

# University Continuing Education Units' Commitment to Research: Program Development as Scholarly Work

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## ABSTRACT

The assumption that there is a positive relationship between research activity and program performance was tested. Thirty program directors were systematically rated on program performance and research activity to determine the degree of correlation, if any, between the two sets of ratings. Analysis of the data indicated there was no relationship between program performance and research activity. Nonetheless, Blaney believes that program personnel should be involved in scholarly work. He proposes a broader definition of scholarship and discusses three reasons for encouraging program-ers to pursue scholarly work.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'hypothèse qu'il existe une relation positive entre le travail de recherche et le rendement d'un programme a été mise à l'épreuve. Trente directeurs de programmes ont été notés systématiquement sur le rendement de leur programme et leur travail de recherche afin de déterminer le degré de corrélation, s'il y en avait, entre les deux. Une analyse des données a indiqué qu'il n'existait aucune relation entre le rendement du programme et le travail de recherche. Néanmoins, Blaney croit que le personnel du programme doit participer aux travaux d'érudition. Il propose une définition plus large d'"érudition" et développe trois raisons pour lesquelles il faut encourager les programmeurs à poursuivre des travaux d'érudition.

CAUCE Journal Editor Gwenna Moss asked me to comment on the need for university continuing education units to have a commitment to research. A plausible assumption implicit in the assigned topic, and an assumption I believe held by many university continuing educators, is that there is a positive relationship between research activity and program performance. In any case, I decided to begin the assigned task by testing such an assumption.

In undertaking this investigation, I have one clear advantage over most readers of this journal—34 years in the business of university continuing education. For 30 of those years, I have been responsible for assessing the performance of other program directors. To exploit this (and perhaps the only) advantage of being around for such a long time, I systematically—and as objectively as possible—rated 30 of my previous and current colleagues on program performance and then on research activity. Whether a relationship existed was then tested by correlating the two sets of ratings.

From the well over 40 potential subjects (i.e., the program directors assessed for this study), 30 were selected. The criteria for inclusion were that I, individually or jointly, was responsible for the subject's performance assessment for at least two years and that the subject's responsibilities were predominantly concerned with programs, rather than with general administration or specialist tasks, such as program marketing. Each subject who was selected was responsible for a particular program area and for the associated support staff. Both credit and noncredit program directors were included, and of the 30 subjects, 17 were female, all but 5 had a graduate degree, and 11 had a Ph.D.

Each subject was assigned ratings of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest for both program and research performance). Program performance for this study included considerations of program quality and productivity, as well as opportunities available for any particular program area. At some point over that past 30 years, I have had the responsibility of making performance judgements on each of the subjects and have used several data sources. In the last 20 years, the program directors with whom I have worked also have been judged by their peers, using a fairly detailed and sophisticated set of criteria and procedures for promotion through ranks. In short, I have some measure of confidence in the ratings ascribed to each subject.

Using the same five-point scale, each subject was then ranked for research activity. Research activity as used here is broadly interpreted to include peer-reviewed research articles; books; creative productions such as film; academic and professional conference papers; intellectual and profes-

sional articles in respected non-refereed publications; and major policy studies. The principal test for inclusion is that the work must be a product of some kind whose merit can be judged by others. Second, the activity must be considered in some obvious way as advanced intellectual work. Excluded as research activity for this investigation are the programs themselves, a matter that will be discussed later.

Upon completing the two sets of rankings, I then considered each program director as an individual in an attempt to determine each subject's two or three most significant personal and professional attributes. Rather than using a predetermined set of criteria, such as degree of flexibility and the like, I deliberately chose imaginable words such as "high energy," "focused," "driven," "disorganized," "boring," "dull," or whatever best captured the idiosyncratic nature and character of each individual. Although my major purpose was to test whether there was a relationship between program performance and research activity, I also wanted to use my first focused review of 30 years of experience with colleagues to see if a pattern emerged from comparing personal attributes with program performance. Like most others in our field, I felt I had a pretty good idea about the personal characteristics most frequently associated with good or poor program performance, but I had never attempted to test these notions over time in any systematic fashion.

As a check on the validity of my judgements, I asked a former colleague who also had worked with the same 30 program directors to independently go through the same process as I had. We then compared our rankings and discussed personal attributes. The two sets of rankings on program performance and research activity were almost identical. In no case was there a difference greater than one point on the five-point ranking scale. Where differences occurred, we discussed the reasons for our judgements and respective rankings. In the end, I decided the final rankings, as reported in Table 1.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the rankings, and the resultant coefficient of .0655 confirms what an observation of the data suggests: there is no relationship between program performance and research activity. There also is no relationship between program performance and gender or whether the subject had a Ph.D.

So, to what is program performance related? To personal attributes. Program directors who consistently outperform others are, generally, perceived as being brighter, more focused, more personally and intellectually driven, high energy people. They all tend to have very high personal

**TABLE 1:** Ranking of 30 Program Directors on the Bases of Program Performance and Research Activity

Program Director	Program Performance	Research Activity
1.	5	5
2.	4	4
3.	1	4
4.	3	1
5.	4	1
6.	5	5
7.	5	1
8.	4	3
9.	3	4
10.	4	4
11.	5	3
12.	5	5
13.	4	1
14.	4	3
15.	4	1
16.	4	4
17.	5	1
18.	5	2
19.	4	1
20.	3	2
21.	4	1
22.	2	1
23.	1	3
24.	2	3
25.	5	1
26.	4	1
27.	2	2
28.	2	1
29.	2	1
30.	5	1

standards—a characteristic sometimes irritating to colleagues, especially to those who perform less well. The attributes of the lower performers, generally, and not surprisingly, are that: they are often unfocused; they display a relatively low level of energy; they tend not to be noted as brilliant; and they tend to make things more complicated than they need to be. “Capacity to complicate things” and “capacity to focus and simplify work” as much as any other quality differentiated the low and high performers. With but one exception, the highest performing program directors write clearly.

It is of interest to note that of the subjects who had a ranking of either 4 or 5 in both program performance and research activity, all were involved in research related to their program area or to program development itself. Of the six subjects in this category, the research activity of two was almost exclusively in the field of program development. The other four subjects’ research included program development and an associated academic field. None of the six researched in fields unrelated to his or her program area, lending further support to the observation that the highest performing program directors are fairly focused individuals.

If there is no relationship between program development and research activity, why then promote and reward research activity among program directors? Why take time away from valuable, potentially revenue-generating programs if research activity does not enhance program performance? Perhaps the most frequently cited reason is that both program staff and the unit itself will be seen as more relevant to the university’s work if program directors are active in research. And, if the unit is seen as more relevant, then perhaps the opinions and work of the unit will be more highly regarded, and, thus, more strongly supported by faculty and administration. This assumption, too, could be tested, and certainly far more rigorously than I have for this article. I am convinced that responses from a dozen well-placed and informed senior faculty and administrators who know the work of continuing studies program directors would confirm a null hypothesis. Program directors, regardless of whether they are active in research, are highly regarded first and foremost when their program performance is exceptional. Faculty and academic administrators respect bright, focused, enthusiastic, and highly productive program directors who create high quality programs that meet expected revenue targets. As reported above, this kind of program performance bears no necessary relationship to research activity. This ought not to be surprising. Almost everyone in the university business has observed that the best academic

administrators—deans, vice-presidents, presidents—are not necessarily the best researchers. Although some, in fact, are tops in their fields, as many, are certainly not in the top quartile of scholars.

It is arguably the case that when a senior academic administrator has proven his or her value and performs exceptionally well for the institution, it becomes largely irrelevant to most members of the university whether the administrator is a top scholar.

Despite not finding a relationship between program performance and research activity, there are three reasons why program directors should be involved in scholarly work, with such work more broadly defined than publications in refereed journals. First, scholarly activity directed to learning how we can improve our professional work—such as research directed to better understanding our students; how university and community resources may be combined to serve a specific educational need; employing technology to enhance instruction; and the effective marketing and administration of programs—ought to improve program performance over time. Moreover, as professionals, we as much as any group ought to be committed to the concept of our own lifelong education and the ongoing improvement of professional practice. That reason alone is sufficient to encourage and reward worthy scholarly activity.

A second reason for encouraging scholarship among program directors is so that we may contribute directly, through our own scholarly work, to broadening the faculty reward system as a key step to fundamental renewal in our universities. Canadian universities will confront reform over the next 10 years that will be as radical and transforming as it has been in the health care and social services program sectors. Whether university reform will be internally driven or imposed will depend, to some extent, upon how we manage a change in what faculty perceive as being worth doing.

Relative to other public institutions, universities in Canada and the United States have in fact been remarkably successful. When surveyed, the Canadian population is reasonably satisfied with our universities, especially with regard to research productivity and creating access for a broader student body. But the directly interested and informed public—our ministries, our legislators, and the leaders in our communities—are increasingly sceptical about whether we are doing the right things; about whether the community is getting the full potential of its investment. In particular, the interested public is concerned that the universities care too little about education and too much about research, and care too little about our institutions' relationships with their communities and too much about the

discipline-oriented, international academic community, where academic reputations are established. There are other concerns, but the perceived imbalance between education and research—or between community and internal university values—is the main one, and it is at the heart of most others.

This concern has two dimensions. The first is that we neglect the quality of teaching while overvaluing research. For the most part, our critics have been right about this. As the saying goes, “what gets measured gets done.” Rightly so, we measure and reward research quite rigorously. However, we give much less attention and rigour to judging and improving teaching—and very little research goes into this task. Often when faculty do not produce the amount or kind of conventional research expected of them, we take “corrective action” by giving them more teaching. Indeed, how we value teaching and research, respectively, is reflected in our use of the terms “teaching load” and “research opportunities.”

Second, and more importantly, it is not so much that research is rewarded more than teaching, but that we define far too narrowly the forms that “research” or scholarship may take. In *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer argues that professorial responsibilities should be defined to integrate teaching and scholarship, with scholarship not only embracing research as we now reward it (both pure and applied research), but also embracing other forms of rigorous intellectual work, such as curriculum development, course design for mediated instruction, public policy studies, community development projects, and so on. He proposes four forms of scholarship: scholarship of discovery; integration; teaching and learning; and practice. Each form of scholarship, as for traditional research, should be subjected to peer review and judged for its own kind of intellectual excellence. As Boyer urges, it is time to recognize the full range of faculty talent and the several functions that universities ought to perform as well as they can for our society.

A more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar, and a revised and supporting faculty reward system are fundamental to renewal in our universities. President Charles McCallum of the University of Alabama, in his article “The Bottom Line: Broadening the Faculty Reward System,” states: “We must change the pervasive faculty idea that a university’s activities can be executed without regard to the needs of the surrounding community and that the faculty reward structure will be limited in its application to those activities carried out entirely on campus or with colleagues at other campuses. We must change the faculty reward structure

to accommodate the new needs of society." He adds further that these changes will not occur without strong leadership from strong faculty, as well as from the university administration. It is in the interest of both the community and the university that these changes occur. And it is of particular and obvious interest to those of us in university extension that scholarship be reconceptualized. By not only promoting a broadened view of scholarship, but more significantly, by also substantially contributing to the process of defining a more inclusive body of scholarship, we can be a part of the leadership solution in meeting the challenges to our universities.

A third reason for encouraging scholarship among program directors is that the fundamental focus of all our work as continuing educators ought to concern the university's primary mission of scholarship. We are more likely to be effective in our institution if we are seen to be advancing the university's principal mission of advanced intellectual development, or, more simply put, scholarship. In support of that mission we have a special responsibility to create learning opportunities for adults. That work must embrace and advance the university's mission. As an integral part of the university's mission, we can help to define and enlarge that mission. The strongest case for continuing studies can be made within the context of the university's fundamental values respecting scholarship. Esteemed scholarly activity on the part of program directors enhances our value as members of the academic community.

The above argument leads me to conclude that the best answer to the question of whether program directors ought to be involved with scholarly activity is that if they are not, they are not doing what they should be doing—creating quality programs. Program development can be and should be considered within a more inclusive definition of scholarship.

Sandra Pearce (1993) reported that some deans and directors are concerned that many program directors holding academic appointments are not doing research, as research is traditionally defined. My response to this concern is that good program development constitutes good scholarship; great program development constitutes great scholarship. Perhaps we ought to direct our energies more to including such work within the academic reward system rather than to pressing continuing studies academic staff to produce "research" that, when unenthusiastically undertaken, likely will not be the best possible intellectual product from any given amount of time.

Great programs—those intellectually crafted to serve and inspire adult learners; those that engage the best faculty in ways that challenge them to

create new presentations of what they discover and know; those that incorporate the most effective and efficient means of promoting learning—are, indeed, intellectually demanding, scholarly activities. We now are doing a much better job of describing this work to others, so let's start making it count for what it is.

In my investigation of whether program performance is related to traditionally defined research activity, I found that, excluding programs themselves, there is no relationship. My contention, however, is that the best program directors are indeed involved in scholarly activity, namely, in the programs they create and manage. Program directors do not need to look to a field beyond their professional craft of program area for an intellectual, scholarly challenge. They certainly may, and many do. But the intellectual and creative act of program development itself can be exceptional scholarship. Scholarship through excellence in program development and delivery should be central, judged, and counted. Such a commitment will improve the quality of our programs and, at the same time, contribute to a university-wide interpretation of scholarship that befits our time.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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