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## **Moving Beyond the ‘Big 3’**

**By Mary Coussons-Read and Tammy Stone**

It's a brave new world for tenure-track faculty members, graduate students, and postdocs these days. New and aspiring professors enter an academy in which the traditional boundaries defining faculty work, the "Big 3" of teaching, research and service, are blurred and, in many cases, disappearing as modern scholarship becomes increasingly collaborative, cooperative, and integrated. For example, not only do we pull the most recent research results into our class lectures but, increasingly, we actively involve our undergraduates in the research enterprise. Institutions of higher education appear to promote this redefinition of faculty work by encouraging professors to weave together aspects of teaching, research and service, especially in areas that lend themselves to collaborative inquiry and scholarship. In some cases, grant competitions and other types of administrative support are in place to foster this integration, but there's an elephant in the room.

Faculty searches at many institutions of higher education already acknowledge this shift, actively seeking candidates who are multi-disciplinary in their training, teaching, and service interests, and who are used to blending these activities. For many incoming faculty members in the sciences, the silos that defined training and teaching 15 or 20 years ago have given way to team-based approaches to graduate training, postdoctoral mentoring, teaching, and field and laboratory-based research. Similarly, the training model for many social sciences includes traditional research methods and data-oriented training merged with community outreach opportunities and service learning. Frequently, these experiences are interdisciplinary, bringing together interests and scholars that deepen understanding of an issue and provide more comprehensive data or possible solutions. These trends would appear to be entirely positive.

Enter the elephant.

Colleges and universities are sending very mixed messages to faculty members on where integrated research, teaching, and/or service work fits in their progression through the reappointment, tenure, and promotion systems that literally make or break their careers as professors. Many colleges show that they support and encourage integrated work, for example, by providing administrative and financial support for such activities through internal grants and centers, but when the time comes for reviews, professors find themselves in the position of essentially defending their activities. This is because many existing review criteria are designed with the "Big 3" in mind as separate factors, as a result of being formulated at the first half of the last century in terms of an academy that focused on itself as a free-standing intellectual center

and less on being a resource for and an integral part of the communities that surround and support it.

When faculty members approach the review process at our university and elsewhere, the value of faculty work that blends the “Big 3” is unclear and difficult to measure. In some cases, integrated faculty work, especially integrated research and teaching, is seen as an aberration that requires justification, additional documentation, and assurance of the value of the activity in question. Indeed, the degree to which this message is unequivocally delivered varies somewhat, but as a general rule, a Google search of Web-accessible review criteria for many types of academic units returns requirements for justification of integrated or collaborative work. Examples of the types of validation required include but are not limited to:

- Detailed explanation of why the integrated work can be classified as both research and service, and what proportion of the work falls into each category.
- In the case of multi-authored or multi-participant projects (and this is common for integrated work), descriptions of individual contributions of all collaborators.
- Explicit justification of why an integrated or collaborative approach was used.
- Assurance that the integrated work is occurring in addition to the candidate’s activities in the traditional divisions of faculty work, especially in the case of research.

Clearly, part of the purpose of these guidelines is to assure that candidates are, in fact, making substantial and relevant contributions in research, teaching and service, and are not “double dipping” when engaged in and reporting integrated work. Moreover, when more than one individual is involved in a project, there can be concern that participation and responsibility for the project is not spread equally. It could be argued, however, that integrated work and collaborations produce positive outcomes that can be measured in ways besides the number of journal publications, student course evaluations, or the number of committee reports generated, many of which are not captured in traditional review guidelines.

For example, the definitions of contributions to a scholarly field can be expanded beyond the traditional disciplinary divisions and the journals associated with them for generations. Instead, equal weight can be given to relatively new but high quality venues dedicated to collaborative and integrated research, teaching and service. A great example of such an area is science education, in which science faculty conduct research on K-12 science education and classroom approaches. Additionally, work products, activities, and outcomes occurring outside traditional journal publications (i.e. applied work with non-profit organizations, governments, communities, or civic organizations) can be given greater weight in the review process.

Importantly, the collaboration that often goes hand-in-hand with integrating aspects of teaching, research and service has garnered significant support from several respected groups in higher education, and provides an additional challenge to faculty evaluation. This sentiment is well-articulated in a 2005 National Research Council report on fostering “independence” in emerging scientists: “An ‘independent investigator’ is one who enjoys independence of thought — the freedom to define the problem of interest and/or to choose or develop the best strategies and approaches to address that problem. Under this definition, an independent scientist may work alone, as the intellectual leader of a research group, or as a member of a consortium of investigators each contributing distinct expertise. Specifically, we do not intend ‘independence’ to mean necessarily ‘isolated’ or ‘solitary,’ or to imply ‘self-sustaining’ or ‘separately funded.’”

This definition is fundamentally different than the definition of independence that is used in many review documents which are based on the way we conducted ourselves as faculty members 20+ years ago. It is certainly different from the definition used, formally and informally, by review committees in many universities, and does not fit especially well with the team approach that often characterizes integrated teaching, research and service among our best and brightest faculty. The traditional definition is of a solitary, funded, scholar, recognized in his or her own rite as a contributor to the discipline, who does research, teaches, and serves in the silo of his or her discipline and institution and keeps each area of his or her job (teaching, research, and service) strictly separated.

It could be argued that in a world without the digital, data, and real-time communication and knowledge access capabilities of today, engaging in collaboration or attempting to integrate research and teaching, for example, was much riskier, and had the real possibility of diverting a pre-tenure faculty member's attention, resources, and focus. Without electronic media, for example, the lag time between current research findings and the classroom or lab was much longer, and would conceivably be somewhat of a diversion from the focus of a course or project.

Today, however, the world is a very different place, and it is entirely possible for faculty members, regardless of career point, to collaborate, cross disciplines and time-zones, and get the on-demand data and communication they need to develop highly effective integrated research, teaching, and service activities and projects that provide incredible experiences for students and show, unequivocally, the value of the university. Doing this successfully can be a career-building centerpiece for some of our most innovative, committed, and promising faculty. As institutions, we strive to recruit the brightest, most promising faculty, many of whom are doing wonderful integrated research, teaching, and service work. It's time for us to meet them halfway by creating review criteria and systems that reward this new definition of independence. Are review committees really so rigid that they can't handle one list that combines research, teaching and service rather than three lists?

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