

# MRFA Scholarship Series Session 1 - Session Notes

## What Constitutes Scholarship at MRU



### Lee Easton, MRFA President

There is no direct article in the CA related to scholarship. It is found in the general criteria for tenure and promotion. In the CA there are overarching definitions which were left intentionally broad to account for the various disciplinary differences and professional undertakings. Documents developed by GFC further refine the concept of scholarship with disciplinary considerations taken into account.

Research and scholarship are two separate items. Both count, but different things constitute scholarship and research. We have an expansive view of research at MRU.

We are an undergraduate teaching university, we are not a research intensive university: our teaching loads are higher here than at those types of universities. The scholarship and research we undertake needs to be congruent with workload and resources that are present at MRU.

1. We are not legislatively allowed to do discovery research. This is not to say that we do not do it but we do not get the kind of funding that goes along with discovery research.
  - a. MRU often does not have the infrastructure to support discovery research.
  - b. Article 145 and List A funding – members can apply to this fund for major scholarly work
  - c. Appendix on teaching, scholarship and service lists what counts. The list of what counts as scholarship is illustrative not restrictive: scholarship includes what is listed there but is not limited to that.
2. The teaching emphasis we have here will mean that our scholarly output will look different than colleagues at research intensive universities.

### Academic Standards Regarding Research and Scholarship

- Teaching and Service criteria are at an institutional level but scholarship is still at the Faculty level. The Faculty based criteria for scholarship may be high level on what constitutes scholarship. In Arts there is a detailed view of this wherein a chart articulates what counts and how.
- You need to take into account the disciplinary differences on how scholarship and research is undertaken (e.g. the scholarship done in interior design is substantially different than what is done in Psychology and then again to what is done in Biology).
- There is ongoing effort to recognize the breadth of what it is we do as faculty when we engage in research and scholarship.

### Regarding Peer Review

- Peer review has been considered to some extent in different areas
- Creative writing has a different way of being peer reviewed compared to how an article published in a journal would be peer reviewed

## **Collette Lemieux, Director of the Mokakiiks Centre for Scholarship of Teaching**

### **What sets MRU Apart**

We say that MRU is at the top in undergraduate teaching. This is more than small class sizes, but our focus on quality teaching. A big part of this is engaging in scholarly teaching, which is integrated in tenure and promotion.

What scholarly teaching is comes from the scholarship of teaching and learning – the research that helps us understand what the best practices are and how to implement them. How we reflect on ourselves as practitioners and as educators and our own processes in understanding the student experience. MRU is a forerunner in the scholarship of teaching and learning and we are known for this. This is in part because we value teaching in a different way than other University's that are more focussed on research over teaching.

### **Understanding our Practice**

SoTL provides us a way to systematically better understand what students learn in our classroom, how they interpret what we say to them, and to investigate the effectiveness of our teaching practice.

SoTL is a transformative experience. As we try to engage in scholarly education it can help us improve the student experience, but until we really engage in SoTL we do not fully understand how our pedagogical designs impact what is happening in our classrooms. Through SoTL, we can transform our teaching practice and ourselves.

SoTL has a direct impact on our students and on ourselves and you can see these changes in a very practical way.

### **Why are we at MRU**

We love our discipline and we love teaching and SoTL brings these things together.

### **Considering Impact**

Faculty going through tenure have concerns about SoTL not being seen as quality research but I am firmly opposed to this view.

We need to tell our story and we need to tell our story of the impact our pedagogical designs have.

Impact and dissemination of SoTL may be different than other types of scholarship and different types of impact. For example, the impact of SoTL may be seen through changes and improvement to teaching practice within our own institution rather than increasing a number of citations etc.

## **Natalie Meisner, Director of Changemaking and Poet Laureate for Calgary**

This undergraduate institution is a great home for those who engage in community based or arts activism-based scholarship.

The flexibility of the definition of scholarship is important at MRU and it will hopefully be maintained

In artistic endeavours the scholarship can resemble the scholarship done in other areas, but there can be other modes where you speak to community members and get their input. However, these other types of work do not typically fit the typical reporting mechanisms: it is more difficult to codify these items.

[Legislating Love](#) – this play came out of both archival and legislative research as well as first person testimony

[The Caregiver Project](#) – collecting broadly first person testimonials and narratives and will work with these to create monologues

There are various levels of peer review involved in creative works

## **Scharie Tavcer, Associate Professor in Criminal Justice**

### **Scholarship that brings about Change**

Practical tools and practical projects that people can consume and apply in the justice sector

The criminal justice sector is very vast and broad. The areas I am focussed on are things pertaining to gendered violence (sexual violence and relationship violence and in understanding the law and occupational stress injuries with first responders and supporting criminalized offenders being reintegrated in the community).

I am critical of the system but we do need to work within it.

There is a wide diversity of projects possible within the justice system

Study done of the older downtown library reviewing its environmental design and how to solve problems of, for instance, drug use in public spaces. The outcomes of this research were implemented by the library

A current project is on sexual consent education at Canadian PSIs – this was a nation wide project and included interviews, speaking with stakeholders, and the now creation of consent education module online. This module has been sent off for informal peer review who are experts in this topic. Then worked with design to make it aesthetically appealing. Then it will be sent to student groups to review it as users and interactive participants. Down the road I may write up the study but there have been many other outcomes along the way in terms of dissemination.

### **Peer Review and writing Textbooks**

I have edited and co-wrote and wrote textbooks. These practices and changemaking

When doing tests the peer review process is paramount. A current manuscript has gone out four times for peer review.

This can strengthen the text but it can also lengthen the process and you need to determine which peer reviewer's comments to consider or not (see funny [meme](#) in relation to this)

### **Writing textbooks**

I enjoy writing these textbooks and do so much more than in writing articles.

Writing textbooks can be a viable alternative to writing articles.

As a teaching intensive institution we rely heavily on textbooks. I approach the writing of textbooks in terms of how I would lecture on the topic.

It is important to consider voice in writing chapters

Need to consider how accessible it is and need to keep in mind the audience.

It is valuable to attend writing workshops when you are considering writing textbooks.

## **Discussion**

The departmental and varied view of what constitutes scholarship can be concerning for faculty who are tenure track, yet the expansive view is beneficial to all members

Scholarship can be about telling a story and it is important to be in control of your own story in terms of making connections for a different kind of review / peer review to assist in the ways we can tell our stories

Being confident in your work as being scholarship helps you to tell your story in terms of how it is scholarship

When your work does not neatly fit in a prescribed box of what scholarship is you need to try to make things fit which can be difficult. It is important, for this reason, to approach tenure and promotion from a holistic sense that looks at the whole body of the work. There can be more or less flexibility in this depending on whether you are applying for promotion or tenure, respectively. Just because something does not fit in the box does not mean that you should not claim it. There is peer review at the departmental and Faculty level review processes where the overall dossier is reviewed. It is also important to note that tenure dossiers do have room for creative display, explanation and storytelling for your scholarship.

It has been important to keep the criteria at the Faculty criteria level as this is developed by faculty and not at the discretion of the University through bargaining which can take years to come to agreement between both teams

It may be useful at another point to consider a session on dissecting the differences between research and scholarship and the related impacts on grant writing etc.