

2019

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### Recommended Citation

White, L. (2019). How can SoTL help forensic educators assess their performance? *National Forensic Journal*, 36, 18-24.

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## How Can SoTL Help Forensic Educators Assess Their Performance?

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Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a movement among educators which seeks to acknowledge the work we do teaching as its own form of unique scholarship. SoTL argues the work we do as teachers can be peer-reviewed, critiqued and shared with others in our academic communities. The goal of this paper is to outline how forensic educators can use SoTL approaches to help build an argument about their scholarly activity as illustrated in coaching practice. SoTL provides a framework through which we can articulate the significance of this aspect of our scholarly performance.

Although discussions of formal assessment practices in forensics have been increasing in the past several years, the focus of these have been primarily around how we, as educators, can assess student learning as a way to justify the activity as a whole (Kelly & Richardson, 2010; Kelly, Paine, Richardson & White, 2014). Certainly, our performance as forensic educators can and should be evaluated based on student-learning outcomes. However, the assessment of our own scholarship as academic professionals is often ignored. While publication and presentation obligations vary across institutions, most academic appointments come with the expectation faculty engage in regular scholarly activities. Given research expectations are frequently cited as a contributing factor to coach burnout (Leland, 2004; Preston, 1995; Richardson, 2005), exploring ways forensic educators can balance coaching responsibilities and research expectations is vital.

Traditional approaches to assessment, such as publication and conference presentation quotas, do not account for a forensic educator's most common scholarly activity. Effective coaches are constantly working collaboratively with students on research projects in the form of speeches presented at tournaments. Like traditional research, these speeches are presented publicly and peer-reviewed. However, current faculty assessment measures do not take into account this significant scholarly activity. Forensic educators need to articulate better the active scholarship in which they regularly engage. The goal of this brief essay is to explore the origins of the SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) movement as a resource for forensic educators to use when documenting their scholarly activity for their own professional-review process. This paper will provide a brief overview of the SoTL movement, explain how the movement is easily applied to forensic practice and finally provide suggestions for how forensic educators can use this approach to assess their own scholarly contributions.

### Overview of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Kern, Mettetal, Dixson, and Morgan (2015) argue SoTL “lies at the intersection of teaching and research” (p. 4) and although there is some disagreement about what sort of activities fall under the classification of SoTL, for an activity to be considered part of a SoTL framework it must require “conscientious consideration, planning, and follow through” (p. 4). Traditional published or presented data-driven studies of teaching effectiveness, case studies, and essays concerning effective teaching practice are the

activities most universally “counted” as SoTL projects. However, the origins of the movement did not define scholarship this narrowly. The SoTL movement grew out of ideas presented by Boyer (1990) in his text *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Boyer was reacting to a shift in academic culture that valued research productivity over teaching effectiveness. Boyer writes, “the faculty reward system does not match the full range of academic functions” and as a result “professors are often caught between competing obligations” (p. 1). Boyer sought to expand the definition of scholarship to include a more comprehensive understanding of the various intellectual activities performed by professors. Boyer argued, “What we urgently need today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar—a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching” (p. 24). Acknowledging and valuing the variety of work done by professors allows academic professionals to nurture their own professional growth in a way that strengthens self, students, and institution.

Boyer’s (1990) approach to scholarship involves viewing scholarship as having four different, yet related, functions: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching. Initially, the *scholarship of discovery* is what we consider traditional research. The contribution to a wide base of knowledge is a worthy goal of academic professionals. Many thrive in an environment focused on scientific breakthroughs and intellectual discoveries.

However, according to Boyer, influential scholarship moves beyond discovery. Therefore, the *scholarship of integration* is also a valuable function. Boyer defines this function of scholarship as giving “meaning to isolated facts, putting them in perspective. ... making connections across the disciplines” (p. 18). Essentially the scholarship of integration moves beyond discovering what can be known and shifts to an understanding of what findings mean in a larger context. Boyer suggests an increase in interdisciplinary programs of study is a sign that the scholarship of integration is gaining appreciation.

Next, Boyer describes the *scholarship of application*. This function of scholarship seeks to explore how knowledge can be used to solve problems. Traditionally this function of scholarship has been relegated to the underappreciated professional expectation of service. Boyer, however, argues that service can be considered scholarship if the activities are “tied directly to one’s special field of knowledge” and “is serious, demanding work, requiring the rigor—and accountability—traditionally associated with research activities” (p. 22).

Finally, Boyer proposes an appreciation for the *scholarship of teaching*. He cites Aristotle’s claim, “Teaching is the highest form of understanding,” to support the rigor involved in effective teaching. To teach well requires a deep grasp of one’s subject area as well as the ability to explain broader connections between bodies of knowledge. Boyer maintains, “inspired teaching keeps the flame of scholarship alive” (p. 24). Therefore, without professors committed to effective teaching, the distribution of knowledge would falter.

Boyer (1990) was clear in his stance that all four functions of scholarship need to be recognized and rewarded within the academy. Each function of scholarship contributes to the vitality of a college or university. Boyer’s work is especially useful for forensic educators seeking to articulate their own scholarly contributions to their institution.

### Application of Boyer's Functions of Scholarship to Forensic Educators

Although many forensic educators engage in the *scholarship of discovery*, and the community supports several academic journals dedicated to publishing this work, the traditional approach to scholarship is not the type of scholarship in which many forensic educators excel. This may be due to time constraints linked to coaching and travel, but perhaps the reason is less defeatist. Boyer's reconsideration of scholarship grants permission for forensic educators to unapologetically admit their scholarly passions and skills manifest in other areas such as integration, application, and teaching.

The interdisciplinary nature of competitive forensics lends itself to a commitment to the *scholarship of integration*. Currently forensic competitors are coached to interrogate the implications of the topics and literature they explore. Coaches encourage their students to synthesize research, question widely accepted interpretations, and build connections between once disparate ideas. The performances delivered in competition are innovative and exciting in the ways they provide a broader understanding of the world. Boyer (1990) explains, "The scholarship of integration also means interpretation, fitting one's own research—or the research of others—into larger intellectual patterns" (p. 19). Forensic educators promote this form of scholarship on a near-daily basis as they work with students to develop their events.

Another current value supported by many forensic educators is the commitment to integrate themselves and their students into civic-service and social-justice work. This focus on the *scholarship of application* is an additional way forensic educators contribute to less-traditional forms of scholarship. Many of those involved in the forensic community recognize the advantage their refined communication skills offer them, and as a result seek ways to use these skills in a service capacity. Forensic educators work to create opportunities for their students to use their advocacy skills to improve local communities. Boyer (1990) clarifies that the scholarship of application is not just "doing good," but rather applying the knowledge and skills gained through professional inquiry toward solving key social problems (p. 22). Therefore, a team's commitment to make blankets to be given to a local shelter is an example of "doing good" but a commitment to planning, sponsoring, and presenting a public debate on the issue of local poverty could be considered scholarship of application. Forensic educators can turn to Boyer's framework as a way to justify service commitments as a form of scholarship.

Finally, Boyer's (1990) *scholarship of teaching* is especially relevant to the work done by forensic educators. Boyer argues great teachers "stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning after their college days are over" (p. 24). The most effective forensic educators are great teachers. Certainly, competitive success for students is a goal, but those coaches with longevity in the activity understand and appreciate the importance of nurturing students who will be life-long learners. Boyer strongly defends the vital importance of the scholarship of teaching writing, "Without the teaching function, the continuity of knowledge will be broken and the store of human knowledge dangerously diminished" (p. 24). The commitment to teaching is what simultaneously fuels and exhausts the effective forensic educator. The excellent scholarship done in this area needs to be respected and rewarded.

## Documenting the Scholarly Contributions of a Forensic Educator

Boyer's (1990) project intended to recognize "the great diversity of talent within the professoriate" and to help faculty "reflect on the meaning and direction of their professional lives" (p. 25). Such guided reflection can be especially useful to forensic educators seeking to build an argument regarding the importance of their work in the area of scholarship. The final section of this paper provides practical advice for how forensic educators can document the unique nature of scholarship related to their professional activity.

In *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate*, Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) extend Boyer's (1990) work by offering guidelines for how academics can assess activity that falls within the four functions of scholarship as outlined by Boyer. The authors understand that for Boyer's approach to have institutional legitimacy, there must be some process for measuring quality. Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff explain that all quality scholarship, regardless under which of Boyer's functions it falls, is guided by six standards of quality: first, the project must have clear goals; second, be supported by adequate preparation; third, use appropriate methods; fourth, generate significant results; fifth, be effectively presented; and finally, include reflective critique. If forensic educators wish to use Boyer's approach as a basis for self-assessment, they must be able to articulate how their work adheres to this process.

Initially, scholarship must have clear goals. Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) argue all scholarship projects must have objectives that are clearly defined and achievable. In other words, when arguing coaching activity is scholarship, forensic educators need to approach coaching in a way guided by articulated objectives. Best practices to meet this step include developing a formal strategic plan for the forensic program. The strategic plan should include expected participation numbers, travel commitments, competitive goals, and social growth goals for students. These should be formally linked to the institution's strategic plan. Second, coaches need to clearly state student learning outcomes for participation. Coaches should know what skills they intend to teach and be able to articulate the co-curricular nature of the activity.

Next, coaching as scholarly activity must be grounded in adequate preparation. Forensic educators need to stay knowledgeable regarding disciplinary developments in communication studies, but also have a solid understanding of effective coaching practices and administrative functions of their home campus. When coaching, becoming isolated in one's own world of appointments and travel is difficult to avoid. However, forensic educators must engage in their own professional growth to ensure they are prepared to meet the expectations they have outlined when setting goals. Adequate preparation can be demonstrated by keeping a log of materials one reads. This log can include research relevant to a student's topic, potential literature for student performance, monographs about effective teaching and coaching, as well as listserv discussions about current topics within the forensic community. Coaches also need to set aside time to discuss the art of coaching with peers and mentors. Even something as simple as grabbing coffee with a peer during an off round can provide significant gains for personal growth. Finally, forensic professionals need to stay aware of the administrative workings of one's campus. Coaches should attend relevant trainings and meetings designed to assist them with the logistical aspects of coaching.

Further, forensic educators must document the methods they use to meet the objectives they have outlined for their programs. Few individuals outside the forensic community have an understanding of the countless hours forensic professionals log each semester. Coaches must do more to document the scholarly work they accomplish. One simple step is to log coaching hours. Although this can be tedious, tracking the number of hours set aside for coaching appointments is a concrete way to measure the teaching aspect of coaching. Coaches can also log the time spent editing drafts. Keeping track of speech draft revisions is an additional way coaches can document their coaching methods. The ability to track the history of a document's revision process through programs such as Google Docs makes this type of documentation relatively easy. Documenting the revision process undertaken between coach and student is an excellent way to illustrate how a coach engages in the scholarship of teaching. Similarly, each season a coach can select one or two events and keep a "coaching log" that outlines the process one goes through when assisting a student to develop a strong performance. Finally, forensic participants should complete bi-annual evaluations of the coaching staff. These student evaluations can serve as documentation of coaching effectiveness.

Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) add that to be assessed as effective, the results of scholarly activity should achieve stated goals and "add consequentially to the field" (p. 36). If coaches have strategic plans and systems in place to measure student learning outcomes, they should be able to document how their programs are achieving stated goals. However, demonstrating how one's coaching impacts the broader forensic community is more difficult. One way forensic educators can measure the impact of their coaching is to collect ballot comments that indicate when a student's performance has positively impacted a judge. Often judges will comment when a student performance leads them to see the world in a new way or challenges their understanding of a topic. These "epiphany moments" are evidence that the scholarship of teaching through coaching is leading to significant results. Additionally, forensic educators can request colleagues write letters of impact that describe the ways their coaching efforts are benefiting the larger forensic community. Students from other teams are constantly learning from the performances of their peers and the ballots coaches write. The scholarship of teaching happening in the forensic community is a unique form of co-teaching. As colleagues, we can help each other document the impact we are making outside the boundaries of our own teams.

Effective presentation as a standard of quality is perhaps the easiest of the six measures for forensic educators to document. A typical forensic student will give at least four to six speeches at each tournament. These speeches are the most obvious evidence of the scholarship being accomplished in the forensic community. Although those outside of the forensic community may struggle to grasp many of the rules and norms of tournament practice, they can recognize the exceptional ability of students involved in the activity to effectively communicate messages. Campus showcase performances are an excellent way to document the public presentation of scholarship occurring within a forensic program.

Finally, perhaps the most important stage of the evaluation process is reflective critique. Forensic educators need to take time to critically evaluate themselves. Often coaches are so busy they don't take the time to reflect on how they approach coaching. The sheer number of hours dedicated to working with students leads to a dependence on intuition and habit. However, careful reflection regarding "why" one approaches coaching in a specific way leads to self-awareness that will improve one's craft. Most coaches expect

their students to conduct a ballot analysis of judge feedback. Coaches should engage in a similar task. Conducting exit interviews with students at the conclusion of each academic year is an excellent way to engage in the reflective critique process. Coaches can ask students what went well during the past season and what might be done more effectively in the future. Synthesizing student feedback allows the coach to adjust goals and methods for future academic years. As Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) explain, “reflective critique both promises and promotes intellectual engagement. It leads to better scholarship” (p. 35).

Documenting coaching efforts may seem a daunting task to add to an already overwhelming list of responsibilities. However, the effort will help forensic educators build strong arguments regarding the significance of their scholarship. “Documentation that addresses these standards familiarizes campus colleagues with the contexts surrounding the scholarly projects they are asked to review” (Glassick, Huber & Maeroff, 1997, p. 49). A formal assessment of scholarship helps ensure those outside of forensics understand the value of the work forensic educators do. As Hutchings, Huber, and Ciccone (2011) write:

The scholarship of teaching and learning is not so much a function of what particular pedagogies faculty use. Rather, it concerns the thoughtfulness with which they construct the learning environments they offer students, the attention they pay to students and their learning, and the engagement they seek with colleagues on all things pertaining to education in their disciplines, programs, and institutions. (p. 10-11)

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