Research Plan for the School for Professional Studies

Research can be defined as "a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue" (Creswell, 2008, p. 3). Research, in other words, is an activity designed to increase insight or understanding about some topic or issue. Scholars are those with some subject matter expertise who utilize the process of research in an ongoing way to generate new knowledge, insights, or understanding about that subject matter. Scholarship, therefore, become the artifacts created as a function of the scholar's use of the research process (e.g., books, journal articles, a new course).

At the School for Professional Studies (SPS), the research process plays an important role in the successful implementation of the school's strategic direction. Research is primarily leveraged for two interrelated purposes:

- To enhance school and program performance
- To engage in scholarship and scholarly pursuits

School and Program Performance

Research plays a critical role in efforts to monitor, grow, and enhance the quality of education provided by SPS, as well as its overall performance as a business unit. Without high-quality data, user-friendly tracking mechanisms and scorecards, and timely reports, the SPS leadership team and the directors of various academic and non-credit programs cannot make sound evidence-based decisions. To assist in the development and maintenance of quality research processes to benefit school-wide evidence-based decision making, the Dean of SPS established the Data Committee, chaired by the Director of Strategic Research at SPS. Committee membership consists of representatives from student services, undergraduate education, graduate education, and the Center for Workforce and Organizational Development. The purpose of the committee is to:

- Guide data enhancement and reporting within SPS
- Ensure data needs of the various stakeholder groups are being met
- Plan and execute research directed toward better understanding one or more school performance indicators
- Assist as needed in providing data support for academic program reviews or program improvement initiatives

Scholarship

While research can be applied for the direct benefit of key performance metrics, research at SPS must also be applied for the purpose of scholarship and scholarly pursuits. Although scholarship has not often been viewed as important for units serving adult populations, it does provide several benefits for SPS:

- SPS is part of a broader university community, a community that, for the most part, emphasizes scholarship as a core component of faculty status and the production of scholarship provides SPS with credibility among other academic units on campus.
- Scholarship can be leveraged as a marketing tool, providing recognition for faculty (among peers at the university, and in the same/similar fields across various academic institutions) and enhancing efforts to recruit students (especially in graduate programs).
- Scholarship can be leveraged to provide external funding in the form of grants and contracts.
- Scholarship can be leveraged for the purposes of developing and enhancing courses within academic programs.

Traditional academia focuses on what Boyer (1990) called the *Scholarship of Discovery*, most closely mirrored by those conducting basic research or research within a traditional laboratory. While SPS recognizes the importance of this type of scholarship, a type of scholarship that was the earliest focus of research efforts in academia, faculty within SPS often do not engage in this type of research for several reasons:

1. Most faculty are not basic researchers. SPS offers applied, practitioner-oriented degrees, and, therefore, SPS faculty tend to specialize in application and practice.
2. Most faculty members possess administrative duties, and, as such, they do not have the time available to conduct extensive, laboratory research outside of their normal work activities.
3. The school lacks any existing laboratory space. Given the strategic focus on online programming, traditional laboratory space would lack overall utility.

Though SPS may never be known for its expertise in the scholarship of discovery, research can and should be defined more broadly than that. As Boyer argued, there are three equally important additional areas of scholarship, and SPS is poised to grow its recognition in these three areas.

Scholarship of Integration involves synthesizing information across different disciplines in a way that provides new or deeper insight on some problem or issue. SPS was conceptualized as a multidisciplinary school, with faculty members representing various disciplines offered within its academic degrees. With current faculty representing such disciplines as Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Computer Science, Philosophy, English, Engineering, and Public Policy, the school offers an academic environment in which knowledge from different disciplines can be freely shared, discussed, and integrated. While some such collaboration occurs currently (often to the benefit of academic programs), it typically happens more organically with few documented artifacts for dissemination (i.e., a key element of scholarship). As such, more concerted effort should be placed on strengthening collaboration in scholarly activity across disciplinary lines. This is currently happening within the graduate programs at SPS, in which programs are being conceptualized in a modular way, allowing the multiple disciplines represented to be integrated for the benefit of the student and the school. Scholarship in this

domain might be operationalized as a new program or course with a multi- or interdisciplinary component, as well as more traditional forms of scholarship (e.g., publications).

Scholarship of Application involves scholarship that applies the knowledge gleaned from the discovery of others with an eye toward (1) solving practical problems and (2) discovering new knowledge, understanding, and insights. SPS has many faculty members who already engage in this type of scholarship, applying their expertise toward solving practical problems in a way that produces artifacts for dissemination (e.g., books, research articles, presentations). Furthermore, all existing master's programs within the school require a Master's Research Project, which meets the criteria for this form of scholarship. While SPS could invest in all forms of scholarship, the evidence would suggest that one of its greatest strengths currently lies here.

Scholarship of Teaching involves gaining and disseminating knowledge through the process of teaching. Given that scholarship is about the process of developing new knowledge and insights, the process of teaching – as a dynamic process between faculty and students – is a form of scholarship. When faculty members create an environment that stimulates new and creative insights for themselves and their students, the teaching can and should be considered a form of scholarship (as contrasted with the view of faculty as transmitters of existing knowledge only). Self-evaluation, peer review, student evaluations, and even peer-reviewed publications in teaching journals all constitute an effective way of triangulating scholarship that stems from teaching. Although SPS has the potential to more fully address the scholarship of teaching and cultivate it as a strength, it currently does not do so on a consistent basis at the present time.

A Research & Scholarship Agenda

A more comprehensive view of research and scholarship creates the opportunity to set a research and scholarship agenda that will provide strategic benefit for SPS. Specifically, there are three broad strategic directions that should be the focus of such efforts:

1. Development of appropriate and accessible metrics, dashboards, and tools that can be leveraged to monitor and enhance school and program performance outcomes (such efforts must also involve the Center).
2. Implementation of a systematic program of research directed toward identifying high-leverage opportunities for enhancing marketing and recruitment, advising and retention, and academic program expansion (such efforts must also involve the Center).
3. Cultivation of an environment that promotes the scholarship of integration, application, and teaching, ensuring support, recognition, and rewards are aligned with such an environment.

While these areas are quite broad, they can be operationalized as more specific goals to be accomplished over 1-, 2-, or 3-year periods.

References

Boyer E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate.* Princeton, NJ:

    Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*

    and qualitative research (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River: Pearson.

List of activities that will count as scholarship

- Minimum standards for scholarship across the school but determined by one's overall job responsibilities
- Direct or indirect relationship between an experience and performance of one's duties or to the broader mission of the university
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