

Standards for Scholarship

Laura Blasi, Ph.D., Director, Institutional Assessment

5-14-2013

"We must," Ernest Boyer wrote, "give the familiar and honorable term 'scholarship' a broader, more capacious meaning" – one that includes four distinct but interrelated dimensions: discovery, integration, application, and teaching (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999.) When he wrote *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* over twenty years ago (1990) he was, in part, bridging the gap that was more prevalent between teaching and research than we experience today at Valencia College.

Our college provides encouragement and incentives to conduct research related to teaching and learning, with built-in support and motivation for us to create and implement research-based activities. The challenge then, with so many projects being developed and implemented, is to understand and use a shared set of standards for quality research. An instructor's scholarship, moving from the stages of discovery, integration, application, and teaching, can be measured by six standards according to Boyer, having or using:

- Clear goals
- Adequate preparation
- Appropriate methods
- Significant results
- Effective communication
- Reflective critique

These have also been called "habits of mind" (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999) and they are discussed or demonstrated within many of the faculty development workshops and in conversations across the college. While we have an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to review certain kinds of studies following federal guidelines,¹ we know that all studies should be guided by these standards. Having "clear goals" in part means that we have a research question and purpose in mind – rather than letting the research method determine what we do. "Effective communication" throughout the study helps to build stronger projects and a stronger community of practice. As faculty members learn from colleagues, collaboration and communication are vital to the process. By explaining the purpose of your research as you talk with your colleagues you may clarify or refine your

¹ Find out more about the IRB through the Valencia College Website. Complete the "Key Questions Checklist" online to find if you should apply for IRB review of your proposed research. Please go to www.valenciacollege.edu/IRB for more information.

goals, while you are actively engaged in the college's community of practice. Later on you will want to share the results and any next steps through conversation, presentation, and/or publication.

Your purpose should be communicated to your participants, too. You are showing respect for your participants as you provide context, describe why the work matters, and explain why they should spend their time participating. When they understand the purpose of your study and why their participation matters, they are more likely to respond and more likely to respond in a thoughtful way² – which adds to the reliability of your data.³

Reliability means that you can accurately draw conclusions given the data you have. The careful design of your study adds to its validity, so that your results are more reliable; they are meaningful and appropriate to the questions being asked.⁴ Seemingly simple things like providing directions on the questionnaires that you have developed will then increase your response rates and the reliability of your data.

An Example Published in a Peer Reviewed Journal

Please see the companion article that has been highlighted with a few added notes to provide an example of these standards in action.

Alessio, H. (May 2004). Student perceptions about and performance in problem-based learning. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 4(1), 25-36.

By asking specific questions you can evaluate your own work and see how closely your project meets the standards articulated by Boyer, in terms of “appropriate methods” and the other habits of mind. The six questions that follow are interesting to think about – but more specifically they can be used as a checklist to document the steps you are taking to carefully design a rigorous and thoughtful study.⁵ These questions align with each of those habits of mind asking that you demonstrate:

² We see this in the Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI) each term and this is why faculty members work to communicate the purpose of the SAI each time students are asked to take this course evaluation survey.

³ This research-based finding is described in the work of Don Dillman on survey design; see the Works Cited.

⁴ An example can help to illustrate the difference between reliability alone and the broader concern for validity. A bathroom scale can be reliable. That is, it can accurately show your weight. However, it does not provide a valid measure if you want to document something else and answer a different question – for example if you want to know a person's height. In this example you have reliability, but not validity.

⁵ Imagine the impact your use of these standards can have when you include them in a professional portfolio, demonstrating your own rationale and methodical approach within your professional practice. These also help you to read the research of others and to mentor colleagues new to action research.

1. Clear Goals

Does the scholar state the basic purpose of his or her work clearly? Does the scholar define objectives that are realistic and achievable? Does the scholar identify important questions in the field?

2. Adequate Preparation

Does the scholar show an understanding of existing scholarship in the field? Does the scholar bring the necessary skills to his or her work? Does the scholar bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward?

3. Appropriate Methods

Does the scholar use methods appropriate to the goals? Does the scholar apply effectively the methods selected? Does the scholar modify procedures in response to changing circumstances?

4. Significant Results

Does the scholar achieve the goals? Does the scholar's work add consequentially to the field? Does the scholar's work open additional areas for further exploration?

5. Effective Presentation

Does the scholar use a suitable style and effective organization to present his or her work? Does the scholar use appropriate forums for communicating the work to its intended audiences? Does the scholar present his or her message with clarity and integrity?

6. Reflective Critique

Does the scholar critically evaluate his or her own work? Does the scholar bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to his or her critique? Does the scholar use evaluation to improve the quality of future work?

For Reflection and Discussion: These Practices in Action

Sarah, an instructor with four years of experience at Valencia College, is in her first year of the Teaching/Learning Academy (TLA.) She teaches courses in the General Education program, has begun learning about LifeMap, and has even taken students abroad to Spain. In her classes, she has been focusing on teaching students strategies for analyzing primary texts ("This skill is part of what it means to be a critical thinker," she tells them.) Let's think about her research. She spends several hours developing a survey based on a hunch she has related to student learning – she gives it to her students hoping she will gather some meaningful evidence. What does she need to do before and after to ensure her scholarship will be well-designed and thoughtful, drawing on her community of practice? Once she administers the survey what might be next steps to engage others, act on the findings, and perhaps develop the study further?

Note: You can invent the topic of the survey and its findings if that helps you to think about the "before" and "after" of her story. For later reflection... what might successful strategies look like compared to those that might not result in reliable and meaningful results?

Concluding Thoughts

There are many books and Websites that provide information regarding research design and research methods.⁶ Before considering the design of your study and the methods that you will use – your first challenge is in identifying your topic of interest and in creating your research questions. Your questions come first, then the study is designed to answer those questions. The choices you make about the participants (your sample), your instruments (such as exams or questionnaires), and your methods (such as interview, observation, assessment, or survey) flow from your purpose and the research questions that you are seeking to answer. These standards for scholarship (articulated by Boyer) and related questions can help you to develop and implement a project that is meaningful and will be part of the growing community of practice at Valencia College.

Survey Tools, Sources of Data, and More

- 1. Qualtrics Online Survey Tool***
<http://www.qualtrics.com>
- 2. Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI)***
http://tiny.cc/faculty_sai
- 3. Valencia College Data and Reports (i.e. CCSSE and ECAR)**
<http://tiny.cc/via-reports>
- 4. Institutional Research – Internal and External Reports**
<http://valenciacollege.edu/IR> (see “Standard Reports”)
- 5. The LibGuide for Action Research**
http://libguides.valenciacollege.edu/destination_ar
- 6. TLA Action Research Resources**
<http://valenciacollege.edu/faculty/development/programs/tla/actionResearch>
- 7. Institutional Research Board (IRB)* overview and forms**
<http://www.valenciacollege.edu/IRB>

**These are also available through Atlas.
Login through Atlas for Qualtrics if you need to create your account.*

⁶ *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* by John Creswell (2009) can be a good place to start – while not specific to action research it does cover the basics of research and provides an overview of different methods along with examples.

Works Cited

- Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dillman, D. A. (1999). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method*. (2nd ed.), New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons. (While this is a classic, check for recent editions...)
- Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., & Maeroff, G. I. (1997). *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professoriate*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hutchings, P., & Shulman, L. S. (1999). The scholarship of teaching: New elaborations, new developments. *Change*, 31(5), 10-15.

For an online list of more readings go to: <http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/resLinks/selBibl.shtml>

About the Author

Laura Blasi is the Director of Institutional Assessment and joined Valencia College February 2012 with a master's degree in English and a doctoral degree in education (research methods.) Her experiences prior to Valencia include five years in the College of Education teaching research methods and assessment strategies as a full-time faculty member at UCF. Her office facilitates Program Learning Outcomes Assessment planning and processes; coordinating Assessment Day each spring and the State Assessment Meeting (SAM) each summer. The Valencia Institutional Assessment (VIA) office oversees the SAI, the IRB, and assists with survey development through Qualtrics. VIA also facilitates administration and analyzes and reports data from national surveys administered college-wide, such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE.) Related workshops for faculty members are described in the Faculty Development catalog and more information and resources are available on the VIA site (<http://www.valenciacollege.edu/via> or contact us by e-mail: lblasi@valenciacollege.edu.)