



Revising Research
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WASHINGTON -- Maybe universities aren't using English professors' time in the ways they should.

In a **paper** released Friday, the Emory University English professor Mark Bauerlein argued that the way universities structure the workload of faculty members who teach and do research about literature is inefficient. Because faculty members spend so much time writing papers and books, and because so few of those pieces are cited by other literature scholars, Bauerlein argues that universities would be better suited by employing literary researchers in different pursuits.

“Many professors enjoy their work, finding it rewarding and helpful to their other professional duties, but if their books and essays do not find readers sufficient to justify the effort, the publication mandate falls short of its rationale, namely, to promote scholarly communication and the advancement of knowledge,” Bauerlein wrote in the report. “To put it bluntly, universities ask English professors to labor upon projects of little value to others, incurring significant opportunity costs.”

When presenting the paper Friday at a meeting here Friday, Bauerlein did not argue for fewer faculty members in literature fields. Instead he argued for changing the pace of literature research and easing some of the pressure placed on junior faculty members to publish research papers and books to get tenure. Instead, he wants to place more emphasis on producing quality works that advance the field. Changing that requirement would give faculty members more time to teach classes, work with students individually, and pursue long-term research projects that they cannot focus on when required to publish so frequently.

Bauerlein acknowledges that his findings are strictly limited to faculty members who study English literature, and that research in other disciplines might be a better use of money. But Bauerlein's findings open a discussion about the most productive use of faculty members' time. At a time when numerous universities are wondering **how to be more efficient**, Bauerlein's report adds some ammunition to a side claiming that the current structure of faculty members' jobs needs to be examined -- and that there might be too many literature professors.

The paper was produced by the Center for College Affordability and Productivity and released as part of a conference co-hosted by the center and the Cato Institute, a think tank that advocates for limited government and pro-market approaches.

Representatives from the Modern Language Association, the primary professional association of language and literature scholars, said Bauerlein's work raises significant questions about the balance of teaching and research in faculty workloads, an issue the association has **studied**. But

they note that Bauerlein's exploration of the topic is too simplistic.

"We don't think the impact of research can be measured 'by the numbers' alone, as Mark Bauerlein attempts to do," said Russell Berman and Rosemary G. Feal, president and executive director of the Modern Language Association. "But he does raise important questions about the dissemination and impact of published scholarship."

They also noted that research informs teaching, which cannot be measured by formulas. Correctly weighting the two in the tenure and promotion process is a question institutions will have to grapple with soon.

"We are in the midst of a sea change in higher education as we focus on issues of student learning and innovative teaching, which in turn should lead to adjustments in institutional expectations for publication and research," Berman and Feal said. "It is important that colleges and universities consider how to modify their practices for evaluation, hiring and promotion in accordance with their missions, and for many institutions, this should mean paying greater attention to teaching."

Bauerlein reached his conclusion by examining the English departments at four public universities: the University of Georgia, State University of New York at Buffalo, the University of Vermont, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He compared the amount each department spent on research -- which he estimated to be one-third of each faculty member's salary -- and compared that with the number of papers and books the department produced, and how commonly those works were cited.

English departments are producing, Bauerlein found. According to a study by the Modern Language Association, the number of scholarly works (books, essays, reviews, dissertations, etc.) published each year in the fields of English and the foreign languages and literature has climbed from 13,757 in 1959 to about 70,000 in recent years.

Faculty members were also highly productive at the institutions studied in the paper. The University of Georgia's English department, where there are 39 professors, wrote or co-wrote 22 books, edited or co-edited 15 papers, and wrote 200 research essays over the five-year period from 2004 to 2009.

Even faculty members with tenure, commonly stereotyped to be unproductive, produce a significant amount of papers and books. "Put all the research-related activities together and you get a portrait of eminently industrious research groups," Bauerlein wrote. "The image of the tenured professor idling away in perfect job security, enjoying tenure without making further contributions to his or her field, doesn't stand."

The problem is that most of the research is not advancing scholarly communication, because most works are not cited enough to justify the amount of time and money that goes into producing them.

To measure the impact of scholarly publications, Bauerlein counted the number of citations. For papers, he used Google Scholar. For books, whose citations cannot be examined in Google Scholar or other databases as easily, he randomly selected a handful of books and counted the number of times they were cited.

Paper citations fell into patterns. Most papers received only a handful of citations. Of the 17 articles published by the University of Illinois English department, 11 garnered between zero and two citations and four garnered between three and six citations. Two received more than 20 citations. Books followed a similar pattern.

University	0-2 Citations	3-6 Citations	>6 Citations
University of Georgia	16	4	3
SUNY-Buffalo	11	0	2
University of Vermont	11	3	2
University of Illinois	11	4	2

While the numbers of citations might seem low, they are not significantly different from other disciplines. A **2010 report** by Thomson Reuters found that the average number of citations for a U.S. paper in the sciences between 2005 and 2009, roughly the same time period covered in Bauerlein's data, was 1.75. Some fields were significantly higher, such as space sciences and plant and animal sciences, which averaged four citations. But other fields, such as engineering, chemistry, and physics, averaged only one.

Bauerlein puts the blame on institutions for crafting positions that emphasize research that, in the end, is not being read. "There is a glaring mismatch between the resources these universities and faculty members invest and the impact of most published scholarship," he wrote. "Despite scant attention paid to scholarship, a faculty member's promotion and annual review depends heavily on the professor's published work. A university's resources and human capital is thereby squandered as highly trained and intelligent professionals to toil over projects that have little consequence."

In his talk at the conference Friday, Bauerlein did not advocate for fewer literature professors, only for less literary research. "Maybe not everyone should be doing research," he said.

Bauerlein said this project and arguing for changing the field of literary research will dominate the next few years of his life.