

Presidents Discussion Series
Changing Faculty Roles and Responsibilities, Part 1

This is the first part of a two part Discussion Series on the roles and responsibilities of Faculty now that Mount Royal is a University. It is critically important that we understand, respect and support both teaching and scholarship.

Reinforcing a Culture that supports Excellent Teaching, John Cox, Earth Sciences

“Teaching is not accorded the importance it deserves in Canadian and North American Universities...Teaching should be the first priority of Universities.”

No Place to Learn: Why Universities Aren't Working
by Thomas Pocklington and Allan Tupper

MRU does not fit in the universities that this book refers to. We are good at teaching overall. We should stay this way and continue to promote teaching and excellence in teaching. It is not hard to stay good at something when we are already good at it, and we are currently close to the top on the teaching and satisfaction side. We have a long way to go in this regard for research. Teaching is important but that does not mean research is not. None of the new universities in the UK are in the top 40 after thirty years and this may be the case for MRU in terms of research. The only way this will happen is if we reallocate our resources and we should not do that at the expense of teaching.

Why do we have jobs here: someone pays us. The government funds us through grants and they have called us an undergraduate teaching university: the government that funds us stresses teaching. The money also comes from students and, if you asked them, they would want us to stress the teaching also.

When you look at where we are now, we are comprised of quite different cohorts of faculty. The generation of faculty hired from 1980 to the late 1990s were hired with a masters and industry experience. When hired they were told that teaching was the main focus and that other things were much less important relatively. These faculty members knew in coming here that teaching was first and foremost. In the last six or seven years we transitioned to a university and things have changed. Teaching and research are coming to be treated as having equal importance. Look at who we are hiring now: new PhDs and Post Docs. They have gone through undergraduate, masters and PhD programs where research was their main concern, and this did not change when they came to Mount Royal. They are very experienced researchers but they are not all natural teachers. If we are going to maintain teaching as our focus and our strength we need to have supports in place to enable faculty to be excellent teachers.

The Integration of New Faculty who were hired into a University with Faculty Hired into a College, Michelle DeWolfe, Earth Sciences

This is a matter of integrating people on TSS and TS. In ISP people mentioned that there was a choice to be hired to TS and TSS: newly hired felt they had no choice and had to be in TSS. It was made clear to new faculty that they would do research and they were to express how they would do it at an undergraduate setting.

I was hired in 2008 coming directly out of a PhD and was engrained in the research world. Overall, the those hired in 2008 (55 of them) were in the same boat-all directly out of graduate studies. The integration has been great, at least in the department of Earth Sciences. It is a small department and all understand well what their colleagues do. In the larger university setting the integration could be better. There is a lack of transparency between the two streams' roles and responsibilities. Sometimes, especially in geology, people on TSS 'disappear' during intersession. This is in conflict with some faculty members' understanding that this is the period in which a lot of service work is to be done. They do not understand that this is time needed for research. They also do not understand the amount of pressure from the university for faculty on TSS to be away, if required, to do the research. If TSS faculty do not do this in intersession, they need to do it over the summer and lose their vacation. It is easy to become petty or frustrated when you do not understand what the other person is doing: if you think what a colleague is doing is based on a selfish motivation to further their research. Faculty need to remember that it is really the University putting a lot of pressure on TSS faculty to excel in research.

Discussion Summary:

Several comments were made about the distinctions and generalizations that are made at MRU. We need to remember that in both TS and TSS that Teaching comes first. Both streams include service as part of workload. And, faculty in both streams do valuable research to different extents. We need to change our phrasing related to these streams: stop referring to them as the teaching and scholarship streams. We are all going the same valuable work that contributes to the university and benefits our students. We need to be aware of, understand and celebrate the work that our colleagues are doing to reduce the divisions that form when we rely on the distinctions that we have made.

Since we are a teaching focused undergraduate institution we need to ensure there are supports for faculty to improve their teaching. One recommendation which was generally agreed to was that there should be a peer support group comprised of excellent teachers who could be called on, possibly with reassigned time, to give support and to do peer evaluations.

Other related recommendations

- Make it easier to switch streams (reduce the stigma around the change from TSS to TS)
- We need to have greater intentionality around our focus on Teaching (e.g. set a goal for the percentage of faculty on TS). Here we should set a target and work to achieve it. If we do not do this, the slow evolution toward the majority of faculty doing TSS will continue. We need to champion the TS stream and have the majority of the efforts devoted to teaching. Then, we can have a small contingent of researchers who are models of undergraduate research.
- Clarify performance expectations for tenured members.
 - o We have a system where academics make the academic policy decisions and it is everyone's obligation to be involved in the governance of the university. If there are problems respecting standards or processes, then, as a member of the faculty council it is your duty to bring them forward and develop improvements with your colleagues. It's our role to address the problems.
- Better training is needed for TPC members so that tenurable faculty can feel free to fully participate in governance.

This discussion continues at noon on March 27.

Discussion:

There is a misunderstanding between the pure academics and the ones hired with backgrounds in professional practice and designations. An important aspect of teaching is the professional experience that some faculty have. Some faculty can be good teachers and they keep up with the changes in the professional designations and the changes in the industry: this work of maintaining currency is research too. From June 15-Aug 15 people on TS do not get time off either. Even though TS faculty are not doing pure research they are contributing to the overall betterment of the discipline and the institution. We went wrong when we created this divide between those doing research and those who are not: we are all contributing to the betterment to MRU. Unless we can accept this the discussion is pointless: it requires a change in our thinking more than anything else.

- The book refers to this. There are far too many over focussed academics out there and it recommends more breadth. In some areas it is important to be more informed about the overall discipline.
- In Accounting there are some individuals very good at research and consider what people on TS were doing was quite trivial compared to what they were doing
- There needs to be more discussion at a department level about what people are doing. This would mitigate the divide. There also needs to be more praise for what we are each doing.

To have a TS stream is an opportunity that not a lot of other Universities have. We should not lose this opportunity; so, we need to find a way to negotiate between the two streams. Another opportunity for us is our ability to move up to full professor without scholarship. We need to change our understanding of each other and what we do. We need to change our attitude of what we think is most important. This will take a long time because it is a cultural shift.

Do you think the workload at MRU assists you in your goals here or is it causing difficulty: what are the workload expectations here?

- The workloads are amazingly advantageous to my career as TSS faculty. The workload I have makes it possible to do what is expected of me. I have the ability to be an amazing teacher and researcher.

The generalizations here are inappropriate-the division of faculty between TS and TSS or from those hired when Mount Royal as a College or a University-and are not reflective of how some faculty feel about what they able to accomplish. This is a remarkably polite and happy panel that does not reflect a lot of the nasty undercurrents that are going on in MRU. Particularly seeing Trevor Davis' transition video which paints a much stronger picture of the division. David, where do you see us?

- People in the panel were picked who respected each other so we could have a healthy dialogue with respect for each other. We do not want a debate: we want to celebrate both teaching and scholarship.
- Why do you feel we need to have the sanitized version of the debate?
 - o It is a real issue but we need to find ways to celebrate both.
 - o We can build an institution that respects both. Here we have two people in the same department: this shows that there is a lack of communication between areas or in larger areas. We can improve this.
 - o This is not shirking from the debate: it is very important for us to be talking about these issues. The more positive the discussion is the more productive it would be.

I also started in 2008 and was on the TSS stream but I also really love teaching. If you love teaching and want to improve it this University is not set up for this right now. We are stripping ADC and ISP and these were the primary supports for teaching. Peer evaluations could be improved. Right now this is word of mouth: faculty need to find the right person to give them guidance. Just because someone has been here for a long time doesn't make them a good teacher. Sometimes the person doing the evaluation comes out learning from the class but not teaching the faculty member they are evaluating. We need a pool of really good teachers that we can go to for peer support for and for peer evaluation. They should get release and go to conferences. We need to support teachers

Agreed

Following the topic on the balance between research and teaching, the problem here is visibility. It is tremendously difficult to be visible in this institution. It is about knowing what we do, what everybody else does and celebrating it

Going back to the starting point, we started with Boyers model of scholarship and this is a circle rather than a stream. You have more of some things in your circle than others but we are all doing the same work. It would be good to have our workload to be more flexible. The language we use to describe it is unfortunate: this cannot be fixed overnight

Workload in both streams and changing streams

- Right now the punishment is going to the teaching stream. We should have a culture where it is possible to go back to TS. (not punishing faculty in any way if they do this)
- Tenure track faculty are clear on the research expectations it is not clear what the standards are for tenured faculty and this causes animosity. Tenured faculty should not have to do more than the criteria for tenure but they should be held to the same standard.
- Peoples' expectations of research programs are sometimes too ambitious and we are setting the bar higher than is realistic. We need the message to get out there that faculty do not need to do more than the tenure requirements.
- People are more stressed and unhappy than we have ever seen. We need to make it clear that our expectations are not unrealistic

We should get out of the habit of calling the streams Teaching and Research. Teaching is number 1 on both streams and it sets up the expectation that people on TS do not do research. This is a false dichotomy.

The tenure criteria and standards set the deliverables at a fairly achievable standard over a five year term. New faculty coming in out of other experiences and may have false expectations of the research

standards here. It is not just the standards set by the University. We hired people with personality types that have high bars for themselves to do excellent research and this creates stresses.

- What pressure from the University is being felt?
 - o A lot of the pressure is personal as well.
 - o Would the personal pressure exist so much if it wasn't already coming from an external source?

There was a structural imperative we were operating under in 2008: we had to hire PhDs and they had to have research qualifications as we needed to meet quality council requirements. So, yes 55 people came in with the expectation to develop significant research profiles.

The old and new divide should be lost. We are all here and we are diverse and our differences hold us together

Q: From experience of being a productive researcher and an excellent teacher at another institution what would the suggestion be?

A: We haven't set it up yet. The beauty of MRU could be the yang to the University's Yin. We could have greater intentionality around teaching. The target at UofC was to have 15% instructors and 85% more extensively doing scholarship. Maybe the complement to this is that our research and scholarship be more focussed. Right now there is and will be a slow evolution toward people doing TSS. We cannot remain in the middle place we are now. We need to manage this and champion the teaching stream and have the majority of the efforts devoted to teaching. Then, have a small contingent of researchers who are models of undergraduate research. The lack of definition in the middle ground where we are is no man's land

- Is there a goal for the ratio of TS and TSS?
 - o There are legitimate goals since most of the recent hires have been TSS in the affect of increasing contract hires.
 - o There are different sets of goals depending on where you are at.
 - o Moving toward no streams is not likely the answer

We have created a system of rank and promotion that allows people who are excellent in the classroom to be recognized for that as a full professor that would be difficult in other institutions and maybe we do not celebrate this enough.

Teaching streams are often viewed negatively because it becomes a class system where those on the teaching stream are paid less and cannot be promoted. We absolutely need to avoid this.

One of the biggest changes here over the years is the change in governance. We have a system where academics make the academic policy decisions and it is everyone's obligation to be involved in the governance of the university. If there are problems respecting standards, then, as a member of the faculty council it is your duty to say this and work on a better document with your colleagues. It is our role to address the problems.

- New faculty are not in a position to do this
 - o If you are on GFC you should know this is your role and you should do it.
- People in their first year should not necessarily be doing this but if you went through the process and thought it should be improved then you should improve it.

It is interesting that service is not part of this discussion and it is tied to teaching and research, There is the idea developing that TS people should do more of the service than TSS. There is a fear that some people are not as involved as we used to. People on Academic council were more involved. Why is there more of a culture of fear now then there was before? And, who are they afraid of? If you do you work your department won't deny you and if they do then UTPC will fix it.

- Some of this fear is caused by TPCs not doing the proper evaluations. They will pick out one negative comment on an SEI and put more emphasis on this in a report than a bunch of accomplishments.
 - o This is something that needs to be addressed through training.
 - o This is the same as it always was. There have always been crazy TPCs. The TPCs are no different now than they were.
- It is sad that people are afraid and we as an institution need to do something about this.
- The fear of faculty in tenurable positions is related to the amount of work it took them to get

there to need their PhDs etc. and they bring this attitude with them.

- Once we hire someone to tenure track it is very unlikely that we will get rid of them.

Can't we go back to how it was before we had streams? We can all be faculty and some faculty can get reassigned time for research and it can come and go. People who want to pursue scholarly agendas could just apply for this.

- Was the introduction of rank what made this problematic?
 - o Yes this was part of it.
- Still, the streams are not necessary and may be disadvantageous over time due to the inclination of faculty to be on TSS. It should be a competitive thing for those who want to be in research.
 - o We should not get rid of the streams. A competitive process would not be fair. New Faculty would have no time to develop research proposals.
 - o We need fair and transparent processes.
 - o Mount Royal should maintain its focus on teaching as a teaching university, but as a university we still have research. The streams are good because it gives you time and shows trust and faith in the faculty member to get the research done in the future.
 - o If people had to apply for release every year they would not do it.
 - o If it was application based people in small departments would be at a disadvantage
 - o If we cannot show funding agencies that we have time and space for research our faculty members will not be eligible for grants. We need to keep TSS for this as well.

As an undergraduate teaching institution our research is supposed to be directly related to the teaching we deliver. Purely academic research may not fit in with this and therefore it makes sense that it may not be fully supported.

- This is in the Act and we should be aware of it.
 - o The Government has no business telling us what type of research we should be doing
 - o This government has a different mandate and that mandate is legislated.
 - o The government has not tried to take this part of the act to control the research we do

External funding not being available is a reality here. Faculty need money to do what they want to do. Some faculty are trying to create opportunities for students to do research so they can get degrees with having done real projects and creating new data. If the money doesn't come from NSHRC it has to come from someone else.

Our initial research initiative was due to the external drivers. How do we know when we are there and how frequently will we be evaluated on this?

- The Quality Council doesn't know either. In the end we are the ones who will set the expectations and determine when enough is enough.
- This hasn't stopped the quality council from commenting and so the MRU administration is constantly reminding them that we are doing something different and they are referring to the other model, the UofC model. We are an undergraduate teaching institution. We engage in scholarship but our faculty are all teachers.

We need to figure out a way to move from TSS to TS that is not embarrassing and that has no ill effect for our members.

We talk about everyone's research. But there is also the possibility of having a small contingent of very focussed researchers.

Some faculty here feel that they need to leave MRU in order to keep their research at the levels they want to. A lot left at the end of their first year. If they don't then they toe the line here and get into the MRU teaching mode. Faculty have their careers here and their careers with the academy. Staying here limits their options in the future for their career in the academy.

- No everyone wants Mount Royal to be their career.
- Faculty know what Mount Royal is and what the research expectation here is. We cannot widen the gap between TS and TSS course loads to address this. We would lose our collegiality.

There is a culture of going down to TS. TS is not even presented as an option in some areas. We need

to address this by clarifying the TSS roles. If they cannot fulfill the scholarship expectation they need to be on TS.

- We are stretched so thin right now.
- It is not a punishment it is accountability. People need to do their jobs.
- Teaching cannot be a punishment. It is a matter of workload
- It seems that counselling should be separate in terms of release time. In other departments we can fill hours with contract faculty. It is morally repugnant not to backfill hours in counselling for those on TSS
 - o Our mandate to look after students should come first.
 - o Initially TSS positions were backfilled that's why we had the large hiring groups in 2008 - 2009.

When you put resources to something it means that it matters. If there are not enough funds for research, faculty work to combine their teaching with their research and the funds often are internal.

A lot of the feedback on teaching is from SEIs and they have been sort of helpful in lots of ways and we are now going to put this online. We say teaching is important but we are doing online SEIs. The only people who go online to fill the SEIs are the outliers.

- We need to decide what we are going to do as an institution and put resources to it or we will end up remaining in the middle ground.

This discussion continues at noon on March 27.