

HOW DOES STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY, AS A RESEARCH-LED INSTITUTION, ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE VIA THE INTEGRATION OF THE THREE ROLES OF THE UNIVERSITY?

Discussion Document, Draft Three

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In May 2006 the Vice Rector (Teaching) of Stellenbosch University, tasked a team to present a report and strategy for the enhancement of the stature of teaching and learning. This initiative was in line with the University's commitment to quality teaching and learning. It was subsequently reinforced by a recommendation of the audit report of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), for the University to consider ways in which to raise institutional awareness of the importance of teaching and learning, and arrangements for the improvement of teaching skills as part of the performance management system for academic staff. The report of the task team was presented to the Vice Rector in February 2007. It contained a broad strategy and set of activities. This document is based on the report of the task team.

Many of the suggestions in this broad strategy are already being implemented as part of other strategies at the University. The purpose of this discussion document is to present an argument for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the three roles of a public university, namely teaching and learning, research and community interaction, and how these can be seen to be integrated. By doing so, it attempts to give further elaboration on the implications of the term "pedagogy of hope". The document is intended to facilitate discussion on the role of the University, and further, to set terms for future discussion on how academics executing the three roles should be supported.

What is meant by "integration"?

Integration of the three roles of teaching, research and community interaction occurs at the level of the individual lecturer, as well as at the level of the institution. It has different implications at each of these levels. In the strong sense, *integration* can mean the seamless interweaving of the functions and activities of each of the roles, but since this is neither always practical nor advisable, in the weak sense, *integration* also refers to the *balancing* of the three roles. The weak sense implies adequate recognition and support for the three roles. Both the weak and the strong sense require attention at the University.

DISCUSSION

Strategic mission of the University

In its Strategic Framework document of 2000, the mission of the University is described as creating an "environment in which knowledge can be discovered; can be shared; and can be applied to the benefit of the community". Its vision emphasises the importance of pursuing excellence by gaining national and international standing by means of, "its research outputs" and "its production of graduates who are sought-after for their well-roundedness and for their creative, critical thinking". The framework also describes the graduate's qualities as being "enterprising, innovative and self-renewing". These core attributes and attributes imply an institution which can sustain a high degree of quality research output, and at the same time, excellent and student-centred teaching and valuable community interaction.

Given its past in the history of apartheid, Stellenbosch University cannot ignore the imperative to make a major contribution to the social development of the local and sub-continental region. Such a contribution can be made via knowledge production, community interaction and concerted attempts to support the learning success of an increasingly diversified student population. The forms this contribution takes finds expression in the policies on Community Interaction, Teaching and Learning and Research. These policies suggest that the University aims to sustain its vision of excellence as a research-led institution, but at the same time, its vision of relevance, and of quality teaching and learning.

The university as a site of scholarship

The university is the only institution in which the three key forms of knowledge practice, namely discovery, sharing and application, are legitimate practices. They can all be subsumed within the kinds of scholarship outlined by Ernest Boyer:

- Scholarship of discovery (where new and unique knowledge is generated)
- Scholarship of teaching and learning (where bridges are creatively built between the discipline and the student's learning/understanding. eg: work that deepens our understanding of teaching and learning in the discipline, or sharpens our focus on student learning)
- Scholarship of engagement (where the emphasis is on the use of new knowledge in solving society's problems, or in creating civically engaged citizens)
- Scholarship of integration (where new relationships among disciplines are discovered or created).

According to Candy (2000) the scholarship of integration has at least three main aspects: first the integration within a discipline or a field of study, of knowledge claims derived by different research approaches or at different times in different parts of the world. The second aspect involves the incorporation of new knowledge acquired in real world settings into the intellectual apparatus of a discipline. This aspect can be particularly useful in professional preparation of students. Thirdly, integrative scholarship, which according to Candy, may involve drawing together insights from different disciplines or fields of study. Most real-world problems do not present themselves as neatly labelled within a discipline but span different disciplines and contexts, and solutions are often found through the juxtaposition of several disciplines or fields of inquiry¹. The current interest at the University in trans-disciplinarity as an appropriate academic response to dealing with problems of social development and sustainability underlines the need for the University of Stellenbosch to find ways to encourage the scholarship of integration as a way of thinking.²

In order to qualify as scholarship, the activities an academic engages in should subscribe to the three criteria outlined by Lee Shulman (1999): "It should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community".³ Each key practice of the academic, namely knowledge discovery, sharing and application can be plotted against the three core functions of the university. The table below gives examples of how the three functions and uses of knowledge could intersect in an integrated knowledge system.

¹² Candy P. 2000: Knowledge navigators and lifelong learners: producing graduates for the information society. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 19(3)

² An example of this is the work of the "TSAMA Hub", involving colleagues from a variety of departments at the University, with the CSIR and members of other NGOs. Also, see M. Max-Neef (2005), Foundations of Transdisciplinarity, *Ecological Economics*

³ Hutchings, P. and Shulman, L. (1999) The Scholarship of Teaching: New Elaborations, New Observations. *Change*, 31(5), 11 – 15.

TABLE: Intersections of the Three Roles

	Discovery	Sharing	Application
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> research in various disciplines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conference presentations publications teaching sharing directly with communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> commercial and other applications via consultancies direct application in community contexts
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students as partners in research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching postgraduate and undergraduate students presentations at conferences in general, and not only teaching and learning conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> encouraging students to apply what they learnt in degree programmes in various formats, for example via service learning
Community Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> research about, with and for communities eg. in anthropology, political science, social work, agriculture, business settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sharing at community fora, conferences, workshops, professional associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> direct application in community contexts (NGO, commercial, professional) application of programme content in various settings

How integrated are the three roles?

The various roles as elaborated here are interdependent. For example, no new pure research can be conducted if there are no students choosing to enter postgraduate studies in relevant fields. No new knowledge can be shared with emerging graduate professionals if research is not conducted. Optimal, transformative learning, further requires “an environment that encourages and regards intellectual openness”⁴. A research-led environment in which the three roles are integrated, is conducive to the facilitation of transformative learning. The circle is completed when knowledge generated in the academy is applied (for profit or not for profit), and tested in the world of work or what is known as “the community”. It is thus in the interest of Stellenbosch University if the three roles of academics are acknowledged, supported and rewarded. It is furthermore of strategic importance that the three roles are given appropriate levels of prominence and focus in the various disciplines, and where relevant, that they are integrated.

Certain disciplines lend themselves more easily at various points to focused attention on one or other of the roles. For example service learning lends itself more easily to integration in the professional social and health sciences, education or law, rather than in pure mathematics. Various roles are also more profitable in certain of the disciplines, for example, research into applied language studies is not very profitable, but fairly cheap to conduct, whereas research in chemistry would be expensive to conduct, but a potentially high income generator if linked with applications of commercial or strategic interest. While the generation of income remains a key ingredient for sustained growth and quality, it is not the *raison d’être* of the institution.

⁴ Kelly McGonigal, 2005, *Teaching for Transformation: From Learning Theory to Teaching Strategies*. Stanford University: The Center for Teaching and Learning. 14 (2)

What is the problem?

Whilst at Masters and doctoral levels teaching and research may be indistinguishable, this is not so at lower levels. It has been argued by many academics at Stellenbosch University in public forums such as the annual Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Conference, that lecturers who focus more intensively on their teaching out of a natural affinity for teaching or out of a sense of duty, are less likely to be promoted than their peers who are more productive as regards research outputs. It has also been argued that excellence in community interaction receives the least attention during promotion processes⁵. At Stellenbosch University the challenge to the integration of the three roles of the academic is generated by the fact that the University made a conscious and successful attempt to position itself as a research-led institution in the past decade. In interviews conducted as part of a research study on successful lecturers of first-year students, the point was made by academics that a factor hindering good teaching practice is that the University sends out mixed messages about the importance of teaching. The remuneration for research outputs at SU via third stream funding tends to lead to reward of individuals or centres, unlike the remuneration for teaching, which is more centrally managed according to set formulae, and the financial reward for most kinds of community interaction remains low. At SU, given the strategy to position the University as a research-led institution, the institutional culture rewards research over teaching and community interaction. This is not necessarily enshrined in policy, but established via practices, for example, with regard to appointments and promotions.

There are established public systems for peer review for the acknowledgement of the quality, volume or pre-eminence of research, unlike teaching or community engagement. This is an international phenomenon, supported by professional, disciplinary associations and governmental organisations. This phenomenon has an influence on the practices and ethos at Stellenbosch University.

Thus the conditions pertaining to Stellenbosch University are influenced by, and mirror international trends. It has been acknowledged internationally that it remains difficult to sustain a research-orientated and student-centred institutional focus at the same time. In the research interviews referred to above, lecturers expressed the opinion that by emphasising that all lecturers should engage in all three roles, the University management is placing undue pressure on academics who are still trying to find their way in academia. It has been observed in international settings that the kind of university that places this pressure on academics to perform strongly in both teaching and research (“greedy institutions”) is typical of “comprehensive universities” with a focus on teaching and research, and on teaching masters students⁶. The Boyer Commission on Reinventing Undergraduate Education⁷ claim that in the United States at research universities, “Fragmentation has increased drastically during the last fifty years”. It has been found that the combination of a research and student focus is most commonly found in North American creative, small and prestigious liberal-arts type colleges, in which there is attention to both research and fostering student questioning and critique⁸. This fragmentation is the result of modern governance and output-oriented cultures and it has an influence on academics’ working conditions⁹.

⁵ L. Toews & A. Yaedjian (2007) The three-ring circus of academia: How to become the ringmaster. *Innovation in Higher Education*, 32, 113-122.

⁶ Wright, M. Assar, N. Kain, E., Kramer, L, McKinney, K., Glass, B. and Atkinson, M. 2004 Greedy institutions: The importance of institutional context for teaching in higher education, *Teaching Sociology*, 32:144-159.

⁷ The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University; Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities (no date)

⁸ AW Austin and MJ Chang (1995) Colleges that emphasise research and teaching: Can you have your cake and eat it too? *Change*, September/October 45-49.

⁹ Liudvika Leisyte, L., Enders, J. & de Boer, H. (2009) The balance between teaching and research in Dutch and English universities in the context of university governance reforms, *Higher Education*, 58:619–635

A trend evident in the UK, Australia and New Zealand which is beginning to make its influence felt in South Africa is for funding schemes to reward either teaching or disciplinary research, and thus to polarise the two domains.¹⁰ The solution proposed by Krause (2009: 422), lies with the employment of the term “public scholarship”. This term, with its references to being “responsible” and “relevant”, aligns the task of the university more closely with the notion of a “pedagogy of hope”:

In summary, the concept of public scholarship brings under a single lens the range of activities constituting academic inquiry, emphasising that, together, they constitute the core business of responsible and responsive institutions of higher education in the twenty-first century. Colbeck and Michael (2006b) contend that, rather than being another dimension of academic work, public scholarship *is* academic work that is reframed as a unified whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Although there is a strong endorsement for the integration of the three roles of the University in its strategic documents, there has not been sufficient attention in the various policies, management and human resource practices, of how to give expression to this. It is thus proposed that these documents, especially those pertaining to career management and recognition of good practice, be reconsidered in relation to the concepts of “integration of the three roles of teaching, research and community interaction”, or the concept of “public scholarship” as elaborated above. These policies and procedures should be given further consideration by academics and administrative personnel involved in human resource management and development, as well as those tasked with the promotion of each of the key roles, but not by any of these groups in isolation.
2. The successful implementation of policy is highly dependent on practices in specific and localised settings¹¹. Thus discussion of how to give flesh to the concepts of integration or public scholarship should be encouraged to take place at the faculty or departmental level.
3. If successfully integrated, the three roles of the academic should be evident in the post-graduate as well as undergraduate curriculum. The revision of the institutional Teaching and Learning Policy is an ideal opportunity to suggest ways in which the University’s programmes could contain maximum opportunities for students to learn about and benefit from discipline-based teaching, research and community interaction.
4. A more nuanced and integrative approach towards knowledge and practice should lead, by definition, to a more flexible view of the distinction between administration and the three roles of the University. Thus the professional identities and related conditions of support services personnel who perform services and who are required to conduct research and/or teach, should be reconsidered.

¹⁰ Krause, K. 2009. Interpreting changing academic roles and identities in higher education. In M. Tight, K. Mok, J. Huisman and C. Morphew (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Higher Education* 413 – 425. Routledge, New York.

¹¹ P. Trowler (2008) *Cultures and Change in Higher Education; Theories and Practice*. New York: Palgrave McMillan.