17th Annual Midwest SoTL Conference – 2016 Call for Proposals

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Title: Impact of SoTL on Online and Face-to-Face Courses

Short Abstract (60 words): Drawn from the literature and the experiences of two faculty members, this presentation will highlight the many opportunities to engage in SoTL and demonstrate the impact that SoTL activities have had on the teaching approaches and student learning outcomes that the presenters have seen in the diverse array of face-to-face and online courses that they teach.

Presentation format: Presentation

Description (800-2000 words, plus references) – Scholarly Teaching:

Given the 25th year anniversary of Boyer's "Scholarship Reconsidered", it seems especially appropriate to focus the 17th Annual Midwest Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) on celebrating that SoTL has not only taken its rightful place as a significant part of informing pedagogy and enhancing student learning, but that it also enjoys a substantial body of research attesting to its effectiveness. (Kern, Mettetal, Dixson & Morgan, 2015) With the evolution of SoTL over more than two decades, the opportunities to engage in SoTL activities have become plentiful and the willingness of universities and colleges to invest in SoTL is more apparent. Among these SoTL opportunities are prestigious print and online journals for publishing ground-breaking research and sharing best practices, a multiplicity of conferences at the local, regional, national and international level, the establishment of faculty Communities of Practice (also known as Faculty Learning Communities) to provide encouragement and support for faculty wanting to try new initiatives and approaches in their teaching and grants to fund course enhancement as well as conference attendance. Moreover, many universities and colleges have established Centers for Teaching and Learning, putting SoTL-related work at the very heart

of the academy. Not only is this a time for relishing the successes from participation in SoTL, but also for sharing what has been achieved and using this as momentum to propel SoTL forward towards the next decade and beyond. (Gordon, 2012; Haigh, 2012)

In the early days of SoTL, many academic institutions may have been skeptical about its potential, especially universities more accustomed to valuing traditional forms of research activity. However, a number of institutions, prompted by concerns from legislators, alumni, industry leaders and the public at large, recommitted to their teaching missions and were willing to make at least modest investments to recognize, support and promote quality teaching, to demonstrate the link between individual courses, degrees and programs and measureable student learning outcomes and to encourage their faculty to participate in SoTL-related activities. Indeed, by 2013, Draeger was able to assert that SoTL matters on at least six interrelated levels, making it worthy of long-term investment. (Draeger, 2013).

> First, SoTL matters because learning matters and thus it can help students learn more effectively. Second, SoTL offers faculty members the tools to more effectively share their disciplinary passions. Third, it offers faculty members an avenue for continued intellectual growth. Fourth, SoTL can build strong disciplinary communities that enliven the intellectual climate of a campus. Fifth, SoTL can inform institutional policy-making. Finally, SoTL matters even when it does not directly transform institutional policy because it embodies a spirit of pedagogical innovation that enlivens the quest for learning and reminds us why it is pursuing.

To this, the presenters would add that SoTL has encouraged them to question their assumptions about the reasons for poor student performance in their courses and to devise some interventions to help students be more successful and engaged in their own learning.

This presentation will feature the experiences of two faculty members who have had many different opportunities to engage in SoTL. One of the presenters has been active in SoTL for more than a decade. The other faculty member is quite new to SoTL. One of the faculty members teaches face-to-face courses, the other faculty member teaches online courses exclusively, which has its own special challenges. (Kreber & Kanuka, 2006) One of the faculty members teaches courses that are heavily focused on technology, while the other faculty member's courses deal primarily with business and law. However, it is clear from the literature that any program or discipline is appropriate for – and can benefit from – SoTL activities and the research that supports it. (Burns, Merchant & Appelt, 2013; Clark, 2009; McKinney, 2012; Hubball & Clarke, 2010) Between them, the presenters have participated in a wide variety of SoTL activities. They have used these activities to enhance their teaching and seen this translated into improved student learning. Drawn from the literature and their own activities, this presentation will give attendees an expansive view of the many SoTL opportunities that are available and will also provide concrete examples of how the presenters have incorporated their SoTL experiences into their courses. As such, this presentation will complement and update many of the journal articles that assist faculty in learning how to do the scholarship of teaching

and learning and that offer information on the various opportunities to engage in SoTL activities. (Grauerhotz & Zipp, 2008)

Conference attendance may be one of the easiest and most obvious ways to engage in SoTL. Fortunately, there are many excellent conferences available, from local conferences, such as IUPUI's E.C. Moore Symposium held every spring semester, to the prestigious set of Lilly Conferences offered throughout the U.S., with the most senior of them being the Lilly Original Conference on College Teaching held at Miami University each November. Among many outcomes from attendance at and participation in this conference are two examples. First, the presenters lamented the passivity among students in their courses and were looking for ways to promote active learning and personal responsibility. A session at the Lilly Conference was devoted to increasing student accountability. Inspired by the approaches taken by the speakers at this session, the presenters developed a mid-semester student accountability questionnaire that proved very helpful. One of the presenters uses peer review as part of grading final projects in two of his courses. This critique of peers is often resisted by students and the results are particularly difficult to quantity and incorporate into a grading scheme that is fair when one or more members of the group are *in absentia* for much of the semester. His attendance at various sessions of the Lilly Conference as well as other SoTL-related conferences has helped him to refine this process so students can confidentially assess the quality of a group member's contributions, whether the member was reliable and prepared, that the member met the group's deadlines and that the member showed an acceptable level of cooperation in the group. This revised approach not only contributed to grades that were more accurate, but created an environment that is similar to the real world so that students can develop skills in teamwork, cooperation and critiquing the work of others. The presenters have done considerable work looking at various ways to enhance student learning in online and face-to-face courses as well as on multimodal learning, which they have presented at various conferences.

One of the approaches to SoTL that has been embraced on many campuses is the development of Communities of Practice, which may also be referred to as Faculty Learning Communities (hereinafter FLCs). (Cox, 2003) One of the presenters has been a member of four different FLCs, two of which she chaired. Her first FLC was on Problem-Based Learning (PBL). Through participation in this FLC, the presenter incorporated PBL into the graduate course she was teaching. This FLC not only provided the support and encouragement she needed to try something new and cede "control" over the classroom experience, but it was also where she began her commitment to reflective teaching. After each course session, she spent some time writing her impressions of what went well and what was less successful as she learned to release some of the responsibility for the course to her students. Two of the best aspects of this FLC were having a facilitator from a school that had already implemented a PBL curriculum for its major degree program and that participants in the PBL FLC represented a wide variety of schools and disciplines on campus. At that time in her career, the presenter was very new to teaching and had an administrative position, meaning that she often felt very isolated, which was

mitigated by being part of the FLC. Participation in another FLC on creativity resulted in presentations at national and international conferences. A third FLC on critical thinking helped the presenter understand how to craft her assignments so that they reflected the various levels of Bloom's and Anderson's taxonomies, to write effective and action-based learning outcomes and to include two of her assignments as part of a presentation and toolkit on critical thinking.   Each of her courses now features overall student learning outcomes as well as learning outcomes for each course module, all of which are tied to course content and assignments, making rigorous assessment possible. Thus, her participation in FLCs has translated into the kind of deep and lifelong learning that faculty members want to see in their students and that continues to inform her approach to teaching even many years later. (West, 2013)

Publication in SoTL journals is another activity that brings stature to the faculty member and his or her department and allows innovative pedagogy to be shared with the larger academic community.   The presenters have been active in publishing in SoTL journals, usually with colleagues from within their school. For example, a recent article considered how to promote academic literacy among students in a wide variety of majors. More recently, the two presenters have collaborated with colleagues to prepare an article looking at attendance and participation in online and face-to-face courses and how this impacts grades as well as student engagement. Their article, in the final stages of revision, was informed by feedback they received when presenting their preliminary findings at a SoTL conference. Such dissemination of SoTL-related work provides academic institutions with an assessment of student learning and measurement of relevant outcomes that can be presented as powerful evidence to interested constituents. (Cassard & Sloboda, 2014; Dickson & Treml, 2013) An alternative to publishing one's own research is becoming a reviewer for one of the SoTL journals. One of the presenters is a reviewer for two of these journals, which then assists her in making sure that her own manuscripts meet all of a journal's criteria for topic, writing style, organization and format.

A final opportunity that the presenters have taken advantage of is grants for SoTL. Some of these grants have been travel grants to attend conferences on teaching and learning, but one presenter obtained a course enhancement fellowship through his school. He used this funding to tackle a project of considerable importance, which was to transition his programming and logic courses from face-to-face to online format as part of the school's initiative to offer a fully-online bachelor's degree. Not only did the grant provide him with the necessary summer salary support to pursue this project, but the lessons he learned through this experience will help other faculty who need to convert their courses to an online or hybrid format.

As the presenters compare and contrast their experiences in SoTL, the differences they have seen in their approaches to teaching and how this has impacted student learning, participants will be encouraged to become even more engaged in SoTL activities and will be able to articulate why this is important. One of the unexpected benefits of their participation in SoTL has been the joy that results from collaborating with colleagues. A secondary outcome is that they both won teaching awards last year on the strength of their combined efforts. Clearly, the

presenters are living examples of the power of SoTL and are compelling evidence that Boyer was correct in what he advocated as part of his "Scholarship Reconsidered". As observed in a recent article, "SoTL has a vital and important role for students in the form of enhanced learning outcomes and for academia as a learning-centered enterprise." (Kern, Mettetal, Dixson & Morgan, 2015). Although finding that SoTL may still be a vastly under-utilized resource at many universities, these authors assert that "[b]y properly defining the role of SoTL within their missions and valuing SoTL within their faculty's work, universities have the opportunity to enhance learning across academia."

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