There was an interesting discussion recently on the listserv of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education featuring a conversation about the teaching-research nexus. The conversation featured, as an instigator for the discussion, the future direction of the University of Saskatchewan as an institution prioritizing both teaching AND research as articulated by our new President. Questions were raised about whether research was indeed good for student learning and whether there was a conflict between the research and teaching. A lively conversation ensued, one continued in part by Jim’s editorial in this issue of Bridges, that is important for the University of Saskatchewan as we strive to, in the words of our first President, “hold an honourable place among the best” universities in Canada and around the world.

There is research, of course, showing that research intensiveness does not necessarily equate with teaching quality. The most famous study was a meta-analysis of over 50 other studies by Hattie and Marsh (1996) that shows that essentially there is no correlation (.08) between ‘traditional’ measures of research excellence (in particular, publication and citation rates) and teaching excellence (in particular, student evaluations of teaching). Their conclusion was that while these measures of research and teaching are uncorrelated, to ensure that the teaching and learning environment benefits from research, educators in higher education need to find active ways to bring research and teaching together.

The literature on this topic has followed two main paths of debate and inquiry: first, is research important for student learning? and second, should faculty/institutions engage in both research and teaching? To deal with the first of these two questions, a number of scholars have written about the impact of undergraduate research and research-based teaching and learning on student learning at the undergraduate level. The most sustained work done to bring together good practice examples of undergraduate research and research-based learning has been by Healey and Jenkins for the Higher Education Academy in the UK (Jenkins, 2004; Jenkins & Healey, 2005; Jenkins, Healey & Zetter, 2007; Healey & Jenkins, 2009). In terms of the impact of research on student learning, a few people to look at include: Kuh (2008) on high-impact educational practices (which includes undergraduate research as one of the most impactful experiences for students), Hunter et al. (2007) on the impact of research experiences; Brew (2006) on the integration of research and teaching; and the list goes on and on. In the Canadian context, I co-authored an article (2008) and book chapter (2011) on this from previous work undertaken at the University of Alberta, which I have included in the references below.

In the words of Healey and Jenkins, “all undergraduate students in all higher education institutions should experience learning through, and about, research and inquiry…We argue that such curricular experience should and can be mainstreamed for all or many students through a research-active curriculum. We argue that this can be achieved through structured interventions at [individual instructor, program], departmental, institutional and national levels” (Healey and Jenkins, 2009, p. 3). They further argue that students’ involvement with research and discovery might indeed help to define that which makes higher education higher. There has been an emerging consensus in the literature that research can be a benefit for students’ learning (a topic which I will return to in a future issue of Bridges).

Let’s turn to the second question about the importance of both teaching and research for faculty and institutions. Building on Hattie and Marsh’s (1996) conclusion that traditional measures of research excellence and teaching excellence are not correlated, and that we need to find ways to meaningfully bring teaching and research together, there is a significant literature dedicated to the importance and Impact of an integrated academic identity that merges both teaching and research seamlessly. Hattie and Marsh (2004) wrote a second article articulating frustration that their original meta-analysis had been misused to argue for the separation of teaching and research. In confirming
...the most successful early career academics often have an integrated academic identity across all aspects of their academic career... (2012)

their finding, they argued that the original 1996 study confirmed that some people are successful at both teaching and research, while others are only successful at one or the other, and finally some aren’t particularly successful at either teaching or research. They did not intend, as others subsequently concluded, that the two are separate entities and should be treated separately for funding or policy purposes. Instead they argue that it is better to consider how we might improve the teaching-research nexus for individual academics (as part of their academic identity and in how they ‘practice’ as academics) and institutions.

In essence, Hattie and Marsh were arguing for higher education institutions to explore how we might take full advantage of the teacher scholar model – of academics as both teachers and researchers. A significant part of Brew’s (2006) book, which I referenced earlier, is on this very topic – how one’s research might more actively inform and influence one’s teaching practice, and how one’s teaching might in turn inform one’s research practice. And there was also a seminal article by Colbeck (1998) that shows academics with an integrated identity (one where the individual can articulate how teaching benefits research and research benefits teaching in an integrated manner) have difficulty seeing how the two can be treated separately. On the flip side, Colbeck’s work also shows that for faculty who have a fragmented academic identity, where teaching and research are completely separate aspects of one’s work and are competing with one another for time and attention, it is often difficult to see how they can be mutually beneficial.

In a recent study by Kathryn Sutherland (and colleagues) undertaken at all eight universities in New Zealand (2009), as well as at universities in Canada and Sweden, the most successful early career academics often have an integrated academic identity across all aspects of their academic career (teaching, research, service, leadership, etc.) (2012). In her research, those academics identified as being successful early in career were often able to articulate where and how teaching and research are mutually supportive and beneficial.

Based on an understanding of this literature, in order for faculty to be successful (particularly early in career), it is our collective task wherever possible to help all faculty develop an integrated academic identity – an identity where they can see the mutual benefits that come from the research and teaching aspects of their teacher-scholar roles. It goes beyond the individual academic, however, in that we also need to explore how the research and teaching mandates of our institution can be mutually beneficial for student learning and for research. For example, the University of Alberta, one of our U15 peers, has made the connection between teaching and research an explicit part of their Institutional academic plan by stating, quite provocatively, that learning in a research intensive university should be defined as a qualitatively different experience than learning in a non-research intensive university (University of Alberta, 2007).

Ernest Boyer (1990) started his seminal work, Scholarship Reconsidered, where he introduced his four notions of scholarship (discovery, application, integration, and teaching and learning), by arguing that it was time to get beyond “the tired, old research vs. teaching debate and define, in more creative ways, what it means to be a scholar” (p. xii). He goes on to argue, as do most (if not all) of the authors above, for a broad definition of research that goes beyond a closed notion of only traditional discovery research in the disciplines. For all faculty to have an integrated academic identity, we must think broadly about what it means to be a scholar, an academic. This requires broad definitions of scholarship and research that move us beyond how they might traditionally have been defined, in addition to the critically important discovery research we expect in our disciplines.

References:


Hunter A. B., Laursen S. L., & Seymour E. (2007). Becoming a scientist: The role of undergraduate research in...


Endnotes

1 Dr. Sutherland spoke at the U of S this past November at both the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching Effectiveness, as well as at the Early Career Research Mentorship Workshop hosted by both the Office of the Vice-President Research and the Office of the Provost and VP Academic. Links to the videos of her talks are available on the GMCTE website.

In October, the University of Saskatchewan’s Community Outreach and Engagement Office opened at Station 20 West. Situated alongside a diverse group of organizations including CHEP Good Food Inc., Quint Development Corporation, the Good Food Junction Co-op, the Mothers’ Centre, and the Saskatoon Health Region’s Our Neighbourhood Health Centre and KidsFirst Program, the COE Office will focus on enhancing and building community-university relationships through community-engaged teaching and learning, and community-based scholarship/research. At the same time, the COE Office is aspiring to be a doorway to the University for the communities surrounding Station 20 West.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like further information about the COE Office—I can be reached at lisa.eckerson@usask.ca or 966-1780. Also, there are a few different ways that you can connect with our office in the coming months:

**Workspace in the COE Office at Station 20 West**

There are four cubicles in the COE office available to researchers, graduate students and staff engaged in community-based scholarship/research and/or curricular activities that meaningfully connect with community-identified interests and organizations working in the core neighbourhoods surrounding Station 20 West. A small meeting room that accommodates eight people with video conferencing capabilities is also available, as well access to shared meeting spaces at Station 20 West. Workspace priority will be given to applications for research programs that:

- demonstrate community involvement and community partners
- explain the community needs/interests that the research/program addresses
- identify the anticipated benefits for the community
- identify the anticipated benefits of using a workspace in the COE Office at Station 20 for faculty research, student learning and/or teaching.

If you are a faculty member who is interested in using one of the office workspaces in the COE office at Station 20 West for a time as it relates to your research/programs, or if you are supervising a graduate student or staff member whose work could benefit from being situated at the site, please contact donald.bear@usask.ca for an application form.