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## Reviewing *Professors as Teachers*

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# REVIEWS

***Professors as Teachers.*** By Steven M. Cahn. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2022. 90 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-6667-4638-9 (HARDCOVER) \$30

Steven M. Cahn's book *Professors as Educators* presents the case that professors should be more than just researchers. He maintains that professors should push themselves to be genuine educators in their fields in order to inspire and equip their students and outlines what he believes to be the necessary qualities a professor needs to have as an exceptional educator. Cahn contends that for higher education to shift to this paradigm, certain changes must be made within the university system. Cahn proposes five change strategies:

- adding practicums to those seeking faculty appointments
- changing the faculty appointment process
- changing the evaluations of teachers
- changing the nature of tenure
- changing the way administration views teaching.

Steven Cahn opens his book by addressing the stigma often associated with being a professor—teaching. He claims that, for the most part, professors do not wish to be educators but rather researchers. Professors often seek positions that emphasize research to the detriment of teaching, and for those professors already teaching, the author states that many would like a reduced teaching load to accommodate their desire for more research opportunities. Later in the chapter, the author claims that teaching is the real work of the professor, yet does not provide much evidence to support the claim. On the other hand, much evidence is given for the claim that professors prefer to be researchers.

In the following chapter, “How Teachers Succeed” (chapter 2), Cahn discusses the qualities needed for professors to be exceptional educators. He argues that professors are effective as educators when they can motivate their class, organize their material, and present the content with clarity. He states that to motivate a class, professors should employ humor, storytelling, rapid-fire questioning techniques, and elements of drama and should take time to plan and organize their material clearly and logically so students can follow. Finally, all material should be presented with clarity of thought and delivery. While this list of traits is an admirable start when discussing effective pedagogy, it is far too simplistic. Effective pedagogy requires many more components that simply are not discussed in this chapter.

Cahn also discusses the role of a teacher within the class and university. In “A Teacher’s Role” (chapter 6), Cahn accurately describes the professor’s role as being a guide and an authoritative figure in the classroom and that the professor should seek to teach all students in the classroom, not just the gifted and talented. Curiously, though, Cahn appears out of touch when discussing professors engaging in romantic relationships with students. While Cahn advises against these types of relationships from a moral perspective, which is admirable, he fails to do so from a legal perspective. Title IX is not mentioned within the text, which is surprising since Title IX regulations have made it clear that if professors engage in these types of relationships, they could lose their positions at their respective universities.

After spending some time delineating what qualities faculty need to have to be effective educators, Cahn presents multiple proposals to move the emphasis of higher education from research to education. In chapter 3, “Learning to Teach,” Cahn offers his first proposal—to insert practicums within graduate work that would emphasize teaching a class. He does specify that the practicums would only be offered to students who are interested in a full-time faculty position in the future. In the practicum, the graduate students would get practice teaching their respective content to each other and then would present feedback to their colleagues. The received feedback would then help each graduate student to improve as an educator within the classroom. While this is a commendable idea, it may not be practical to implement across all

disciplines. Some colleges and departments within universities may not have the appropriate faculty on staff to develop graduate students to be competent instructors, lecturers, and future full-time faculty members. Pedagogy is both an art and a science and takes years of practice to master. With this in mind, a consideration could be made for graduate students who are interested in faculty work to partner with education departments, which would expose these graduate students to the true principles of pedagogy and allow them to see how these principles can be implemented in their disciplines.

In “Appointments” (chapter 7), Cahn proposes his second change proposal to help shift the paradigm from research to education—that higher education institutions should emphasize teaching and pedagogical skill over research and department interests during the hiring process. By emphasizing pedagogical skills, universities can acquire and develop talented educators within the field. As Cahn states, this is in direct contrast to how most universities choose to hire faculty. In many cases, universities either seek candidates who are renowned researchers in their field or choose faculty members who can help existing faculty further their own research. Ideally, universities should look for faculty members who will bring both pedagogical skills and talent, as well as a fresh perspective on research. While Cahn is correct in his approach, I am not sure his generalizations apply to most universities across the country. Due to program structures, accreditation bodies, and state agencies, universities must be mindful that applicants must meet certain criteria to teach specific content areas effectively.

Cahn presents his third change proposal in chapter 3, “Evaluating Teaching.” In this chapter, the author rightly states that for too long, faculty evaluations have been conducted by students, and universities have placed far too great an emphasis on how the students evaluate their instructors. Cahn provides ample evidence as to why this should not be the case. He proposes instead that faculty should evaluate each other in a peer-reviewed system. While this is an excellent idea, it is not fully formed. We cannot know for sure if the faculty evaluations themselves are not without bias unless evaluation systems have been put in place. These evaluation systems need to demonstrate reliability and validity, which can be done through the development of university-wide rubrics.

Cahn's fourth proposal appears in chapter 9, "Tenure," in which Cahn discusses two sides to tenure and acknowledges that the issue is divisive: whether to keep tenure or not. However, his proposal, surprisingly, does not have anything to do with whether to keep or discard tenure. Cahn's proposal works under the assumption that universities will keep tenure, which is slightly out of touch with current university trends as more universities are discarding tenure and moving towards lengthy contracts for senior professors. While his assumption may be less accurate in the last several years, the proposal that he gives has merit. Cahn proposes that tenure be granted to those professors who show a balance between research and teaching. With the current trends, Cahn's argument could be applied to say that faculty promotion of any kind should be holistically based. To be promoted, professors need to demonstrate both scholarship and instructional effectiveness. This proposal would also stress the importance of teaching to seasoned faculty members. By changing the promotion process to include effective pedagogy, current university professors would be encouraged to further develop their pedagogical skills in the classroom.

The fifth and final proposal put forth by Cahn is that for the paradigm to shift from an emphasis on research to more emphasis on teaching, the values of the university administration must change (chapter 10, "Administration"). For universities seeking to change their culture from an institution solely focused on research to one that also values teaching, Cahn advocates emphasizing instructional effectiveness in the interview process when searching for and hiring new administrative officials. He believes that universities that value teaching alongside administration and research and include such criteria in the interview process will garner new administrative officials who can change the university culture. As universities hire more teaching-focused administrators, the university's culture will shift to one focused on instructional effectiveness.

Cahn's premise of professors as educators is promising. While some elements of his work need more research and evidence, the overall idea of his work is noteworthy. It should be examined by any university seeking to improve the student experience.

## REFERENCES

Cahn, Steven M. (2022). *Professors as teachers*. Resource Publications.

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