

Publications Advisory Committee, ISSOTL

# Mapping Progress: The Life and Work of *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*

A Report from the ISSOTL Publications Advisory Committee

The Publications Advisory Committee (PAC) was established by the Board of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) in late 2013 “to guide the development of ISSOTL’s journal, *Teaching & Learning Inquiry (TLI)*, by periodically reviewing the model employed for its publication and dissemination” (ISSOTL by-laws, <http://www.issotl.com/issotl15/node/10>). While *TLI*’s co-editors and Editorial Board provide leadership for and manage all matters related to the journal’s content and substance, the PAC concerns itself with the journal’s financial health and sustainability, and with maximizing visibility and impact. Our aim, in short, is to ensure that the journal serves the needs and purposes of the ISSOTL community.

With these goals in view, in mid-2014 after extensive study and review, the PAC recommended to the ISSOTL Board that *TLI* position itself for a transition to an Open Access (OA) publication model. The aim of this recommendation was to build on *TLI*’s highly successful launch and early work by significantly expanding access to the journal, giving authors control over their intellectual property and the ability to share their work with colleagues and students without restrictions, taking advantage of emerging trends and possibilities in the scholarly publishing world, and controlling costs (Eaglestone, Edwards, Gundry, Mueller, & Zellinger, 2016; Suber, 2008, 2012; Willinsky, 2006). Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, OA was (and is) seen as congruent with the culture of sharing and inclusivity that characterizes ISSOTL and the SoTL community more generally.

Following extensive consultation with ISSOTL members, the Board approved this recommendation and worked with the PAC over the following year to establish a publishing partnership with the University of Calgary’s Libraries and Cultural Resources journal hosting services.

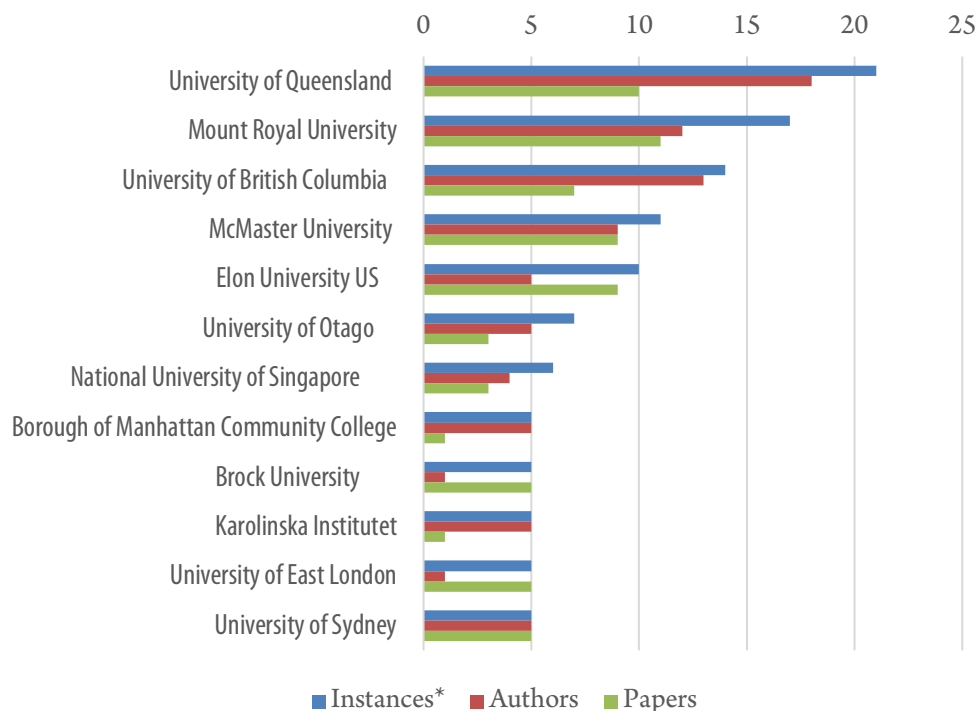
Now, after two years of operation under the new model (the first OA issue of *TLI* was 4.1 in March 2016), the time is right to step back and take stock. Who seeks out publication in *TLI*? What kinds of work, from which contexts and settings, are accepted for publication? How do readers find the journal? Who reads and uses its resources? What are the trends over time? What are the right metrics for assessing its impact? The goal of this report from the Publications Advisory Committee is to map the journal’s work for *TLI* readers, ISSOTL members, and all of those who care about the power of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to improve the quality of the student experience. We conclude with a number of recommendations that build on the journal’s success.

## TLI/AUTHORS

A review of the contents of *TLI* is an important window into the health of the journal and the state of the scholarship of teaching and learning. As of the October 2017 issue (5.2), *TLI* has published the work of 239 authors from 122 different institutions in 15 countries. (See Figure 1.) There is considerable, but not complete, overlap between the institutions that have the most papers, those that

have the most authors, and those that have the most instances. (If two people from the same institution have two papers each, that counts as four instances for that institution.)

**Figure 1. Authors' Institutions in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry***



As noted in the journal’s “Statement of Rigour” ([bit.ly/TLI-rigour](http://bit.ly/TLI-rigour)), *TLI* has an acceptance rate of 30% among blindly submitted manuscripts. But this number varies significantly by issue and depends on how the denominator is determined. For instance, some contributions are invited (the inaugural 1.1 issue was comprised almost entirely of invited essays), and those pieces are not counted in the 30% figure. Further, authors whose papers are not accepted receive considerable feedback, and often resubmit three or four times before being accepted, a positive development but one that confounds the question of acceptance rates. Two issues (1.2 and 5.1) were dedicated to articles resulting from the work of ISSOTL’s International Collaborative Writing Groups (ICWG), an initiative designed to bring new voices to *TLI* and raise the visibility of work by newer SoTL scholars from around the world by pairing them with established authors. This notion of cultivating new and diverse talent—through invited contributions, improvement-focused feedback, and initiatives like the ICWG—is central to the ethic of the journal and to ISSOTL’s commitment to building the field.

## VISIBILITY AND STANDING

The success and impact of a scholarly journal depends in part on what library and information specialists refer to as “discoverability.” This, in turn, is a function of a number of features which make the journal and its contents easy to find.

Most important in this regard, all issues of *TLI* (including volumes 1 to 3 published through our original arrangement with Indiana University Press) are now available from the *TLI* website, with downloadable PDFs. Thus, anyone who has Internet access can find and use the journal. Freed up from restrictive intellectual property rules that characterize most subscription-based journals, all *TLI* articles are now licensed under Creative Commons, such that authors and readers can freely and immediately share articles with colleagues around the world—and with students.

Also critical to discoverability is indexing. *TLI* is now indexed by Google Scholar, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and the Modern Language Association (MLA) International Bibliography—a development of special interest to ISSOTL members and journal subscribers from humanities fields who may sometimes feel that SoTL is dominated by social science scholars. A recently signed agreement also makes *TLI* content available through EBSCO, a major database provider, through a number of its databases. In short, ISSOTL's journal now appears in the periodicals lists of an increasing number of institutions, and shows up in their libraries' search results. Additionally, steps are now underway to expand indexing to sites that will put *TLI*'s work in front of a wider universe of readers who may not be familiar with—but could benefit from—the scholarship of teaching and learning.

*TLI* is now listed in and searchable through the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) (<https://doaj.org/>). Listing here makes us more findable, and acceptance in DOAJ is a mark of quality that authors, and tenure committees, are increasingly looking for. As one of our partners at the University of Calgary noted, DOAJ is the “white list for open access journals.” It is often the first place authors check to see if an open access publication is a trusted journal. Listing in DOAJ also leads to listing in other Open Access indices such as BASE (<https://www.base-search.net/>).

*TLI* is also a member of Crossref, which allows us to give each article a DOI (Digital Object Identifier). These numbers are also seen as a mark of quality, and are increasingly required by citation styles such as that employed by the American Psychological Association. From an information point of view, DOIs facilitate citation counts and tools that link articles through citations such as the ‘Cited by’ links in Google Scholar.

It should be said that none of these “discoverability” developments come to pass automatically. The attention to indexing, databases, and the DOAJ reflect concerted effort by many people associated with the *TLI*, including the editors, editorial managers, members of the PAC, and our OA publishing partners at the University of Calgary.

#### *TLI* ON SOCIAL MEDIA

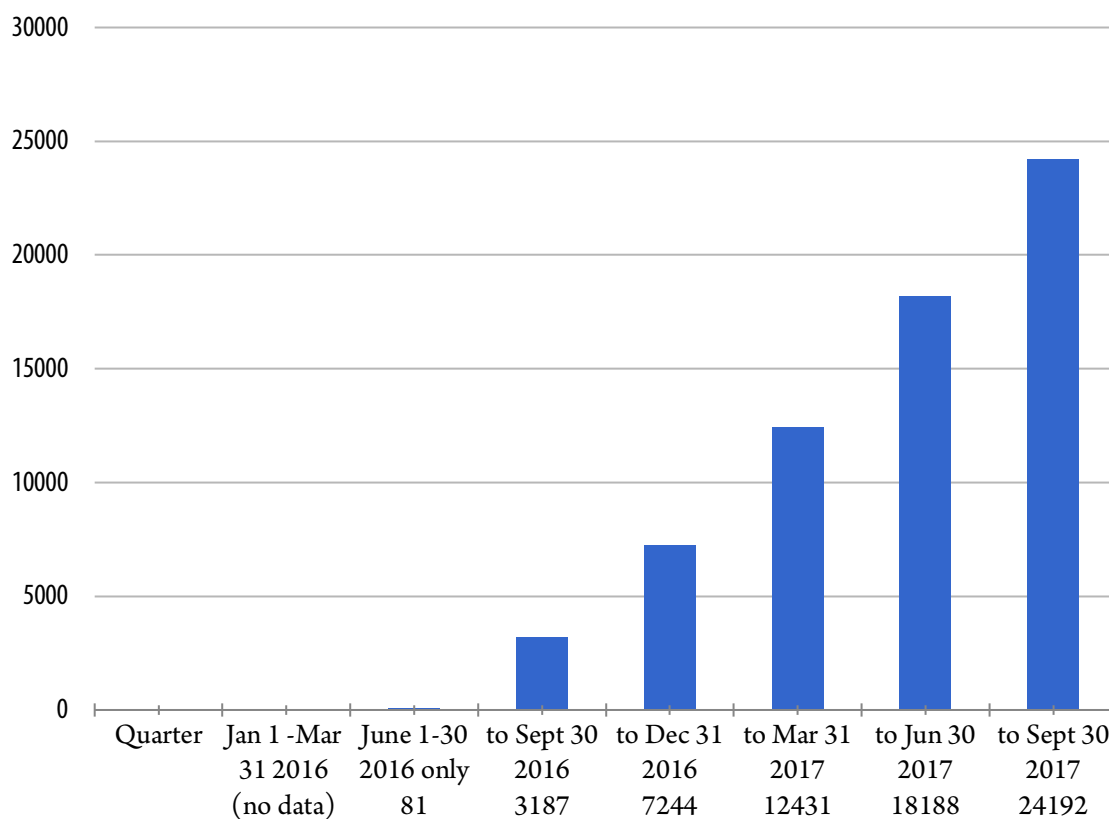
*TLI continues to expand its reach through Twitter. The account now has over 700 followers, and is used to promote new issues, calls for articles and reviews, identify new articles, and promote other ISSOTL functions such as the conference and the tweet chats. During March and April of 2017, when new articles were being tweeted daily (this is currently done primarily by *TLI*'s managing editor), we were averaging 343 impressions per day; that is, 343 Twitter users a day were seeing our tweets, and of those a significant number were liking and/or retweeting them. In months where tweeting is less frequent, this rate of engagement drops significantly. More sustained tweeting in between issues, or tweeting older content in rotation, could be useful for the journal and the SoTL community.*

## THINKING ABOUT IMPACT

There is now a growing body of research suggesting that open access publishing increases access and impact (Hitchcock, 2004; Tennant, Waldner, Jacques, Masuzzo, Collister, & Hartgerink, 2016). That said, metrics for determining impact are a subject of debate in the fast-changing world of academic publishing.

In the case of Open Access publications like *TLL*, downloads are at least a prerequisite for impact. As indicated in Figure 2, *TLL* has seen steady growth in the number of article downloads, with September 2017 seeing the highest number at 6,047. As of the end of September, articles from *TLL* had been downloaded 24,192 times. There are predictable variations in what gets downloaded, with articles by highly visible authors (such as Chick and Felten) seeing more traffic, while reviews, editorials and other non-research articles see fewer downloads.

Figure 2. Cumulative Downloads, January 2016-September 2017



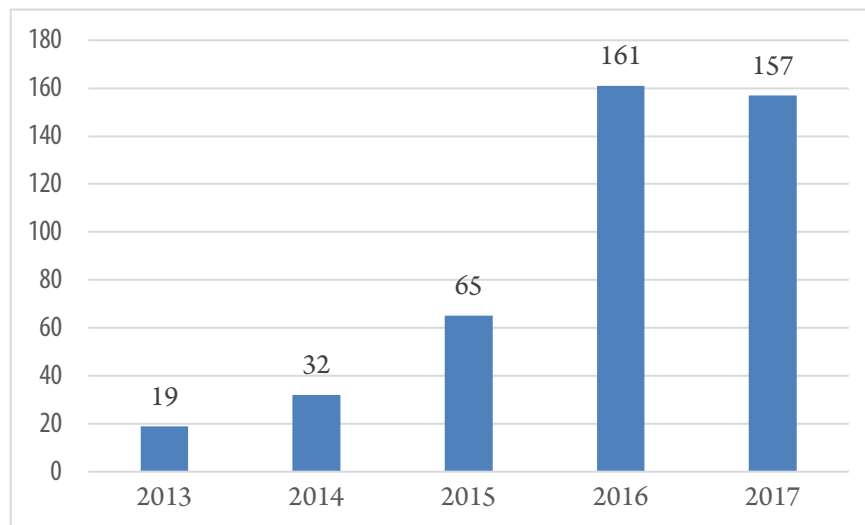
Download metrics are not perfect. Analytics available through Open Journal Systems (the platform used by *TLL*) capture downloads from that site but some (perhaps many) readers may download articles through other sites and sources. Thus, the numbers in Figure 2 almost certainly represent an under-count. That said, their upward trajectory is a good sign, especially for a journal as young as *TLL*. In the future it may be possible to complement these numbers with data from Project Muse and JSTOR, through which papers from volumes 1 to 3 are still being downloaded.

Another measure of impact comes from citation-based metrics (Hitchcock, 2004), specifically Journal Impact Factors (JIF). This measure, more common in the sciences, is based on how many times papers from a given journal listed in the JIF database are cited by papers in other journals in the JIF database. Because listing in the database is tightly controlled—historically by a major for-profit journal publisher—not all journals are listed and the scores unfairly penalize new journals, journals in newer fields, and journals from the global South. As the measure has become a proxy for quality, the JIF has also led to intense competition and perhaps inevitably to some gaming of the system. In a number of ways, then, JIF metrics are not fully appropriate for *TLLI*.

A different impact metric, the *h*-index, is also based on citations, but of *individual* articles. To track this metric, the PAC created a Google Scholar profile for the journal as if it were an author. As of this writing, *TLLI* has an index of 10—that is, at least 10 papers with at least 10 citations each. It is difficult to know how this compares to other journals as they may not use this metric. Readers interested in *TLLI*'s reach can see the *h*-index of its articles at <https://scholar.google.ca/citations?user=jhU3GuIAAAAJ&hl=en&authuser=2>. (To see where each article is cited, click the number.)

Google Scholar also helpfully provides citation counts for each year since publication. Figure 3 shows a positive growth and a notable increase since *TLLI* moved to Open Access. (Note that complete data for 2017 was not yet available when these numbers were run.) Not surprisingly, the most highly cited articles prior to 2016 were the ones that the journal had chosen to make Open Access individually.

**Figure 3. Citations of Articles in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry***



While the *h*-index and other kinds of citation-based metrics give some indication of impact, they are less than perfect measures of the kind of impact that the scholarship of teaching and learning aims to bring about. They do not, for instance, capture when findings from an article in *TLLI* are implemented in the classroom, or when something in the journal's pages causes a reader to seek out further information and perhaps begin to examine her or his own teaching in new ways. (For more on the limitations of the *h*-factor, see Konkel, 2014.) In this regard, a useful ISSOTL project could be to explore strategies for mapping these more “practice-based” forms of impact. For starters, individual authors can work to document this kind of impact as colleagues pick up on and apply their findings; one member of the PAC documented impact in this way as part of a promotion and tenure file.

## LOOKING AHEAD

As ISSOTL members know, *TLI* will soon be moving into a leadership change. Co-editor Gary Poole, who, along with Nancy Chick, has held that position since the journal's first issue, will be gradually transitioning out of the role. The new co-editor will be Katarina Mårtensson, who will begin her term in 2019, bringing significant editorial experience and a long track record of leadership for the scholarship of teaching and learning, including her current role as ISSOTL president. The journal will continue to be in fabulous hands!

As that transition unfolds, the PAC would like to offer a number of suggestions and possibilities for building on *TLI*'s success:

1. The first is to take full advantage of the journal's open access model. The PAC encourages authors to share their work with colleagues and students who may not regularly see *TLI*—and in doing so bring greater visibility to the journal itself as well. Social media can play an important role here.
2. Be actively on the lookout for potential contributors—scholars whose work you learn about during a conference presentation, for instance. Think, especially, about newer scholars, including students. ISSOTL will do well to continue efforts like the International Collaborative Writing Groups that introduce new voices, including those from regions that are less well represented at present.
3. If you are on a campus, check with your institutional library to see a) if they list *TLI* in their periodicals list and b) if so, whether the listing connects to the <http://tljournal.com> site. While you're checking that, have a look at the recommended journals for SoTL or equivalent lists on webpages set up by your campus center for teaching and learning or your local SoTL group to see if they link to *TLI*. If your campus has a teaching center, encourage its leaders and users to draw on the work of *TLI*. In short, *TLI* authors and readers and all ISSOTL members can usefully be on the lookout for opportunities to bring the journal to the attention of others.
4. Share your ideas about topics, authors, and features for the journal with the co-editors. And if you have ideas for increasing impact and visibility, the PAC would love to hear them. (Might it be interesting to conduct a reader survey?)

Finally, we want readers of this report—and champions of *TLI*—to know that the PAC is now working with the co-editors on strategies for sustainability and future leadership. In particular, we are exploring editorial models that will help to distribute the workload and develop leadership for the future.

That future looks bright. *TLI* is on an upward trajectory on just about every dimension one can imagine. The PAC will continue to track that progress, and to document it. But the bigger and more important task for all those who value the journal is to bring continued imagination and vision to its future. What do we want it to look like in five years? How can we not only document its success but advance it? How can it become more robustly international? And how can the possibilities of Open Access be tapped into more fully? These are questions for *TLI*'s editors and Editorial Board and (given our charge) the PAC. But they are questions as well for the ISSOTL membership more broadly.

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