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Publish or Perish: Can Scholarship and Teaching Coexist?

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Abstract

Faculty at institutions of higher education are experiencing constant requests to increase teaching loads and class sizes while, at the same time, continuing to meet the demands for scholarship and service. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) can serve as one way in which faculty can simultaneously focus on improving their teaching and their students' learning as well as meeting the rigorous demands for peer review and publication. The systematic approach of asking questions about one's teaching, designing and conducting appropriate research methodologies to investigate those questions, analyzing the results, and subjecting the entire process and findings to peer review elevates good teaching to appropriate scholarship worthy of recognition in the tenure and promotion processes of higher education. This essay examines definitions and the history of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. In addition, it focuses on how faculty members can find time for and get started with SoTL work.

As faculty at an institution historically focused on teaching, we are interested in improving our teaching and, in turn, our students' learning. We are sometimes confronted with evidence that our students are not necessarily learning all that we intend for them to learn.   Indeed, we often find that our students perform quite acceptably on exams, achieving good course grades, and yet somehow, we suspect that these students have not mastered the course material.   This frustrating scenario is fairly commonplace and often leads to a feeling of helplessness and despair.   After all, what can a faculty member do? We are expected, as faculty, to teach (often with heavy teaching loads and increasingly larger classes), to participate in service (both to our institution and to the community), and to continue to be scholars within our disciplines.   Many faculty find it difficult to balance the in-depth teaching, service, and scholarship responsibilities, as they often seem unrelated and disjointed.   And, with the exception of those in the field of education, most faculty receive graduate training in research in their disciplines, but little or no formal training in teaching.

Typically, all of our graduate school training teaches us to be scholars and researchers.   Yet, we often do not think to apply these same techniques to our teaching and to improving our students' learning in our classrooms.   However, for a number of reasons, a growing number of faculty choose to do exactly this by participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). According to McKinney, "there are three rationales for SoTL: professionalism, pragmatism, and policy. Essentially, it is our professional obligation to be scholars in our disciplines and as educators. In addition, SoTL is practical and will help us and others (as it is made public) improve teaching and learning. Finally, SoTL can help us provide evidence for important discussions about policy decisions" (p13). By performing SoTL work, faculty are able

to address their frustrations in a productive manner; faculty can refine a research question about their teaching and use systematic work to determine the outcome of their students' learning.

Outside of research-intensive universities, the focus and mission of many institutes of higher learning is teaching. However, scholarly work is still the path to academic status in higher education, and both individual faculty and colleges and universities continue to embrace peer review and publications as the most prestigious product of faculty.   Boyer (1990) addressed the issue of scholarship when he said, "The time has come to move beyond the tired old 'teaching versus research' debate and give the familiar and honorable term 'scholarship' a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work" (p.16). The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is one mode in which faculty are able to address the teaching focus, which is the mission of their institutions, the demands of what is often a heavy teaching load, and the desire to participate in scholarly work.

One additional, and perhaps often unaddressed, advantage to SoTL work is accountability.   As faculty, we have all heard calls for institutions of higher education to be more accountable for the quality of education of our graduates (as well as for retention, progression, and graduation rates).   While the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning does not represent, in general, generalizable data that a university can use, SoTL work can support the efforts of faculty for accountability in terms of documenting and improving student learning outcomes.   It can also provide valuable information for other faculty as they strive to improve their teaching and their students' learning.

What is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?

On the spectrum of good teaching practice, we can begin to differentiate between the reflective teacher and the practitioner of SoTL.   A good teacher is one that works to promote student learning and other identified student outcomes. Reflective teaching has a fairly self-evident description: a reflective teacher is one that, at some point, reflects on her/his students' learning, and how her/his teaching has impacted that learning.   These reflections may be private musings, but more commonly take the form of reflective essays during a self-evaluation process, typically in a summative fashion.   Ideally, these reflections then inform that teacher's future instructional design and delivery.

Next on this spectrum of good teaching practice is the scholarly teacher. This teacher is one who takes a scholarly approach to teaching and views teaching as a profession.   The scholarly teacher (at the University level) is one who understands that pedagogical content knowledge is an area in which to develop expertise.   A scholarly teacher also regularly reflects on student learning.   Scholarly teaching, however, begins to use the tools of scholarship to more deeply analyze student learning than one expects in a simple reflective essay.   Scholarly teaching may also be thought of as a means to objectively document effectiveness as a teacher and/or a means to provide assessment data for other uses not related to peer review.   Action research projects may also, in the absence of peer review, be appropriately discussed as scholarly teaching.   It should be respected as good teaching practice.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning takes these efforts to promote student learning a step further. According to Hutchings and Cambridge (1999), the American Association of Higher Education

defines the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as "Problem-posing about an issue of teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to the disciplinary epistemologies, application of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer review" (p. 7). This differs from scholarly teaching in several very important ways. First, SoTL steps past reflection on student learning outcomes and poses questions about how students learn or about the impact of faculty teaching on student learning. Were these questions simply asked and reflected upon, this might remain in the realm of scholarly teaching. By the refinement of the posed question, however, faculty can then develop appropriate methodologies to study student learning and, thereby, answer these questions. The methodologies used to answer the questions can vary based on the questions posed and the learning to be impacted. In some cases, a scholarly textual analysis of student writing will be the appropriate means to examine faculty questions about learning, but in other cases, examination of students using performance tasks or many other techniques may be more appropriate. The faculty member carefully designs a study to probe some facet of the question he/she has posed and uses the findings to make changes in teaching and improve students' learning. In other words, the changes are based on findings from systematic study rather than "hunches", informal evidence, or what we, as faculty, assume that we know to be true. After the study is completed, the work is then shared with colleagues and subjected to peer review. It is the systematic investigation or research and the making public of the findings (including subjecting it to peer review) that elevates good teaching and reflection to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

How is SoTL characterized as research? The National Research Council has developed guiding principles for scientific research that include:

- Pose significant questions that can be investigated
- Link research to relevant theory
- Use methods that permit direct investigation of the question
- Provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning
- Replicate and generalize across studies as applicable
- Disclose research to encourage professional scrutiny and critique (Lauer, 2006).

Looking at this generalized list of principles, one could apply this set of criteria to either traditional scholarship in most academic disciplines or to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This is the heart of the matter: If the process of scholarly work (including subjecting it to professional scrutiny) is generally the same, then we can say that scholarly work has been done and accord it the appropriate degree of respect.

What is the History of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?

The contemporary Scholarship of Teaching movement began in 1990 with Boyer's publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered.* Boyer proposed that scholarship can take four forms: "discovery (traditional research); integration (bringing new ideas into an expanding multidisciplinary repository of knowledge); application (the interaction of theory and praxis), and teaching" (Bender, 2005, p. 42). Boyer, then, proposed that the scholarship of teaching was just as relevant as research and should be considered on equal status. Lee Shulman (1999) reconceptualized the phrase as the "Scholarship of Teaching *and Learning*". While Boyer and Shulman provided a

formalization of the term and the movement, many efforts were ongoing related to the teaching-learning process. One can look as far back as Dewey and others for discussions about teaching and learning. Many disciplines, such as the field of psychology, have focused on teaching and learning for may years. For example, the American Psychological Association has focused attention on teaching and learning since 1945 when it formed a separate division dedicated to this issue. The division has, since 1950, published, first in a newsletter and later in a formal journal, research related to teaching and learning.

In 1998, the Carnegie Foundation launched the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). The goal of the CASTL program is to support a scholarship of teaching and learning that: "fosters significant, long-lasting learning for all students; enhances the practice and profession of teaching, and; brings to faculty members' work as teachers the recognition and reward afforded to other forms of scholarly work" (Carnegie Foundation, n.d., ¶ 2). Huber and Hutchings (2005), among others, are continuing to expand the work first begun by Boyer and Shulman by researching the impact of SoTL on teaching practices and careers of professionals in higher education. What is clear from the work completed thus far is that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is providing an avenue for professors to jointly focus on teaching and learning as well as on scholarship.

How do I find time for and begin with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?

A lack of time seems to be one of, if not the, most prevalent reason expressed for not being able to engage in scholarly work and in improving teaching. The issue of a lack of time is becoming even more pronounced as teaching loads and class sizes

are increasing. There is no question that teaching large sections of classes, even if one has multiple sections of the same class, requires much more time for interactions with students and for grading. Quality teaching involves much more than delivering lectures and grading exams. In larger, research based institutions of higher education, graduate assistants are often relegated to these tasks to free professors' time for other activities. In smaller, teaching-focused institutions, however, the use of graduate assistants is often much more limited. Therefore, faculty are left to assume all of the responsibilities of increased teaching loads and larger class sizes as well as continue their responsibilities for scholarship and service. Administrators often tell faculty, "It can be done" or "If you think you can, you can," but they may not offer suggestions of alternatives for successfully accomplishing all of these responsibilities.

Work in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning has proven to be one alternative for "multi-tasking"…that is, working on improving teaching and learning simultaneously with engaging in scholarly research. Additionally, department chairs are often interested in SoTL work as it directly relates to assessment needed for accreditation purposes. As faculty document and analyze the learning of their students and the meeting of learning goals/objectives, they are engaging in the process of assessment of student outcomes required by accrediting agencies. More and more faculty are developing learning outcomes or goals for their courses. These outcomes can be turned into variables related to research questions for SoTL, and therefore, lead to scholarly publications and presentations. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (as cited in Smith, 2008, p. 265) outlined a series of questions to help faculty begin SoTL

research (see Figure 1).   This is not a comprehensive list, but rather a list to aid faculty in starting to think about SoTL research projects.

Figure 1
Questions to Help Faculty Develop Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Projects
1. Important Goals: What can students do after completing the program (course, activity)?
2. How do students learn to do this?
3. What information or evidence is there that students are learning this?
4. How has this information been used to help students learn?
5. What additional evidence is needed to understand how well students are learning this?
6. What possible new or improved assessment tools or techniques might be used?

These questions can help faculty formulate goals and develop ideas for research questions that could be investigated in SoTL work. Smith (2008) also provides several suggestions for SoTL work related to comparison/control groups. If a faculty member is teaching multiple sections of a course, he/she could try a new teaching method, grouping strategy, or assignment with one section while maintaining the former methods with the second section. If the instructor is careful to be systematic about the research, he/she may be able to use previous semesters' sections of the same course for comparison purposes. Another option is for faculty to borrow sections from another instructor.   Of course, using a comparison/control group is only one method of research that can be used for SoTL work. In fact, any research method can be applied to SoTL work.

Another aspect to keep in mind when conducting SoTL work is the careful attention to standards of ethics for the involvement of human subjects. As always, when working with human subjects (perhaps even more so when they are our students), it is important to work within the university's internal review board parameters. The human subjects review is designed to ensure that research conducted by faculty, administrators, or students of a university does not endanger or otherwise adversely affect human subjects. With SoTL work, care must be taken to ensure that students are not adversely affected in any way by the research. This careful attention to standards of ethics is the same in SoTL work as with any research effort.

The key in SoTL work is for faculty to set goals or learning outcomes for their courses, ask themselves questions related to these goals/outcomes, then develop a systematic and ethical way to investigate the questions, and finally, analyze and make public their findings through peer review, publication, and presentation. This process has simultaneously, then, provided for the improvement of teaching and learning, scholarship and peer review, as well as assessment for accreditation.

Conclusion
Faculty at institutions of higher education are experiencing constant requests to increase teaching loads and class sizes while, at the same time, continuing to meet the demands for scholarship and service. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning can serve as one way in which faculty can simultaneously focus on improving their teaching and their students' learning as well as meeting the rigorous demands for peer review and publication. The systematic approach of asking questions about one's teaching, designing and conducting appropriate research methodologies to

investigate those questions, analyzing the results, and subjecting the entire process and findings to peer review elevates good teaching to appropriate scholarship worthy of recognition in the tenure and promotion processes of higher education. With limited time, increased responsibilities, and increased expectations, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is a welcomed idea whose time has arrived.

NOTE: Many peer-reviewed journals welcome the submission of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning manuscripts. In addition to *Perspectives in Learning: A Journal of the College of Education and Health Professions*, a listing of publication opportunities can be found at: http://www.buffalostate.edu/orgs/castl/publish.html

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