In Pursuit of Scholarship: The “Raw Nerve” of the Academy

Linda M. Strand
College ofPharmacy, University of Utah. Salt Lake City UT 84112

For the past three days, we have been offered a number of provocative definitions and explanations of scholarship. We have been presented with an impressive array of expectations and indicators of whether or not we are worthy of the appellation “scholar,” and we have been enlightened as to what it takes to administer a faculty bent on a life of scholarship. My charge is to examine scholarship from the perspective of an individual faculty member who must eventually navigate through what often appears to be an “academic maze.”

Let us begin, then, by engaging ourselves in a bit of “elementary” scholarship by initiating a line of inquiry: Why have we been discussing the topic of scholarship over the past three days? Is it because there is too little of it in our colleges of pharmacy? If so, because we, as faculty members, should be spending more time in pursuit of it? The reason has not been made explicitly clear to me. I do not think it is because everyone is talking about it. The conversations in most colleges of pharmacy today are more likely to involve the following bits and pieces: How much faculty salary offset have you brought in this year? How many single or first-authored papers have you published in the last year? Exactly how much external funding have you been responsible for, and what are your funding sources? How many students did you precept or teach this year? How many graduate theses did you supervise this year? How many guest lectures were you invited to give, and just how many manuscripts were you asked to review? I am not passing judgment on these topics of conversation, but they certainly are more familiar to me than are questions or discussions concerning scholarship.

So, why is this the focus of our meeting? Is it an attempt to create a false state of consciousness among those of us who are trying to comprehend what the “academic maze” is all about? Is it an attempt to make faculty forget about the realities alluded to above? Is it an attempt to make less than desirable situations seem more palatable? For example, too little state support, programs built on too much soft money, inadequate preparation for many of our pharmacy practice faculty, pharmacy administration programs too focused on anachronistic pharmacy practice, basic sciences which continue to lack visible links to the practice of pharmacy. I do not believe so, but the questions certainly need to be asked.


At the risk of repeating material already covered, I would like to briefly focus on a working definition of scholarship, and then discuss perceived and actual barriers to achieving the status of scholar in a contemporary college of pharmacy. It is my hope that near the end of my discussion, we will have decided whether scholarship is a worthy pursuit, whether it is achievable, and what the pragmatic factors involved in achieving the status of scholar look like.

We need to be careful with a word such as scholarship. Scholarship means many things to many people. As a word used in practical day-to-day affairs, it too often becomes a linguistic gloss for assorted academic activities. As with the word “excellence,” it takes on all the mystical trappings of “quality,” but fundamentally remains a vagary that gives rise to the conscientious nodding head—the quiet approval that implies that we all know what it means. This level of understanding is acceptable if your only intention is to talk about scholarship; active engagement in the act requires a more substantial grasp of the concept. I should begin by making it clear that when I refer to scholarship, I am referring to scholarship as an end in itself. I am not referring to what is commonly measured as outcomes of scholarship, namely publications, funding, a reputation and awards. I am referring to scholarship as an end in itself, whether it be quantitative or qualitative, explanatory or interpretive, “hard” or “soft.” Scholarship should not be method or content dependent. Instead, it should focus on the depth and the scope with which an idea is pursued. Scholarship is a passion for ideas and their exploration. It is a commitment to a universal skepticism, and not a blind faith in “facts” and the conventional wisdom of the established theories and paradigms.

Although many of the papers I perused for this presentation addressed scholarship, some in a more scholastically manner, Winiarski(2) quite succinctly helps to explain what I have been saying:

Scholarship does not necessarily mean a product, though it most commonly will emerge as a printed document. Scholarship is more than a set of values and attitudes. It is characterized by intellectual curiosity, skepticism and a commitment to inquiry that permeates professional deliberations and actions. A sense of dissatisfaction with unexamined questions guides the scholar. It would seem reasonable to suggest that one could engage in scholarship and that logical outcomes of such activity would be 348 American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education Vol. 52, Winter 1988
publications, funding and quality training. Let us pretend for just a moment that this is the case. A hypothesis accepted as fact: when one engages in scholarship, the result will be 35 single-authored publications, $2.8 million in competitive funding, service to a significant number of individuals, and teaching that is exemplary. Now, we have just removed what would seem to many of us to be the most significant barriers to entry of consent with enough breadth and scope for us to be considered scholarly activity. Are there other barriers to engaging in scholarship that you and I as faculty should be aware of? I think the answer is yes, and for me, they represent much more significant barriers than having to publish, teach, provide service and obtain external funding; which may very well be seen as "natural" extensions of scholarship. These barriers represent to me the real challenges to scholarship, challenges that each of us need to face and either accept or move on to academic endeavors other than scholarship. These challenges lie in the following areas: (i) the sacrifice which must be made for scholarship to be realized; (ii) the technical emphasis and demands of a professional college; and (iii) the lack of a theory of pharmacy practice. I will discuss each one of these challenges.

SACRIFICES FOR SCHOLARSHIP

In order to understand the sacrifices mandated by a life of scholarship, we must understand that scholarship most certainly goes beyond research. The rigor, the persistence and the drive for perfection encompass much more than a research method or statistical technique. Because of this, scholarship is first and foremost, a way of life and not just a career. C. Wright Mills3 articulated the demands of scholarship when he explained to neophyte sociologists the following:

"It is best to begin, I think, by reminding you, the beginning student, that the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community you have chosen to join do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such distinction, and they want us to take each for the entire work of the other. Of course, such a split is the prevailing convention among men, in general, deriving, I suppose, from the foolishness of the work which men in general now do. But you will have recognized that as a scholar you have the exceptional opportunity, and the responsibility, of disentangling the habit of good workmanship. Scholarship is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of career; whether he knows it or not, the intellectual worker forms his own self as he works toward the perfection of his craft; to realize his own potentialities, and any opportunity he has of help making him a character which has as its core the qualities of the good worker (pp, 195-96).

Additional characteristics, which we might find more uncomfortable than comfortable, were explained by Diderot (1713-88) when he suggested that scholars of every ilk had to accept without question that, "everything must be examined, everything must be shaken up, without exception and without circumcision"(4). I should imagine that the adoption of this approach by a significant number of faculty in colleges of pharmacy today would cause quite a stir. It did historically, for the central players of scholarly efforts worked outside the university. Why? Because, according to Rokeach5, the universities were quite "inimicable to the more advanced critical thought of the time." Thus, "intellectual workers... had to be made outside of the oppressive environment of the academic establishment."

The marginality of scholars throughout history, beginning in the fifteenth century, is very well documented. Today's scholar, certainly the potential scholar, should be cognizant of this history. Unfortunately, when we discuss contemporary scholarship, we tend to ignore the accompanying alienation and the legacy of universal skepticism. The lone scholar is not a "team player," and such deviance is rampant in universities, in general, and professional schools, in particular.

To summarize, I have argued that scholarship goes beyond research. In addition, I have emphasized that it is, first and foremost, a way of life and not just a career. It involves the examination of everything, not just because it is fundable or publishable. It demands that everything be shaken up, without exception and without circumcision, which leads to alienation and universal skepticism. This might be a good pace to pause and consider whether we still want to pursue scholarship. Let us not pass judgment just yet.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE TECHNOCRAT AS A "SCHOLAR"

Let us consider next the challenge presented by the technical emphasis of the professional college. In order to fully understand this challenge, we need to look at history once again. We need to proceed from the Enlightenment to the social forces brought about by the Industrial Revolution (17th-18th century). The industrialization enriched pragmatic and materialist principles moved the academy closer to the interests of commerce. The scholar was to be of considerable extent, exceptional, the intellect of a rapidly growing industrial society. This obsession with technique and the objectification of nature in- duced scholarship away from a philosophically interpretive to a more-rationa-empirical modular approach.

In the eighteenth century, European scientists set the stage for a contemporary ethic between those who cling to the more classical sense of scholarship and those who consider research qua research as analogous to scholarship. It should be emphasized that research (of all types) was always an important part of scholarship; however, as time progressed, major portions of what traditionally made up scholarship were eliminated for the sake of efficiency and individual interests. Rarely does one find references to scholars at work during this period of sixteenth century scientific growth. Rather, we find countless references to scientists and their capacity for transforming nature into various marketable commodities. This limits both the scope and depth of inquiry itself, but is not nearly as damaging to scholarship as the more recent development of ownership of ideas in the academic setting. Taking ownership one step further is the non-disclosure of sources of financial support for work completed in an academic setting, a fact that hides scholarship behind a mask of secrecy and suspicion. What C.P. Snow(w) refers to as the "two cultures" began to evolve and, for many observers, polarization within the university setting and elsewhere escalated.

Additional scholars occurred as professional schools clearly distinguished the social and economic value of their "products" from those of departments of history, philosophy, or English. Unquestionably, to be "in" polymer research pays more than being "in" medieval English studies. In short, English scholars knew that has less "cash value" than that of pharmaceutical science. The intellectual, when it comes to financial reward, is clearly content dependent. Such contextual considerations are essential to our understanding of contemporary scholarship. Knowledge, in the professional school, is to be transplanted into science. Science must be developed into technology. This element of practicality does influence the nature and degree of scholarly activity. Thus, while I argue that scholarship should be method and source independent, and depth and scope dependent, this is difficult to achieve in a setting such as a college of pharmacy.

In a professional school where specialization is rewarded and technocratic emphasis more highly prized, precisely, the study of interconnections needed for scholarship gives way to differential designations. An example of where connections are badly lacking is with our obsessive use of behavioral objectives to the specifics of outcome in colleges of pharmacy. We have placed in curricula what the outcomes of pharmaceutical education should be within a clearly articulated definition of clinical pharmacy practice. It has also occurred without establishing clear standards of practice for the clinical practice of pharmacy. It seems risky, why is pharmacy student is dressed and scope, to put in concrete that which is still unknown to us, and yet is a very important part of what we do and what we teach in colleges of pharmacy today.

THEORETICAL OMission OR IDEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

The main challenge to engaging in scholarship, which I would identify here, relates to the absence of a theory of pharmacy practice. Wh,
should this omission be a direct threat to scholarship? The answer is
that to a considerable extent an absence of theory leads to the ascend-
dance of a "common sense" approach to practice which "bends to the
discussion of exigencies of a practice devoid of theoretical in-
greteness" (7). That is to say, "common sense" points of view are
substituted by a whole network of prejudices, unspoken truths and in some cases by the superstitions of the
conception of the world. Practice is sufficient unto itself and "common sense" adopts a passive and uncritical attitude towards
it, "common sense" is no more than the error or practice.
In short, a critical stance is essential to discovering what we as a profession are all about. Then, perhaps, we can engage in the scholarly examination of issues derived from a more active engagement with our
raison d'etre.
A theoretical framework linked to practice would reveal the inter-
connections between the "chunks" of knowledge presently presented.
The basic sciences, for example, would exist within an intellectually
synergistic context. Also, the act of developing theory would provide
the necessary framework in which to move rationally and
peer judgment on ethical issues as well as the economic forces.
Scholars do require a minimum of order, even those who are presently
developing chaos theory.
Additionally, while we are on the subject of chaos, the idea of
unstable culture within the college cannot go unnoticed. That cul-
tures have conflicting beliefs is well known. But, scholarship builds
knowledge and, at some point, must contribute to a more stable
intellectual culture within which the scholarly artesian is rewarded. A theory
of practice will create stability of purpose and foster scholarly debate on
how we will accomplish our professional remit. While we can study
beliefs, no matter how primitive, they are a poor foundation upon
which to build a scholarly enterprise.
ACCOMPLISHING SCHOLARSHIP
Against the above backdrop it is essential to examine the question: How
does the aspiring scholar survive in the professional school? Also, how
do we foster intellectual curiosity, skepticism, and critical thought
within the confines of a technical culture, a culture that is seemingly
economic dependent? What kind of life style can be found within the
context of our obsession with funding? Do we develop scientists, scholars, or "acccountants"? These are but a few of the many questions
asked by those embarking on careers in the academy.
Survival, so it would seem unquestionably involves obtaining fund-
ing; not just any funding, but competitive funding. It involves getting
published, and much, much more. So very rapidly the newcomer learns the
rules of survival. He or she learns to prioritise, to adjust weights to
retention, promotion, and tenure criteria. Academic folklore becomes
instructive. It is learned that few, if any, faculty are terminated because
of poor teaching, however defined. As for service — few feel threat-
ened by committee work and the odd talk given to a local citizens
group. But all feel the terror struck by the demands and expectations of
funding. The intellect becomes caught up in paradigms and the "received view" of "normal" science(1). One very quickly learns to
"play it safe" and pursue conservative, i.e., fundable projects. To take
seriously Kant's dictum "dare to know" and engage in risk-taking, is
decidedly harmful to the health and happiness of the would-be
researcher.
What then, is the positive dimensions of contemporary life as a
neophyte academic in a college of pharmacy? What can be done
develop an academic culture that is constructive, is generative
of scholarship, and reawards creative, imaginative thinking? What can we
do to maximize intellectual risk-taking, critical thinking, and the
legitimation of Kant's claim? The short answer is that we can dare to
change the established order of things. We can move toward develop-
ing an academic culture which encompasses different norms, values and
expectations.
And how? First, we need faculty who are informed about the
meaning of scholarship, faculty who are willing to make the sacrifices,
who will combat the technical emphasis in a professional school, and
who will participate in the development of a meaningful theory for
pharmacy practice. In order to develop these faculty, we need to
expect, perhaps even demand, leadership that possesses the values and
attitudes that promote scholarship, not compromise it. We need to
demand that our department chairmen and college deans have a plan,
a professional plan, which acknowledges that our first and foremost
priority, as colleges of pharmacy, is to produce the best clinical
practitioners possible. A plan which expects high research quality
which furthers professional practice and our role as defined by the
society which financially supports it. A plan which requires that our
teaching methods instil the creation of competent practitioners and
not preclude it. A plan which will provide the departments of pharmacy
practice and our departments of pharmacy administration with a chance
to succeed. In both cases, a plan that will assign the resources needed
to develop quality graduate programs to badly needed to bring our
colleges of pharmacy into the twenty-first century. A plan which will
mandate that resources devoted to basic science research contribute
meaningful insight into pharmacy practice theory development. A plan
which acknowledges, articulates, and further the synergy so badly
needed in a college of pharmacy.
And, perhaps most important of all, we need to assume the risks
inherent when we "dare to know." Indeed, we have very little choice
should we desire to cultivate scholars. Should we wish to continue with
our technocratic zeal — then we must be willing to live with the
consequences of our action and endure our casualties. The raw
milk we touch will be, in reality, our own.
Acknowledgement: The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance
of Dr. Peter C. Morley, Research Professor, Department of Pharmacy
Practice, College of Pharmacy, University of Utah, in the preparation
of this presentation.

References:
(1) Rahn, T., The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed. University of
(3) Mills, C.W., The Sociological Imagination. The Oxford Press University
(1968) p. 5.
(1963).
2: 159.