

'Publish or perish' — dead or alive?

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Some say it's dead, others believe it is very much alive. Some despise the concept, while others consider it an integral part of university growth.

What is involved in the traditional theme of "publish or perish" among the University faculty.

There is a discrepancy among colleges within the University of Nebraska - Lincoln about the demand for research from faculty members. A representative of one college calls the "publish or perish" concept silly. Another professor said he believes it is the fundamental requirement of a university instructor.

Ned Hedges, assistant vice chancellor for academic affairs, said he believes there has been a movement that last five years to recognize ways to reward a faculty member other than by published research.

Most promotion and tenure policies at UNL, he said, depend not only on scholarly research, but also on teaching capabilities and public service contributions.

College decides

However, Hedges said, the trend has been let each college set the criteria for judgment of its faculty members.

"I despise the concept of 'publish or perish,'" Charles Miller, dean of the College of Business Administration, said, "and I think it's a silly axiom."

Although a teacher is measured by his peers through his publications, it is not a requirement for advancement within the College of Business, he said.

However, Melvin George, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, said his college expects its faculty members to be active in their own fields. While the criteria is loose at the college level, it becomes increasingly demanding in each department, he said.

Faculty judgment

Departments with doctorate programs require a measurable amount of scholarly research from their faculty. Faculty judgment is based on teaching, public service and particularly scholarly research, George said.

James Rawley, chairman of the history department, said since his faculty members must train graduate students to be researchers, it is expected that the teachers engage in research in their own fields. At the present time, 13 of 22 history department members are doing research.

"In the history department publication remains an important, if not principal criteria for promotion," Patrice Berger, a researcher in the history department, said.

However, Berger said it is basically a good system of promotion, provided flexibility is allowed. Although the rule "publish or perish" sounds forbidding, he said, the pressure isn't bad.

Contributes to knowledge

David Levine, chairman of the psychology department, said a member of his faculty "cannot be an adequate

university teacher unless he contributes to the growth of knowledge." He said he makes no distinction between teaching and research.

Promotion and tenure within his department depends ultimately on what each tenured member considers to be the most important contribution to the university. Levine said he believes research is the most important.

Alan Bates of the sociology department said the emphasis on research is heavier in some departments than others.

Allen Williams and Harry Crockett, Jr. of the sociology department are researching this summer. Williams said he was encouraged by the department, and said advancement within the department depends on it. Both received a National Science Foundation grant for their research.

Finance own research

However, if a teacher cannot receive a grant from university, governmental or private sources, he must finance the research himself. Since research requires so much time, Bates said it is practically impossible to teach and research at the same time, especially in the summer.

Therefore, it is practical for the teacher to give up his summer teaching and forfeit his salary until his research is completed, Bates said.

After the research is completed, the faculty member with an article to publish may encounter problems, Hedges said. Publication outlets are decreasing because there are more articles to be published than every before, he said.

"For example, the Journal of the Modern Language Association, the major publication outlet for English research, is not accepting any papers for consideration, let alone publication, until 1975," he said.

Departments judge

However, some teachers can submit their papers to a board within their department for judgment," Hedges added.

"It is unethical not to publish research," Levine said, "because a teacher should share his knowledge not only with his students, but with his peers so he can be judged."

Hedges also said the basis for qualifying and quantifying research is very difficult. Therefore, a teacher who regularly turns out research papers at the expense of his students cannot be considered more valuable than a teacher who produces a small amount of relevant research and is an accomplished instructor, he said.

Berger emphasized the flexibility needed in the promotion criteria. If a teacher is outstanding in research, but cannot perform well in the classroom, he said, more research should be demanded of him.

A better teacher

However, if a faculty member is a better teacher than researcher, he should not be required to do as much

research. But, no matter how good the teacher, he still must do some timely scholarly research in his field, Berger said.

Regardless of pressure upon faculty members, the university, as opposed to other educational institutions, still has an obligation to transmit and create knowledge, George said.

By law, the university must expand the scholarly knowledge of the state. "Whereas I believe the principal job of a university teacher is to teach student," Hedges said, "traditionally, a university is where you push back the borders of the frontiers of knowledge."

However, Hedges said a university can afford to have faculty members who are outstanding in only one of three major areas of research, teaching and public service.



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