

Digital Scholarship

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In recent years there have been questions about whether new forms of digital communication count for promotion and tenure. What about blogs? Websites? Databases? Videos? A draft report of the *UNC Task Force on Future Promotion and Tenure Policies and Practices* ([Report](#)) recommends that “the university, in all its academic units, should demonstrate an openness to new forms of scholarly communication and to a diversity of activities and styles.” The report recognizes that the forms for disseminating our work will continue to evolve and multiply. Carolina’s promotion process should “encourage innovative and ambitious work, not place roadblocks in its way.” According to the Task Force, “[e]ach unit should amend tenure and promotion procedures to make such openness a fact in faculty evaluation.”

I am delighted that the draft document takes such a strong stand on the importance of recognizing digital scholarship. It also raises a number of issues that will have to be addressed over time by each academic unit. What are the goals and significance of digital work? Should works be counted only if they “aspire to some kind of permanence?” Who should evaluate digital work and what are the evaluation standards? In addition to feedback from scholarly peers, the Task Force recommends that the unit also consider “feedback from users, students, and other audiences for the work in question.” The School has long taken this approach for all of our work—asking our primary audience (public officials) about the value of work that is intended for them. It will be helpful for us if others at Carolina finally recognize the value of external review by groups other than academic peers.

The ultimate question for most units is whether a particular digital communication is “scholarship.” The answer should depend on the intent and substance of the communication rather than the form. My blog should not count as scholarly research and publication under the School’s promotion and tenure policies. Jeff Welty’s *North Carolina Criminal Law* blog has a different purpose and in my view it should count. Our current policies recognize that “[h]igh-quality, high-impact works, regardless of the choice of medium, count the same for purposes of reappointment and promotion.” The School will need to refine our policies as we continue to develop alternative ways of communicating our work to public officials and others. In the meantime, I am pleased that the Task Force has embraced the value of digital scholarship and I hope that its recommendations will be adopted. Take a look at the report and let me know what you think. (It also contains a section on faculty engagement, which I will blog about later.)