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"Toward a Scholarship of Teaching"

Prof. Lee Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, gave the keynote speech on Friday, October 24, 1997 on the occasion of the Dedication and 10th Anniversary of the founding of The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning. In addition to this speech, Prof. Shulman presented Prof. Thomas Banchoff (Mathematics) with the Carnegie Foundation's 1997 Rhode Island Professor of the Year Award. Below is an account of his remarks by Sheridan Center Graduate Teaching Fellow, Michael J. V. Woolcock, Ph. D.

THOSE CONCERNED with the state and status of college teaching are more than familiar with the arguments that good teaching is difficult to measure in a valid and reliable form. In an academic environment that seems only to require, recognize, and reward research productivity, Professor Lee Shulman, new President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, argued that the best approach to countering this trend is not to diminish the stature or importance of research, but rather to find ways to establish rigorous procedures whereby the quality of teaching can also be verified by, demonstrated to, and shared with others.

Where scholars expect their research to be open to criticism and debate as a matter of course, what goes on in the classroom is largely considered off-limits to outsiders, even (especially?) one's departmental colleagues. Some regard the teacher-student relationship as both personal and private - hence to be shielded from external scrutiny - but Shulman maintained that this relationship is too often used as an excuse behind which to hide poor teaching. Importantly, preserving the integrity of the teacher-student relationship does not have to come at the expense of developing what he calls a scholarship of teaching, an approach whereby successful pedagogical practices, communication strategies, and assessment procedures are openly shared, discussed, and improved upon. Unless and until college teaching can be evaluated with something approaching the professional rigor and

openness of research, it will continue to place a distant second to research in terms of perceived and actual importance to an academic's professional development.

What to do? Shulman presented some general suggestions for cultivating such a scholarship of teaching. The first of these was to establish forums in which master teachers across different levels - i.e., primary, secondary, and higher education - could convene to share ideas. In mathematics, for example, Shulman argued that there was much to be gained by having the best college professors and high school teachers learning from one another. Sponsoring summer workshops in which these conversations could take place was one way in which the Carnegie Foundation hopes to facilitate the sharing of ideas, to forge greater continuity across the curriculum, and to elevate the status of high-quality teaching. Second, Shulman stressed the importance of preparing explicit departmental mission statements, which make it clear to faculty, students, and administrators what the department as a whole is trying to accomplish. Closely linked to this was Shulman's third strategy, the construction of departmental and individual teaching portfolios. A true scholarship of teaching required an expectation that all teaching activities - from goals and content to assessment and student feedback - be fully documented, and open for others to consider. A final suggestion, aimed at trying to diminish the pursuit of publications for their own sake, was to consider only a faculty member's five best publications in tenure decisions, thereby helping to foster an emphasis on the quality, as opposed to mere quantity, of one's research.

Shulman's speech was well-received by the audience, which was drawn from Brown faculty, students, alumni, and local educators. It was greatly encouraging to hear of constructive initiatives being made to increase the professional standing of college teaching, and to learn that considerable human and financial resources were being used to this end. Proposals to realize these initiatives within the context of a scholarship of teaching should also serve the goal of helping faculty to strive for greater complementarity, not competition, between their teaching and research endeavors.