DIVERSITY&INCLUSION SCHOLARSHIP IN ONLINE HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In the higher education world, Diversity and Inclusion has been playing an increasing important role. Universities all over the world need to prepare professionals that upon graduation are fully prepared to address all multicultural, multi-generational, and other challenges created by a diverse workforce driving our global marketplace. To be fully prepared and, at the same time, aligned with the requirements from different accreditation bodies, institutions need to foster their faculty and student pools to constantly get involved with scholarship. In higher levels, such as master and doctoral programs, faculty credentials need to include conference presentations and articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Doctoral students also need to show their capability of preparing not only their dissertations but also do high quality research and develop scholarly works. This article describes a proposal of a methodology that can be used by different online institutions to engage and foster faculty and students to deeply commit efforts to developing scholarship. As a case study, the authors will restrict their examples to the area of Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace.

KEYWORDS: Diversity, Globalization, Higher education, Online education, Scholarship, Workforce

INTRODUCTION

Universities around the world face constant challenges related to the highly competitive environment they operate, in a world without borders, shrunk by globalization. Like companies in any other industry, educational organizations must compete with institutions all over the world. Students in any part of the globe can opt for not attending classes locally, due to the incredible advances of technology in the 21st century, which turned online education into the reality of higher education. The survival of institutions depends on developing a competitive advantage by delivering high-quality programs, and complying with accreditation regulations. Those regulations include the need of having a faculty pool with the right credentials, including proven scholarship (ACBSP, 2016; HLC, 2016, WCSUC, 2013). On each new year, more international institutions start the candidacy process to become fully accredited by American and European accreditation bodies. In this process, they have to abide by the scholarship requirements and deal with an increasing diversity, in terms of race, ethnicity, language, culture, sexual orientation, etc. Understanding those differences and being more inclusive also increase their potential to succeed and to better prepare their students and faculty to face the challenges of a global marketplace. (Holden, Hamblett, 2007). In the next sections of this paper, we will focus on the US educational environment, and we will discuss the importance of scholarship and its impact on accreditation and online education. A short presentation of Boyer’s Model, commonly used by American universities to address scholarship is also presented. A through discussion of a real case of implementing a scholarship initiative in an online environment closes the paper.
Scholarship and Accreditation

Scholarship has commonly been confused with research, which is only one of the many forms of it. Many leaders in the education industry believe that scholarship should only be pursued by students and faculty that are involved with doctoral programs. That is only partially true. Regional accreditation bodies in the USA highlight the importance of scholarship in their standards, showing the importance of it. HLC, the Higher Learning Commission, responsible for the accreditation of high education institutions located in the center of the USA, includes in its Policy Book Chapter B: Criteria for Accreditation CRRT.B.10.010 (HLC, 2016), the criterion 3.8.5 that states “The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution’s mission” WASC, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, the accreditation body responsible for regional accreditation in the west coast of the USA, in its Handbook of Accreditation Revised (WSCUC, 2015), published by their Senior College and University Commission, includes criterion 2.8 that states “The institution clearly defines expectations for research, scholarship, and creative activity for its students and all categories of faculty. The institution actively values and promotes scholarship, creative activity, and curricular and instructional innovation, and their dissemination appropriate to the institution’s purposes and character”. It suggests that where appropriate, the institution should include in its policies for faculty promotion and tenure the recognition of scholarship related to teaching, learning, assessment, and co-curricular learning.

Programmatic accreditation bodies in the US also include specific regulations to mandate educational institutions to foster scholarship among faculty members. One good example is ACBSP; the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs, which in its Standard 5, focused on Faculty and Staff, includes the following:

“Criterion 5.8.1 Faculty members must be actively involved in professional activities that will enhance the depth and scope of their knowledge and that of their disciplines, as well as the effectiveness of their teaching. The institution must demonstrate a reasonable balance of scholarly and professional activities by the faculty as a whole, consistent with the stated institutional mission” (ACBSP, 2016).

ACBSP follows the Boyer’s Model of scholarship (Boyer, 1990; Boyer, Moser, Ream, Braxton, 2015), in its accreditation standard. In the same Criterion 5.8.1 scholarship is defined to include four types of intellectual activity:

- the scholarship of teaching
- the scholarship of discovery
- the scholarship of integration
- the scholarship of application

According to this criterion “these four types of scholarship are to be equally recognized, accepted, and respected, and the overall performance of each faculty member is to be carefully accessed and held to a high standard of excellence” (ACBSP, 2016). The Boyer’s Model will be discussed in detail in the next section of the paper.

As one can see, scholarship is not restricted by research, and it should be embraced by faculty and students of the multiple level of programs being offered by educational institutions. Research is only one of the 4 different types, the scholarship of discovery, and even though it can be exercised by stakeholders in all levels of higher education institutions.

Scholarship and Boyer’s Model

In his book, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate, Ernst Boyer defined that scholarship is not restricted to research, but it can be portrayed in four different forms: discovery, integration, application, and teaching (Boyer, 1990). Faculty members, while performing their duties in academia should care and foster all four different types, in a balanced way. Different levels of higher education programs will eventually lead to activities that would prioritize one or more types. It seems obvious that faculty engaged in doctoral programs would be more involved with research than professor teaching for institutions that only offered associate degrees. However, all scholarship types should be pursued by faculty and students in any higher education level as a form of professional growth.

“Scholarship surely means the discovery of knowledge, as in research, but that is only the beginning of the process. Scholarship, to be complete, also means the integration of knowledge. It means the application of knowledge. And it means the presentation of knowledge, as in great teaching” (Boyer, 1992).

Scholarship of Discovery

Boyer has defined the Scholarship of Discovery as the one involved with the freedom of inquiry and scholarly investigation. This type of scholarship portrays the main focus of this paper.

“We take the position that research is at the very heart of academic life, and we celebrate what we call the scholarship of discovery...(And) as long as scholars are free to pursue the truth, wherever it may lead, there will surely continue to be a flow of new scientific knowledge” (Boyer, 1992).

The main purpose of the scholarship of discovery would be to build new knowledge through disciplined, investigative efforts and the usage of the scientific method. We are biased to believe that only institutions offering doctoral degrees should be involved with this type of scholarship. The scholarship of discovery is important to any educational institution, since it contributes to the intellectual climate of the university, characterizes the creative process that helps scholarship to advance, and may lead to results that can potentially improve the university’s reputation and increase the recognition of their efforts.
Doctoral degrees are, however, the typical environment in which the scholarship of discovery has the better ground to flourish. The development of dissertations by students and the mentorship performed by qualified faculty, following rigid rules of formatting and high quality contents, is a good example of this type of scholarship. Faculty and students need to be engaged not only in the process of developing dissertations, but their review of the literature, results and suggestions for future research can be shared in different venues, such as peer-reviewed conferences and journals, and in the form of presentations and articles.

Faculty in higher education organizations have research interests and, in many instances, are funded by the government and other private organizations, to investigate, develop new knowledge, and create theoretical and practical infrastructures that can be used by society or provide foundation for future studies. In the fields of medicine and technology, a lot has been gained because of the scholarship of discovery.

Scholarship of Integration

The second type defined by Boyer (1990) is the Scholarship of Integration. It is characterized by interpreting the use of knowledge across different disciplines. In an information society, it is hard to separate different fields of knowledge and deal with the boundaries of the human problems of today, since they frequently do not neatly fall within defined disciplines. The scholarship of integration represents an essential addition to a successful scholarship of discovery, particularly in institutions that have a practitioner-oriented focus. It is extremely important since the process of making connections across disciplines expands thinking and, therefore, knowledge across multiple fields, helping scholars to develop new ideas and solutions to be applied in the world we live in.

“We need creative people who go beyond the isolated facts; who make connections across the disciplines; and who help shape a more coherent view of knowledge and a more integrated, more authentic view of life... And in our fragmented academic world, this task of integration becomes urgent every single day” (Boyer, 1992).

Scholarship of Application

The third type, Scholarship of Application, has been known as applied research or development for many years. It focuses on the responsible application of existing and new knowledge to aid society and professionals in addressing challenges and solving problems. Consulting and leadership roles in professional organizations, to investigate, develop new knowledge, and create theoretical and practical infrastructures that can be used by society or provide foundation for future studies. In the fields of medicine and technology, a lot has been gained because of the scholarship of discovery.

We need to relate theory and research to the realities of life...I am convinced that university scholars urgently need to respond to the crises of this century... How can we justify a university that is surrounded by pressing human needs and essentially ignores them? It's a failure not only intellectually, but ethically as well” (Boyer, 1992).

Scholarship of Teaching

Finally, the Scholarship of Teaching represents the most frequent and traditional activity in the academic environment, teaching and learning. Its importance as scholarship, however, cannot be minimized, since it is through the dissemination of current knowledge that individuals realize the need of more investigation and inquiry (Discovery), more multidisciplinary approaches (Integration) and more practical usage of the theory (Application).

There is a constant need for studying and improving models that facilitate teaching and learning, so the process is optimized, and can more easily lead to the other types of scholarship and to reciprocal benefits between faculty and students.

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Scholarship in Online Universities

Scholarship, as discussed before, play a crucial role in the educational process for any serious university. To be fully prepared and, at the same time, aligned with the requirements from different accreditation bodies, institutions need to foster their faculty and student pools to constantly get involved with scholarship. In higher levels, such as master and doctoral programs, faculty credentials need to include conference presentations and articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Doctoral students also need to show their capability of preparing not only their dissertations but also do high quality research and develop scholarly works. (Connor, Shaw, 2008).

An increasing number of educational institutions around the world have among their student and faculty pools, individuals that want to take advantage of online education. How can scholarship be fostered in an online academic environment? Technology today provides educational institutions to enhance the learning process, by taking advantage of remote education. LMS’s deliver contents to students who don’t need to come and attend class in a physical classroom. Faculty can work on professional development by taking courses online on attending events and conferences without having to be physically there. The same tools can be used to build a full-featured Center that remotely congregates people with same scholarly interest, while providing them with the resources, guidance, and opportunities to developing their scholarship.

The experience of the authors in doing that can be reflected on the two centers successfully
created by them in the past three years, with the engagement of more than three hundred researchers and scholars. Since 2014, they have created, launched, and led centers of excellence dedicated to Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace, developing programs and solutions in the various dimensions of Diversity and Inclusion, with a substantial focus on companies and organizations that embrace or are willing to launch diversity and inclusion strategies and professional development among internal and external stakeholders. This connection between academia and the real world of business can trigger the interest of individuals to pursue their scholarship, since they realize the perspective of increasing their future employability (Carnevale, Smith, Strohl, 2013; De Meuse, Hostager, 2001; Holden, Hamblett, 2007; Wickramasinghe, Perera, 2010) while seeing tangible outcomes that impact the life of other individuals and the destiny of companies and organizations. Any initiative to have potential for success should engage people. They are the vital force behind the research and scholarship. It should also keep resources within easy access reach, so they could be immediately available to individuals interested in pursuing their scholarship. Any initiative should also be disclosed and advertised through different channels, in an effort to create awareness and also foster the academic community to benefit from the opportunity of the extra support in developing their scholarship. The use of a website has proved successful, and should be seriously considered as the best option.

That website might include:

- Profiles of all individuals (students, faculty, partners) engaged in the scholarship effort
- Description of all areas of interest and research agenda
- Scholarship Communities
- Repository of scholarly production by members, seminal published works and training/support materials to enhance the qualification of members and the quality of outcomes
- Opportunities for sharing scholarship
- Communication of outcomes and achievements to academic community
- Links to partners and other websites that can add value to community members

Scholarship communities are defined to streamline research and scholarship among affiliates, and at the same time create clusters of excellence related to different dimensions of topics being investigated. Under the leadership of one of more members, the scholarship communities should focus on results that can bring benefits to the internal academic community as well to external stakeholders. Those external stakeholders include organizations and companies that need that scholarship to perform better and face their marketplace challenges on an advantageous condition. The use of blogs and discussion forums inside scholarship communities can help the dissemination of progress being made in the areas of interest, as well as create opportunities of finding new solutions and approaches to problems being addressed.

Diversity is intrinsically connected to the fact we are human beings, and it can be found in all dimensions of both our personal and professional lives.

Can you look at the world that surround us and not think of or see diversity?

To foster scholarship among faculty, students, alumni, and partners, Argosy University Tampa and Sarasota launched in July 2016 a new initiative: The Center of Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion. It was conceived to include not only the traditional dimensions of Diversity, the ones usually considered by people and companies like gender, race and ethnicity. It embraces a more comprehensive view of Diversity in the Workplace (see Figure 1).

The mission of the Center is to serve and support all aspects of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, academia, and society. It provides resources, education, solutions, and training to businesses and organizations to assess, create, and implement Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives, aligned with the demands from internal and external stakeholders. The Center of Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion fosters scholarship and the advancement of knowledge and understanding of diversity and inclusion through research, publication, presentations, integration, and applications. The Center embraces the four types of Boyer’s Scholarship (Boyer, 2015). Affiliation with the Center is welcome not only for members of the Argosy University community, but also for partners, individuals, companies, and organizations who have a real concern about making this marketplace a more inclusive one.
The Center encompasses the following knowledge areas:

![Figure 2 – Areas of Knowledge Covered by the Center](image)

More than 40 professionals and scholars are already affiliated with the Center and some of the ongoing activities are listed below:

- Conducting research in many dimensions of diversity and inclusion in the workplace (Ball, 2003; Carnevale, Smith, Strohl, 2013; Charles, 2009; Perry, Unwin, 2011; Stark, Kirk, Bruhn, 2012; Taylor, Stein, 2012; Tuck, 2009; Willis, 2010), such as:
  - Thinking and Learning
  - Culture, Race and Ethnicity
  - Age and Generations
  - Gender and Sexual Orientation
  - Special Needs and Disabilities
  - Veterans
  - Religion and Spirituality
  - Global Citizenship
  - Diversity Management
  - Talent Management

- Supporting and enabling companies, organizations, and the community to strategically work on Workforce Skills and Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives focused on increasing internal stakeholders’ performance and external stakeholders’ satisfaction and loyalty, connecting the scholarly knowledge from Academia to the demands of the market (Figure 3)
- Collaborating with companies to perform Diversity and Inclusion diagnostics and create professional development programs to fill the gap between desired goals and the current situation. Inspired by the demands from the organizations already being served, he developed a framework to address D&I in companies and organizations, based on 3 phases: Diagnostics, Gap Analysis, and Action Plan (Figure 4)
- Moderating panels on Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace in different cities across the US to engage external companies and organizations and create more awareness about the relevance and importance of those topics to society
- Finishing a book on Diversity and Inclusion to be published by Palgrave McMillan in 2017, entitled *Diversity and Inclusion in the Global Workplace: Aligning Initiatives with Strategic Business Goals*. The book is divided into two grand areas: Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace, in which different dimensions of diversity are discussed, and Applying D&I in the Workplace, covering different applications for companies and organizations

![Figure 3 – Connecting Academia with the Market](image)
CONCLUSION

Having existed for half a year, the Center of Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion has already find its place in the academic community and the society. The Center is receiving the recognition for its achievements in different venues and through different groups of people. Its leader, Dr. Carlos Tasso De Aquino, has recently participated in the HR Tampa Diversity Day, moderating a panel on diversity in which representatives of important companies shared their own experience with diversity and inclusion. Scholarship affiliates are increasingly being invited to be guest editors for special issues on diversity and related topics in high quality peer-reviewed journals around the world. Their academic production is also being accepted for presentation and publication more often. Only the Center’s leader has presented or published in more than 40 venues in the past two years. Partnerships are currently in development to take the Center’s initiative to Colombia and Peru, open new opportunities for investigation and for better understanding of Diversity and Inclusion practices among different cultures around the world.

The Center will continue this journey of providing the right support to and fostering stakeholders to develop even further their scholarship, applying their knowledge and skills to create a more diverse, inclusive and productive world, in which differences are not only respected but used to leverage a better life.


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