Lee Shulman, PhD – Stanford University
Thursday, May 19th, 12:30-1:30pm, Annenberg 303

What is “evidence” for the improvement of teaching and learning in an unscripted and highly contextualized world?

The phrase “evidence-based” rolls off the tongue trippingly. Whether describing good medical practice, educational design, or management in business, experts insist that judgments and decisions be “evidence-based.” What distinguishes evidence from conjecture, speculation, anecdote or fantasy? Randomized control trials? Replication? Close connection to theory? Carefully following rules of data collection and analysis? Or can anything be called evidence in a world where claims for generalizability and broad transfer from research to practice are increasingly in doubt? In the colloquium, I will discuss how we get smarter in understanding and influencing the practical world of teaching and learning in schools and universities, museums and hospitals, summer camps and religious institutions. As we come to recognize how particular and even unique are the situations we confront with our pedagogies and our designs, how do we use, acquire, create or defend what counts as “evidence?”

Lee Shulman was the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education and Professor (by courtesy) of Psychology at Stanford University. He was previously Professor of Educational Psychology and Medical Education at Michigan State University, also serving as founding co-director of the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT). He received the BA, MA and PhD from the University of Chicago. Shulman is a past president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and of the National Academy of Education. He received AERA’s career award for Distinguished Contributions to Educational Research as well as the 1995 E.L. Thorndike Award for Distinguished Psychological Contributions to Education from the American Psychological Association. He is a Fellow of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and was also a Guggenheim Fellow. In 2006, Shulman received the Grawemeyer Prize in education for his collected writings on teaching and teacher education, published as The Wisdom of Practice by Jossey-Bass, Inc. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in 2008. While leading the Carnegie Foundation, a new era of work in the scholarship of teaching and learning flourished. His pioneering studies of medical reasoning (with Arthur Elstein) were published as Medical Problem Solving by Harvard University Press in 1978. His research group at Stanford laid the conceptual foundations for and conducted the studies that supported the creation of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, with more than 110,000 teachers now certified in the U.S. Shulman’s research and writings have dealt with the study of teaching and teacher education; the growth of knowledge among those learning to teach, including the central role of pedagogical content knowledge; the assessment of teaching; medical education; the psychology of instruction in science, mathematics, and medicine; the logic of educational research; and the quality of teaching in higher education.