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The public role of the university professor

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ing those rules of civility. Being in the present and paying attention are gifts that my students and I honor in our classroom community, as well. We wait for one another in whatever form that may take, and for which we are grateful daily.

3. **Listen deeply**. To listen deeply, we actually listen to the feelings beneath the words shared in class and in life. Quaker writer Douglas Steer puts it this way, "Holy listening — to 'listen' another's soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery — may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another." In class we seek to listen to ourselves as well as to others.

4. **Speak Kindly**. Above all, I want to be a kind person, and I want that gift for my students. I ask my students to think about how they want people to remember them after they die. I know that I want them to be remembered as kind. One way to open up to this experience and other emotions is to share our life stories with one another in class, and through our stories, we hear about kindness and courage and honesty and pain and gratitude.

5. **Guard Time**. Punctuality is nonnegotiable for me. I reflect upon the importance of time at each class period. Arriving on time is a rule of civil, respectful behavior. Some years ago, I invited a guest to speak to my class. She was considerably early and remarked to the class that because of her respect for me, she wouldn't even consider arriving late. I was honored by her civility, and I have held that story in my heart ever since she shared it.

These five ideas form the core of the most pressing issues today in my psychology classroom. The ideas also form the core of why the knowledge of psychology matters, how it links to the world outside the classroom walls, and how it provides a window to the souls of my students. This is how we learn. This is how we live.

Mary Lynn Colosimo is an associate professor of psychology at Trinity Christian College.

James Tackach

The Public Role of the University Professor

According to the contract that governs my professional life at Roger Williams University (RWU), I must teach four courses each semester, hold four office hours, serve on at least one academic committee (if asked), advise up to twenty-five students, and attend my university's annual convocation and commencement ceremonies. The evaluation section of the RWU faculty contract also stipulates that I may be assessed every five years — I am tenured — on a wide variety of professional endeavors, including research and publication, participation in conferences and seminars, grant writing, curriculum planning and development, and community service.

My duties at RWU rarely take me beyond the grounds of our beautiful campus alongside scenic Mount Hope Bay in Bristol, Rhode Island. Once or twice per year, I am expected to attend a professional conference off campus and interact with colleagues from other academic institutions. Other than those semesterly or yearly ventures, I work for and with the students, faculty, and administration of RWU. Perhaps that is fitting and proper. For the most part, the students of RWU (a private, tuition-driven institution) pay my salary and, hence, deserve to receive the lion's share of my labor.

I suggest, however, that college and university professors consider taking on a more public role that carries them, with greater frequency, beyond the iron gates or concrete pavements of their own academic institutions into the public sphere — not merely for high-income consulting but with the goal of educating the general public.

Certainly many college and university faculty members already perform this role very effectively. But for most academic professionals, these kinds of public activities are secondary or tertiary considerations; the goal of most college and university faculty members is to serve their own institutions through teaching and committee work and to inform and impress their academic colleagues by publishing their research in refereed academic journals that are rarely read by the general public. Furthermore, the evaluation system in place at most colleges and universities rewards these kinds of traditional academic activities — teaching, serving on campus committees, revising curricula, and publishing in academic publications.

As a result of this rather insular view of our academic workloads, our nation's professoriate has,

to a great degree and in important ways, lost touch with the public surrounding our campuses. In my academic field, literary studies, for example, professors have been filling the pages of too many scholarly journals with a form of gobbledygook prose understandable only to a small number of specialists in the field. I have advanced degrees in English, but even I am often unable to decipher the arguments put forth in critical articles in literary journals in my field. I suspect that academicians in other academic fields have similar complaints about the stuff that their colleagues produce to fill the pages of academic journals and thereby secure tenure and gain promotion. I remember a news story of several years ago that reported on a sociologist who intentionally composed an academic article that said essentially nothing in several pages of jargon-filled prose and had the article accepted by a prominent journal in his field.

I realize that articles in certain scientific journals might be hard to digest by the common reader, and I fully understand the necessity of cutting-edge research reported in the language of specialists. But all of us, I would argue, particularly scientists, have a responsibility to bring our knowledge to the general public as well.

I propose that faculty members at America's colleges and universities make a new commitment to the public that supports our institutions with its tax dollars and tuition payments. Such a commitment might take any number of forms:

- Lecturing at public libraries, museums, Rotary clubs, and other venues where the public gathers.
- Participating on panels at theaters and concert halls during post-performance discussions.
- Writing articles for newspapers and popular magazines and authoring books for general audiences.
- Conducting research and writing grants for nonprofit community organizations.
- Offering workshops for high school teachers and speaking in high school classrooms.
- Serving on the boards of and participating in programs offered by museums and historical societies.

Of course, colleges and universities must reward these kinds of public activities. A biologist who secures a grant for a nonprofit environmental organization to conduct water testing on a local river must receive the same credit that her colleague receives for securing a grant for his university from the National Science Foundation. A literary scholar who writes a travel piece on Concord, Massachusetts, for a newspaper or magazine must receive the same credit that a colleague receives for an article on *Walden* published in a refereed scholarly journal.

If colleges and universities mandated dialogue with the general public as an important element in a faculty member's contribution, more of my colleagues would descend their ivory towers and face the public. The public would benefit from our educational efforts; colleges and universities would profit from having their good names spread in the communities that support these institutions; and faculty members would benefit from an opportunity to make a positive contribution in the communities in which they work.

James Tackach, a professor of English at Roger Williams University, is president of the Phi Kappa Phi chapter at the University of Rhode Island.

Audrey J. Jaeger and Courtney H. Thornton

Fulfilling the Public-Service Mission in Higher Education: 21st Century Challenges

Engagement. Community Service. Civic Responsibility. Service Learning. Outreach. Extension. Today there are more nuanced terms that apply to the public-service mission of higher education than ever before. Some believe that this renewed interest in the public-service mission is cyclical and soon will pass in favor of another emphasis in higher education. Others believe that the call back to public service in higher education reflects the significant needs of society or decreased state funding for higher education, two areas that will not change quickly. Regardless of the reason for the increased attention to this oft-neglected aspect of the traditional tripartite mission (teaching, research, and service), public service faces many of the same challenges today that it did in ages past. When institutions realize that public service needs more attention, reactive changes to the curriculum, institutional policy, or organizational structure are implemented. These approaches are impermanent and even fleeting, changing perhaps as soon as the next faculty-senate vote. It is time to acknowledge the deep cultural challenges to fulfilling the public-service mission and to work as a national network in higher education to actively address them.

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