



How Scholars Trumped Teachers: Change without Reform in University Curriculum, Teaching, and Research, 1890–1990. Larry Cuban. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999. 280 pp.

RICHARD WISNIEWSKI, *University of Tennessee at Knoxville*

rwisniewski@utk.edu

As a former dean, I considered it a good day if I did not have to discuss the relationship between research and teaching. Opinions regarding what "really counts" when it comes to tenure and promotion were part of endless and unresolved debates. An anecdote noted in Larry Cuban's study will ring true for most academics. A young professor is shown a plaque listing professors honored for their outstanding teaching. Her senior colleague points out those who were denied tenure because their publications were deemed inadequate. His point is not lost on the new professor, as it has not been missed by tens of thousands of others in the academy.

Although this is not a new issue, Cuban has provided an excellent and fresh analysis of the phenomenon. The tension between teaching and research is more complex than is generally assumed. It is influenced to some degree by faculties and administrators, but its roots are deep in the history and culture of universities.

Cuban is known for his studies of attempts to change educational practices. Coming to Stanford from a career in public school teaching and administration, he writes, "I found . . . jarring paradoxes in how university faculties managed their curricular and pedagogical affairs that both startled and puzzled me. This study documents my journey to understand better the persistent tensions within the teaching and research in which I (and many colleagues) have been fruitfully if not frustratingly engaged" (p. 11). What he learned is an important contribution to an understanding of American higher education.

His study is first and foremost a historical analysis based on sound scholarship. His annotated footnotes and extensive references strongly support his findings. Although his focus is on one institution, his insights apply to universities across the country. Stanford and other research universities, he explains, have "had a disproportionate influence historically on curricular and instructional practices in higher education and instructional practices in higher education both in the United States and abroad" (p. 2). Or, as one of my colleagues observed, most universities suffer from "status envy."



The chapter entitled "How Universities Tame Reform to Preserve the Research Imperative" provides a typology for studying campus change that includes differences between incremental and fundamental changes, the breadth and level of changes, and the influence of time. These heuristic continua reveal the conflicting values endemic to the university-college dichotomy. The term *university* refers to an institution devoted to research, whereas the term *college* refers to one that educates the young. Indeed, Stanford and other institutions tried more than once to divorce themselves from the latter, though with no success. Hence, both missions coexist, and the compromises made to serve both goals create the tensions and paradoxes that characterize many campuses. As Cuban notes, "Newly hired and tenured professors learned to live with the angst-ridden contradiction that flowed from the university-college: They were hired to do research but paid to teach; then they were retained or fired on the basis of publications" (p. 182).

The heart of the book is in the two case studies that reveal how this fundamental tension permeated faculty life at Stanford for a century. Cuban examines the history and development of two very different disciplines: history and medicine. As unique as preparing physicians and historians might appear, it is remarkable how the culture of research came to dominate both. The two case studies are especially interesting because the roles and influence of prominent professors and administrators are part of the documentation offered.

It should not be inferred, however, that teaching was or is unimportant. Leaders and committees pronounce the importance of teaching with regularity. Prizes for outstanding teaching are offered, teaching evaluations are conducted, and activities designed to enhance teaching are provided, as is true on most campuses.

Nonetheless, Stanford's culture—including its strong departmental structure, its commitment to faculty autonomy, and a determination to maintain a high ranking among universities—serves to ensure that research "trumps" teaching whenever curricular, personnel, or structural choices need to be made. Cuban's use of the term *trump* is exactly right. As in card games, trump cards are powerful, but this does not mean that other suits never get their due.

Cuban offers provocative insights that will challenge readers. For those, like me, who insist that teaching and research are co-equal, he presents sobering contrary arguments. His emphasis on facing reality is especially powerful because he wants a better balance to exist, but commonplace efforts to support teaching simply do not alter the culture of an institution.



Reformers, and these are my words, must offer bolder solutions that go beyond superficial changes. And nothing is harder to achieve, as the book makes clear. Academics have honed the art of looking as if changes are being made while ensuring that core values and structures remain inviolate. Cuban describes how generations of professors and administrators at Stanford have limited internal reforms while responding to shifting social and economic times. "Change without reform" perfectly captures this cyclical process.

The book's weaknesses are few. Data on the actual research productivity of professors might be revealing. One also wonders why the school of education, Cuban's academic home, was not given more attention, for his insights surely would be powerful. But these are quibbles.

Larry Cuban has produced an important study of change and continuity within universities. His work underscores why more historical and qualitative studies of universities are needed. For reformers, such knowledge can lead to new strategies. Those satisfied with the status quo can benefit from a firmer knowledge of how the status quo came to be. Whatever one's views, this book deserves a wide audience.

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