Notes regarding proposed changes to Chapter 1 of the Faculty Handbook

Goals of the FHRC’s septennial revision of the Faculty Handbook include improving its clarity, accuracy, and consistency.

The Handbook is a document on faculty governance, and thus focuses critically on the three criteria of faculty evaluation: Teaching, Research, and Service. Those criteria are not unique to Missouri State, and certainly were not invented by the FHRC. Rather, they are the virtually universal pillars of faculty evaluation at universities across the country. There has always been, and probably always will be, variations in opinion about what fits into each of these. For example, while classroom instruction invariably falls under the category of Teaching, student advisement is sometimes recognized as a component of Teaching (as is the case at MSU), while at other times it is regarded as Service. Despite such ambiguities, nearly all institutions retain the terminology of Teaching, Research, and Service for describing key faculty duties.

Therefore, when the FHRC started revisions to the University Mission section, it seemed in the best interest of faculty to couch that mission in terms of the central duties on which faculty are evaluated: Teaching, Research, and Service. Very simply, we define the University’s Mission in terms of the faculty’s key roles and responsibilities. We believe this represents a strong justification of the faculty’s broad range of activities.

The scholarship/research/creative activity topic was one that the FHRC discussed long and hard. Anyone who has read through the Handbook has certainly encountered various combinations of those terms many times. We recognized that phrases such as “research and creative activity” and similar constructions were actually problematic for a variety of reasons.

The phrase “research and creative activity” clearly implied to us that these were considered distinct. That is patently absurd. Advancement in any field requires creativity to see new connections, to explore new means of expression, and to foresee new ways of achieving ends. The nature of creative activity certainly varies between performing art and particle physics, but creativity is always essential. Likewise, all of our work depends at least to some extent on a knowledge and understanding of what came before, what its strengths and limitations were, and with a vision of what we might add to the field. Those traits of “research” are encountered across a very broad range of faculty’s activities, whether it be a sculptor discovering new ways to express an artistic concept or a biologist planning a study of factors affecting bat populations. It is also worthwhile pointing out the following passage from the current Handbook (emphasis added): “4.2.2.1. RESEARCH MISSION: The process of research is understood as the production and formal communication of original creative, scholarly work, and, while the definitions of "scholarly" and "creative" may differ across academic disciplines, …” The connection between “research” and “creativity” is already embedded in the Handbook.

Another problem with the phrase “research and creative activity” is that it is neither accurate nor inclusive. The Handbook recognizes all of the following as modes of “Research”:

- Discovery: gaining knowledge of or ascertaining the existence of something previously unknown or unrecognized
• Application: using established knowledge to solve significant problems
• Synthesis: bringing knowledge together from disparate sources to produce a whole work that is greater than the sum of its parts
• Criticism: using established values (aesthetic, logical, ethical) to evaluate quality of artifacts (e.g., art, legal decisions, news media)
• Creation: production of unique forms of expression, generation of new interpretations, theory-building, and model-building

If one considers the terms “research” and “creative activity” within narrow definitions, it is likely that “research” will be identified primarily with the first mode, and “creative activity” mainly with the last mode. At least to some extent, this view leaves out application, synthesis, and criticism. Some may argue that adding “and creative activity” is necessary to recognize contributions from the arts. In reality, the phrase uncomfortably leaves out modes of research that must be recognized. A cumbersome option would be to replace each occurrence of “research and creativity” with “activities leading to discovery, application, synthesis, criticism, or creation.”

FHRC also considered the advantages and disadvantages of using the term “scholarship” in place of “research.” We did recognize some attractive features of that term. However, if interpreted narrowly, it could still be perceived as excluding some entirely legitimate modes of research. Another concern is that, at least in some circles, scholarship is interpreted as “keeping up with one’s field” without necessarily having a connotation of contributing to it.

Ultimately, FHRC settled on the term Research – very intentionally capitalized – because it is the traditional term used to define a key duty of faculty. Section 1.1.3.2 very clearly states that we recognize that this incorporates scholarship, and that the term Research is meant to be inclusive of all modes of research. We believe that we should use the term Research consistently throughout the Handbook in place of the phrases “research and creative activity”, “scholarship, research, and creative activity”, etc., and that we should frequently remind readers that Research is meant as an expansive term that includes a very broad range of activities.

We believe that by clarifying the broad sense of Research right from the beginning, and by insisting on that broad view throughout the Handbook, that we will reinforce, rather than diminish, the appreciation of the contributions of faculty whose primary research activities center on artistic creations, as well as those whose research focuses on applications and on other modes of research.

Very simply, “Research” is ultimately the most accurate and most inclusive term for what is meant, and is also the term that is recognized across a broad range of academia.