Engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
Focus of SoTL

“developing scholarly knowledge with substantial impact in both the disciplinary and institutional setting”

~McKinney, 2007, pg. 6
“In scholarship and research, having a ‘problem’ is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves. But in one’s teaching, a ‘problem’ is something you don’t want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it. Asking a colleague about a problem in his or her research is an invitation; asking about a problem in one’s teaching would probably seem like an accusation. Changing the status of the problem in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation is precisely what the movement for a scholarship of teaching is all about.”

~Bass, 1999
SoTL Activities
(Martin, Benjamin, Prosser & Trigwell, 1999)

• Engagement with existing knowledge on teaching and learning
• Self-reflection on teaching and learning in one’s discipline
• Public sharing of ideas about teaching and learning within the discipline
Characteristics of SoTL
(Shulman, 1999)

Ongoing development and expansion of ideas

Reviewed and evaluated by SoTL community

Public dissemination
Difference between SoTL and Program Assessment/Evaluation

**Program Evaluation**
- Internal focus
- Goal to improve practice and/or accountability
- Local audience
- No (or limited) formal review
- Lacks IRB oversight

**SoTL**
- External application
- Goal to improve practice and inform knowledge base
- Public audience
- Traditional peer review
- Required IRB oversight
Rationale for SoTL

**Professionalism**
- Obligation to be scholars in our discipline

**Pragmatism**
- Improve teaching and learning

**Policy**
- Inform important decisions
Standards for SoTL Work
(Glassick, Huber & Maeroff, 1997)

- Clear goals
- Adequate preparation
- Appropriate methods
- Significant results
- Effective presentation
- Reflective critique
Characteristics of SoTL
(Theall & Centra, 2001)

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<tr>
<th>Publicly-Shared</th>
<th>Learning-Focused</th>
<th>Pedagogically-Relevant</th>
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<td>• Shared public account of teaching</td>
<td>• Emphasis on learning outcomes and relevant teaching practices</td>
<td>• Discipline and pedagogical knowledge and innovation</td>
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Conducting SoTL
Getting Started
(McKinney, 2007, pg. 26-27)

1. Think about a teaching and/or learning issue, problem or question that you have about your students, a course, an assignment, a pedagogical strategy, your program, etc. Briefly state that issue, problem, or question as a question(s).

2. What do you know about this topic and about ways to study this question from the extant literature in your discipline and in higher education more broadly?

3. Given your question, what types of information or artifacts do you already have that will help you to answer this question?

4. Give your question, what other types of information or artifacts will you need (and from what sources) to answer this question?

5. Give your question and the information you need, what research strategies (e.g., self-reflective portfolio or other product, interviews, focus groups, analysis of existing data, content analysis, questionnaires, quasi-experiment, multi-methods) might you use to obtain this information and answer this question?

6. What time frame will be most appropriate to answer your question?

7. What are some practical problems you might face in doing this study? What resources would you need and how might you obtain these?

8. What ethical issues should you consider in doing this study?

9. In what ways and in what outlets (broadly defined) will you be able to obtain peer feedback on this work and make this work public?
Step #1

• Identify teaching-learning issue, question or problem
  • What question(s) about your students’ learning do you want to explore?
  • Process starts with identifying a problem or situation that you would like to improve or an opportunity you would like to seize
Taxonomy of SoTL Questions

What works?
- Questions that seek “evidence about the relative effectiveness of different (teaching) approaches”

What is?
- Questions that describe, but not evaluate the effectiveness of, different teaching approaches or ways that students learn

Visions of the possible
- Questions related to goals for teaching and learning that have yet to be met

Theory building
- Questions designed to build theoretical frameworks for SoTL
SoTL must be grounded in theory

- **Paradigms or worldviews**
  - General theories of human learning

- **Midrange theories or models**
  - Models of successful learning in a discipline

- **Narrow models or phenomenon**
  - How students learned in a certain way in a given class
5 Key Features of Published SoTL Work
(Weimer, 2006)

1. Work is focused on how to teach
2. Literature is a mix of experience-based and research-based work
3. Content is diverse
4. Focus beyond content and method to include affect and development
5. Emphasis on shared characteristics across disciplines
Step #2

• Integrate SoTL investigations into existing professional obligations
Step #3

• Address practical and ethical issues
Practical Questions

• Do I understand how to conduct SoTL research?
• What data do I have available to me?
• What resources do I have to conduct my study?
• How much time do I need to complete this investigation?
Generalizability of SoTL

Focus is typically on small, local samples

Maximize value of design within constraints
Ethical Considerations
(Hutchings, 2003)

Issues surrounding use of student work
• when & how to obtain consent

Issues related to choice of research strategy
• possible harm as a function of research design

Issues connected to making results (good or bad) public
• potential harm to reputation
SoTL and IRB

- SoTL projects require review and approval by the Institutional Review Board
Step #4

• Design your SoTL investigation
Approaches to SoTL
(Nelson, 2003)

- Reports on particular classes
  - Qualitative before-after assessment
  - Quantitative before-after assessment

- Reflections on teaching experience
  - Essays about teaching based on experience, reflection, conversations, etc.
  - Summaries of expertise gained over time
  - Integration of broader models or theories related to teaching

- Comparisons of courses and student change across time
  - Qualitative studies focusing on critical issues
  - Quantitative comparisons across multiple courses or sections
  - Comparisons of courses with a shared instrument

- Non-classroom experimental work
  - Learning science or psychological research on learning processes

- Synthesis of sets of extant SoTL work
  - Annotated bibliographies of SoTL work
  - Meta-analysis
SoTL Methodologies

- Course Portfolios
- Reflective Analysis
- Interviews & Focus Groups
- Observational Research
- Questionnaires
- Content Analysis
- Secondary Analysis
- Experiments
- Quasi-Experiments
- Case Studies
- Multi-Method Studies
Step #5

• Make your SoTL work public
SoTL Outlets

- Publications
- Presentations
- Web Sites
- Shared Reflective Artifacts
- Portfolios
- Performances
- Juried Shows
Standards for SoTL Work

- Exhibits methodological rigor
- Has substantive implications or outcomes
- Peer-reviewed
- Public