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SCHOLARSHIP:
THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ACADEMY

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Scholarship is often asserted to be “the coin of the realm.” This assertion focuses on how scholarship may result in the professional advancement of individuals and members of the academy as they seek promotion and tenure. But scholarship is more than that.

Scholarship is part of an academic's responsibility as a teacher, scholar, and leader. Academics have a responsibility to research, write, and speak on various subjects on which they have or are gaining expertise. And academics have a responsibility to read scholarship written by others.

In August 2021, members of the legal writing community gathered at the 2021 Southeastern Association of Law Schools (SEALS) Annual Conference to explore scholarship's role in discipline building. Part of the Writing Connections programming, the discussion group had the title “Discipline Building: Scholarship and Status in the Legal Academy.” The program description highlighted the goal of the discussion: “to encourage conversations about developing a scholarly agenda, adopting processes for serious scholarly inquiry, and promoting scholarly achievements within the legal writing community.”

As moderator of this discussion group, I posed the following six questions:²

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² The questions were inspired by those posed in the program's description of the discussion group.

1. What is “legal writing scholarship”?
2. Does the discipline need to have (or agree on) a definition of legal writing scholarship?
3. How might a definition of legal writing scholarship advance the discipline? Might a definition of legal writing scholarship limit growth of the discipline or exclude the work of some?
4. Should the definition of legal writing scholarship include an interdisciplinary component?
5. To what extent should legal writing scholarship connect to the bench and bar?
6. Should the definition of legal writing scholarship include the characteristics of “serious scholarship” and, if so, what does “serious scholarship” refer to? How does a definition of scholarship move beyond issues of placement, length, and number of footnotes?

The questions prompted evaluation, assessment, and reflection of our responsibility as teachers, scholars, and leaders. As part of that responsibility, we seek opportunities to educate others, forge connections, and enrich existing conversations. Our responsibility as academics is to frame, contribute to, and advance exploration of relevant subjects in which we have or are gaining expertise.

The SEALS discussion and this issue of Proceedings continue this exploration of legal writing scholarship. Specifically, the essays and article published here consider the need, value, and perils of formulating a shared definition of legal writing scholarship to advance the discipline of legal writing.

Each of the contributing authors shares thoughtful responses to the posed questions. To begin, Professor Kirsten Davis’s essay, “A Provisional Definition of ‘Legal Writing Scholarship,’” explains the importance of a definition and offers a working definition to spark conversation. Professor Michelle L. Richards in her essay “Defining ‘Scholarship’: Why Writing about Writing Should Count” presents

another potential definition drawn from promotion and tenure standards. That definition is an “informed, reflective, deeply analytical, and, in some substantial part, a personal statement.” Professor Elizabeth E. Berenguer's essay, “Claiming Our Place at the Table of Legal Academia: Examining Types and Topics of Legal Writing Scholarship,” explores how a shared definition may both advance the discipline and limit the growth of the discipline. Professor Elizabeth Sherowski, in her essay “Measuring Impact: A Supportive and Inclusive Definition of Legal Writing Scholarship,” posits that a restrictive definition may undermine some important work that has been done and continues to be done in the discipline. Finally, Professor Melisa H. Weresh reviews how traditional legal scholarship has been tied to status and security. In her essay titled “Legal Writing Scholarship: Moving Not Toward a *Definition*, But Toward a *Cohesive Understanding*,” she explores what a common understanding may bring and how sharing a common understanding could build the legal writing discipline.

I thank the discussion group participants and the contributing authors for sharing their experiences, perspectives, and comments. As you read their work, consider how you would answer these six questions. Consider what would be gained and what would be lost with a shared definition. How would a shared definition enhance or limit the discipline? Finally, consider whether a definition is even needed. Discussions about the value of scholarship and the relevance of scholarship are also part of an academic's responsibility. I look forward to continuing the conversations.