

## Faculty Work and Academic Cultures

Published by [Dean Saitta](#) November 8th, 2007 in [Prez's Pulpit](#).

by **Dean Saitta**

The Research, Scholarship, and Creative Work (RSC) Task Force Report, like much of the faculty response to the Teaching Task Force Report that preceded it, takes differences in our “academic cultures” for granted. I respect our different academic cultures as much as the next person. But as an anthropologist I’m also inclined to see culture as partitive rather than normative. I expect that within any given academic culture there will be differences—maybe even deep differences—between faculty with respect to what they value within the RSC enterprise. Basic or applied work? Original or synthetic? Discipline-based or Interdisciplinary? Single investigator or collaborative? Peer-reviewed or demand-driven? Preferences will change with opportunity and career stage. Sometimes RSC isn’t the top priority at all if challenges in the scholarships of teaching and service are of more compelling interest.

So it seems to me that what we need today are some *cross-cultural* conversations and agreements about Faculty Work and its evaluation that will respect the different scholarly interests of faculty both between and within cultures, and allow them freedom to rearrange their work priorities as circumstances and career stage warrant. I don’t see any reason why such agreements couldn’t encourage as much innovation, excellence, and reputation-building as our current normative approach. It might even encourage more, if it impels faculty to more confidently cross divisional boundaries and bridge between the academic and the civic. Minimally, we need such cross-cultural conversations and agreements if we’re going to cope with the new realities of scientific research that emphasize interdisciplinary and collaborative work (for example, see [here](#)). Frameworks for supporting and evaluating faculty work (including tenure and promotion criteria) ought to be substantively comparable across academic cultures if such research is to take root and blossom. Our campus AAUP chapter is making an effort to gather unit promotion and tenure [documents](#) so that faculty across campus can better determine if colleagues in other units would be keen or reluctant to take on collaborative work, civically-engaged work, etc. Certainly, we need some cross-cultural comparability if the public good goals that Chancellor Coombe outlined in his recent Convocation [speech](#) are to be achieved.

In the past we’ve emphasized cultural difference and autonomy, primarily for financial reasons. It now seems time to emphasize—or create—a bit of cultural unity given a new and different environment. Administrators and faculty should work with each other across the academic cultures to create the common understandings, agreements, and structures that might encourage and reward new forms of innovation and excellence in everything that we do.