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By Kenneth C. Green

Review, Promotion & the Pogo Problem

TECHNOLOGY IS SOMETHING GROWING NUMBERS OF FACULTY ARE EXPECTED TO DO. IT IS NOT, HOWEVER, SOMETHING THAT COUNTS AS SCHOLARLY.


At the risk of showing my age, I confess that I remember Pogo, Walt Kelly's acclaimed political cartoon satire about creatures residing in the Okefenokee Swamp. Pogo the Possum and his friends have been gone from the nation's newspapers for some time. Pogo's wisdom survives.

Pogo's (and Kelly's) most memorable and widely cited comment was that "we have met the enemy, and he is us." Offered as insight about life in the swamp, it also provides insight into other organizations and cultures, including academe. Indeed, Pogo's insight says much about a very unswamplike issue that has been spreading across college campuses and into classrooms, faculty offices, libraries and resident halls for the past two decades: information technology.

Why do colleges invest in technology? Certainly expectations play a role. Today, students (of all ages)

come to college expecting to learn about and also to learn with technology. Employers expect college graduates to have technology skills. But in between these expectation factors resides a huge set of curriculum aspirations, great hopes that technology will engage students, enrich the curriculum and enhance learning.

Indeed, the growing presence of technology on college campuses and the great aspirations for curriculum integration of technology resources force many in higher education to confront a set of issues that seem mutually exclusive, the high-touch (almost handcrafted) traditions that have long held an esteemed (if increasingly mythical) place in academic work versus a high-tech future likely laden with a rich array of IT resources. In between reside the vast majority of faculty and administrators who simply are struggling to assess the appropriate role of technology resources in their scholarly work, in their instructional activities and in the priorities of their programs, departments and institutions.

Over the past two decades  colleges have spent huge sums (billions and billions and billions of dollars) on hardware, software, training, campus networks, content licenses and user support as part of their IT investments. Concurrently, institutions and academic programs have also invested significant dollars to encourage faculty to explore ways to bring IT into the classroom and into the learning experience. Courseware development programs, academic support centers and technology development initiatives reflect yet another component of the IT infrastructure at many institutions.

While most institutions are creating an infrastructure to encourage use of IT in instruction, too few two- or four-year colleges and universities provide formal recognition or reward for these efforts. Indeed, data from the 1998 [Campus Computing Survey](#) reveal well over half of all US colleges and universities have IT support centers and institutional development programs. In contrast, just an eighth (about 12 percent) formally "recognize or reward IT as part of the routine faculty review and promotion process."

The (often younger) faculty who pursue scholarly adventures in cyberspace, the very objective their departments and institutions seek to foster with various technology initiatives, typically find themselves at significant risk during the review and promotion cycle.

Technology is not yet a recognized component of the review and promotion algorithm. Technology is something growing numbers of faculty are expected to do. It is not, however, something that counts as scholarly.

Academic departments and institutions are sending a clear if somewhat punitive message to faculty about IT: Do more with IT in instruction, but do it in addition to your other professorial responsibilities. IT support programs and development initiatives at many institutions are useful and important, but faculty also monitor the experience of their colleagues. Failure of academic departments and institutions to recognize and promote the instructors who invest significant time and effort to integrate technology into their instructional work send a chilling message about the real nature of the institutional commitment to IT in instruction and scholarship.

Some campuses have expanded the promotion algorithm to include a technology component. For example there is [Seton Hall University](#), one of the small number of institutions with a universal access (i.e., notebook computer) initiative. A recent Faculty Senate Resolution endorsed including a technology component in the review criteria to assess faculty portfolios on research, teaching and service. Faculty need not become techies to survive and thrive at Seton Hall, but neither are they penalized for their interests and efforts. Note that the initiative to include technology in the review process was endorsed by the faculty senate and is now a part of the faculty handbook. Some other institutions have pursued a similar process.

The number of colleges and universities doing so remains small, very, very small, despite exploding interest in IT and widespread calls for a broader, more encompassing definition of scholarship. For example, the president of one institution that also has a notebook initiative, where review and promotion is overwhelmingly based on teaching rather than research, reports the college has yet to operationalize its technology initiative into the review and promotion process. Technology may bubble up in the review process to the benefit of individual faculty, but it is not an explicit component of the process at this campus, despite college administrators' significant investment of time and effort in a universal access initiative.

What then about scholarly and professional associations? Do these groups have standing on this issue? Given the proliferation of technology-oriented special-interest

groups across almost all associations, have these organizations spoken in a clear policy voice to say something about the role of technology in teaching, scholarship and professional development? Alas, no.

Would it make a difference on your campus if the Modern Language Association, the Academy of Management or the American Association for the Advancement of Science, among others, did so? Would a formal resolution from these organizations have meaning in the hallway conversations and during committee meetings when the review cycle begins again next fall? After all, the people who belong to your respective academic association are also members of your academic department.

Which brings us back to Pogo. "We have met the enemy, and he is us." Perhaps we the faculty are our own enemy on the issue of recognizing IT as a legitimate scholarly pursuit. After all, we the faculty review the portfolios of paper assembled by our colleagues each year in their quest for promotion and tenure. We the faculty are members of the departmental committees, faculty senates and professional associations. We the faculty serve as mentors for our graduate students and as colleagues to one another.

If we do all these things, we must do one more. Twenty years into the so-called technology revolution in higher education, we the faculty who sit on review and promotion committees must take the initiative to expand the algorithm so technology, now so much a part of the instructional experience and so important a tool in so much scholarly work, must attain its appropriate place in the review and reward process. Our colleagues who are eager to pursue IT should know they may do so without fear of falling on a digital sword because of their scholarly interests and instructional investments in IT.



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