How and Why Scholarly and Creative Work Support Quality Teaching

One of my goals as Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees is to convey to the Trustees that the job of a faculty member is much more complex than many may realize and that is not easily quantified. Research and creative work is the foundation of quality teaching at Clemson and thus also at the heart of our mission to deliver the highest quality educational value to our amazing students and, by extension, the State of South Carolina and the nation.

Faculty take great pride in teaching well, which is a hallmark for Clemson and a key ingredient in making our reputation as a top public university. Great teaching is not easy, and it’s not an ability anyone gains merely through acquaintance with subject matter. The foundation of great teaching is scholarly research and creative work and the knowledge it produces. Scholarly and creative work is a form of intellectual and symbolic capital without which good teaching is impossible, though many may attempt to teach what they learned in school and hope that it still has currency in our frenetically changing world. Many people may perform well enough in the classroom to get by, but great teachers have active research programs that help them distill the best that can be known, they recognize and appreciate that the simple is often more complicated than it might initially appear, and they understand that there are hierarchies of knowledge or even good practices and better or best practices. Great teachers keep up with the latest research and methods because they understand that knowledge and practice change and that our students need to know what matters today and what will matter twenty years from now. The foundation of good teaching is not opinion or casual familiarity. The research and creative work that supports our teaching gives us credibility and authority—in the classroom and beyond. It gives Clemson the intellectual capital without which there can be little to say.

Great teaching is also a deeply collaborative process involving students, teachers, and the wider knowledge networks with which they engage. This kind of collaboration is difficult to quantify, but it may have an even greater impact on quality teaching than received wisdom. Collaboration connects students with faculty and faculty and students with professional networks in academia and industry. Collaboration creates opportunities for innovation, new learning, diversity, and collective problem solving in a globally connected world that we know faces major challenges. Clemson, like any great university, is a grand central station of

“Scholarship is critical to my effective performance as a teacher. Remaining current in research allows me to focus my graduate courses and upper-level undergraduate courses on those aspects of engineering theory and techniques that are likely to be of most relevance to students who go on to positions of engineering practice and advancement. It also keeps me sharper intellectually than I would be otherwise, which I believe helps me in identifying more effective pedagogical approaches for courses at all levels.”

—Daniel Noneaker
Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, College of Engineering and Science

“My scholarly work informs my teaching in every respect. I actually use my own research in my classes to help students learn. I have found students appreciate having an active scholar as a teacher.”

—James Satterfield
Associate Professor, Eugene T. Moore School of Education
sorts, a place at which our students acquire new knowledge and discover what they can do and make with it, and the hub from which faculty help students chart their course into the wilderness. [Slide 5: Satterfield] To lead students on this journey, faculty must know the lay of the land, the well-worn paths and new trails, and they will know what to expect because they live and work there already, just as they live and work at Clemson.

Academic Reputation

Clemson’s reputation as a top public university, ranked #21 as we all know in the latest US News and World Report rankings, depends on a variety of factors, most specifically how we rate with high school counselors and admissions directors, who tend to focus on the quality of undergraduate programs, and university presidents and provosts, who tend to focus on research, graduate schools, awards, and professional leadership in forming their opinions. US News rankings ostensibly focus on undergraduate education, so there’s some disconnect here, as you might expect with something as complex as a university’s reputation. We also know that the reputation score can be difficult to nudge higher because it depends on opinion to a great degree. In 2012, a US News study calculated that if we factor out reputation scores, Clemson ranked #19 instead of #25. Faculty, connected as they are in many ways with all that the university does—from teaching to research and creative work, mentorship of students and colleagues, development of innovative academic programs, and more—obviously can play a huge role in enhancing Clemson’s reputation. Faculty believe that the administration needs to support high quality and high profile research and creative work—and not simply with dollars, but those certainly help. As Provost Aziz has noted, a key measure of our quality as a research institution is our Carnegie classification, which is presently “High” but on the cusp of “Very High.” To assume our new identity as a first-class research university and (by consequence) positively influence our reputation, achieving this “Very High” status needs to be a priority. Faculty also want to know that innovation is not simply encouraged but also understood as something that takes time to bear fruit, especially with respect to Clem-

“In the end, reputation is what you do, not what you say.”
—Neill Cameron
Vice President for Advancement

“A well-mentored student is the best advocate for Clemson. They carry our name and message around the globe.”
—James Satterfield
Associate Professor, Eugene T. Moore School of Education

“My scholarly/creative work informs how I think and make, and since I work collaboratively, I always experience innovation in relation to others. I view students as collaborators in learning, so research and teaching are conceptually and practically tied together in my work.”
—Andrea Feeser
Associate Professor of Art and Architectural History, College of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities

“In the end, reputation is what you do, not what you say.”
—Neill Cameron
Vice President for Advancement

“A well-mentored student is the best advocate for Clemson. They carry our name and message around the globe.”
—James Satterfield
Associate Professor, Eugene T. Moore School of Education

“Today’s Clemson undergraduates, particularly those admitted while high school seniors, come to Clemson more prepared than previous generations of Clemson students. They require a strong faculty whose teaching is informed by on-going, published research.
—Lee Morrissey
Professor of English and Department Chair, English, College of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities

“In the end, reputation is what you do, not what you say.”
—Neill Cameron
Vice President for Advancement

“A well-mentored student is the best advocate for Clemson. They carry our name and message around the globe.”
—James Satterfield
Associate Professor, Eugene T. Moore School of Education

“My scholarly/creative work informs how I think and make, and since I work collaboratively, I always experience innovation in relation to others. I view students as collaborators in learning, so research and teaching are conceptually and practically tied together in my work.”
—Andrea Feeser
Associate Professor of Art and Architectural History, College of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities

“In the end, reputation is what you do, not what you say.”
—Neill Cameron
Vice President for Advancement

“A well-mentored student is the best advocate for Clemson. They carry our name and message around the globe.”
—James Satterfield
Associate Professor, Eugene T. Moore School of Education

“My scholarly/creative work informs how I think and make, and since I work collaboratively, I always experience innovation in relation to others. I view students as collaborators in learning, so research and teaching are conceptually and practically tied together in my work.”
—Andrea Feeser
Associate Professor of Art and Architectural History, College of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities

“In the end, reputation is what you do, not what you say.”
—Neill Cameron
Vice President for Advancement

“A well-mentored student is the best advocate for Clemson. They carry our name and message around the globe.”
—James Satterfield
Associate Professor, Eugene T. Moore School of Education
son’s reputation. The administration can ensure that faculty work focuses on this ideal and not merely the mechanisms of measurement and self-reporting that sometimes can produce what colleagues describe as evaluation fatigue, which can lead also to suspect data. What we—trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students working together—need to do is imagine and then create a culture of learning and research that inspires everyone to work toward the common goal of establishing Clemson’s preeminence as a top research university.

I want to digress a moment to draw from my own experience as a faculty member at now three different universities. During my first stint as an assistant professor at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale (#177), I worked my tail off during the tenure and promotion process, barely squeaking by in 1997. As I look back, I wonder how on earth I spent my time when I see that I published only seven or eight articles (all great, mind you, but hardly a number to reduce my anxiety or my dean’s). I realize now that much of my time was devoted to learning to teach and professionalize but also there were ample “assisted” invitations to justify, explain, or account for my own research or the programs with which I was involved. The culture felt like a panopticon, which is a sort of prison where no one knows what other inmates do but the warden watches all. Innovation and research were valued, but they weren’t the modus operandi. Then I jumped to Purdue (#24) and, miraculously, I published 5 books in five years, wrote many more articles, and accomplished all sorts of curricular and programmatic change. I had matured as a scholar, of course, but it took time and, critically, it happened because at Purdue, research and cre-
ative work were in the air—everyone did it, talked about it, valued it, promoted it. We still reported it, of course, but the collaboration, mentoring, and support were everywhere. Faculty want to establish that kind of culture at Clemson. We're getting close. We want to be educators, not simply facilitators, or teachers who only teach and lose currency in their fields or remain isolated from the wider world of higher learning and cutting-edge research. Our students deserve this kind of faculty. It's why they would choose Clemson in the first place. There are vocational and technical colleges out there who can train students well enough. At Clemson, we want to inspire them.

I want to close with just one more personal example, this one a representation of how important it is for faculty to create networks of collaboration and then use these networks to foster research, creative work, and innovation. This is an image of my LinkedIn network from a couple of months ago. It maps many of the connections I've made over the years with students and colleagues, both locally and nationally. You see the orange area to the left, which is Clemson. The green area to the right is primarily Purdue. Then there's the huge blue blob, which represents the connections to
people in the profession, in the publishing industry, and more. You see the complexity in this next slide. Somewhere in this network are nodes that reveal the connections that can pan out. As you heard yesterday in the Educational Policy Committee meeting, we’re on the verge of announcing a major partnership with Adobe. Perhaps one of the nodes there is Jim Bottum, my colleague at Purdue and now Clemson, and Kay Wall, Jan Holmevik, and the rest of the team. There are connections to Adobe people, to students who have used the tools in my classes, and to scholars on the cutting-edge of digital publishing. Clearly, it takes significant work to create these networks, which grow as a result of our teaching, research, scholarly work, collaboration, and more. They take time and energy to develop. Sometimes, more often than not, they lead to unexpectedly great innovations that no one could have ever imagined and that we hope will inspire our students along their own paths.