Implications of Service as an Emerging Factor in Retention, Tenure and Promotion Decisions

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ABSTRACT

Service has long been recognized as a necessary but insufficient ingredient in the retention, tenure and promotion process at most colleges and universities. The relative importance of service is growing with the emergence of the concept of the metropolitan university and new alliances and expectations among the university and its various publics. The service dimension may prove to be especially important for those with marketing and communications knowledge and skills. This paper cites some of the standard and more current thinking on service, then provides a service "how to" guide for those on the tenure track process.

HOW MUCH SERVICE IS ENOUGH?

The question of how much weight to give service relative to teaching and scholarship, the traditional three areas of consideration for retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) is often posed and never finally answered. I will not answer it here, but hope to show that the importance of service is growing as expectations of the university change, and that those of us in the marketing and communications disciplines are well positioned to lead this growth and make it positive.

Centra (1979) notes that public and community service is infrequently recognized or rewarded. His survey of department heads found that only two percent considered public and community service a critical factor in evaluating faculty members. Stroup (1983) suggests that community service should include "offices held in academic, professional, and scholarly societies, public and/or governmental service/community service activities relevant to the faculty member's role at the university, and consulting activities."

Bowen and Schuster (1986) measured involvement in public service, as a percent of total faculty time, ranging from three to five percent: if one adds in institutional governance and service, with between 16 and 21 percent reported, the total for service related work rose to between 20 and 25 percent. They argued for a broader definition of service and said, "a new breed of professors has emerged who move easily between the academic world and business or government."

Melville (1991) talks of the emergence of the Metropolitan Grant University in which faculty is rewarded for locally focused research and "a real commitment to local service." This model is driving a reassessment and self evaluation process on my campus and at many large, urban campuses.

Dills, et al (1994), distinguish service from citizenship, calling citizenship: "what is expected of faculty members as their minimum contribution to the joint efforts of the academic unit so that it may continue to function. Citizenship, unlike service, does not necessarily require the application of substantial professional expertise or knowledge." When service is discussed, it is well to remember this distinction.

Braskamp and Ory (1994) trace the concept of service back to the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. Among other definitions, they cite the Schomberg and Farmer definition of public service as "a set of activities utilizing faculty expertise to solve societal problems or to help others to do so, intended to benefit the public and contribute to the welfare of society." They make a good case for the practical application of knowledge being, in itself, good scholarship. In particular, cite "professors in professional disciplines" as more likely to engage in this type of scholarly work than are professors in humanities and sciences. It is my belief that those of us with marketing and communications knowledge and skills, because of what we have to offer in the applied sciences, are in a better position to provide service to our universities and our communities and that, consequently, the service may have more meaning when it is considered for retention, tenure and promotion.

My university’s policy covers service under professional achievements and says: "Professional achievements include, but are not limited to, active participation or leadership in professional associations, meetings, panels, activities or workshops; patented inventions or discoveries; consulting; service on editorial boards or as editor of a professional journal or newsletter; adjudicator, or translator or reviewer for publishers, or other agencies and associations; public lectures, honors and awards."
In general, professional achievement consists in (sic) active participation or leadership in the CSU or in professional associations related to a faculty member’s discipline. Service to other associations and to the community, state, nation, or international community in a capacity related to the faculty member’s discipline and requiring the application of the faculty member’s professional knowledge or skills shall also be recognized as a professional contribution or achievement.” (ARTP Criteria, San Jose State University, 1994). This broad definition allows much interpretation, but it does specify that the faculty member must apply professional knowledge or skills. That is, just being on a board carries no weight; using your skills and knowledge does. The policy goes on to state that these achievements (service) must be thoroughly evaluated by one’s disciplinary peers, within and/or outside one’s department, not merely enumerated.

The Department of Psychology at Florida State University also has an enlightened view of service, calling it “a responsibility that falls upon the shoulders of the professor by reason of his/her professional, academic, and state-employee’s identification.”

The department breaks service down to Department service, College service, University service, and professional service, to include both academic and public service. The department policy says that professors, by being appointed to public advisory groups, “serve in an advisory capacity governmental agencies and public and private social service agencies on state, national, and international levels. These service activities not only provide service to humanity, but bring prestige to the University.”

Indeed, those of us in marketing and communications are often ideally positioned to provide valuable knowledge in the service of our university or community. In practice today, consulting activities and the involvement of the local business community in special projects are already bridging some of these new alliances. In live case studies and internships, for example, we blur the lines between the purely academic and service to the community. Live case studies benefit the sponsoring organizations, and the donations they make to our department benefit the department directly and the university indirectly by providing soft money for department programs. Students benefit enormously from the “real-world” experience, and it often leads to employment for top performers (Jordan, a, 1993).

Internships benefit the sponsoring organization and the students. The sponsor recognizes the student’s value by paying the tuition for the course, $450, and the internship may become employment for students who have applied themselves and impressed their sponsors (Jordan, b, 1993).

In his inaugural speech, Robert J. Caret, the newly installed president of San Jose State University said, “There will be an emphasis on teaching, on learning outcomes, on professional service to the community … We will work with the local government to help solve the social and economic problems of the region. We will continue to be an engine of economic development, and we will enhance our role as catalysts for social change. We will be recognized as the resource we are, not because of what we say, but because of what we do. We will work with local communities to help them realize their dreams, which, by definition, are our dreams.” (Caret, 1995)
Clearly, the course is set. At many urban and metropolitan universities, service seems likely to increase in importance as a factor for consideration in the RTP process. The balance of this paper is addressed to those faculty who are on the tenure track and are therefore accountable for service as well as teaching and scholarship. It also addresses any interested faculty in the California State University system. All the new rules have not yet been written, but with the new contract it appears we will be in direct competition with all other faculty members for pay increases. Service may loom large as a criterion in the new schema.

GETTING STARTED

First, a caution for those on the tenure track—don't ever believe that service will replace scholarship or teaching. New paradigms may evolve in which service, particularly service to the community, dominates, but it remains a solid support player in today's faculty evaluation criteria. In other words, probationary faculty members should continue to concentrate teaching and scholarship as the primary areas on which they will be evaluated.

I will leave to others the task of defining service and differentiating it from citizenship and consulting, in my experience, the lines are blurry and evaluation committees will consider each case individually, weighing outstanding service in some cases more heavily than others. In the absence of clear cut and agreed upon criteria and definitions (and I believe we will never have a definition that will apply universally), it is imperative that each Department or other decision-making unit, whether it is a College, School, or University, make its best attempt to clarify local policy for the benefit of the tenure track faculty, and for those evaluating them. It is critical, for instance, that Department and University-Level definitions and criteria be consistent, so that faculty do not conduct themselves on the assumption that their activities will be considered strongly only to find out that these activities carry little importance at higher levels in the evaluation process.

Inconsistent application of existing policy sends up a warning flag to the attentive probationary track faculty member: compared to evaluation of service, evaluations of teaching and scholarship are relatively straightforward and consistent. Given the inconsistencies we have all seen in these areas, it is no wonder that people are leery of committing too much time and effort to service. A department may value and reward on-campus service, whereas the school, college, or university levels are looking for, and reinforcing, community service.

A clear signal from the top, such as President Caret's statement, goes a long way toward bringing not only direction but consistency to the process. But even in the absence of such clarity, all the signs point toward the increasing importance of service—to the university, but especially to the community, for those of us in public universities.

WHERE TO SERVE

The dictum to think globally but act locally is a wise one. Good citizenship/service begins in the department. Showing up is the starting point. With all its flaws, the RTP process still seems to recognize that the Department level, with the candidate's day-to-day colleagues, has the most say. At my university, as at most others today, we have significantly fewer faculty doing all the same work we did five years ago, and it's imperative that each of us contribute, or those who do the work must also bear the burden for those who don't. People on the tenure track should make it their business to attend all meetings and serve on at least one Department committee. That is serve, not merely attend. Ideally, the junior faculty member will assume a leadership role in a department activity or function; at the minimum, active participation and a substantive contribution are expected.

The question posed in the RTP committees is: "should we choose as a colleague for the next 20 or so years a person who has not shown any inclination to pitch in a help out with the work we all share?"

In conjunction with a senior faculty mentor, each probationary track faculty member should plan a course of service over the five or six years leading to tenure, a course that will, naturally, continue after tenure is granted. That course should have a base of service in the Department, but include service to the School, College, and University. At whatever level, make the service meaningful. Committee membership without contribution carries little if any weight with any RTP committee I have served on.

At the College and University committees level, the work of the committee may be less familiar, but there is often a greater opportunity to contribute based on the knowledge and skills you bring to the table. Most of us in the marketing disciplines have a solid grasp of applied research or planning or communications that will augment the knowledge and skills that our colleagues from other Colleges bring with them.

Working with colleagues from around the campus broadens our horizons and provides the opportunity to get more involved in shared research projects, consulting, grant or proposal preparation, and other activities. Cross-disciplinary research and teaching
projects are almost always perceived as more prestigious than work done by an individual or by two people within the same academic unit.

Get Appointed

Being appointed to a committee on campus is easy—just ask. Try to choose a committee that's a good fit for you, your skills and interests, and one on which you can make a meaningful contribution. Service at these levels is expected; you can make that service significant by assuming a leadership role.

Get Elected

Run for your Academic Senate. As an Academic Senator you will play a role in the governance of the University, a clear message that you understand the concept of service and are willing to do more than your share. At the Senate you will come to understand how the business of the university is conducted—the role of faculty, administration, and support services. You will establish a set of contacts throughout your campus, resources for you to call on as you become a resource for them. I recommend the experience, though it is not for everyone.

Get Involved

I was asked by my College Curriculum Committee to make a presentation on how to get involved in service to the community, (that presentation grew into this paper). In my final dossier for tenure I had evaluative letters and commendations from three mayors, two county supervisors, and five or six city council members. I had completed a grant for the state, with a colleague from Environmental Science, which resulted in publication of a brochure. More important to me, personally, were the evaluative letters from board members at a local recovery house where I had helped with research and publications that were sorely needed. I do not recommend this level of involvement for everyone—maybe not for anyone—but the possibilities are there if you choose to avail yourself of them.

Join

Join the Western Marketing Educator's Association (WMEA), or other academic associations. Again, just joining is not enough. You have to be active, reviewing papers, writing papers, participating on panels, and doing some of the work it takes to make an organization worthwhile. This takes on meaning if you become an officer of the organization. I also recommend industry groups. My serving as the University liaison as a vice president of the Business Marketing Association has benefited me and my Department in University-wide and national industry-wide exposure.

Get in the Service Loop

Yes, it exists. Mine started when an acquaintance asked me to join the board of a recovery home for men just off-campus. Boards for non-profits can almost all benefit from the knowledge and skills any university professor, but especially a marketing professor, can bring to it. I was not naive. I knew that I was being asked because work had to be done, there was no money, and I had the skills to do it. In my continuing work on this board, I am regularly recruiting accountants, lawyers, construction experts, and anyone else with a skill we need and an urge to serve.

Because of this work (it showed up in my first year dossier as pro bono consulting), and my expertise in communication, my Dean asked me to help the Mayor of our university's city (almost a million people) with a communication program targeting at-risk teenagers with alcohol and drug avoidance messages. This led to my appointment to the University President's special advisory committee on drug and alcohol abuse.

Two years later, my service on that task force was instrumental in my appointment to a county advisory commission on alcohol and drug prevention.

Three years later, it also led to a paid consulting job with my former Dean in her new position as Chancellor of a Community College District. This is not to say that the motive for doing pro bono community service is that it will or even that it may lead to paid consulting, but the possibility is there. The point is that being involved in the community and being visible will open up many opportunities that might otherwise not have appeared.

Get a Grant

I got on my university foundation's grant list, wrote a proposal, and received a grant to research, document and publicize the state's efforts in environmental mitigation. The grant was lucrative for me, and my university made 25% off the top. Contributions like this, always valuable, are becoming even more important as state funding diminishes.

Get Re-Appointed

Because I plan to live where I am for a long time, I went to my city (population 100,000) council and volunteered to serve on a commission. An appointment made by the council. I was named to the Cultural Advisory (Arts) Commission and served for
four years. When I left, my position as chair was taken over by the Chair of the Art Department at another local University (and now friend). I moved on to become a Trustee for the City Library and currently serve as Secretary on that Board.

As a result of my work and visibility with my own city's council, I was asked by our mayor to help her publicize the national convention of the White House Conference on Learning and Information Systems Technology (WHCLIST) that she had managed to bring to town. I did, happily.

As I went through this busy time of service, I did not really plan any of these fortuitous coincidences. But I was involved and most of all willing. I don't recommend service to anyone who is not predisposed to it. I feel like I want to make a difference and service to the community allows me to do that (or at least gives me the illusion of doing that).

If the concept of service is calculated merely to show up in a dossier, I would recommend a concentration on research or scholarship, and confine service to on-campus committees. That is, don't do service if you're doing it reluctantly.

Many academics will doubtless continue to prefer the relative seclusion of the campus community, the pursuit of scholarship and teaching. But as public university support is re-examined, many would like to see more accountability from the universities, more visibility in the community, and stronger connections among all the complex interest groups and individuals who contribute to and benefit from a metropolitan university.

For those of us who enjoy this interaction, a new path is being created. Each university must establish its own criteria for service, then be certain that those who choose to do a lot of service are recognized and rewarded consistent with their expectations. Even at metropolitan universities, with good direction and encouragement from the President, it will be difficult. At smaller, more isolated campuses, the service model may not be appropriate.

Where it is appropriate, and it is implemented consistently, it presents the possibility that all parties win.

The individual wins. When faculty contribute to their universities, and their communities, they enrich themselves with personal contact and a sense of accomplishment even beyond their teaching and scholarship.

The university wins. As faculty become involved with the communities both on and off campus, the bonds that are formed are powerful and make solutions to all common problems more achievable. Just as the university asks faculty to be good citizens of the university, the university itself must be a good citizen in its community.

The community wins. The wealth of knowledge and talent available among the faculty at any university is staggering. A wag once said that the reason Washington, D.C. is in such a mess is that all the people with all the answers are busy teaching at the universities. Maybe it's time for a few of us to spend some time applying our know-how to problems or needs in our communities, our state capitols, or — why not—Washington, D.C.

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REFERENCES

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