Upon Further Reflection: More on the History, Tripartite Role, and Challenges of the Professoriate

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Abstract—This paper expands on the role of the professor by detailing the origins of the profession, adding some of the unique contributions of North American universities as well as some of the best practice recommendations to the unique tripartite role of the professor. It describes current challenges to the profession including the ever-controversial student rating of professors. It continues with the significance of empowerment to the role of the professor. It concludes with a predictive prescription for the future of the professoriate and the role of the university-level educational administrator toward that end.

Keywords—Professoriate history, tripartite role, challenges, empowerment, shared governance, administratization.

I. INTRODUCTION

NO other endeavor combines the lure of adding to the body of knowledge, passing it to peers and students within a framework of unprecedented autonomy and flexibility, all under the umbrella of a reputable, time-honored global institution. Professors generally set their own hours, classes, research projects and committee involvements while afforded opportunities to speak on their publications in worldwide conference venues. It is a noble profession originating as early as 400 BC [1], matured throughout the millennia but it is not without challenge to institutional stability to be addressed later in this paper.

Practical suggestions for defining and maximizing the tripartite role of the professor are also included in this essay. The paper concludes with a proposed return to the original function of the professor as a multi-disciplinarian humanitarian of superior intellect and inquisitivity.

II. A HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS

How did the scholarship get to where it is as a profession and as an institution? Who were the original professors? The following briefly reviews our occupational roots.

Fig. 1 depicts the original Greek and Roman lineage of Academia which the author would like to refer to as The Seminal 17. The author wishes to focus on the European genesis because there is disagreement among scholars [2]–[11] regarding whether or not early European universities had parallels in Islamic nations. Although Hilal [12] reported, the ancient University of Timbuktu (circa 1100) in West Africa had 25,000 students; and China, too, possessed "great bodies of learning" at Shang Xiang school founded in the Yu Shun

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Era. However, this writing will focus on European institutional beginnings.
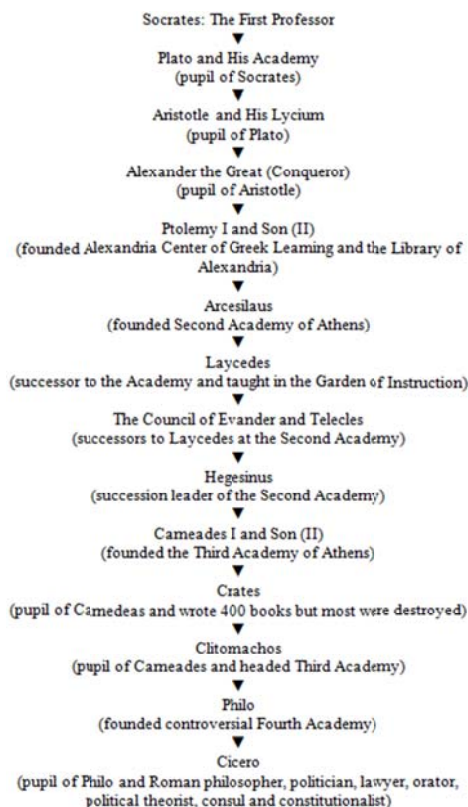

Fig. 1 Expanded Western Origins of Academia [2]-[8]

Significantly, the Socratic Method is still being used in teaching in a variety of modern-day universities as well as in practice in some political careers [13]. The ancient curriculum consisted of law, rhetoric, music and philosophy. Philosophy, of course, is still the namesake of the Ph.D. in contemporary academia.

The lineage in Fig. 1 concludes with Cicero because the fall of the Roman Empire followed shortly thereafter with not much scholarly work being done in the Dark Ages. Cicero's writings were rediscovered by Italian scholar (also a priest and a poet) Petrarch in the 1345 who is considered by many scholars to be the Father of the Early Renaissance. Upon rediscovery, Cicero's writings were widely published throughout Europe second only to the Gutenberg Bible. Their translations also greatly influenced 400 years later progressive American politicians John Adams and Thomas Jefferson in their authorship of the Declaration of Independence [14]. The

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author searched in vain for a linkage between Petrarch and Leonardo da Vinci but could not find any. A rediscovery of Aristotle's works, too, more than 3000 pages that were eventually translated, is reported by Rubenstein [15] and Dales [16] in the 12th Century. Dales called this rediscovery "a turning point in the history of Western thought".

After Greece, scholars [17], [3] disagree as to the first recorded medieval university. The University of Salerno in Southeast Italy existed "as early as the middle of the eleventh century" [17]) but Ruegg [3] stated the University of Bologna is "the oldest university [1088] with an charter of academic freedom that guaranteed the right of a traveling scholar to unhindered travel in the interests of education". This is important for two reasons. First, early Italian universities in Southern Italy focused on law and medicine whereas Northern Italian universities focused on the arts and theology. Secondly, "unrestricted travel" and the concept of academic freedom continues to hallmark the modern professoriate given scholarly diversity and the number and locations of international academic conferences where scholars gather to share and discuss their scholarship. McClusky and Winter [17] further illustrated this example of early academia.

Some time before 1100 we hear of a professor named Pepo, 'the bright and shining light of Bologna'…[however] the teacher who gave Bologna its reputation was [named] Irnerius…perhaps the most famous of the many great professors of law in the Middle Ages…by 1158 it was sufficiently important in Italy to receive a formal grant of rights and privileges from Emperor Frederick Barbarossa …by this time Bologna had become the resort of some hundreds of students...this was the beginning of the [European] university.

The original Latin word *universitatas* (a community of teachers and scholars) referred to degree-granting institutions of learning in Western and Central Europe; and consisted of self-regulating guilds of students and teachers who were chartered by royalty in the towns they were located. Other early European universities appeared circa 1200 in other parts of Italy, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom most notably Paris, Cambridge and Oxford. Law, medicine, theology, grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, geometry, astronomy and music were their major curricular components. City governments created universities to satisfy a thirst for knowledge and the belief that society would benefit from scholarly expertise. Aristotle's works were rediscovered, translated and taught in the 12th Century as the bases for logic, science and art. Faculty governance, then called a faculty guild, began at the University of Paris and continues to be a hallmark of modern institutions of learning [17]. From the 1400s to 1800 there was tremendous growth and research throughout Europe and indeed the world. Theology began to play a less significant role as advances in science became more popular

III. THE IMPRINT ON HIGHER EDUCATION FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

U.S. universities have their roots in the European university system [17] especially Germany where "the German model was a comprehensive research university …influenced American universities even now". American colonial colleges were patterned after Oxford and Cambridge but had some important differences. First, the university became a configuration of colleges "each with its own heritage, tradition, funding and emphasis" [18]. Next, enrollments at Harvard, Yale, the College of New Jersey and the College of William and Mary remained intentionally small – under a hundred students a year – until major growth occurred in the 1800s. A landmark event occurred in 1900 when the presidents of fourteen universities met to form the Association of American Universities (AAU). The charter members included: Harvard, Hopkins, Columbia, Chicago, California, Clark, Cornell, Catholic, Michigan, Stanford, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Princeton and Yale. Large-scale philanthropy ensued and a revival of gothic architecture and elaborate university planning occurred. Many wealthy donors were not even alumni or college graduates but believed in the national importance of higher education.

A new concept of academic professionalism emerged with gradations of rank and promotion (instructor, assistant professor, associate professor and full professor); and were increasingly expected to have a Ph.D. The latter ranks earned tenure and sustained academic freedom upheld by the newly formed American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Professors tried to exert a strong academic influence on the undergraduate course of instruction, with emphasis on their own research. Land-grant universities created numerous partnerships between state governments and academia, notably the University of Wisconsin, "a model system for providing educated, responsible experts to fill the state's civil service needs in a range of fields…" [18]. California, too, produced Stanford, Berkeley and the College of the Pacific which became "the fulcrum[s] for a distinctively Western version of Progressivism". More recently California also produced the first accelerated, condensed curricula featured at National University founded in 1971. The one-course-per-month model has been copied vigorously and variously with varying levels of success by other institutions. Neville [19] reported data from the U.S. Department of Education that National University led California in granting master's degrees in all disciplines to minority groups and was second in the nation.

Thelin [18] goes on to describe the period of 1945 to 1970 as the Golden Age of Higher Education in America. Mass access and affordability fueled in large part by the post-World War II GI Bill doubled enrollments at many universities while requiring standardized testing for admissions and placements. Junior colleges were renamed community colleges and served both terminal and transfer students, funded largely through local property taxes. Kerr [20] extended "the half-century 1940–1990 as a golden age for the research university in the United States" and "the two great periods of academic change in American higher education: (1) after the Civil War with the

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land-grant movement, and 2), the 1960s. "Both time periods had at least two things in common: a spurt of growth in enrollments that made additions of new faculty and new programs much easier and new surges forward in national efforts in which higher education could participate". He also summarized the American research university as having four ages (Fig. 2).

1. Origins: 1820 – 1870
2. Slow growth 1870 – 1940
3. Rapid expansion 1940 – 1990 (The Golden Age)
4. Constrained resources 1990-present

Fig. 2 Four Ages of the American Research University adapted from Kerr [20]

Sociologist Wilson [21] reported that the rise to full professor might be motivated by a need for intellectual curiosity and economic security. They may be symbolized with certain eccentricities and mannerisms such as the goatee, the cane or umbrella and "numerous other studied affectations". Moreover, they are favorably described as genuinely curious, possessing high ideals, studious, proud, human, cultivated, dignified, unprejudiced and contented yet "more openly self-critical than the members of most other occupations…[and conversely] many lean over backwards to avoid conforming to stereotypes". Yet, "knowing that a given individual is a university professor does not enable one to predict precisely how [s]he will behave, for there are too many factors involved". He continued, "the professor's prestige is connected with his institutional affiliation, and a faculty member at one of the leading universities has some prestige attached to him [or her] regardless of his [or her] personal standing among the elite in his field". Wilson also pointed out a need for more participant observation of which this writing does.

IV. Modern Challenges to the Professoriate

Modern challenges to the university and the professoriate include "political controversy, public doubt, technological change, mission drift and financial crisis [22] and [23]. Astin, Astin and Lindholm [24] added a list of increased pressures affecting the modern professoriate to include those in Fig. 3 (in no certain order).

More online courses and the considerable learning curve of this technology
Budget cuts affecting pay, benefits, programming, equipment and staffing
Loss of perceived job security through decline/elimination of tenure and full-time positions
Increased expectations from accrediting agencies
Increased pressures for faculty scholarship funding/grant money
Demanding students
Competition from MOOCs (free online courses) with questionable quality and rigor
Increased class size*
Increased administrative workload*
*Added by Mueller

Fig. 3 Stressors Affecting the Modern Professoriate adapted from Robison [25]

Another pair of sociologists, Frank and Gabler [26], reported century-long worldwide shifts in the emphases of the three main branches of learning (humanities, social sciences and natural sciences) and their application. The humanities diminished as relative prominence in the social sciences expanded while the natural sciences remained constant. Donoghue [27], an English professor, bleakly predicted the end of [humanities] professors in the wake of increasing university corporatization. He continued,

...professors will not become extinct per se, instead they will be absorbed into broader categories of professionals and service workers…the liberal arts model of higher education… is crumbling as college credentials become more expensive and more explicitly tied to job preparation…the for-profit universities' commitment to information technology accentuates the status of faculty as delivery people and threatens to hasten the reconceptualization of the job of professor.

Obviously professors of all ranks and locations hope that Donoghue's [27] prediction becomes a false prophesy. In any case this centralization of faculty selection, training and evaluation; and curriculum and program design is further exemplified by another university (Phoenix) which is now the world's largest "university". Their granularized curriculum is written exclusively at Apollo Group headquarters suggesting an absence of time-honored academic freedom as well as a lack of academic integrity (diploma mill?). They have also given rise to a culture of "come-and-go" faculty (only 26% of instructors have stayed four or more years); deplorable admissions practices including several lawsuits and a graduation rate of only 16% (Dillon cited in Donoghue [27]). Phoenix uses a team-based student assignment curriculum that lacks student accountability and condones social loafing. This suggests the absence of another time-honored tradition: academic integrity. It should be further noted that University of Phoenix is regionally accredited by North Central Association (NCA) because Phoenix founder John Sperling could not achieve the more reputable Western Association Schools and Colleges (WASC) regional accreditation in San Jose, California; hence the move to Phoenix, Arizona.

One wonders how many other substandard, for-profit and not-for-profit universities are regionally accredited and why. Moreover, why isn't the Department of Education intervening *more* to set *higher* standards of quality academics and disaccrediting those who fail to comply? Yet McCluskey and Winter [17] pointed out "one standard for all college graduates would be caustic to the diversity of American higher education".

McCluskey and Winter [17] also corroborated that the online course can be considered the biggest revolution in the history of the university. Assessment in digital courses can be done more rigorously because there is more data. Course-to-course comparison has become a distinct capability of the internet and has redefined the role of the traditional professor from that of "individual craftsman" to "digital collaborator who is a partner in a learning enterprise". Coleman and Bandyopadhyay [28] concurred and cited research from Wang (2009) "collaboration becomes the essential competency in the current knowledge society".

Nilson [29] described numerous other research-based teaching-related activities (Fig. 4).

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Applied learning theory/learning styles
Outcomes-centered course design
A complete syllabus with assignment grading rubrics
Strategies for motivating students
Copyright guidelines
Visuals and instructional technology
Preventing and responding to classroom incivility
Preserving academic integrity
Lectures that are learning experiences
Discussion leadership
Student group work
Test design, preparation and feedback
Summative assessments
Prompt grading
Valid and reliable student evaluations
Peer, administrative and self-evaluations

Fig. 4 Research-based teaching-related activities, adapted from
Nilson [29]

Evaluation of instruction is a particular sorespot for faculty at many colleges and universities. After all, one could argue vehemently the lack of correlation between measure of student learning and measure of student likeability of the instructor (the student evaluation of instructor). Feedback from the student is but one of four sources of evaluation in corporate training, for example [30]. More important than student/trainee rating of the instructor is knowledge gain (measured by pre and post-tests), application of individual learning in real-work scenarios and the collective performance improvement impact on the organization e.g., productivity and customer service increase. Perhaps academia could adopt these additional measures of learning or other longitudinal alumni success measures as part of their official assessment. Nevertheless, we are stuck with student evaluation of instruction for the time being so it behooves us to design a valid and reliable instrument. Our university has adopted a new, streamlined form that uses the median and the mean as measures of central tendency and feedback. It also labels this input as student *perception* not fact. We hope the new form will increase response rates and provide more valuable feedback for instructor consideration. This will be the subject of another publication submission in the future. Relatedly, research from Shook, Greer and Campbell [31] indicated that high evaluation scores in online classes were attained due to timely feedback and grades, active instructor participation and perceived usefulness of live lecture/chat sessions.

Aggregate GPAs, too, are tracked quite vigorously at my university; and administration has set GPA targets for undergraduate classes at 2.75 and graduate classes at 3.25 (on a 4.0 scale). Whereas many faculty are not in favor of this I personally think it is a very good idea because it helps curb grade inflation and promote academic rigor. Institutions outside academia only reward the very best performers at the top level; why should the student body be any different?

Ironically, professors are not trained to teach (with the possible exception of professors of education) but they are taught to research. The entry ticket to university teaching is of course, the doctorate (from the Latin *docere,* meaning "to teach"). The original medieval doctors were tested for ecclesiastical knowledge at the University of Paris in 1213 and granted the license to teach by the pope. As of 2014 there are 26 different kinds of doctoral degrees in the United States,

mostly in health-related fields but also in arts, music, government and management. There are numerous international variations.

Regarding the centerpiece role of the professor, adding to the body of knowledge, Robinson [25] offered these suggestions and stages for professorial scholarship (Fig. 5). She also suggested "writing in bites, not binges".

1. Prewriting – reading and organizing notes/relationships among ideas
2. Free-writing - identifying best time and place for 90-minute chunks
3. Drafts –putting down sections in any order and then percolating ideas
4. Rewrite and Revise – re-outline for flow, transitioning and edits

Fig. 5 Suggested Stages of Scholarship, adapted from Robison [25]

As for the tertiary service role of the professor, Buller [32] identified this as the "maligned stepchild of the academic triad" and continued explaining "teaching is the service we provide our students [while] scholarship is the service we provide our discipline or to society at large". Einstein added, after considerable thought (in his later years when asked the purpose of human life) "our purpose is to serve others… what other purpose could there be?"

Yet service that is not teaching or scholarship only accounts for approximately 10% of the professor's role at most academic institutions (arguably much higher at many institutions such as mine). Service can be to the program one teaches in (such as course updates or program reviews); to the discipline (such as referee or editor to papers or academic conferences); to the department (such as hiring new faculty); to the School (such as grade appeals committee); to the university (such as academic senate); to the community (such as workshops or public information); or to any combination of the samples above. Service can also include leadership opportunities such as a committee chair, department chair or membership on boards. Moreover, the increasing number and scope of administrative tasks such as ordering textbooks, staffing adjuncts and the endless curricula reporting requirements used to be the responsibility of administrative or teaching assistants but now relegated to the professor. The author calls this "administratization" of the role of the professor. This less important work significantly detracts from the professor's intellectual contributions to teaching and scholarship.

Yet Buller [32] aptly pointed out that "service on committees is one of the most important ways in which college professors participate in shared governance…". He advised choosing committee work aligned with career goals and offered these simple guidelines for service (Fig. 6) on committees and leadership of committees (Fig. 7).

1. Always be on time
2. Come prepared when minutes, agendas and other materials are distributed in advance
3. If new to a committee, do more listening than talking
4. Contribute insights that advance the work of the committee
5. Draft proposals for committee work whenever possible

Fig. 6 Committee Service Guidelines adapted from Buller [32]

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1. Know the committee's operating procedure
2. Prepare, distribute and adhere to an agenda
3. Keep the discussion focused and moving
4. Ask and answer "what problem are we trying to solve"?
5. Set a constructive tone

Fig. 7 Committee Leadership Guidelines adapted from Buller [32]

Additional service to students can also take the form of academic advising (curriculum advice based on the student's long-term interests) or perhaps thesis selection as another example. Mentoring is another form of service, independent of advising or teaching, and it can be accomplished with students or with junior faculty. Buller [32] described mentoring as "helping to shape the future, one life at a time" by being a good role model, providing objective guidance, support and *career* advice. He also recommended defining the goals of the relationship at the start, encouraged risk-taking and helping the protégé become successful on their own terms not necessarily the mentor's standards.

V. BECOMING AN EMPOWERED PROFESSOR

McCluskey and Winter [17] stated, "in searching for the heart and soul of a university, it cannot be found anywhere but in a strong faculty voice and shared governance" and "there should be a Chinese Wall between the administrative functions…and its academic life". Moreover, "what is needed now is a synthesis that respects the traditional role that faculty play in academic leadership while at the same time modernizing the university for the digital age". Bravo. Hopefully the "Chinese Wall" will prevent administrators from further administratizing the role of professor which is the case at my university.

Thankfully, the time-honored tradition of shared governance continues to be an item of evaluation by many regional and discipline-specific accreditation bodies. The business equivalent of shared governance has gained wide support in the management literature (less so in practice) and is frequently termed empowerment or participative decision-making. The concept of shared governance in academia, however, is subject to wide interpretation by administration and faculty. For example, should professorial representatives (i.e., academic senators, task forces or union officials) be consulted in hiring and promotion decisions? And, if so, to what degree of involvement or approval? Most universities have faculty policies that dictate faculty involvement in such decisions.

Given the unusually high intelligence level of the professoriate as compared to other institutions it makes sense to ask professors for their recommendations on decisions which affect them. After all, we are the educational elite of society; and quite capable of expressing ourselves. In the absence of these shared governance bodies the professoriate may be in danger of eroding the time-honored practices of academic freedom, academic integrity and perhaps the entire institution of higher education. Bolman and Gallos [23] aptly pointed out academic administrators face challenges such as political controversy, public doubts, technological changes, demographic shifts, mission drift and financial crisis. All the more reason to involve the professoriate in decision-making as follows:

Skillful leaders routinely seek information and advice from diverse others. They thank them for their honesty through non-defensive listening and they acknowledge constituent contributions to successful outcomes. Such conversations will broaden our [administrative] perspectives and diagnostic skills…The respect that we show others in seeking their participation and involvement will only deepen their commitment to our organization and to our leadership success

Shared governance in academia is the equivalent of *empowerment* in the business world. The term *empowerment* was popularized by Block [33], the consultant's consultant. Block said empowerment is

rediscovering a positive way of being political…for the middle-aged and restless… choosing between maintenance and greatness, caution and courage, dependency and autonomy…stems from two sources: (1) the structure, practices and policies we support as managers who have control over others, and (2) the personal choices we make expressed by our own actions…achieved through creating a vision of greatness, building support for it and enacting it.

Certainly the empowered professor as a manager of the classroom, a role model for future leaders and a stakeholder in the continued success of the university can choose to involve themselves even more in decisions that manifest an institutional and societal vision of greatness and prosperity.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the fictional film *The Paper Chase* based on Osborn [34] Harvard law student Hart said to Professor Kingsfield at the end of a grueling first year of legal studies "*Professor, I wanted to tell you that I enjoyed your class…the class meant something to me*". Earlier in the film and at the start of the semester, Kingsfield dismissed Hart from his contracts class and told him to go call his mother and tell her he would never be a lawyer. Hart then called Kingsfield a son of a bitch, in class, to which Kingsfield responded, "*that's the first intelligent thing you've said. Come back. Perhaps I've been too hasty*". The author recalls watching the movie in awe as an undergraduate sociology student at the University of Wisconsin circa 1977, and thinking *geez I'm glad I'm not in law school. My studies here at Madison are tough enough*. It never occurred to the author then that he would be on the other side of the podium some twenty years later. Yet the author has thought often of this movie and how he might be a real-life Professor Kingsfield, minus the profanity, who makes a difference in the lives of those who come to learn.

Peter Drucker [35], arguably the most important management author of all time, put it this way: "in knowledge and service work…partnership with the responsible worker is the only way to improve productivity. Nothing else works at all". We are all in the business of creating the future every day in our teaching, scholarship, service and leadership thereof. Delbeq cited in Bolman and Gallos [23], a scholar and

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former business dean, resurfaced the importance of cultivating our spiritual intelligence, our sense of calling and leading with soul. The sacred legacy that Socrates started, complete with academic freedom, is therefore ours to continue.

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