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PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH
SCHOLARSHIP AND THE AIMS OF LIBERAL EDUCATION
MATRICULATION CONVOCATION

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In the revised charter of 1901, Lawrence proclaimed as its mission "to afford instruction in the liberal arts and sciences and to develop the scholar." Nothing from the college archives of that period suggest precisely what the authors of that statement meant by the term "scholar," but we can posit that it conveyed the sense that such a person was someone who had "acquired learning" in the arts and science disciplines and was thereby "learned or erudite." The definitions of others may be of some help here, or may not. George Bernard Shaw, writing at about this time, saw a scholar as someone who wrote Latin verses, and American author Elbert Hubbard described the species as "a medieval owl that roosts in universities." Some cynic suggested that a scholar is "one who takes pains and gives them to others." David Riesman was more kind: a scholar, he said, is "one who reads, reflects, and enjoys learning." Friedrich Nietzsche was more demanding: scholars are "those rare human beings" who really know how to use valuable books--presumably because they "write, or could write, books of the same type."

Whatever we may think of these descriptions, the term persists at Lawrence. Our mission statement includes the purposes of enrolling "intellectually curious students who demonstrate an abiding desire to learn and the will to join a community of scholars and

artists in the vigorous pursuit of knowledge" and of attracting "a faculty of active scholars and artists devoted to the intellectual life and to the teaching of undergraduates." Our current literature repeats those complementary objectives and refers to the college as "a community of scholars" that has "drawn together students and faculty who are serious about scholarship."

Left at that, the notion of a community of scholars serious about scholarship may be deemed fairly benign, perhaps even bucolic. But as any reading of the current state of affairs in American higher education will reveal, for many people the view of the academy as a place populated by scholars doing scholarship is anything but benign and bucolic. Indeed, in the eyes of some critics, the notion is downright dangerous. And that is so for a host of reasons, among which are the definition and demands of scholarship that have become normative in American higher education in the twentieth century.

But there are other reasons besides the definition of scholarship that provoke the problem here. Higher education bashing, as I've noted in this setting in prior years, is becoming something of a journalistic war game these days. The latest mortar lobbed over the ivied walls and into the hallowed halls has been fired by Martin Anderson, whose [Impostors in the Temple](#) has recently hit the bookstores. Here we have yet another shot fired not just across but into the bow detonating the charge that higher education is in trouble, this time on the grounds that "America's academic intellectuals are largely insulated from the discipline of free markets, [with] each university or college a tiny oasis of quasi-

socialism." Professors don't profess, Anderson argues, but turn their graduate students into indentured servants to do the teaching so that the professors can get on with the business of scholarship, which, he alleges, makes the whole profession a fraud. Faculty "pretend to teach, they pretend to do original, important work," Anderson writes, when in fact "They do neither. They are the impostors in the temple."

Anderson leveled this charge again--at the same time promoting his book--in a recent Wall Street Journal. "Teaching is an old and honorable profession," he wrote. "And yet many of today's professors view it with undisguised contempt. Indeed, they believe teaching to be beneath them. They regard their students as mere obstacles to their own intellectual hobbies and scholarly pursuits. As former Stanford Professor John Kaplan once observed, 'Professors feel that students are the crabgrass on the lawn of academia.'" All of this is familiar stuff, ideologically charged versions of lots of the old chestnuts: tenure as sinecure, the leisure of the theory class, the ivory tower removed from the real rough and tumble world, and so on.

And when we stack this latest blast alongside other salvos by D'Souza, Kimball, Smith, and Bloom, it should come as no surprise that a sense of deja vu coupled with weariness sets in. These charges all begin to sound alike and rebutting them becomes a tiresome business. What makes the rebuttal particularly tiresome for those of us at Lawrence and other selective liberal arts colleges is that the projectiles being hurled at the academy are missing us altogether, and in most cases are not even being aimed our way. But, in the

public mind, higher education is higher education, a college is a college, faculty are faculty, and we're all being wounded by the same shrapnel. The other thing that makes the rebuttal difficult is that there inevitably are some institutions which seem to provide such inviting targets for the critics that it becomes more difficult to deny the legitimacy of the assault. Two months ago, for example, a report leaked from the University of Wisconsin to the press in Madison revealed that of the 1,076 state-funded faculty members, 45 taught no lectures and 270 taught only one in the fall of 1991.

Now there are undoubtedly wholly defensible explanations for these findings--lecture courses are not, after all, the sum and substance of teaching at Madison--and we can presume that the teaching loads the report described comport with the aim and structures of the comprehensive research university. At the same time, we need to be attentive to the fact that this report, when leaked, became big news in Wisconsin: the president of the United Council of the UW Student Governments reacted to the report by lamenting the absence of faculty in the classrooms "where we really need them"; a critic of the university inferred that the data showed that "some faculty members would rather have root canal surgery than teach an undergraduate course"; some legislators suggested that state funding for UW-Madison would need to be reexamined; and the Governor was even prompted to offer an "even though I've not read the report this doesn't sound so good to me" response in a press conference.

Why all the attention? Several reasons: first, higher education has come to rival government in a kind of scandal-of-the-week sweepstakes and the public seems to relish bad

news about colleges and universities. Second, and more substantively, this report undoubtedly touched a nerve--a nerve that has been frayed by all of the reports, books, and articles that preceded it--in the public mind that values education as a student-centered teaching and learning enterprise and that sees research in competition with or as the antithesis to that enterprise. And so here we get some other old chestnuts roasted on the fire: publish or perish, teaching versus research.

This last juxtaposition has been around a while, and has provoked various potential remedies. Twenty or so years ago, one such proposal was to create a distinct doctoral degree that would not require a research-based dissertation for individuals intending careers in teaching. That idea never got off the ground. More recently, there have been proposals to create a separate teaching track for tenure at large universities and for the creation of teaching colleges within such universities. Elsewhere, universities have sought to handle the issue by hiring faculty whose primary duties would be undergraduate instruction, thus freeing other faculty to concentrate on research. Still others have suggested setting up research institutes in universities, staffed by researchers not by faculty, thereby solving the present problem by eliminating it. These several illustrations suggest a radical bifurcation of the two enterprises: teaching is one thing, research is quite another and never--or at best rarely--will the twain meet or intersect.

Last June, Bryan Barnett, an academic program administrator at Rutgers, offered a "Point of View" in [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) that took this position to its

(presumably) logical conclusion; the title of his piece was "Teaching and Research are Inescapably Incompatible." The thesis of this argument is predicated on the features and reward systems of the research university, in which the "the research demands on individual faculty members will never leave enough time or energy for them to meet the need for devoted teaching and curriculum development." The requirements to achieve excellence in undergraduate education, Barnett argues, are irreconcilable with the commitments of such faculty to their research and are "not valued in the professional culture of research-oriented faculty members."

He also dismisses the notion that research influences and improves teaching, a notion challenged as well by a study reported in a recent Journal of Chemical Education, which found that "while basic research by university professors has benefits to society, improvement of teaching quality in undergraduate courses does not appear to be one of them." Barnett implicitly endorses that finding, and he further states that research can have a deleterious effect on instruction. To the extent that the research interests of individual faculty members drive and shape curricula, he writes, those curricula become dominated by arcane and specialized courses. "The unmistakable message of the melange of course topics is that the faculty thinks students should master whatever it is the faculty finds interesting enough to study. This is hardly the best approach to determining the content of undergraduate education." Barnett's solution is radical and clear: admit the incompatibility, divorce research from teaching, fund each separately, and make each activity accountable on its own merits and distinct from the other.

That we have come to the point in American higher education where these issues and controversies are prevalent must be understood in large measure as a sign of an emerging conflict about the purposes of the enterprise. Historically, higher education has embodied three missions: first, the propagation of knowledge (the tradition best exemplified by the liberal arts college, in which the teaching mission is paramount); second, the creation of knowledge (the tradition that emanated from American appropriation of the German model of the university, in which the research mission is central); and third, the application of knowledge (the tradition inaugurated by the founding of land grant colleges and universities in the last century and extended exponentially through professional, vocational, and technical training programs in this one, in which the contribution of education to practical and professional concerns is key). Different institutions have focused on one or another of these missions, though some--mainly the large research universities--sought to accomplish all three. The crisis in this sector of higher education arises because the demands of each often preclude accommodation of the others, with the result that the university is fragmented. And so the research universities become battlegrounds for the primacy of teaching, or research, or training.

The battle has been joined on many fronts. On the one hand, legislators and boards of regents are pressuring faculty to become more "productive," productivity in this case being defined rather antiseptically and mathematically as spending more "contact hours" in the classroom in front of students. As one state official put it, "There are perceptions out there that the faculty doesn't teach enough [and] that the faculty spends too much time doing

research." In fact, there seems to be widespread conviction that so-called "teaching loads" have declined nationally in recent years, although no hard evidence has been assembled to substantiate the claim. Nonetheless, within the last year at least a dozen states have initiated investigations into the academic work week of faculty members with the aim of requiring them to teach more undergraduate courses. Still, college officials do not express much optimism in addressing those perceptions--much less the reality that provokes them--and say that "they face an uphill struggle because of the entrenched power of the faculty in academic affairs, and because of disciplinary organizations that heavily influence the curriculum and continue to promote scholarship over teaching as the principal route to academic advancement."

While some defenders of present arrangements have argued that "publish or perish" will continue to be the norm at most big universities--in part because faculty publications and research grants represent the prevalent measure of institutional fame and acclaim, attributes deemed desirable by both faculty and administrators--other studies have suggested that many faculty--a little more than a quarter overall and nearly 50 percent at research universities--feel that demands for research interfere with teaching. In some places, efforts to achieve a greater balance among these pursuits are underway; last year, for example, the president of Stanford charged that "the overproduction of routine scholarship is one of the most egregious aspects of contemporary academic life" and suggested that faculty be limited in the number of scholarly articles that could be submitted for tenure and promotion reviews. Another suggestion was offered by the former executive director of the Modern Language Association

with his tongue only slightly in cheek: he proposed that the most worthless academic scholarship be featured in a new specialty journal entitled Twaddle; that way, he said, scholars may produce less of it. Along similar lines, some have argued that the time has come to emphasize quality over quantity as the criterion for judging scholarship--a proposition that one would think had been the expectation all along. That it is now forwarded as a serious suggestion would be hilarious if it were not for the fact that it actually seems to be a novel approach. While all of these notions serve multiple purposes--like, for example, cutting down on the numbers of journals and hence relieving pressures on library budgets--each addresses, either obliquely or directly, the teaching versus research debate.

Of the three missions of higher education--the propagation of knowledge, the creation of knowledge, and the application of knowledge--the third need not concern us here. But the relationships between the first two--or, as now seems to be the case, the division of research and teaching--does concern us because we may become seduced into accepting what for the liberal arts college is an artificial distinction. As articulated and attacked at the big university level, the research or scholarship versus teaching controversy posits a kind of individual and institutional schizophrenia, as if, somehow, the individual faculty member was two persons and the institution two entities engaged in two wholly discrete activities, either one of which necessarily diminishes or denies the other.

That may be a mental aberration afflicting some professors and some institutions--typically, the ones that get all the press--but for the liberal arts college that sense of

separateness has no place or bearing. In fact, the genius of the liberal arts college ought to be that it frames the issue in a wholly different way: it is not a matter of research or scholarship and teaching, but of research and scholarship and learning. Posed in those terms, a whole different set of considerations and consequences emerges. Scholarship and learning produce compatibility, not conflict; research and learning are complementary, not competitive. Their aims are not at odds, but as one. One Lawrence scientist put it this way: the issue for the college is not a matter of changing priorities, "emphasizing research and deemphasizing teaching, but rather that we recognize the pedagogical value of research, particularly in the sciences. Those of us who do collaborative research with students believe strongly that the best way to learn, and to teach, science is to be doing it for real, not just reading about it in textbooks, and that means doing research." Comparable claims, perhaps voiced in different ways, can be made for other disciplines as well.

Scholarship and research are not only accepted at the liberal arts college, then, but they are applauded, and for several reasons. On the one hand, the place of scholarship and research prevent the institution from becoming a teaching college, as Robert Pirsig defined it in Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. "At a teaching college," he wrote, "you teach and you teach and you teach with no time for research, not time for contemplation, no time for participation in outside affairs. Just teach and teach and teach until your mind grows dull and your creativity vanishes and you become an automaton saying the same dull things over and over to endless waves of innocent students who cannot understand why you are so dull, lose respect and fan this disrespect out into the community. The reason you

teach and you teach and you teach is that this is a very clever way of running a college on the cheap while giving a false appearance of genuine education." In that sense, Lawrence is not a teaching college.

Rather, Lawrence is a learning college--a learning community--where the faculty embody the virtues of Chaucer's clerk: "Gladly would he learn, and gladly teach." Indeed, for liberal education, the shared pursuit of learning is what defines the enterprise. Our business here, as one faculty member wrote to me recently, centers on the premise "that awakening people to the life of the mind and the disinterested pursuit of excellence is the primary mission of the college." Hence, to be serious about scholarship means, quite simply, to be serious about "the centrality of intellectual life," to be serious about liberal education. For a member of the faculty, it means to be serious about learning more about the discipline she or he teaches or executing better the art form he or she practices. For a professor to argue that he or she is disinterested in scholarship or research or creative endeavor, therefore, is to confess disinterest in learning and, inexorably, disability in teaching. Attention to and support of scholarship and creative endeavor broadly defined, then, are institutional investments in the long-term viability and vitality of the faculty's contributions to the college's teaching mission.

Some studies have suggested that research does not improve the quality of teaching. The Chemical Education article reported its findings this way: "The regression analysis of student evaluation of overall teaching effectiveness, SE, against number of publications, P,

indicated a correlation coefficient of 0.20 which is not significantly different from zero at the 80% level of confidence." For the selective liberal arts college, however, the response to this gobbledygook statistical finding is: Not. Scholarship and research and creative endeavor enliven teaching precisely because they exemplify and embody learning. And learning, engaging in the spirited and robust development of the life of the mind, is what education in the liberal arts and sciences is all about.

Research and scholarship and creative endeavor in this setting are not typically supercollider, Nobel-laureate, Pulitzer Prize, Carnegie Hall, Museum of Modern Art stuff, but, although they may be, that is not the point. Not all research or scholarship or creative endeavor is cutting-edge, paradigm-shattering, novel, uncharted territory activity, but it is no less important for that and now and again, of course, faculty garner wide acclaim for their contributions. Within the past year, for example, one member of the faculty has had his book listed as one of the top in its field and another has had a piece included in an anthology of the best dozen articles on a topic. Other faculty have had their scholarship praised by critics or have won national awards for their work. Many faculty have been successful in recent years in generating support from the National Science Foundation for student-research-centered programs. Beyond those examples, however, is the more telling point: That all members of the faculty have published or performed is but another way of saying that all members of the faculty have a lively engagement with their field, their discipline, their art, their craft and that engagement redounds to the benefit of the educational enterprise in several ways.

At one end, it means that the faculty have done or are doing what students do, which should give them a certain degree of patience and humility in their work with students. There is no better antidote to intellectual or artistic arrogance than having faced the judgment of one's peers, of knowing what it means to have an article rejected, of experiencing the agonies of writer's block, of receiving unfavorable comments from an editor or peer review panel, of confronting the frustrations of a failed experiment, of hearing from the critics that a performance or painting did not meet expectations. Faculty who have put their learning on the line are better mentors for and teachers of undergraduates who are asked to do likewise.

At the other end, research and scholarship and creative endeavor keep the individual professor in tune and in touch with his or her field, knowledgeable about the nature and challenges of its methodologies, cognizant of the contours and shapes of its fundamental questions and problems, and prepared to contribute to advancing our knowledge or enriching our sensibilities through both intellectual insights and creative interpretations. Research and scholarship and creative endeavor, then, represent processes that lead to the discovery of things heretofore unknown, or a way of yielding new interpretations of extant and familiar materials, or of rendering an expression of creativity that is idiosyncratic and distinctive.

Research and scholarship and creative endeavor may not always result in publication, but they should result in product or performance or presentation, accessible to and shared with others. That accessibility and sharing are important, for as individuals engage in those activities, they do so in a mode that is public and shared and hence that others can

understand, challenge, and appreciate. Personal and private insights, though they may be inspiration, are not the fruits of research and scholarship and so cannot be judged and trusted, they do not lead to conversation and debate. They are merely opinion, personal preference. Research and scholarship, on the other hand, produce results and conclusions and judgments that can be trusted--or that can be made trustworthy--precisely because they are public and shared. Further, responding to and taking into account the reactions and judgments of others is an essential part of our intellectual growth. The dialogue or conversation that ensues when we confront criticisms or queries sharpens our thinking and our knowing. This give and take, these interactions with others--whether with peers or professors--are an essential aspect of the ideal of scholarship as learning. Which may be a good way to describe teaching. Yale history professor Lee Wandel argued the point this way, using Socrates as the exemplar. The Socratic method bears directly on the relation between teaching and research, he asserts, for if "teaching is not the 'dissemination' of knowledge, but its pursuit, if it is not monologic, but dialogic; if it consists not in lecturing, but in asking questions, then teaching and research become two modes of inquiry. They become inseparable and interdependent."

Perhaps the best way to understand why it is important that we practice what we preach is to take the counter case. Imagine the field biologist who never did research in the field, or the literary critic who had never analyzed literature, or the musician who did not perform his or her instrument, or the philosopher who had never advanced a philosophical argument--and extend that counter case to every discipline and every faculty member at Lawrence. What one would have, all too quickly and soon endemically, is a pretty soporific

enterprise: repetitive, dated, enervated, and ultimately unsatisfying and empty.

At bottom, however, the genius of research and scholarship and creative endeavor at the liberal arts college is that they are not the preserve of the faculty but of the learning community. Students at college do these things too, often as collaborators with faculty, occasionally as publishing or performing contributors. This mode is particularly lively in the sciences and social sciences where student research opportunities represent one of the most significant forms of learning. Indeed, students in introductory biology are assigned independent research projects, a strategy that has captured the attention and interest of other colleges and universities. The numbers of students working on research projects at and beyond Lawrence over the summer months have increased dramatically in recent years. And it is widely recognized that one of the principal reasons that colleges like Lawrence have been so successful in sending graduates on to productive careers in science is the research experiences afforded students in their undergraduate years. For these reasons, funding support for student research are central to our plans for the college in the coming decade.

But more pervasive than those celebrated cases is the ongoing, term-by-term, year-by-year student engagement with these activities. Students may be surprised by that claim. Indeed, some students may be abashed to think that they are members of a "community of scholars....serious about scholarship." That's not the kind of thing the average nineteen-year-old boasts to his or her friends and buddies. "How's it goin' at Lawrence?" "Hey, great, I'm doing scholarship." Not a likely exchange, I admit.

But the absence of the exchange--or the tentativeness some of you may feel about scholarship and research and creative endeavor--does not obviate the presence of the fact: those are the activities that engage you. You may have thought that you were just "writing a paper" or "doing a lab" or "executing a sketch" or "practicing a piece." You would be wrong: those activities are scholarship and research and creative endeavor. You may believe that research and scholarship and creative endeavor are only the province of effete, anti-social, bookish nerds or, conversely, of persons of exceptional gifts. You would be wrong: those activities are things you do, not just things done by others that teachers tell you about. When Lawrence professes that it enables your education but does not give it to you, that "doing" is what we have in mind. And when we claim that the long-term validity of liberal education is that it helps you learn how to learn, that "doing" is what gives the argument focus and force.

The various departments offer many courses aimed directly at this form of learning: Research Methods in Sociocultural Anthropology; Micro- and Macroeconomics; Literary Analysis; Research Methods in Political Science and Psychology; Historiography; Music Theory and Analysis; Structuralism and Hermeneutics in Religious Studies; and many others that, however titled, introduce students to the canons and strategies of scholarship and research. Thus, students come to appreciate and apply a variety of ways of knowing: literature searches, experimental design, mathematical modeling, survey techniques, theoretical applications, interpretive schemes, computer simulations, analytic approaches, data manipulations, and the like. These various methods may emanate from a given

discipline, but they typically transcend it and so constitute important intellectual skills that may be applied for a lifetime. They enable your learning to persist beyond college and in new settings. They are the traits that explain, in large part, the exceptional success rates of liberal arts graduates in many fields and occupations. Most of all, such skills enable one to distinguish the sham from the valid, the trivial from the substantive, the prosaic from the novel, and the mediocre from the excellent. Knowing the difference between those sets of extremes is an important outcome of liberal learning. Without proper attention to the means, therefore, we would be in no position to assess the ends. In that sense, becoming a scholar is the same as becoming a thinking person--privately, professionally, and publicly.

Granted, liberal education in the arts and sciences is not all hands-on, lab-intensive, field-oriented, library-based, performance-centered. Much of the business of liberal education involves someone who knows something leading someone who does not along the path to grasp and appreciate it. Much of liberal education involves coming to terms with what others have said or thought or theorized or discovered or accomplished, since knowledge--pace Thomas Kuhn--is usually additive and cumulative, even as it may be wholly new to a person confronting that knowledge for the first time. We gain new knowledge by building on inherited knowledge; indeed, by appropriating inherited knowledge, we make it our own. One of the chief aims of the college is to propagate that knowledge by extending it to another generation. Finally, much of liberal education involves not the creation of isolated dots of new knowledge, but connecting existing dots to form some pattern, some whole, some coherence, and so your education here is integrative as well as investigative.

At the end of the day, or of the course, or term, or year, or of your undergraduate experience, you should have the glimmering of how things connect and intersect and relate.

So scholarship and research and creative endeavor are not the sum and substance of liberal education; they are not what the philosophers call sufficient for your liberal learning, but they are necessary. The teaching versus research controversy at the big universities, then, is one that at Lawrence we dismiss as irrelevant and distracting. Research and scholarship and creative endeavor are not for us the rarefied undertakings of an elite class of men and women who shun and spurn teaching as beneath them or as a duty to be done so as to earn the institution's support for their private agendas. Rather, research and scholarship and creative endeavor are pursuits we share, faculty and students, sometimes together and always alike. Those shared activities are a vigorous and exciting aspect of our common life, and ones that we should celebrate with pride and with enthusiasm. The teaching versus research controversy has no place at this college. For us, scholarship and learning produce compatibility, not conflict; research and learning are complementary, not competitive. Their aims are not at odds, but as one. And it is that harmony and mutuality that represent the special feature of liberal education that makes Lawrence a place that is, for faculty and students, a learning community of scholars "serious about scholarship." In that spirit, I wish each of you all the best in your teaching and learning this year.