



March 14, 2017

Dear Colleagues:

At the Faculty Meeting on March 3, I indicated that I would be sending a memo to the community initiating a discussion on Elon's teacher-scholar statement. Elon's teacher-scholar statement was written in 2003 and, like our mission statement, is a defining document for Elon. Much has changed at Elon since 2003, including the hiring of almost 70% of Elon's full-time faculty. Now is a good time to reflect on what the teacher-scholar statement means for Elon today.

To set the stage for this discussion, I believe that it is important that we consider what makes Elon unique and sets it apart. Elon's distinctiveness arises, in large measure, out of values we embrace and the resulting **constructive tensions** with which we continually grapple. The tensions reside in the following:

- **The teacher-scholar model** – With teaching as the primary focus of the Elon faculty, we have committed to a model that holds in balance the practices of teaching and scholarship, explicitly including the related work of mentoring. The teacher-scholar model embraces the *both-and* tension (that is, not *either* teacher *or* scholar, but *both* teacher *and* scholar), recognizing the valuable outcomes that emanate from that tension.
- **The defining characteristics of a comprehensive, liberal arts university** – Not a liberal arts college, nor a professional school, nor a research university, Elon purposefully embraces select qualities of all three. Elon College, the College of Arts and Sciences, shelters a Phi Beta Kappa chapter and provides a core curriculum that focuses on a set of courses and experiences that are shared by every undergraduate. At the same time, Elon's accredited professional schools provide an innovative and real-world education. Finally, Elon's high-quality faculty integrate research and teaching to provide an intellectual climate that encourages scholarship and fosters one of the nation's leading undergraduate research programs.
- **A commitment to classroom-based academic challenge and experiential learning** – Elon embraces both of these teaching and learning traditions, committed to pursuing an ever-better learning- and student-centered environment that advances disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and professional knowledge.
- **A valuing of meaningful contributions to the life of the university** – Amidst the day-in and day-out demands on their time, faculty and staff are an integral part of the University through their presence and involvement....through their ongoing 'commitment to the life of the university,' to service, leadership, and mentoring. Elon faculty and staff sustain a deep commitment to enhancing all of the university, with constant attention to the quality of the student learning experience.

- **The integration of the curricular and co-curricular** – The Elon Experiences and the Experiential Learning Requirement characterize an essential part of an Elon education, wherein one finds years of commitment to the integration of the curricular and co-curricular. Elon’s focus on integrating living and learning is more recently evident in our groundbreaking efforts to create one of the nation’s most vibrant residential campuses, fully integrating in and out of the classroom work with the university’s outstanding academic programs.
- **Balancing institutional growth and long-held values** – Over the past decades, Elon has grown into a mid-sized liberal arts university, but as it has grown, it retains the heart and soul of a small liberal arts college.

Elon’s uniqueness is not in any one thing that we do or how well we do it, but rather how we embrace the work of balancing all of these constructive tensions, as well as how we engage together in the work of enhancing a university relentlessly focused on academic excellence and student transformation. Herein, too, lies our shared responsibility to nurture a community where all can flourish.

In this context, we find a faculty committed to the ongoing pursuit of excellence. What does it mean to be an excellent faculty member at Elon? What are the distinct Elon values of our faculty? For the past 13 years, faculty at Elon have embraced the ideal of the teacher-scholar, and have defined that ideal, its values, and its expectations in the [Elon Teacher-Scholar Statement](#). This ideal includes the following:

- *Elon University is principally dedicated to teaching...in and out of the classroom.*
- *The Elon community is committed to creating an environment that allows the faculty to excel as teachers, scholars, and mentors.*
- *The faculty are committed to improving the content and pedagogy of their teaching.*
- *The classroom is a place to challenge students to be engaged learners and to establish mentoring relationships that extend interactions beyond the traditional classroom.*
- *The Elon faculty embrace the idea that scholarship and teaching are inseparable because scholarship is the foundation of teaching.*
- *The faculty’s ability to model intellectual engagement is based on their intentional and continual development as professionals.*
- *Scholarship is essential to an intellectually vibrant and enriching community, and so it represents the most fundamental form of professional activity.*
- *The university encourages productive interactions that blur the boundaries separating traditional teaching, scholarship, and professional activity.*
- *Elon University encourages and recognizes a broad array of scholarly endeavors just as it has adopted a broad view of faculty engagement with students.*

These commitments to the teacher-scholar ideal place Elon among a few institutions, as I wrote in my letter of introduction for the [2014 Provost Report](#):

*In his often and positively reviewed 2012 book, College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be, Andrew Delblanco references Clark Kerr, founder of the University of California, as identifying what Kerr called the “cruel paradox” of higher education: “A superior faculty results in an inferior concern for undergraduate teaching.” According to Delblanco, this remains “one of our more pressing problems” some 50 years after Kerr’s statement. Too often in higher education, excellence in scholarly and creative activity and excellence in teaching become embattled antagonists, and in this higher education drama, “superior faculty” unfortunately often becomes synonymous with “research faculty.”*

*Elon University is proudly part of an unfortunately small set of institutions committed to embracing excellence in both scholarly/creative activity and teaching. Elon is clearly recognized as a national model of engaged learning, and that achievement is built on the cornerstone of the teacher-scholar ideal...*

Elon's commitments to the teacher-scholar model are reflected in [the criteria for the evaluation of the teaching faculty](#) and a strong cadre of teaching & learning and faculty development supports (e.g., [CATL](#) and a robust set of [faculty funding resources](#)).

Recognition of the fullness of the teacher-scholar model and work is explicitly built into the promotion and tenure system, and consequentially reflected in the decisions made through that system. The data I shared last spring with Academic Council on the success rates of candidates who stand for promotion and tenure provides general information that frames the overall evaluative outcomes of faculty. Academic Council released a 5-year average of the percent of candidates tenured (82.7%), promoted to full professor (59.5%), promoted to senior lecturer (69.2%), and continued for continuing track and lecturer track (100%).

Additional analysis of these data is useful to seeing the significance of the fullness of the teacher-scholar model in faculty review. Promotion and tenure data indicate the valuing of the whole of the teacher-scholar. That data indicates that the most common explanation that a candidate was not tenured (79%) or promoted to full professor (60%) was because the portfolio did not clearly demonstrate that the criteria in the Faculty Handbook had been fulfilled in more than one of the evaluated areas (teaching, service, scholarship). While lack of scholarship is regularly hypothesized to be the area that a unsuccessful candidate is deficient, the data indicate that only 21% of the candidates not tenured and 20% of the candidates not promoted to full professor were solely because portfolios did not clearly demonstrate that the criteria in the Faculty Handbook had been fulfilled in the area of scholarship. Indicating the ongoing significance of the whole of teacher-scholar work in faculty review, 20% of candidates were not promoted to full professor because of either solely teaching or solely contributions to the life of the university. Our stated values, our faculty supports, and our review system each – and all together – reflect a commitment to embracing the work of balancing the constructive tensions inherent in the fullness of the teacher-scholar model.

I want to share a few paragraphs of an article written by Elon psychology professor Mat Gendle titled “It's Not a Zero-Sum Game,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2008. I believe that these paragraphs capture some of what makes our teacher-scholar model unique.

*“At research institutions, a significant portion of faculty time is spent preparing and submitting grant proposals, managing the operations of a sizable laboratory, and overseeing graduate students and postdoctoral researchers.....*

*By comparison, I spend most of my time teaching undergraduate classes, advising students, and training student researchers in my modest and institutionally supported lab. By choosing to work at an undergraduate-centered institution, I have made a choice regarding the sort of work I wish to primarily engage in, but that decision has had little effect on the amount of time I have to dedicate exclusively to my own research.....*

*I find it interesting that so many academics view undergraduate teaching as an impediment to research.... My experience is that extensive undergraduate teaching may, in some ways, help scholarly progress rather than hinder it...the overall faculty workload at a teaching-centered*

*institution is no more or less than that of a position at a Research I campus — it's simply different.*”

Yes, Elon is different and special. We acknowledge and purposefully support the idea that active scholarship is the engine that keeps faculty intellectually curious and stimulated, and their research influences and improves the ideas they share and work they do with students in and out of the classroom. We blur the lines between teaching and mentorship and scholarship, and we embrace the recognition that this makes Elon different!

As I indicated at the Faculty Meeting, currently a group of faculty co-chaired by Professor Steve DeLoach and Senior Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs Tim Peeples are collecting data from the faculty and developing recommendations to further enhance supports for post-probationary faculty in their work as teacher-scholar-mentors. At the campus conversation, on April 7, we will discuss their survey findings and recommendations, as well what the teacher-scholar statement means for Elon today. Please join us for that important report and discussion.

In closing, although Elon is widely recognized as the preeminent university in the country for engaged and experiential education, we are driven by an ongoing commitment to excellence and institutional change. We believe that we can do things even better than we currently are. Thank you, for all you do to make this distinctive learning environment, for your unwavering commitment to Elon’s values, for embracing the work of balancing Elon’s constructive tensions, and for fostering so many amazing stories of student transformation. I look forward to working on our shared goals in the months ahead, as we continue to restlessly pursue excellence in all we do.

I wish you well as you continue with the spring semester. See you on April 7.

All the best,



Steven D. House, Ph.D.  
Provost and Executive Vice-President  
Professor of Biology

Relevant documents are provided at the following links.

- [The Elon Teacher-Scholar](#)
- [Provost’s Report - 2014](#)
- [Provost’s Report – 2015](#)
- [Provost’s Report – 2016](#)
- [Presidential Task-force on Scholarship](#)
- [Faculty Funding](#)
- [Criteria for Evaluation of Teaching Faculty](#)
- [Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning](#)