Maynard Mack, Jr.

For better or worse, social and legislative pressures are forcing universities to reexamine their current tendency to privilege reseach as the almost exclusive measure of productivity. Departments, 50-70 year old sites of remarkable productivity, are now becoming blocks to needed flexibility in examining faculty roles and rewards. However, for teaching to be valued more, it will need to be evaluated more carefully. While universities must never become society's servants, they are civilization's supporters and as such may well find that teaching merits more attention than is currently accorded.

Teaching Matters:

Reconsidering Our Responsibilities

Like the storied Emperor, our universities are scantily clad these days. As the cold winds of prof scam sensationalism, tight budgets, and informed public skepticism blow over higher education with increasing bitterness, we must worry about our ability to maintain public support for what we do. We *are* losing that support, and it is up to us to find honest and inventive ways to make clear to the public how much of what we do on our campuses *is* in the public interest. It is probably up to *all* of us, especially to a research campus like mine at the University of Maryland, College Park, to make sure that more of what we do *is*, in fact, in the public interest.

There is hardly a campus in the country that does not list its criteria for promotion and tenure as research, teaching, and service, and yet there is probably no school that actually weighs these elements equally as promotion and tenure documents often imply. A few years ago my English department, in rewriting its promotion guidelines, settled on the Biblical language that promotion was based on, quote, "research, teaching, and service, but the greatest of these is research." A charmingly honest way of putting it, given the priorities of the campus. But the brighter lights of the bureaucratic mind were turned on our graceful effort at honesty and we were told we could not come clean like that. It was to be untruth as usual.

This is seen, and noted, systematically by faculty and *increasingly* by students, parents, legislators, and journalists. We need to come clean, and this will mean some adjustments both in what we say — the easy part — and in what we do — the hard part. And if the changes in what we do stretch so far as to alter where faculty put some of their time, or so far as to modify tenure into a system of multi-year contracts — if changes as radical and painful as these are contemplated, deciding what to do will involve a long process of study, debate, and compromise.

But for perspective, let's remember that our current structures and understandings are only *current* and do not go back far in history. Publication as the standard for promotion and tenure is an extremely recent innovation. *Departments* themselves, by which we all define ourselves, are largely inventions in this century. There is nothing in the Constitution requiring that higher education be departmentally based. In fact, in many fields much of the best work in recent years has been on the margins of disciplines, between biology and chemistry, English and linguistics. But departments have been stunningly successful in getting some of the world's work done and even more successful in producing published documents to read...or gather dust on library shelves. They have been successful, and self-protective. And now they are deeply dug-in, solipsistic, and self-justifying, as well as deeply inventive, creative, and productive. But each discipline, armed with its national professional association, now defines the terms of success within its own boundaries. Specialization sometimes reaches such levels of intensity that there is a real danger of our losing new recruits, the students who come to us looking for an *education*, not just for glimpses into a series of specializations they will never choose, or be able, to enter. I view this as tragic because we have been led by our greatest successes in directions that could lead to our greatest defeat: the failure *both* to prepare our students for lives as democratic citizens *and* to attract enough good people to keep exploring new realms of the mind.

We need to reexamine departmental divisions and may even need to reinvent programs of true liberal education—more diverse than those of Matthew Arnold's time but more general than what our current departments will support.

Equally, or more important, as Ernest Boyer argues in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, we need to differentiate among faculty members at the *same* campus and even among different stages in the career of a single faculty member. We need to establish that teaching, research, and service are *all* appropriate missions for faculty at our institutions of higher education, and then we need to construct systems that will challenge faculty members to excel in one, two, or all three of these missions and reward them for so doing. All of our campuses are sufficiently varied that there is room for a mix of talents, and *excellence* should be rewarded and cherished wherever it appears. As Boyer says, no business could allow itself to marginalize the talents of such a large proportion of its workers as universities routinely do. Quality in any area should be rewarded, but mediocrity, even if it publishes, should not.

Some of our campuses *do* serve the national interest by producing new knowledge and publishing it, especially, though not exclusively, in the truly experimental sciences. That is one valid activity for parts of higher education. But in our national wisdom we did not set up our universities as places of advanced graduate training. Instead we have always invited onto our campuses, even our research campuses, thousands, tens of thousands, of undergraduate students, and taken their money. So we owe them a good education, *all* of them, including the ordinarily talented kids lured onto our campus by the promise of a good undergraduate education—whatever that is: they don't know and sometimes we don't seem to know either, or to care.

Since we don't in this country have national examinations the results of which would crudely evaluate and rank our teachers, and since we in general make pitiful efforts to evaluate college teaching through a weak mix of student questionnaires and occasional peer evaluations, teaching isn't really valued. If we want it to be valued, we will need to spend at least as much time hiring for teaching, evaluating it, and promoting and rewarding for it, as we spend hiring for, evaluating, and promoting for research. And the same with service. When we engage in professional

service—not when I help the Boy Scouts but when I run a NEH program for high school English teachers—we should be evaluated by experts on and off campus, just as our publications are evaluated by experts on and off campus. Until we do this, changes in the balance between teaching, research, and service will, properly, be impossible. We cannot expect university administrators or the public to respect teaching more if we don't respect it more ourselves.

At College Park we have taken long, tentative steps down all these roads in the last few years, steps that are, still, preliminary and the next year or two will determine if we have the courage and wisdom to make the accumulated steps into a completed journey to a better place, or whether we will wait for the state legislature to do it for us, probably badly.

I'll mention three, not because they are transferable—these things have to be campus specific—but because they point in promising directions and two of them are, I think, unusual. Beginning with the Pease report of 1988, the campus accepted the idea that pedagogy was the heart of General Education. Increased emphasis was to be put on active learning for students in all the general education classes—more writing, discussion, synthesizing, and responsibility for the student. That report also called for the long-overdue establishment of a Center for Teaching Excellence which we have done on a very low-cost model: no fancy suite of offices, just a talented part time coordinator who organizes workshops for faculty on teaching, publishes an informative newsletter, consults with departments or faculty facing particular problems, and symbolizes in words and deeds that attention is being paid, finally, to the quality of instruction in the classroom.

Most exciting, last year a group of designated Faculty Teaching Fellows orchestrated *the* most important conversation about teaching in my 19 years at College Park. The fellows asked the President and Provost to invite 100 campus leaders, both those noted for their research and those noted for their teaching, to a half-day symposium entitled "Revitalizing Higher Education through Revaluing Teaching." Karl Pister, Chancellor at University of California, Santa Cruz and author of a system-wide report on the need for changes in the definition of faculty roles, was the key-note speaker. The afternoon was spent in workshops on various aspects of revaluing teaching, from what we provide about teaching to graduate students in their graduate training, to hiring faculty with attention to their teaching skills, to teaching portfolios for improving and documenting teaching, to changes in a faculty member's career over time that require adjustments in focus and correlative adjustments in rewards, to exploring a land-grant flagship campus' diverse teaching missions, to the big mother question of them all, are we prepared to *encourage* good teaching wholeheartedly, *evaluate* it systematically, and then *reward* it significantly? The day ended with all in attendance calling for action on four consensus recommendations which have since been presented to our new Provost, and he indicated he intended to act on them all in appropriate ways this year. Perhaps because he is new to campus, we are still waiting.

In April of this year the current group of Teaching Fellows organized a campus-wide "Teaching Matters" forum at which 200 faculty spent the afternoon addressing grassroots teaching questions like large classes, postmodern pedagogy, technology, helping prepare Tas to teach, the roles of canons in the disciplines, teaching portfolios, and so on. Asked to come back with recommendations, most groups rebelled and simply reported that they had had the best conversations in their lives about teaching. We need to establish a procedure that will encourage each campus to examine its proper balance between teaching, research, and service as it approaches

the twenty-first century. This is hardly a call for revolution, but if we want to effect change and to get out front of the negative analyses and evaluations being made of higher education these days, broad, frank debate on a campus-by-campus basis is the place to start. Faculty roles and rewards have to be determined on each campus, for each campus. Our spring symposia in the last two years are a major step for our campus; every faculty must find the forum appropriate to the climate on its campus.

Nonetheless we are, still, coasting into the post-industrial, post-colonial, post-modern, 21st century with a structure of higher education forged in the late 19th century and ossified in the 1950s into a system encouraging narrow specialization and privileging publication over teaching. Some of what we have built *is* getting the work of the mind and of civilization done. Some of it is not. We need a fresh, hard look at the needs of our *students* and of our diverse *world* and then, if we have the courage to be honest, we will not, I think, be able to go on asking the public to pay what they pay for what they are getting. Colleges and universities must not become the state's servants, and we still wear those splendid medieval religious robes at graduation to remind the world and ourselves that we are not of it. But colleges and universities must be *civilization's* servants. If we examine with utter honesty how well we are serving civilization, humanity, then we will begin to know, I think, how to weigh teaching, research, and service.