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# SoTL Principles and Program Collaboration in the Age of Integration

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The increasing acceptance of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) on our campus has led to spreading SoTL principles outside of the usual faculty classroom research projects and teaching/learning center. Three programs examined how SoTL principles aided in integration and initiative building. The programs are the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Program, and the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching. Attempts at integration and collaboration have successfully brought SoTL principles into community building, consensus building, and program assessment. A unified voice, mutual respect, and responsiveness to institutional needs have been the necessary conditions to support the work, which may have directly and indirectly effected change in the campus culture

## Keywords

Program Integration, Community Building, SoTL Practices, Collaboration

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**Cover Page Footnote**

We would like to acknowledge all the instructional consultants and program directors at the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning Community. None of the work we discuss would be possible without their willingness to take risks, share ideas, and make new ideas become a reality.

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## SoTL Principles and Program Collaboration in the Age of Integration

### Abstract

The increasing acceptance of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) on our campus has led to spreading SoTL principles outside of the usual faculty classroom research projects and teaching/learning center. Three programs examined how SoTL principles aided in integration and initiative building. The programs are the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Program, and the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching. Attempts at integration and collaboration have successfully brought SoTL principles into community building, consensus building, and program assessment. A unified voice, mutual respect, and responsiveness to institutional needs have been the necessary conditions to support the work, which may have directly and indirectly effected change in the campus culture

### Introduction

Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) has a long history with the scholarship of teaching and learning, and we have relied on that strength and the dedication of many local practitioners of SOTL to help retain a focus on student learning while the campus identity draws heavily on its research reputation. The recent growth of our SOTL grants program indicates that this community is continuing to grow in healthy ways, expanding its impact on our institutional culture. As our approaches to SOTL continue to evolve, we have found success in leveraging its concepts to integrate distinct but intersecting programs, and to build initiatives that speak to both faculty and institutional needs. In this article, we discuss how three programs at IUB have collaborated by using SOTL principles (Felten, 2013; Elon University, 2013) to inform and advance common agendas while at the same time strengthening each other's work. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Program, in conjunction with the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) and the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching (FACET), have used SOTL in both overt and subtle ways to expand our already vibrant Teaching and Learning Commons.

We need to be abundantly clear that we are examining the growth of the IUB SOTL *program* here, and that we are not describing the work of the individual faculty, staff and administrators who have been involved with the SOTL on our campus over the years. The individuals conducting SOTL projects form a variety of communities central to all of our work, and at the very onset we want to acknowledge and thank all of the teaching and

learning scholars who have contributed to our programs over many years. Without the tireless dedication and contributions that so many have made to the SOTL Program on this campus, it is quite obvious we would have little to talk about. However, in this article we are discussing SOTL work from the faculty development perspective, exploring how the adoption of “SOTL thinking” has led to transformations of our programs and enhanced the way we support teaching and learning across our campus.

As we hope to point out, the evolution of our efforts is comparable to key findings discussed in Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone’s important work on institutional integration of SOTL (2011), and also parallels McKinney’s 2012 suggestions on ways to apply SOTL across the institution (Hostetter & Rehrey, 2012). What follows are brief descriptions of our three programs, followed by examples of how we used SOTL principles to shape, evaluate, and synthesize our most recent efforts. We conclude with some lessons learned that we hope can inform others’ integrative practices moving forward.

Of particular importance to the SOTL Program was the recently founded Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL). Quite a few of the recent changes we discuss have come about in conjunction with new commitments our university has made to teaching and learning, both on its Bloomington campus and system wide. CITL is the result of the forward-looking vision and collaborative leadership existing between the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and University Information Technology Services (Morrone, 2013). Established in 2010, CITL was created in response to the growing instructional and curricular needs of IUB’s schools, programs, and instructors of all ranks, as our large research intensive institution responded to the challenge of providing meaningful learning experiences to 21<sup>st</sup> century students. CITL is a comprehensive teaching center, encompassing a variety of services for faculty, including our Service Learning Program, Campus Writing Program, and support for instructional technologies. As the result of a combining of existing programs, CITL staff continually challenge conventional wisdom on how we do our collective work and seek models that provide unity to our efforts.

FACET is Indiana University’s eight-campus teaching academy. Since 1989, FACET’s community of dedicated faculty has worked to develop reflective, innovative teaching across the Indiana University system. The nearly 600 members of FACET all were selected through a rigorous review process, making membership highly valued, and about 17 to 25 new members are inducted each year. FACET sponsors over 20 conference events each year at campuses throughout the state, including a national conference aimed specifically at non-tenure track faculty. In addition, FACET facilitates leadership development for faculty, a paid teaching internship program for doctoral students, the *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, the *Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning*,

the *Quick Hits* book series, and a SOTL branch called the Mack Center for Inquiry on Teaching and Learning. Recognizing a growing need, FACET organized a national conference for non-tenure track faculty teaching in higher education, called FALCON (FACET's Adjunct Faculty and Lecturers Conference). Held in 2013, FALCON attracted 140 participants from all eight Indiana University campuses and 6 additional universities. Participants engaged in workshops on reflective teaching as well as presentations on SOTL. On the Bloomington campus, the FACET liaison works closely to co-sponsor SOTL events each year (Hostetter & Rehrey, 2008).

Now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year, Indiana University's SOTL Program is open to instructors of all ranks, providing the opportunity and resources to practice evidenced-informed teaching through the lens and expertise of the instructor's own discipline, to reflect upon and document that practice, and to share the results of the research by going public. In large part, the success of the program rests upon intersecting conversations that occur between an ongoing series of SOTL events that include nationally recognized speakers, participation in externally funded studies and research colloquia and, locally funded research projects. Since 2006 the program has provided local funding to support 31 studies encompassing the work of 82 faculty members. As part of the creation of CITL in 2010, the SOTL Program became part of CITL; both for organizational reasons and to better align our common efforts.

### **SOTL Integration for Community Building**

The Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and University Information Technology Services, along with our SOTL Advisory Board, have encouraged us to find new ways to integrate our work, giving us both license to take risks and opportunities for new resources. Looking at our practices through an integrative lens helps us realize that the success of an individual program, research project, or initiative is only part of the picture, as our new collaborations keep us focused on the shared goal of transforming the way that teaching is conducted and valued on our campus.

Our efforts to integrate SOTL practices throughout the institution started with this well-established and well-supported SOTL program, using it both as a base of support and a source of the principles that would inform our collective work. As we began to explore the next wave (Gurung, 2010) of SOTL work, we were mindful of resistance to change, especially within an existing program with significant history and substantial beliefs and traditions. From the start we embraced the approach that the best way to make changes to established programs is to build upon what already has proven to work, leveraging what the community already places value on and holds in high regard (Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011).

Recognizing that SOTL is as much a habit of mind as a body of practices, we decided to focus on SOTL as a set of principles that could guide the way we design and implement a wide range of programs and initiatives. SOTL can be the underlying conceptual framework that informs our various efforts, and through this diffusion reaches a wider body of faculty and administrators falling both within and outside the Commons (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Our integrative approach reaches out to other programs that may not have compelling interest, time or resources to join a well-established and vibrant Teaching and Learning Commons, but who may benefit from the SOTL approach we espouse. While not working at wildfire speed in the institution, such integration of SOTL can lead towards incremental and lasting changes.

### **SOTL Integration for Consensus Building**

The creation of CITL provided new opportunities to reexamine our programs and how we go about supporting teaching and learning individually and collectively at IUB. During the past few years, we have intentionally crossed many of the institutional and self-constructed borders that so often seem to define our work (Gurung, 2010) and prevent us from working together. More often than not, we began by questioning the way we have done things in the past and challenged ourselves to think outside of the parameters that, intentionally or not, are shaped through years of institutional practices and the steady stream of changes that go along with them.

Changing habits requires partnerships, community building, and consensus. One way to achieve consensus is to start with a place of shared interest, one that is comfortable and familiar to all participants, and then build upon the strengths that each program brings to the table. By using our SOTL events as an anchor for a series of showcases, guest speakers, workshops, and learning communities, we have found such a starting place.

Since 2004, we have hosted 160 SOTL events, representing individual and collaborative research involving 202 scholars. Events have taken various forms, including presentations from nationally and internationally recognized scholars, keynotes at focused day-long workshops, and more informal means of sharing work such as poster sessions and writing retreats. Indiana University faculty present their own collaborative work at these events as well, where they are given the chance to test out ideas and receive collegial feedback on the local level before publishing in journals or presenting at national or international conferences, acknowledging the important assets that result by moving from the local to the cosmopolitan (Bernstein, 2013).

Following on our successes with using prevailing themes for a year-long series of SOTL events and with making visible the connections across disciplines, we expanded the development of a teaching and learning theme. We ensured that the year's theme spanned activities across all our

programs. Most importantly, the process of deciding on a theme has in and of itself become a community building mechanism for those of us in faculty development roles.

Currently, a working group comprised of representatives from each of our programs collectively decides on the teaching and learning theme for a given semester. The purpose of the theme is to make visible the conceptual ideas that will connect SOTL events with other workshops, reading groups, Faculty Learning Communities, and initiatives taking place on campus. This may also include the individual interests of departments and programs that choose to partner with us during the semester.

The theme for a semester might emerge from the grass roots, as we seek input or anticipate the needs from one of the numerous faculty communities already engaged in teaching and learning projects. Sometimes the theme taps into trends embraced in the work of new book, a noteworthy scholar, or a national research project. Alternately, the theme may be a response to a top-down initiative driven by high-level administrators, such as our current involvement with the Bay View Alliance and the improvement of student learning within the STEM disciplines.

Though the purpose of this thematic approach is to create opportunities for faculty to dig deeply into a particular teaching and learning paradigm across programs and over the duration of a semester, in fact, a rich cross-fertilization of ideas happens to each program involved in the planning process. The process encourages all of us to rethink our work in relationship to the work of other programs that serve similar but sometimes-divergent interests. Here lies the opportunity for the SOTL principles to inform and help shape an open and inclusive climate of collaboration. An example of using this approach to programing can be found in our theme for the 2014 spring semester.

*Critical Thinking and Inquiry by Design: Engaging Students as Thinkers, Researchers, and Writers* asks faculty to explore the tension between the boundless enterprise of inquiry and discovery that we want to encourage in students and the need to provide structure and guidance for that enterprise. The semester's activities will shape conversations around ways to help students improve their ability to work with sources, reveal their thinking through writing and speaking, and move beyond surface understanding to deeper meaning and meaning-making.

SOTL guest speakers will include Linda Shadiow, discussing *Illuminating the Generative Role of the Personal Why in SOTL Research*, John Bean, discussing the *Expert Insider Prose: Teaching Information Literacy and Disciplinary Arguments across the Curriculum*, and Derek Bruff, discussing creative uses of student response systems, as well as the use of sketch note techniques for note-taking. Reading groups on books by both Shadiow and Bean, along with three separate Faculty Learning Communities,

will undertake conversations and semester-long projects that connect the ideas these scholars bring to our campus with their own scholarly teaching.

## **SOTL Integration for Programmatic Assessment**

While the influences of SOTL have been relatively overt in the ways it has impacted programming within CITL—particularly through acting as a highly visible anchor for the clustered events and through partnerships with FACET—its influence on other center initiatives is more subtle, providing a set of values or principles that shape our work with the faculty. Most notably, CITL’s approaches to assessment have drawn from SOTL principles and concomitantly shaped the campus culture to be more conducive to the growth of SOTL.

Recently, CITL has begun facilitating a large-scale curricular review initiative within our College of Arts and Sciences, leading 45 undergraduate programs through a two-semester process of curriculum mapping and the assessment of student learning outcomes. At the end of this process, departmental faculty will enter into a recurring cycle of assessing student success, using the results to revise courses and curricula as needed to improve learning.

When an associate dean first approached the center about facilitating this programmatic assessment initiative, the project team immediately recognized a significant challenge: How could programmatic assessment be implemented in a way that would be meaningful to faculty and produce genuinely useful results for their programs? On a campus culture still somewhat skeptical of assessment, how could we utilize faculty who had previously received SOTL funding to systematically analyze evidence of student learning, situate their work within existing literature, and collaborate with other faculty both within or across disciplines (CITL, 2013)? What could we use from the body of knowledge that our faculty had created over the years that might help reduce resistance to assessment and increase ownership among the faculty?

It should come as no surprise that these sorts of questions emerged because of the sustained influence SOTL principles have brought to bear on our programs, the way we think about the nature of our work, and the manner in which we reflect upon our interactions with faculty. In short, our understanding of SOTL principles has helped create an assessment process that is more in line with the center’s work, and which better aligns with academic culture and faculty practice (Hutchings, et al., 2013). Among the SOTL principles that influence our assessment work are these:

*A focus on student learning* helps dispel the notion that faculty members are going to collect data for some vague initiative obfuscated by levels of administrative bureaucracy. Instead, the approach builds upon their personal and professional investment in their majors, focusing first on goals

they have for those students as a way of making the process more about learning than measurement. Further, this focus helps dispel some anxiety among the faculty that *they* are going to be evaluated by the results, rather than the assessments ultimately being used to improve student and learning and strengthen their programs.

An *emphasis on inquiry* provides an opportunity to address faculty questions about student learning that emerge through the curriculum mapping process. Departmental colleagues often share questions or challenges regarding their majors—e.g., students not being prepared for a certain course, common difficulties with a threshold concept, learning bottlenecks, or difficulties reading primary literature—and allowing them to address those important questions through the assessment process both makes the process more practical and encourages the habit of asking learning-based questions. CITL’s approaches to assessment and the messages continually delivered to participating faculty members draw on Bass’s (1999) view of “teaching problems” as being starting points of scholarly inquiry, not markers of deficit or failure. Relying on this view helps portray assessment as a means of asking and answering questions en route to improvement of student learning, in part relieving some of the tension that comes from the mistaken belief that poor assessment results will ultimately be used to further some hidden administration agenda.

*Reliance on evidence* for answering those questions can be a sticking point in assessment, particularly when faculty come to realize that an assignment, test, or course grade may not constitute accurate evidence of student learning. Drawing parallels to disciplinary views of evidence, however, opens up conversations about the importance of measuring disciplinary ways of knowing while acknowledging the underlying assumptions faculty have about student learning (Huber & Morreale, 2002).

Respect for *diverse and appropriate methodologies* has long been a tenet of SOTL, encouraging investigators to use research methods and forms of evidence that are appropriate in their disciplines as a way to conduct classroom research. According to Nancy Chick, it is important to develop methodologies that both evolve from the questions and rely on researcher’s disciplinary expertise (Elon University, 2013). While it is important for faculty to understand the different types of measures and tools available to them, it is equally important for them to use disciplinary approaches and preferences, particularly in broader terms of qualitative and quantitative measures. Faculty have voiced a concern that program review would demand standardized metrics, so CITL consultants regularly reinforce the idea that the questions are theirs, the methods for answering the questions are theirs, and the resulting data are theirs. Allowing faculty to bring their disciplinary expertise to assessment is key to encouraging faculty ownership of the process.

A distinctive element of SOTL is the *public vetting and sharing of results*—whether it is locally with faculty colleagues or more broadly through peer-reviewed presentations and publications (McKinney, 2012; Shulman, 2000). While assessment naturally has an aspect of public accountability, that rarely takes place within collegial venues, and even less frequently involves feedback from other faculty members. Drawing on that collegial spirit of SOTL, program review workshops include the opportunity for the cross-disciplinary sharing of goals, learning outcomes, curricular maps, and assessment approaches. By providing feedback to one another, faculty members gain a wider perspective of their work and increase their ownership of the program review process.

*Closing the loop*, or the clear application of results for continual improvement, is central to the most effective assessment programs. Drawing on SOTL's emphasis on making instructional changes based on findings, the assessment initiative's reporting function is relatively brief but clearly asks what course-level or curricular changes were made in response to the data collected about student learning. Improvement of learning is the goal of the endeavor, not just the collection of data. In other words, focus on using data for the improvement of student learning, and the institutional reporting component will take care of itself. While closing the loop is a central tenant of assessment, promoting that goal in the spirit of SOTL—the focus on student learning and the local ownership of the process—has helped faculty become more comfortable with the programmatic assessment initiative.

As the above examples indicate, the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, has embraced SOTL's influence when it comes to this important initiative, which encompasses subtle but important elements that leverage the strengths faculty bring to a research-intensive school. As with most things SOTL, the benefits go in both directions. It is possible that this assessment work may actually shift our teaching and learning culture in ways that further SOTL goals on campus. Incorporating cross-disciplinary cohorts and the sharing of nascent assessment plans, for example, allows faculty to experience the benefits of talking about teaching with colleagues outside of their own departments and disciplinary fields. Similarly, valuing classroom-based inquiry and evidence-informed teaching might pave the way for greater acceptance of SOTL within promotion and tenure processes. That shift, of course, is a long-term proposition, but using the both language and principles of SOTL in an ongoing initiative impacting 45 undergraduate programs has potential for increasing familiarity with and respect for this type of scholarship, a deep integration that moves all our goals forward.

## Lessons Learned

We have learned three important lessons thus far about sharing the work among our programs. Integrative efforts such as ours must contain consistent and unified messages, encourage trust and respect, and respond to intuitional needs.

*Consistency of messages and a unified voice* are vital in helping faculty members see the common threads across our various efforts. Whether that involves using similar terminology, or reinforcing similar concepts across initiatives, we strive to promote common messages about teaching and learning in order to reinforce each other's work and promote our common agendas. Collectively sponsoring events such as our Fall Teaching and Learning Celebration is both overt and public, but the subtle connections through consistent messaging are just as important for ongoing reinforcement of our collaborations. Even distinct programs—such as FACET's conference for non-tenure-track faculty and CITL's faculty learning communities focusing on lecturers' career development—become mutually reinforcing when we utilize consistent, SOTL-influenced messages about inquiry and evidence-informed teaching.

*Trust and respect* are essential to collaboration across programs and the integration of our work. We must be open and willing to try new things, particularly when we collectively decide to challenge our standard ways of operating. Even more importantly, just like people, each of our programs holds certain intangible endowments (Tagg, 2012) that we put at risk in collaborative efforts. Our credibility and reputation with the faculty, our professional and organizational identities, and those things that we believe most distinguish our work from other programs, are all up for grabs in a truly collaborative world. If people sense that endowments will be diminished or diluted through integrated programs, they may resist the impulse to join in. What we have decided is that the potential rewards for the larger, shared mission of transforming teaching across the university far outweigh the risks we all must take.

Mutual respect allows us to recognize that each of our programs has value and currency that can be used for the greater good and for our faculty colleagues. Such trust and respect are just as vital between SOTL and FACET (Hostetter and Rehrey, 2012), where program leaders have risked their own endowments in order to work toward a shared vision of teaching and learning.

Finally, our integrated programs must be *responsive to institutional needs*, whether those needs are as concrete as an assessment initiative or as general and long-term as the promotion of engaged student learning. Being responsive allows us to be "at the table" when significant decisions are being made about teaching and learning (Chism, 2011), and provides opportunities to shape ongoing initiatives in ways that better align with our

shared values. It can be a challenge to be responsive to institutional needs while retaining a strong sense of organizational self-identity, but the successful integration of our efforts affords us a stronger collective identity and improves our ability to influence nascent educational initiatives.

## Conclusion

SOTL has proven its worth to Indiana University Bloomington, and our local version of a teaching and learning commons has provided multiple ways for faculty to engage in scholarly activities that focus on student learning within a research-intensive university setting. However, we realized that SOTL had the additional potential to impact teaching and learning outside of the commons. By using SOTL principles to connect various faculty development programs, we have been able to influence other initiatives, ones not normally considered to be a part of our SOTL program. Bringing SOTL's strengths to bear more widely on teaching and learning has affected subtle changes in the campus culture which we seek to transform, as the value of better teaching and learning practices becomes more widely accepted in places outside of our Scholarship of Teaching and Learning program.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge all the instructional consultants and program directors at the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning Community. None of the work we discuss would be possible without their willingness to take risks, share ideas, and make new ideas become a reality.

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