SoTL at Georgia Southern

All of us recognize and appreciate the growing regional, national, and international reputation that Georgia Southern has for embracing our teaching mission. We devote significant resources to the study and practice of teaching, and an important key initiative that we support is the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL) at Georgia Southern. The main purpose of SoTL at Georgia Southern is to investigate ways to improve learning, and thus, teaching. Programs such as this help move our University to prominence as a national leader in teaching and learning. We are a true student-centered institution, and that key aspect of our culture is well supported by SoTL and other programs. SoTL is multidisciplinary and includes all methods of teaching and spans all academic fields. Regardless of our experience levels, we benefit from inquiry-led, evidence-based knowledge about the very complex process of teaching and learning in higher education today. SoTL unites teaching and scholarship/research. By placing focus upon the students and their learning processes, SoTL fits the tradition of Georgia Southern by focusing upon students and their academic achievement and intellectual development, inside the classrooms and laboratories and beyond.

SoTL Starts with Questions of Student Learning

Interesting and important questions about student learning can come from daily classroom practice where teachers observe gaps in their students' performance and puzzle over how and why students learn or do not learn what they are taught. For example, an instructor may wonder why a significant number of students acquire superficial understanding of key ideas in an introductory course or a significant number of seniors in a program are not able to apply what they have learned to complex, real life problems. Or, an instructor may wonder how a course or even an academic program affects qualities of character and students' dispositions. Questions may focus on the full range of student learning and development - how students develop deep understanding, how they come to use knowledge flexibly, how they develop certain habits of mind and commitments to learning. And so on. (from the SoTL at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse website at http://www.uwlax.edu/sotl/.

Dr. Ted Moore, Provost

Website

A website for the SoTL at Georgia Southern Initiative is at http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/sotl. It serves as the portal for the activities and resources of the initiative.
The Molecular Biology Initiative (MBI) partners graduate students and in-service high school teachers, with the intent of using these partnerships to positively impact the high school science curriculum and to provide professional development for the fellows. Throughout the year-long commitment, teachers are assisted with molecular biology and other advanced laboratory skills, content and resources; while the expert-novice teams work together to develop and introduce hands-on, inquiry-based activities. In 2010, this NSF (GK-12)-funded program involved 18 biology graduate student fellows, 11 fellow-teacher teams in 5 school districts, and 15 university faculty members. Learning and attitudinal outcomes for participants are being used to measure the effectiveness of the facilitated partnerships. Professional development is a key objective for graduate students; and in attitudinal surveys over 75% of the graduate students credited the program with enhanced communication, leadership, time management, organizational, and teamwork skills. It is important for high school teachers to gain content knowledge and lab skills to ensure sustainability of activities; and all teachers to date have demonstrated gains via attitudinal surveys and concept tests. High school students in MBI fellow classes have also benefited as compared to non-MBI classes, with preliminary results showing learning gains for most tested concepts and a net shift in student attitudes about biotechnology. Qualitative interview and observational data are being used to substantiate these results.

Overall, MBI-facilitated partnerships have enhanced the graduate student educational experience; provided professional development for partner teachers; and generated learning gains for high school students through hands-on, inquiry-based activities.

Program information: www.georgiasouthern.edu/mbi.

~Dr. Laura B. Regassa, Biology
The CTLS hosted its 4th annual SoTL Commons on March 9-11, 2011. Keynote speakers were Bill Cerbin (University of Wisconsin-La Crosse), Jennifer Robinson (Indiana University) and Richard Gale (Mount Royal University, CA). Some of the schools represented by attendees at the conference were the Western Oregon University, University of Cincinnati, University of Georgia, St. Leo University, Mercer University, Air Force Academy, Aarhus University, Georgia State University, University of New Orleans, South Dakota State University, Armstrong Atlantic State University, Columbus State University, Southeastern Louisiana University, Augusta State University, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of South Carolina, Alverno College, University of Alabama, Western Carolina University, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Virginia Tech, University of Tennessee, University of Houston, Marshall University, Flagler College, Elon University, University of North Dakota. Georgia Southern presenters included: Susan De Bonis, Lorraine Gilpin, Lauren Bingham, Judith Longfield, Velina Boteva, Emmanuel Clotey, Kimberly Lawrence, Aaron Dilday, Ram Polur, Trent Maurer, Alice Hall, John Peden, Alison Rushing, Rose Mary Gee, Christy Dubert, Marie Graf, Laura Regassa, Ketan Petal, Don Slater, Nick De Bonis, Bill Levernier, Steve Bonham, Diana Sturges, Rachel Van Horn Leroy, Laura Frost, Joanne Chopak-Foss, Dena Hale, Catherine Johnson, Linda Mullen, Abbie Gail Parham, Jessica Orvis, Deborah Sauder, Nathan Palmer, Deborah Allen, Delena Gatch, Padmini Shankar.

Practitioner to Researcher

I am a former elementary music specialist, and in order to meet the needs of ten young students with profound mental disabilities, I was propelled by the methodology of service learning into a life-changing experience. A group of third grade students planned and implemented music activities with the special needs students, resulting in increased responsibility, compassion for special needs students, and development of music skills by third graders; and increased response to music and development of social skills by special needs students.

As a doctoral student, I began looking through a researcher’s lens. I became interested in the “SO WHAT” of the results that I saw in this and subsequent projects. Recent research led me to revisit the original group of third graders now in their senior year. Using a case study research design, I sought to determine the characteristics of an elementary service-learning experience and their impact on students’ future participation in service-learning projects. The qualitative data from surveys showed three highly-developed traits—caring for others, knowing I can make a difference, and social responsibility. Additionally, a sense of self-efficacy and interest in continuing service-learning experiences was demonstrated.

This study is a catalyst for my research at GSU—retrieving data from elementary service-learning projects and conducting longitudinal studies citing the impact of participation in service-learning experiences throughout the school years.

~Dr. Nancy McBride Arrington, Teaching and Learning

“The SoTL Commons is always the highlight of the year for me. It is a great opportunity to get new ideas, bounce my ideas off others, and return to campus renewed and re-invigorated about teaching & learning.”

“Your conference is one of the most intellectually stimulating and professionally rewarding conferences going. IT IS THE BEST!!”

“I really liked the conference and felt like it motivated me to be more engaged in SoTL.”
SoTL Symposium of the South

The 2nd annual SoTL Symposium of the South will be held on Friday, October 14, 2011 at Georgia Southern University for faculty and administrators at private and public colleges and universities in the southeastern region of the United States. The main focus of the Symposium is on ways to develop, design and complete SoTL projects (including dissemination via publication, presentation, etc., as well as practical applications to one’s teaching and students), and practical ways for working to foster, support, and recognize SoTL. For additional information, visit:

http://ceps.georgiasouthern.edu/conted/sotlsymposium.html

Faculty Learning Community for SoTL

The FLC for SoTL began in 2006 and has been meeting (with different membership) for five years.

The members this year were Trent Maurer (HTFCS), Diana Sturges (Health & Kinesiology), Deborah Allen (Nursing), Padmini Shankar (Health & Kinesiology) and Delena Bell Gatch (Physics). The FLC’s facilitator, Trent Maurer says the following:

“This year, the FLC for SoTL has four returning members (including one 5-year member and two 4-year members) and one new member. We will be conducting an original research project over the next six months investigating students’ motivations for taking Anatomy & Physiology I and II. We hope to adapt existing measures that explore students’ general motivation for attending college to the course level, limiting it to students in the allied health fields. This is the first disciplinary SoTL research project the FLC has investigated in its 5-year history. We hope to present our results in the spring at the SoTL Commons Conference, the SoTL Expo, and ultimately to submit it for publication.”

2nd Annual SoTL Expo

The 2nd annual SoTL Expo was held from 3 – 5 pm on April 13, 2011 in the Atrium of the College of Information Technology building. It was an opportunity for Georgia Southern faculty to present posters about their SoTL work, and for members of the academic community to see the work of colleagues and talk with them about that work.

Presenters included the following: Trent Maurer, Deborah Allen, Delena Gatch, Padmini Shankar, Diana Sturges, Don Slater, Emmanuel Clottey, Aaron Dilday, Judith Longfield, Kimberly Lawrence, Ram Polur, Abby Brooks, Laura Frost, Jerri Kropp, Mary Wallace, Sun-A Lee, Jessica Orvis, Jordan Mader, Mike Hurst and Shelby Shuler.

“This year, the FLC for SoTL has four returning members (including one 5-year member and two 4-year members) and one new member.”
This has been a busy year for my SoTL work. I currently have seven different SoTL projects at various stages, and at least one more planned for the fall. One of the more interesting is a project I started in Spring 2010 to examine the effects of introducing Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning [POGIL] into the Family Science classroom. POGIL takes a constructivist approach to learning, guiding students through the process of inductively building knowledge, scaffolded by their instructor. Although constructivism has its origins with several of the founders of Family Science, and we teach our students to take a constructivist approach when working with children, POGIL has never previously been adapted to the Family Science classroom. I chose my Family Economic Environment class to try it out because as a math-based course, it lent itself to inductive thinking. I still have much data to collect, but preliminary results suggest that students are learning more from the POGIL method than they have from more traditional lecture. Students have even commented how much they love the POGIL exercises and how helpful they find them to learning! I would encourage all faculty to look into POGIL.

~Dr. Trent Maurer, Hospitality, Tourism and Family & Consumer Sciences

**POGIL: Process Oriented Guided Instruction Learning**

**SoTL Resources**

- Peer Review of Teaching Project: [http://www.courseportfolio.org/peer/pages/index.jsp](http://www.courseportfolio.org/peer/pages/index.jsp)
- SoTL Publication Outlets: [http://ilstu.libguides.com/sotl](http://ilstu.libguides.com/sotl)

**SoTL Travelers**

Georgia Southern University faculty experienced in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) travel to other colleges and universities to give SoTL presentations / workshops / keynotes, etc. These “SoTL Travelers” are Dr. Laura Frost (chemistry), Dr. Delena Bell Gatch (physics), Dr. Lorraine Gilpin (Teaching & Learning), Dr. Judith Longfield (CTLS), Dr. Trent Maurer (Hospitality, Tourism and Family & Consumer Sciences), Dr. Laura Regassa (biology), and Dr. Diana Sturges (Health & Kinesiology). Normally 2-4 of the Travelers provide each session. For example, this semester sessions were given at Gainesville College (part of a USG faculty development series), Southern Polytechnical State University, and Armstrong Atlantic State University.
The special 5th Anniversary issue of *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning* was published in January 2011 by the Center for Teaching, Learning & Scholarship. The journal is an open access, double-blind peer-reviewed, academic electronic journal and is international in its Review Board, authors, and readership. The issue included Invited Essays, Research Articles, Essays About SoTL, Reflections, as well as Feature Essays by Pat Hutchings (Carnegie Foundation), Mary Taylor Huber (Carnegie Foundation) & Tony Ciccone (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), and one by Lee Shulman (former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), Essays by IJ-SoTL reviewers on how to write SoTL articles for publication, and SoTL Mentors to the World consisting of SoTL scholars available to mentor colleagues anywhere in the world about their SoTL ideas, projects, and applications. The SoTL Mentors are from Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, UK and US (including one from Georgia Southern). One reader from South Africa said that the issue was “stunning.” Authors in the issue came from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, UK, South Africa, China, and the U.S.

**Discovering the Process of SoTL Research**

Undertaking SoTL research as part of the Teaching Assistants Learning Community at Georgia Southern University has proved to be an extremely rewarding experience. Conducting a study on the perceived effectiveness of study guides as part of the TAs Learning Community (TAsLC) has taught me a lot about the research process, from its humble beginnings as a question originating in group discussion to the presentation of our findings at the 2011 SoTL Commons Conference. Through this SoTL project, I have developed skills and acquired knowledge in research methodologies formerly unfamiliar to me such as: the IRB approval process; creation of a research instrument; data collection and analysis; and interpretation of the results of preliminary research. Additionally, this project has taught me how research can be successfully conducted in a group format, under the direction of an experienced researcher, and in conjunction with assistance and support from a supervising department. Overall, SoTL research is a complex process that involves many helping hands, and being a part of this research project has helped me to better understand the intricacies involved in conducting quality research.

~Aaron Dilday, Graduate Teaching Assistant, History
SoTL According to Boyer, Hutchings, Shulman, et al

Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate (1990) first described scholarship of teaching as one element of a four-part categorization that also included discovery, integration and application. Since then scholarship of teaching and learning has been framed in many different ways.

Pat Hutchings and Lee Shulman (1999) explain that “a scholarship of teaching is not synonymous with excellent teaching. It requires a kind of ‘going meta,’ in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning—the conditions under which it occurs, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth—and do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it.” Barbara Cambridge (2001) suggests that this work “entails problem posing about an issue of teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to disciplinary epistemologies, application of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer review.” Kathleen McKinney (2004) describes it as “the systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, publications or performances.” Richard Gale (2008) maintains that scholarship of teaching and learning “involves the gathering and interpretation of evidence of student learning. It invites peer review and ‘going public’ with insights about how, where, and why students learn. In its dissemination, scholarship of teaching and learning influences teaching, learning and scholarship beyond the local context.”

The scholarship of teaching and learning generally includes: rigorous, systematic, and evidence-based study of student learning in one’s own course; the understanding and improvement of student learning and/or teaching practice as its ultimate goal; commitment to disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary peer review and appropriate public dissemination; impact beyond a single course, program, or institution – advancing the field of teaching and learning to build collective knowledge and ongoing improvement.

(from the Institute for SoTL at Mount Royal University; http://www.mtroyal.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/InstituteforScholarshipofTeachingLearning/ScholarshipDescribed/index.htm

~Richard Gale

Call for SoTL Mentors at Georgia Southern

A new aspect of “SoTL at Georgia Southern” is to have a group of faculty experienced in doing SoTL research available to serve as SoTL Mentors to Georgia Southern colleagues (in person, or via email/phone, or both ways). The CTLS will maintain a list of SoTL mentors on the SoTL at Georgia Southern website who may be contacted for SoTL consultation or mentoring. SoTL Mentors (on the website) can indicate if they are currently open to be contacted, or are mentoring to capacity. SoTL scholars are invited to volunteer to be SoTL Mentors by contacting Alan Altany at:
SoTL Voices

"The SoTL movement is a powerful force in helping us avoid ‘the great tragedy of teaching’ which is the ‘collective amnesia’ about what works and why in teaching and learning.” ~Lee Shulman by Kathleen McKinney in Enhancing Learning Through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Challenges and Joys of Juggling

"SoTL is important work because of its main goal to enhance student learning and development, and because it is scholarship. . . . The four standards (for SoTL scholarship) are 1) SoTL exhibits methodological rigor, 2) SoTL has substantive implications/outcomes, 3) SoTL is peer reviewed, and 4) SoTL is made public.” ~Kathleen McKinney

"Doing pedagogical scholarship (SoTL) does make you a better teacher. And better teachers are those whose students learn more... consider seven interconnected reasons that show how and why pedagogical scholarship positively affects teaching:

1) You explore the questions that interest you, 2) You develop instructional awareness, 3) You think more deeply about teaching and learning, 4) You improve for the right reasons, 5) It keeps your teaching fresh over the long haul, 6) It improves conversations with colleagues, 7) It fosters learning in new ways and from new people.” ~Maryellen Weimer, Enhancing Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning: Professional Literature That Makes a Difference

"Most faculty care deeply about their teaching and their students’ learning; many today are trying new classroom approaches in the hopes of strengthening the learning of students from increasingly diverse backgrounds and levels of preparation. But much of this work is lost to the larger academic community because it is private, undocumented, and untested. To build useful, shared understandings about teaching, growing numbers of faculty are now bringing their knowledge, skills, and commitments as scholars to their classroom work. . . . The scholarship of teaching and learning invites faculty to examine their own classroom practice, document what works, and share lessons learned in ways that others can build on. Many campuses are now recognizing and rewarding such work. . . .” ~Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

"We need to think of our teaching with the same intellectual energy and level of inquiry with which we think about what we do in our laboratories or when we sit down to write a poem.” ~Nancy Cantor

SoTL on the Web!
http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/sotl

Center for Teaching, Learning & Scholarship

1303 Henderson Library
P.O. Box 8143
Statesboro, GA 30460
Phone: 912.478.0078
Fax: 912.478.0099
E-mail: aaltany@georgiasouthern.edu

The SoTL Chronicles is edited by Alan Altany of the CTLS. If you have any information, comments, ideas, or projects connected with the SoTL Initiative for possible inclusion in a future issue, please send them to aaltany@georgiasouthern.edu.