

done in a myriad of ways and formats, although a few have proven to be more effective than others.

Documenting scholarship

The quality of performance in any of the four areas of scholarship as outlined by Boyer might be best assessed on the basis of evidence that speaks directly to the standards for judging the work. Such documentation requires rich and varied materials that the scholar and others assemble over a period of time.

One challenge that a broadened view of scholarship poses for documentation is the types and sources of materials that provide evidence of quality. Since it is known that some scholarly activities are more readily documented than others (Chism 1999; Colbeck 1998), special care should be taken that, because of the relative ease of documentation possibilities, these areas are not skewed in terms of overall scholarly performance. One measure to counteract this possible pitfall from a performance management perspective is to agree mutually with a scholar on a yearly basis what the priority areas of his or her work will be, how it will be evaluated and what types of documentation might suffice for that purpose (Bitzer 2000).

What is needed to create a scholarly portfolio? Although there are no fixed recipes, it was found that portfolio development should include at least five key phases to be useful as a quality enhancement instrument (Bitzer 2000; also see Seldin 1991):

- *Phase 1: Summarise scholarly responsibilities.* Portfolios often begin with a statement concerning any agreement, formal or informal, between the professor and department chair concerning scholarly responsibilities, expectations and criteria for success. Such a statement might vary in length and cover such items as suggested in Table 3. In the absence of such an agreement, the professor should include a brief statement on assumptions concerning her or his scholarly responsibilities.
- *Phase 2: Select criteria for effective appraisal of scholarly performance.* Bearing in mind the statement of scholarly responsibilities in Phase One, the professor selects those items for inclusion in the portfolio that are most applicable to his or her responsibilities for a designated period of time (also see Table 3). A factual statement about the professor's accomplishments in each area is then prepared. It is important that items chosen for the portfolio reflect the professor's agreed performance areas. The goal for individual scholars is to itemise both their accomplishments and their reflections on these accomplishments to create a personalised portfolio.
- *Phase 3: Arrange the criteria in order of importance.* The sequence of the statements about accomplishments in each area is determined by their intended use (see Table 2 for general criteria). For example, if the professor wishes to demonstrate improvement in setting scholarly goals and objectives, entries that

reflect that goal (such as participating in seminars or workshops designed to enhance project planning and management) would be emphasised. Paragraphs or bullets help organise the statements, with extra space and attention devoted to those statements the professor accords major significance.

- *Phase 4: Assemble the support data.* The professor should safeguard supportive evidence for items referred to in the portfolio. Included might be such things as original learner evaluations of teaching or supervision of studies, examiner reports, reports on completed research projects and contributed articles on particular areas of expertise. The professor should give written assurance in the portfolio that such support data will be available for review upon request.

- *Phase 5: Incorporate the portfolio into a peer-driven performance appraisal system.* The professional portfolio is then incorporated into the appraisal system of the academic unit (department/school/faculty/institution). It forms the basis for discussion of scholarly performance between the department head and appraisal committee, which should be constituted of peer academics, and the individual professor. The intent is to provide a record of scholarly accomplishments against agreed criteria so that they can be accorded their weight within the professional scholarly profile of the professor. The result of the appraisal can either increase performance, direct proper reward or both.

CONCLUSION

One of the most important developments in higher education in a developing country such as South Africa is the move to enhance scholarly competence in a broader sense and look beyond the traditional focus of research output only (Makoni 2000). Academics in developing countries increasingly face the pressures to reconstruct education and rethink educational philosophies underlying higher education.

Higher education institutions are becoming more diverse in terms of age, gender, race, experience and language (Luckett & Sutherland 2000), forcing South African academics to perform in changed environments and operate in different modes. Days of withdrawing into offices and laboratories within the academic ivory tower is clearly of the past and questions are increasingly being asked about the relevance of teaching and research programmes to economic and social upliftment. These change are not only faced by novice academics, but more particularly by experienced ones who have to redefine their roles and reconsider ways to increase the relevance of what they are doing. As can be expected, these revisions do not come overnight, but has to be shaped by building and establishing new professional profiles and using portfolios to assess scholarly work in higher education. Enhancing professional profiling of academic work expected at higher education institutions in a developing country might not be the last word on quality promotion, but it might be a step in the right direction.

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