

VALUING TEXTBOOK WRITING IN ACADEMIC PERSONNEL REVIEWS

John D. Hewitt, Grand Valley State University

Robert M. Regoli, University of Colorado

ABSTRACT

Faculty who write textbooks within their disciplines are often frustrated by department, college, or university level policies that designate textbooks as something other than a traditional scholarly activity. Some place textbooks under teaching or pedagogical aids while others accept textbooks as a clearly secondary form of scholarly activity. Perhaps more problematic are the lack of rewards and the imposition of disincentives to author textbooks. This paper will examine faculty perceptions of the role and value of textbook writing and issues relating to placement in the personnel review process.

A student at Penn State University wrote an opinion piece in the university's *Daily Collegian* raising questions about why a history professor, highly honored for his teaching, was denied a promotion (Houck, 1994). The professor had taught at Penn State for 27 years and won numerous teaching awards, and thus one might conclude that the professor had simply failed to engage in scholarship. But the professor currently had three bestselling books in the academic market, including a text on Nazi Germany going into its third edition, a text titled *Western Civilization* used at more than 600 colleges and universities in the United States, and a third text on world history. His scholarship was not limited to textbooks as he had also published other scholarly monographs and articles. Either the scholarly monographs and articles were not sufficient or his engaging in the activity of writing textbooks negated the value found in his

other writing efforts. According to the student, the message from the university was clear: "*The original work you've done isn't enough and we frankly don't value your books. To hell with how many books you sell or how many undergraduates you teach*" (Houck, 1994). It could also be added to this message that little or no value was attached to the number of undergraduate students around the country initially excited about the study of history and who then chose to pursue graduate work and become professors of history as a result of reading this professor's textbooks (Roediger, 2004).

Placing Value

Each year in colleges and universities around the country, department personnel committees review and evaluate their colleagues to determine whether tenure, promotion, or merit pay should be awarded. For most faculty members some level of evidence

attesting to contributions in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service is required for positive evaluations. In many department policies governing such reviews, these areas are mutually exclusive. That is, generally an item used as evidence in one category may not be used in another category. In some departments, publication of a textbook is counted under "Teaching" rather than under "Scholarship." Faculty members quickly recognize that counting and valuing of items is an element in the process. Students produce evaluations of faculty through their course questionnaires and the accumulation of publications and department, national, and international service are presented and given weight. Student course evaluation scores and service on committees provide clean ratio level data: a 1.7 in one course is equal to a 1.7 in another course; serving on 5 committees is roughly equal to serving on 5 committees. The rub comes in when evaluating scholarship.

Generally speaking, review committees place greater value on articles published in top-tier journals in their disciplines than on articles in second- and third-tier journals (Leap, 1995). Moreover, committees typically grant greater value to scholarly monographs published by university presses than they do to textbooks. In many top tier or Research I universities, there is little or no value attached to the writing of textbooks at all (North, 2008). According to Edward Corbett (1992), at

such universities, textbooks carry even less weight than coauthored books and articles, those collaborative efforts which are often dismissed as not requiring significant effort by any single member of the "team" of authors. Kendra Hamilton (2002) puts it this way:

In the hierarchy of publication, the single-authored work of original research or the scholarly article appearing in a reputable referred journal is at the top of the pyramid -followed by the edited collection of scholarly essays, the edition of a "lost" primary text and sometimes even the anthology. But the textbook isn't at the bottom of the pyramid; it's not even on it.

Corbett (1992) suggests that "because of the low esteem accorded to collaborative work and classroom textbooks, young teachers of writing are discovering that the rewards for publishing this kind of educational material are minimal."

James Jackson, founder of the Program for Research on Black America at the University of Michigan is quoted as saying "In my field -in psychology -it would be the kiss of death for a young scholar to author a textbook" (cited in Hamilton, 2002). And Kathy Heilenman (1993) suggests that there is an inverse relationship between authoring textbooks and academic prestige: recognition of valid academic work is attached to the production of knowledge

and not to the transmission of that knowledge. Authoring textbooks is not only held in low esteem, many research universities appear to present disincentives for such endeavors by forbidding the use of university time or facilities for textbook writing; faculty who pursue writing textbooks run the risk of becoming "academic mavericks" (Heilenman, 1993).

There are additional disincentives for faculty at many universities who write a textbook, especially an introductory-level text. Perhaps the most common disincentive is the commitment of time required for writing a textbook (Arnold, 1993). A comprehensive lower-division text typically takes three or more years from submission of a prospectus to a publisher to the publication of the book. Assuming similar teaching and service expectations, faculty who pursue authoring textbooks often have little time available to conduct research, write referred journal articles, and submit research grant proposals. Thus, at major universities the reward system minimizes the value of textbooks while maximizing the value of articles and research grants. To achieve tenure, it would be unwise to commit one's time to an activity that will likely have little contribution to a positive tenure decision (van den Berghe, 1970).

David Arnold (1993) surveyed 84 tenured faculty and 28 department chairs covering seven disciplinary areas at a research university to assess perceptions of the scholarship and

utility of writing textbooks. Surprisingly, only 12 percent of the faculty and 14 percent of the department heads gave blanket negative responses regarding writing of textbooks. A larger percentage thought textbook authorship should not be given much or any weight in tenure and promotion decisions with 23 percent of the faculty and 25 percent of department heads rating it negatively. Responses varied by discipline with respondents from education and engineering providing the greatest support for authoring textbooks and those from business indicating strongly negative responses

Authoring Textbooks as Scholarship or Entrepreneurship

What accounts for the disincentives and disdain at research universities for faculty authoring textbooks? There is no question that single-authoring a research article in a top-tier referred journal in one's discipline brings positive recognition not only to the author but to the author's department and university, even if only a few people read it. Indeed, the prestige ranking of departments, and indirectly universities, is frequently calculated based on the number of articles published or citations in the discipline's top journals by department members (Roche & Smith, 2007; Steiner & Schwartz, 2007; Steiner & Steiner, 2006). From this perspective, textbooks bring no status or prestige to a department or university.

Not only does authoring a textbook

not bring status and prestige, for many professors and administrators in research universities, writing a textbook is perceived as nothing more than an entrepreneurial activity, done only for the economic rather than the academic reward. As Arnold (1993) and Corbett (1992) suggest, it is not unusual to hear opinions reflecting disdain for this questionable pursuit, including *"textbook writing should not count because the authors receive royalties"* and *"textbook writing is a mere economic adventure."* Writing textbooks is tainted somehow by money and consequently unworthy of the professoriate.

A third disincentive involves the characterization of authoring textbooks as not meeting the requirements of being "original" or "creative" endeavors found in "real" scholarship. Authoring textbooks is seen as "drudge work" and simply putting in many hours of work is not the same thing as original thinking or creativity (Arnold, 1993). The lack of "original" intellectual effort leaves some, such as a department chair of business at a research university, suggesting that "anyone can write a textbook and get it published within the discipline" (cited in Arnold, 1993).

In response to such dismissal, defenders of authoring textbooks note that the endeavor is *"tremendously creative," typically requires a comprehensive "thinking through of the discipline, and represents a greater dedication to long-term learning experienc-*

es" (cited in Arnold, 1993). Textbooks also are inherently integrated into the pedagogy of the professorate. Textbooks communicate the accumulated knowledge of a discipline to students; they take what is often obtuse and complex findings from cutting-edge research published in journals and research monographs and translates it into meaningful information to be digested by students and other professors. According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer, 1990:35), *"While articles in refereed journals and scholarly books are of great value, writing a textbook also can be a significant intellectual endeavor."*

"Such writing, if done well, can reveal a professor's knowledge of the field, illuminate essential integrative themes, and powerfully contribute to excellence in teaching, too."

With this emphasis on article publication and disincentives for writing textbooks, it seems reasonable to ask whether publications in referred journals only bring status to a department or do they also make a significant contribution to the discipline? To meet the need for faculty to publish research findings in referred journals and thus increase not only the status of a department or university but also the likelihood of promotion and tenure, there has been a significant proliferation of journals in nearly every academic field (Goel & Faria, 2007). However, Corbett

(1992) points out that "*not every published article or book makes a significant contribution to the scholarly enterprise.*" Indeed, Corbett notes that 80 percent of articles in academic journals are never cited by anyone, while Sharon Begley (1991) reports that of a total of 4,500 articles published in top science journals, fully 45 percent did not get a single citation within the first five years after their publication. To the extent that significant citation of scholarship is evidence of significant scholarship, then it might be concluded that a great number of journal articles are merely "journal filler" (Leap, 1995).

With such disincentives to author textbooks, which professors at research universities are willing to risk academic marginalization and the disdain of their colleagues? Certainly, many textbooks are authored by research leaders in their disciplines, professors who have already spent a large part of their careers doing research and publishing journal articles (Platt, 2008). Indeed, the authors of introductory textbooks written in many disciplines in the early 20th century were "*mentioned almost with reverence for having done so*" (Graham, 1988:356). Often, these authors were the "giants" of their disciplines. Through the mid-20th century it was generally believed that authoring textbooks was not "*appropriate for anyone but senior scholars, because of their considerable experience and knowledge of the discipline*" (Graham,

1988:357). Today, it appears that many of the textbooks in circulation are authored by already tenured faculty who do not fear or face the disincentives of untenured faculty in research universities. For example, Mary Lamanna (1988:417) suggests that textbook authorship is unevenly distributed around the nation's institutions of higher education. She notes that the most likely candidates for textbook authorship are professors so senior that their status and professional reputation are entirely secure, professors at non-elite institutions where faculty books are scarce and a textbook is appreciated, or faculty members at smaller colleges where teaching is highly valued.

However, even for tenured professors at non-elite institutions, authoring a textbook is likely to be done while teaching a regular load of classes, without assigned time, and often without graduate or undergraduate students to assist in the accumulation and sorting of a vast array of research findings (Silverman, 1999). It is likely that, as Sheryl Fullerton (1988:354) suggests, these authors have a serious commitment to developing textbooks that will help students:

Not only with knowledge but also with the cognitive chores that seem so difficult for them, such as learning critical reasoning and analytic skills, understanding the relationship between abstract concepts and concrete experiences, achieving an ex-

panded view of the world, and becoming active and curious learners.

Textbooks, Articles, and Affiliation

There are disincentives for faculty to write textbooks at both Research I institutions (lack of recognition and reward) and non-elite institutions (heavy teaching loads), and incentives for faculty at both types of institutions to publish in top-ranked journals (status and reward). A quick perusal of author affiliation suggests that institutional affiliation is significantly associated with type of writing.

The current study examined institutional affiliation of authors of current editions of introductory criminal justice, criminology, introductory sociology, and social problems textbooks published by McGraw-Hill, Pearson (Prentice Hall, Allyn & Bacon) and Cengage (Brooks-Cole, Wadsworth). Readers and peripheral books were not included. In addition, the institutional affiliation of authors of articles published in 2007 in *Crime & Delinquency*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Criminology*, *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Social Forces* was examined. Authors affiliated with universities in other countries, graduate students, and authors not affiliated with academic departments (i.e., state department of corrections, research organizations, and NGOs) were excluded.

While only 33 percent of the authors of the textbooks were affiliated with Carnegie Research I institutions, fully 80 percent of the authors of articles published in top-ranked journals were located at them. Interestingly, only 16 percent of authors of introductory criminal justice and criminology textbooks taught in departments that were ranked among the top 24 programs offering doctorates and identified as the "most productive institutions" according to Steiner and Schwartz, (2006; 2007).

The findings from this brief survey of author affiliation seems to also support the claim that sociology textbooks attract few "luminaries" in the field (Wright, 1995) and that "*few prominent contemporary criminologists/criminal justices write introductory textbooks*" (Wright & Cohn, 1996:462). For example, in their analysis of 16 criminal justice textbooks published between 1989 and 1993, Wright and Cohn (1996:462) found that "*none of the twenty-four authors ranked among the twenty-two most-cited scholars in the books.*"

Conclusions

In all human groupings from dyads to nation-states there is at work a social organization that consists of norms, roles, status hierarchies, and mechanisms of social control. Academe is no exception. While the nature of the social organization is transformed over time and is variable among types of colleges and univer-

Table 1 Textbook Author Affiliation*

	Intro to Criminal Justice	Intro to Criminology	Social Sociology	Social Problems	Total
Number of Authors	29	16	44	27	116
Percent at Carnegie Research 1 Universities	24%	31%	43%	26%	33%

*Comprehensive textbooks currently published by McGraw-Hill, Pearson, and Cengage.

Table 2. Journal Article Author Affiliation (2007)*

	Criminal Justice	Sociology	Total
Number of Authors	188	223	411
Percent at Carnegie Research 1 Universities	72.3%	86%	80%

*Criminal Justice journals included *Crime & Delinquency*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *Justice Quarterly*, and *Criminology*. Sociology journals included *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Social Forces*

sities, ranging from Carnegie Research I universities to community colleges, the social organization itself is fluid, which is why "rules of the game" within and between institutions are amended. Often at the top of modern academic departments are faculty members who secure outside funding for their research and publish their findings in the discipline's most prestigious journals, whether their work is eventually read by hundreds or thousands of journal subscribers or by only a small handful of other specialists. Sitting at the bottom of the hierarchy are faculty often derided as "dead wood," those who have been assigned "extra" service and teaching assignments presumably to "carry their weight," but have no real expectation of receiving much (if any) salary increase or promotion. Only one notch above "dead wood" faculty are those who have turned to writing textbooks.

Because the decision makers in academic departments in Research I universities are often the folks who bring in money, they typically set the rules for what will be rewarded, and more often than not, textbook writing is not rewarded. The irony of course is that textbook writers influence the thinking and thought processes of many more students and instructors than do authors of research articles. In its lifetime, a successful textbook may literally transmit to hundreds of thousands of students and professors a body of knowledge, thus far exceeding the impact of only all but a very few

academic articles and monographs. For example, Paul Samuelson's *Economics* textbook sold more than 121,000 copies in its first edition published in 1948. Between 1948 and 1980, eleven editions of the text reached the market with more than three million books sold; over 440,000 copies being sold in its sixth edition alone. By the time the 18th edition was published, more than four million *new* copies of *Economics* had been purchased by students (Skousen, 1997).

Although a few textbook authors, such as Samuelson, are able to amass a fortune through their writing, authoring a textbook does not guarantee any greater income than salary increases based on teaching reviews, publication in journals, and generation of grants. At universities that reward publishing scholarly monographs, a first book with a university press is often worth at least several thousand dollars in salary increment until retirement age, while royalties on textbooks outside the introductory level market seldom bring in more than a few thousand dollars, and that for only a few years (van den Berghe, 1970). In each discipline there are but a handful of textbooks that withstand the test of time and continue into ten or more editions, while relatively few textbooks go beyond a first or second edition.

All that said, while writing a successful textbook in academe adds little value to a professor's scholarly status it seldom damages his or her reputation, especially for full Professors

or faculty at non-elite colleges and universities. And for some academics, textbook authoring will garner some respect if only because the writing process is so tedious and requires lengthy dedicated effort. However, for those professors in academic departments at Research 1 institutions who are “high brow,” the “movers and the shakers of the discipline,” textbooks always will be regarded as dull and pedantic and the protests of textbook authors looking for respect will fall on deaf ears (van den Berghe, 1970).

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