

I am happy to see the verb “integrating” used in our efforts to develop the next strategic plan. “Integrating” is perhaps the most tricky part in all of our academic activities; if we don’t emphasize it enough, it might be engulfed by the nouns following that verb.

National Research Council (NRC) has articulated a dimension of integration that’s beginning to attract nationwide attention. It has recently completed a study¹ issuing a call to universities on the need to integrate interpersonal and intrapersonal skills with cognitive skills. Accreditation agencies, particularly in engineering, have been modifying their criteria to include non-cognitive skills along the lines described by NRC.

Separation of research, teaching, and engagement as mutually exclusive activities has been in itself a result of lack of recognition of the type of integration NRC is emphasizing – a recognition that cognitive skills are best developed in combination with inter- and intra-personal skills in a community-setting. The notion implicit in separation of research and teaching is that a ‘teacher’ engages only in information delivery through one-way lecturing with no scholarship of her/his own while a ‘researcher’ engages in an exclusively individualistic enterprise with minimal need for interactions with the outside world, students, or fellow faculty. Education is fast evolving to a point where the role of a teacher is no longer to ‘cover’ what’s there in a book but to challenge the students to higher levels of learning, and research is approaching the point of articulating community relevance and developing interdisciplinary connections between groups of scholars.

Seeking higher levels of learning in a community-setting is the integrated purpose of teaching, research, and community engagement. Both freshmen and advanced research faculty share the common grounds of seeking higher levels of learning; it is perhaps no accident that we use comparative degree to refer to our enterprise as ‘higher education,’ and we don’t use its superlative - ‘highest education’.

This paradigm shift, from “teaching *versus* research *versus* engagement” to “learning” is needed to give all of these their rightful and non-conflicting places on campus. There’s a great deal of temptation to prioritize these activities; but prioritization emphasizes their separateness, which might weaken, if not defeat, our exercise on integration.

I hope the budget considerations do not force us to prioritize the essential elements we’re trying to integrate.

¹ *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century*, National Research Council, The National Academies Press, Washington D.C., 2012.