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## Reviewing *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons*

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**Reviewing *The Advancement of Learning:  
Building the Teaching Commons***

The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons  
by Mary Taylor Huber and Pat Hutchings  
Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, Copyright 2005. 187 pages.  
ISBN 978-0-7879-8115-0. \$35.00

by Timothy D. Norton, Ed.D.

With the publication of [\*The Advancement of Learning Building the Teaching Commons\*](#), Mary Taylor Huber and Pat Hutchings continue the theme of the scholarship of teaching and learning addressed in the Carnegie Foundation's previous works, [\*Scholarship Assessed\*](#) and [\*Scholarship Reconsidered\*](#). In these first two publications, the intellectualism and scholarship of the idea of teaching and learning was introduced. With *The Advancement of Learning* a "transformation affecting all teachers" (p. 1) is presented as the vision for the scholarship of teaching and learning. This occurs in what Huber and Hutchings refer to as the "teaching commons," a "conceptual space for exchange and community among faculty, students, administrators, and all others committed to learning as an essential activity of life" (p. 1). Here the one aspect that comes forth most clearly is the need for faculty to make their previously private contributions to this scholarship become public knowledge. The commons serves as the environment for "pedagogical knowledge to circulate, deepen through debate and critique, and inform the kinds of innovation so important in higher education today" (p. 5).

Huber and Hutchings argue that the scholarship of teaching and learning is no longer an option for higher education but has become an imperative. They base this belief upon the changing framework of pedagogy and see it as having "slipped off the cloak of tradition" (p. 7). Rather than research papers, students can write for real audiences. Group and collaborative work are augmenting individual student work. Undergraduate research and service learning are being developed and recognized as legitimate academic exercises. The role of technology continues to alter the pedagogical landscape. With these ever-changing perspectives come "different kinds of assignments and assessments aimed at different purposes and outcomes" (p. 12).

With altering methods, the need for greater dissemination of both learning and teaching practices is evident. The teaching commons is the place where these ideas can be shared. In so doing, private practices become public knowledge. With the openness of ideas comes the responsibility for comment and evaluation. A presentation of knowledge that can be examined, tested, evaluated, and then applied is what Huber and Hutchings feel is the role of the [\*teaching commons\*](#). It moves teaching and learning into the realm of scholarship as college teaching begins "to look more like other professional fields, with a literature and communities that study and advance critical aspects of practice" (p. 13).

One central focus of the book is its introduction to the work of some of the scholars of The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning ([\*CASTL\*](#)), founded in 1997. This academy is central to [\*The Carnegie Foundation\*](#)'s continued development of the scholarship of teaching and learning. It is composed of 137 scholars who are Fellows at the advanced study center. Most have held mainstream faculty positions in various disciplines with considerable teaching and learning experiences. Huber and Hutchings feature the work examples of five of these scholars who have added to the understanding of the role of the teaching

commons in their practice of the scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition, the CASTL scholars participated in a 2004 survey designed to explore various aspects of their experiences as scholars. It questioned their motivations, satisfactions, disciplinary context, their works impact on others and on students, as its overall design was to illuminate the scholarship of teaching and learning in the “lives of professionals who embrace it” (p. 134). Both the individual stories and the collective experiences allow the reader to gain a broader and deeper conceptualization of the impact of the scholarship of teaching and learning as it comes alive within the teaching commons.

Recognizing that the scholarship of teaching and learning remains a new idea on campus, does not generally follow the institutional norm, and is not always supported and rewarded, Taylor and Hutchings ask the question: Why do college and university faculty become scholars of teaching and learning? They answer this by examining the pathways that lead faculty to this work and what communities sustain and support them.

Different points of departure are seen as individuals embrace the scholarship. Some faculty begin as their interest in teaching and learning becomes more relevant to their academic concerns over time. Some may have begun this interest in graduate school as they embark on teaching for the first time. Others may seek this type of scholarship as they realize a need for their students to learn in new and differing ways. In all of these cases, Huber and Hutchings recognize that the scholarship of teaching and learning must first start where faculty are—in their own disciplines. In this, faculty will find inspiration and direction as the disciplines “provide the first natural audience for such work, because it is in these communities that one finds colleagues facing the same educational issues” (p. 64). Additionally, as with their own disciplines, the scholars of teaching and learning must comprehend the need for interdisciplinary networks. It is here where the teaching commons’ number, variety, and distinctiveness of its neighbors add to the scholarship of teaching and learning. This interdisciplinary dynamic may show itself as faculty participate in cross-disciplinary communities, journals on the scholarship of teaching and learning, and writing across the curriculum initiatives.

In both in-discipline or cross-disciplines, the authors see these approaches as examples of what they call the “campus as commons” (p. 82). This helps to move the scholarship of teaching and learning out of the area of personal enrichment into more formal and structured arrangements. Through this campus of commons can emerge the “inquiry, evidence, documentation, knowledge building, and exchange” (p. 85) that constitute “the scholarship” in teaching and learning.

The idea of scholarship is addressed as Huber and Hutchings comment on the fact that in order to call teaching and learning “scholarship,” it must build “knowledge that others can use” (p. 94). They point out that that it sometimes takes on traditional forms of scholarship but also uses newer modes of knowledge production found both within and outside academe. It can be collaborative and interdisciplinary and is primarily geared toward the improvement of practice. It does not seek to separate itself into new disciplines, departments, or programs, but always seeks to improve teaching within the individual disciplines in which faculty teach. As faculty inquire and reflect on teaching and learning, they will be able to gain increased insight as they study the practices of others. This is why the authors emphasize that the individual practice must become public knowledge. It is with this recognition of practice as scholarship that “faculty often find as much to learn from the situated experience of other faculty as from studies done with methodologies designed to minimize the influence context on research results” (p. 98). It is within this idea that scholars benefit from both empirical studies and “work conducted in and

around a single classroom or course” (p. 98). The scholarship may influence not only through “methods, materials, or assessment, but also by inspiring, moving, and changing a teacher’s perspective, attitude, or vision” (p. 99).

It is precisely this innovative concept of scholarship that makes this teaching and learning useful to higher education faculty. Huber and Hutchings see that this difference in the scholarship of discovery and the scholarship of teaching and learning is not an “indictment of its quality” (p. 103) but a demonstration of the unique characteristics of its quality. They refer back to [Scholarship Assessed](#) where the guidelines of clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique are interpreted within the realms of scholarship, both empirical and informed practice.

Creating an action agenda for the scholarship of teaching and learning, Huber and Hutchings indicate that as faculty investigate and document their work, they also want to share their insights with students. Instead of seeing students as merely “objects of investigation,” they should “involve students in activities that invite questions about learning and provide a more sophisticated map of the intellectual arts” (p. 116). In this manner, faculty can invite students into the teaching commons. They further include in their book a recommendation of five areas of action: (a) to establish more and better occasions for talking about learning, (b) to include students to be part of the discussion about learning, (c) to recognize teaching as substantive, intelligent work, (d) to develop new genres and forms to document the work of teaching and learning, and (e) to build and maintain the infrastructure needed to make pedagogical work of high quality available and accessible to all.

With a desire to see the scholarship of teaching and learning move beyond the private experiences of intellectualism and into the public forum of reflection and critique, Mary Taylor Huber and Pat Hutchings see the opportunity to establish a teaching commons that will help to carry the idea of scholarship well into the 21st century. They see fostering this commons as scholars of teaching and learning ask the question, “What does it mean to for me to teach *this* text with *this* approach to *this* population of students at *this* time in *this* classroom” (Salvatori, as quoted in Huber & Hutchings, p. 127). The classroom should be a place where both teachers and students can engage in intellectual interaction that allows for a new conception of the purpose for teaching and learning. With these views of scholarship as demonstrated in the “teaching commons,” Huber and Hutchings can visualize “communities of thought and practice growing up around matters pedagogical” (p. 82) as part of the fulfillment of the idea of the “campus as commons.”

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