

COMMENTARY: Increasing Scholarly Publication Options for Housing and Design Professionals

Craig Birdsong

Craig Birdsong is an Associate Editor of *Housing and Society* and Professor in the Department of Design and Merchandising, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.

The need for scholarly publications continues to increase in all of our lives. Today, whether one's professional role is education, design and construction of the built environment, or administration of housing- and design-related agencies, we utilize more research than at any time in the past. For many of us in higher education, the need for scholarly publication resulted from the “publish or perish” phenomenon which is now a distinct part of the culture of research universities. Perhaps more gradually, yet like higher education, business and industry is increasingly aware of the value of and need for research and scholarly publications. Various articles in newspapers and consumer magazines attest to the increase in companies—particularly new and innovative ones—utilizing research to develop new products, convince new markets of the worthwhileness of existing products, and/or remain competitive in existing markets. The purpose of this commentary is to encourage a more inclusive use of research writing through notes (shorter scholarly articles) and creative scholarship by a wider audience of housing and design professionals.

The concept of scholarship, at least in higher education, experienced a renaissance when Ernest Boyer (1990) defined four stages of scholarship. Discovery (of knowledge), Boyer's first stage, has historically been viewed as the essence of research and scholarship. However, Boyer's work went well beyond discovery to include integration, application, and teaching. Others have expanded on Boyer's seminal work to include a fifth stage, outcome (some end product) (McKenna, Bickle, & Carroll, 2002). Viewing Boyer's four stages as additive and, further, including an outcome stage, results in a holistic and cyclical model of scholarship.

In 1995 creative scholarship was introduced to designers on a national level. It was defined to recognize original creative work and its background research and/or theory development as a legitimate form of scholarship and to separate this from other forms of creative activity (Guerin & Birdsong, 1995). Though the concept and application of creative scholarship began with the interior design discipline,

its purpose, outcomes, evaluation methods, and measures are well suited to other disciplines. Like traditional research, creative scholarship utilizes accepted methods of inquiry and the final result is the dissemination of something learned. However, the outcomes, methods used to evaluate the outcomes, and the criteria measures for review may be quite different from traditional research.

Importantly, creative scholarship is increasingly recognized as a legitimate form of scholarship by departments, colleges, and universities from varying types of institutions throughout the U.S. In addition, creative scholarship must be cited in a consistent and comprehensive format similar to that of traditional citation methods (Kotsiopulos & Birdsong, 2000).

The Housing Education and Research Association (HERA), through its journal *Housing and Society*, has encouraged additional scholarship opportunities through the use of scholarly notes. These are expressly intended to be briefer manuscripts related to housing that present:

- Issues that are exploratory or not heavily theory-based or statistically analyzed (Research Notes),
- Innovative teaching ideas (Academic Notes), and
- Efforts resulting from the development and implementation of programs (Program Notes).

Notes combined with creative scholarship may offer a less intimidating means for young faculty, established faculty who have not been heavily research oriented, and non-academicians to contribute their significant efforts to the discipline through the housing and design literature. Making our research efforts more inclusive may also provide a fresh view of the needs and directions for housing research and programs, and serve our clientele better by offering them the results of well executed but non-traditional research using differing outcomes and measures.

Academic faculty, business and industry professionals, and those involved in housing and design agencies and organizations use displays or exhibits to convey information or concepts to clientele (whether students, consumers, government officials, or other housing and design professionals). These displays or exhibits are most obvious at large home or trade shows where a significant amount of money and floor space is devoted to creating eye-catching, client-stopping visual environments. Two examples are trade shows by the National Association of Home Builders and the National Kitchen and Bath Association. On a lesser scale, displays or exhibits are often part of conferences, meetings, and symposia such as poster sessions at annual meetings of HERA and the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. Similarly, designed environments such as show homes and specialty spaces, like a universally designed kitchen or an innovative ramping system for the physically disabled, are a means of illustrating new concepts as well as aesthetically pleasing and/or cost-effective applications. These examples are

also used, at times, to elicit information or feedback relative to a specific outcome—a topic/issue, concept, or product.

By the sheer frequency of occurrence of these examples (and often their costs) professionals must believe they have worthwhile impacts on their intended audiences or provide the needed feedback. Yet, these impacts or benefits are seldom evaluated and reported for others to learn from and expand upon. When reviewed by relevant groups using appropriate evaluative review measures the significance and effectiveness of the efforts can be adjudicated and shared with others. Written as notes and containing pictures or other graphics, these efforts can have significant and lasting value in enhancing and becoming part of the literature base of the discipline.

The question may arise about the academic worthiness of such additional scholarship opportunities. As defined by *Housing and Society's* manuscript submission and review guidelines, notes and creative scholarship (as defined by Guerin & Birdsong, 1995) meet the criteria of professional distinction in scholarship generally recognized throughout the country. That is, notes and creative scholarship (a) contribute to the expansion or application of knowledge, (b) are adjudicated by peer review, and (c) are disseminated in a format that can be cited and retrieved—*Housing and Society*.

The nature of housing and design and the number and types of people involved in housing and design issues today has changed dramatically in the past 10 years. The Internet provides literally millions of pages of information, often without substantial review of its content. Much of this information relates to housing and design issues. Television now has 24 hour channels offering a vast array of housing and design information—from decorating to design, from construction of new buildings to renovation of 150 year old Southern plantations, from landscaping to specialty topics such as energy efficiency, combating mold and mildew, and asbestos and radon abatements. However, often consumers (and sometimes professionals) have no way of evaluating the accuracy and validity of the information they are receiving (reading or watching).

As an example, Linda Carlson, curator of the museum of the Department of Design and Merchandising, and I are planning an exhibition based on the formative years of both the City of Fort Collins and what is now Colorado State University. The intent of the exhibit is to provide a glimpse of life of the developing middle class in northern Colorado during the last quarter of the 19th century by visually examining the interior environment. The exhibit will be the first to parallel the growth of the museum's expanding collections to include interior artifacts. The planned exhibit will visually illustrate clothing, textile products, and interior furnishings and appointments in order to provide general information about interiors and living conditions.

Once a narrative is written and the exhibit is staged, scholars representing differing aspects of social history will be asked to evaluate the content of the exhibit for its significance and contribution to the evolution of northern Colorado's built environment. If the peer reviewers determine that the exhibit does make a contribution to social literature, we will seek appropriate venues to publish the narrative, photographs of major and explanatory exhibit items, and documentation of the scholars' statements regarding the significance of the exhibit. In and of itself, this example is of limited value beyond the local community. However, the findings of this exhibit combined with those from exhibits of a similar nature from differing regions of the U.S. could contribute to a more in-depth understanding of life during this historical period. This is just one example of how non-traditional research may meet the criteria of professional distinction in scholarship and provide greater insight into some of the issues affecting early residential interior environments.

By encouraging others who are new to the world of scholarly publishing, we can offer each other, and ultimately the consumer/client, assistance through a broader base from which to work. Expanding the definitions of research and scholarly publication through the use of notes combined with creative scholarship provides needed and important opportunities for us as housing and design professionals and our constituents, regardless of who they are.

References

- Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation.
- Guerin, D., & Birdsong, C. (1995). Creative scholarship in interior design education. *Journal of Interior Design*, 21(1), 44-49.
- Kotsiopoulos, A., & Birdsong, C. (2000). The citation gap: Documenting creative scholarship. *Journal of Interior Design*, 26(1), 48-55.
- McKenna, J., Bickle, M., & Carroll, J. (2002). Using scholarship to integrate teaching and research. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 94(3), 39-45.