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Case Study of a Shoe-String SoTL Center

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Abstract

This paper provides a case study of a faculty-driven, cost-effective center focused on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) at a small private liberal arts college. Prior work on teaching and learning centers has focused on large institutions. Our case study shows that a “teaching commons” (Huber & Hutchings, 2006) can be created at a small college (approximately 1600 students) with relatively little expense. Thanks to a grant from the Teagle Foundation, we were able to establish a SoTL center focused on the dissemination and production of SoTL. The center sponsors a biweekly lunch series (with 25% of the faculty attending each session), learning communities, and a summer grant program. Participation in SoTL activities has been excellent with 69% of faculty attending at least one SoTL event during the 2010-2011 academic year. The SoTL center has been instrumental in building assessment oriented skills and structural support for teaching effectiveness.

Keywords

SoTL, Scholarship of teaching & learning, Teaching & learning centers, Liberal-arts college, Assessment

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Abstract

This paper provides a case study of a faculty-driven, cost-effective center focused on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) at a small private liberal arts college. Prior work on teaching and learning centers has focused on large institutions. Our case study shows that a “teaching commons” (Huber & Hutchings, 2006) can be created at a small college (approximately 1600 students) with relatively little expense. Thanks to a grant from the Teagle Foundation, we were able to establish a SoTL center focused on the dissemination and production of SoTL. The center sponsors a biweekly lunch series (with 25% of the faculty attending each session), learning communities, and a summer grant program. Participation in SoTL activities has been excellent with 69% of faculty attending at least one SoTL event during the 2010-2011 academic year. The SoTL center has been instrumental in building assessment oriented skills and structural support for teaching effectiveness.

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Introduction

In 1990, Ernest Boyer argued that the very definition of scholarship in American colleges and universities needed to be reevaluated. Narrowly focused on discovery, it created a climate and reward structure that paid little attention to the value of teaching. Since this proclamation, much has changed and yet much has remained the same. Today many colleges and universities around the country have large centers focused on teaching and learning. Research universities advertise such centers as tangible evidence that student learning is a central focus of their institution. However, evidence of this culture change is mixed. Henderson and Buchanan (2007) found that over the past thirty years, faculty publications in SoTL journals have declined for research universities, but increased for comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges.

Shapiro (2006) points out that large research universities have still not shifted their focus “from teaching to learning” and that the university reward structure still favors disciplinary

research over the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). He writes, "Until provosts and deans begin to recognize high-quality scholarship on teaching and learning as comparable in importance to traditional disciplinary scholarship, we will not see substantive change" (p. 42). Arguably, disciplinary colleagues share much of the blame for this lack of culture change.

Robinson and Nelson (2003) describe in detail one attempt to change the institutional climate, focused on administrators and faculty at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). Despite Shapiro's pessimism, Robinson & Nelson show evidence of significant culture change at IUB. They provide impressive data about faculty engagement in a wide variety of SoTL related activities and it is clear from their writings that the reward structure at IUB has explicitly been altered to encourage research in teaching and student learning. IUB has a student population slightly over 40,000 and much of the literature on teaching and learning centers (TLC) focuses on similarly large institutions.

The context of small liberal arts colleges likely provides for some different supports and barriers than large, research intensive institutions. Large institutions are more likely to be able to support teaching centers with a full-time staff dedicated to running the center with a small fraction of their operating budget. They also need relatively little buy-in by the faculty to supply sufficient traffic through the center for it to be regarded as successful. Large institutions are more likely to have the barrier of disciplinary research being narrowly defined to exclude SoTL in their reward structures.

Smaller liberal arts colleges are more likely to be "teaching centered" where the primary criterion for tenure and promotion is teaching. Given this focus, one might expect considerable support for the SoTL at smaller teaching colleges. However, Reder (2007) argues that many liberal arts colleges take teaching for granted. The assumption among such institutions is often that they hire dedicated and passionate teachers; therefore the need for structural support of quality teaching may be less obvious. Reder states that "although small liberal arts colleges claim to care about teaching, the majority only give lip service to the idea" (p. 9). Financial constraints also are likely to contribute to this relative lack of attention to structural support for teaching and learning. However, if small liberal arts colleges do hire faculty based on their passion and ability to teach, such a faculty may be sufficiently welcoming of teaching and learning centers to make their benefits well worth the efforts needed to provide structural support. This would be especially true if a center could be run cost effectively.

This paper describes the development of a center focused on the SoTL at a small private liberal arts college with approximately 1600 students and 100 faculty. As a small campus attempting to establish a center during difficult financial times, we sought to create a faculty-driven, low-cost center that would support SoTL at our institution. This paper provides a case study of our model for a center. We believe the features that make our model unique are that, rather than full-time staff (faculty or administrators) dedicated to running the center, we have a rotating governing board made entirely of faculty; we have over half of our faculty participating in SoTL activities; and we are running the center on a yearly budget of \$15,000 (not counting personnel costs). This paper will cover the development of the center, the structure of our center governance, an overview of the center activities, data on faculty participation, an overview of the center's budget, an overview of administrative support for the center, and an overview of challenges we have experienced in the process.

Development of the Center

The center developed out of a series of events both on and off our campus. First, in August 2006, Craig Nelson of Indiana University, Bloomington led a half-day workshop for all of our faculty that centered on the link between pedagogy and student outcomes. Dr. Nelson's workshop sparked a broader discussion on campus about the importance of understanding how our pedagogy impedes or enhances student learning. In 2007, two Juniata College faculty members (Michael Boyle, Professor of Biology and David Drews, Emeritus Professor of Psychology) attended a Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) conference on SoTL. This conference highlighted the role of SoTL for understanding the link between teaching practices and student learning and Drs. Boyle and Drews identified the importance of having a focus on SoTL at our institution. Consequently, they approached the Provost for support. During the 2007-2008 academic year, the Provost agreed to fund a biweekly SoTL lunch series by sponsoring the lunches. Faculty, staff, and administrators could pick up a lunch from the dining service, charged to the Provost, and attend a SoTL lunch. Initially, because few faculty members were familiar with the professional literature in SoTL, faculty presenters were asked to choose SoTL articles from their discipline to share with the group. This lunch series helped to broadly educate the faculty about the SoTL literature and best practices in SoTL. In addition to the lunch lunches, the Provost sponsored an inter-semester workshop led by Anita Salem and Shirley McConnell from Rockhurst University that was designed to help interested faculty learn how they might develop and execute SoTL projects.

During this same year, we received a grant request notification from the Teagle Foundation for projects focused on the assessment of student learning. We took this opportunity to propose the establishment of a SoTL center at our institution that would help provide support for systematically improving faculty teaching and student learning on our campus. The grant proposal was for \$149,500 over three years to establish a low-cost, faculty-driven SoTL center at our institution. As part of the grant, we proposed to collect data on the center's effectiveness, on faculty participation in SoTL activities, and to then share our SoTL center model and experiences.

In May of 2008, we were awarded the grant by the Teagle Foundation and preceded to establish a center. During the first year of the grant (2008-2009), we continued with the biweekly SoTL lunch series (now funded by the Teagle Foundation grant) and began to research centers focused on the SoTL. We developed a governance model for our center (described in detail below), developed a mission statement, and planned the activities that the center would oversee. The second year (2009-2010) of the grant was the first official year of the Juniata College Center for the SoTL. A detailed list of activities organized by the center is covered below.

During the first year of the grant, we consulted with SoTL scholars including Milton Cox, who was then the director of the TLC at Miami University and Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, and Michael Reder, who was then the director of the TLC at Connecticut College. Our initial focus for the center was supporting faculty in the production of new SoTL research. Our discussions with Cox and Reder, however encouraged us to expand our focus. Through our conversations, we came to realize that there would be a small number of faculty interested in the actual production of SoTL research. The majority of interest among the faculty would be in the application of SoTL research and the development of scholarly teaching practices. Based on this feedback, we developed a mission statement which says, in part:

The Juniata College Center for Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (CSoTL) promotes professional development related to evidence-based practice in higher education. The goals of the center are to increase:

- open and honest discussion of issues related to teaching effectiveness at Juniata
- awareness of the literature on evidence-based practices in education at Juniata
- scholarly teaching at Juniata
- the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) at Juniata (<http://www.juniata.edu/services/sotl/mission.html>)

The above excerpt explicitly promotes both scholarly teaching and the SoTL (Kiener, 2009; McKinney, 2007). The main goal of the center is to create a culture of open discussion about teaching and learning that is informed by the SoTL literature. Both the activities of the center and the structure of the governing board promote this goal.

Governance and Structure of the SoTL Board

The governance structure of the SoTL center is to our knowledge, unique. Unlike most TLCs, our center has no dedicated staff. Instead, it is run by a rotating board of faculty members who each commit to a three year term. Every year, a new board member is selected to replace one rotating off of the board. During their first year on the board, the new member is the director-designate and receives a one-course release from teaching. The main responsibility of the director-designate is to learn about the center and the duties of being the director. They are involved in all board meetings, planning the center's activities, and attending and running those activities when possible. If they do not have a fully-formed SoTL project when they come on the board, they are expected to have a project ready to execute by the end of the year.

The following year, that person becomes the director and is given a half-time release from their typical annual teaching load. The main duty of the director is to further the mission of the center by encouraging scholarly teaching and the SoTL. In practice, this happens through planning and scheduling of SoTL activities, recruiting SoTL presenters, monitoring the budget, and acting as a consultant for faculty developing SoTL projects. The director is also expected to model SoTL involvement by conducting an original SoTL project.

In the third and final year on the board, one serves as past-director. In this role, the past director helps to guide the board's decision making and provide continuity to the center and support for the current director. At this point, they are also expected to be preparing their SoTL project for outside dissemination. The past-director receives a one-course teaching release for these duties.

Selection of the Director

To apply to the SoTL board, faculty members submit an application which includes a curriculum vita, samples of SoTL or scholarly teaching, a statement regarding his or her interest and experiences related to SoTL as well as a one page abstract describing an original SoTL project that they will conduct during their tenure on the SoTL board. Applications are due at the start of the Spring semester prior to his or her term and are reviewed by current members of the SoTL board. The main selection criteria are ongoing involvement in campus SoTL activities and SoTL related credentials. The name of the candidate selected for board membership is forwarded to the Provost for final approval.

There were several reasons why we chose this governance structure. First, the cost to the college is relatively low since no full-time or dedicated personnel are required. Second, by having a rotating board, the influence of SoTL will spread through campus as different members from different departments rotate on and off of the board. Different members also bring different skills, allowing support for a broader variety of projects than would be possible from a smaller or fixed membership board. This rotation also promotes campus-wide ownership of SoTL rather than associating it with a particular department or group of individuals. Third, the obligation to produce a SoTL project promotes skills associated with leading assessment efforts at the course, department, and institutional levels and the three year tenure on the board allows time to develop those skills. Over time, the number of faculty with those skills increases.

Overview of Activities

The SoTL center runs three main types of activities, all of which are focused on building a community of open discussion about teaching and learning that is informed by the SoTL literature. The activities include biweekly lunches, learning communities (broadly defined), and summer grants. Each of these is addressed in detail below.

SoTL Lunches

Though there are some exceptions, bi-weekly Lunch lunches generally fall into two categories. On one hand, examples from the SoTL literature may be presented, as in the year before the official establishment of the center. These may target particular research projects or somewhat larger reviews of teaching/learning issues. One recent example was a presentation of conceptual issues associated with critical thinking. In each case, efforts are made to provide significant time for discussion.

In addition to sharing SoTL literature, SoTL projects in all stages have been presented as mentoring sessions. Faculty presenters provide some background to their question of interest and their current state of progress in the development of a SoTL project. As the goal of the session is to advance the project, discussants are strongly encouraged to focus their comments on the presenter's project.

Some of these projects, such as one on improving student note taking, may be presented once a significant part of the literature review has been completed but before the presenter has committed to an exact methodology. Discussion then focuses on different ways that the SoTL project might be conducted. This discussion provides critical feedback for the presenter before beginning data collection. Other projects have been more fully realized, sometimes going through multiple iterations of data collection. For example, one of the authors was beginning to develop a measure of psychological critical thinking to be used in his department's assessment efforts. After presenting some background literature on critical thinking and some sample stimuli that he and a colleague had developed, the group provided critical feedback that led to significant changes in the instrument before pilot data were collected. After pilot data were collected and analyzed, another lunch session on this topic was held where attendees again provided more critical feedback that resulted in yet more changes to the measure. Currently, final data on the psychological critical thinking inventory is being analyzed. These data will again be presented at a SoTL lunch before being submitted for publication. A two-year project to increase student's quantitative reasoning skills in an introductory math course has also been presented multiple times during several stages, with feedback resulting in key changes to the methodology.

The SoTL center has tracked attendance at SoTL lunches for the last two academic years in order to assess the effectiveness of the SoTL center. During the 2009-2010 academic year, lunch attendance averaged 33 people with 21 of the 22 departments on campus attending at least one lunch session. The vast majority of the attendees were faculty members although there are usually a small number (approximately 3-8) of staff and administrators also present. During the 2010-2011, lunch attendance averaged 31 people with 21 of the 22 departments on campus attending. Across both years, at least one member of every department on campus attended at least one lunch. Attendance to this point in 2011-2012 has increased to an average of 45. Given 102 full-time faculty members and 117.67 full-time equivalents (counting adjuncts who also often attend SoTL lunches), approximately 25% of our faculty are present at every SoTL lunch and 69% of our faculty attended at least one SoTL lunch during the 2010-2011 academic year.

In discussing these participation numbers with colleagues at other institutions we have noticed that we have greater participation than most. One key difference between our program and many other TLC programs appears to be our firm root in the SoTL literature. Colleagues at other institutions have often described their TLC presentations as anecdotal and oriented more toward teaching-tips than evidence-based practices. We have been rather strict in emphasizing to those that wish to present at SoTL lunches that they must include SoTL literature in their presentation. Our focus, as well as the name choice for the center, emphasizes the evidence-based SoTL approach. This focus has resulted in an educated dialogue, rooted in the SoTL literature, which continues to evolve on campus.

While lunch attendance is a good measure of how well awareness of the SoTL literature and practice is being disseminated on campus, active engagement in the lunches as a presenter is a better gage of how many people on campus are actively involved. During the 2009-2010 academic year, 13 individuals presented at a total of 12 lunches. Ten of the 22 departments were represented among the presenters. During the 2010-2011 academic year, 17 individuals presented a total of 14 lunches. Twelve of the 22 departments were represented among the presenters. A sample of the current year's lunch schedule can be found on our website (<http://www.juniata.edu/services/sotl/calendar.html>). This means that approximately 15% of our faculty are actively engaged in the SoTL lunch series.

Learning Communities

Another way in which we have promoted an open discussion of teaching issues on campus and the development of SoTL related skills is through the formation of broadly defined learning communities. Like our lunch series, our initial learning communities focused more on educating ourselves about the SoTL literature than on producing any tangible SoTL products. All learning communities sponsored by the center meet in the late afternoon and provide wine, water, soda, and chips as a way of showing our appreciation for faculty time and to help build a sense of community. Our initial learning community was formed in the Spring of 2009 and 15 faculty and administrators met on a biweekly basis to read *Enhancing Learning Through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Challenges and Joys of Juggling*, by McKinney (2007). This book proved to be another excellent means of educating faculty and administrators from a wide range of backgrounds about the basics of the SoTL.

In the Spring of the following year, 2010, 14 faculty members met biweekly to read *Making Teaching and Learning Visible: Course Portfolios and the Peer Review of Teaching*, by Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, and Savory (2006). After reading this book, we suggested to the administration that we bring the first author, Dr. Daniel Bernstein to our institution to kick off the 2010-2011 academic year. As a result, Dr. Bernstein presented a morning-long

workshop to the entire faculty in August of 2010. To capitalize on this event, we invited all interested faculty to join a biweekly portfolio learning community that would focus on the creation of course portfolios. Seventeen faculty from 10 of the 22 departments on campus began the process of creating a course portfolio. Faculty were evenly distributed by rank with 6 full, 6 associate, and 5 assistant professors involved. New members of the learning community were encouraged to read the relevant sections of the Bernstein et al. book read by many of the learning community members the previous spring semester. Faculty drafted sections of the portfolio at their own pace and shared their work with members of the learning community to benefit from peer feedback. This learning community met for the entire academic year and continues in to the 2011-2012 academic year.

The SoTL center has also hosted an ongoing learning community for new faculty members of the institution. Initially, we invited all faculty who had three years or less experience at the institution. During the second year (2010-2011) we opened the group to all untenured faculty. The group was designed to be a mechanism for building a culture on campus for open discussions about teaching and student outcomes. Additionally, it was designed to support new faculty members in their orientation to the institution, an important component of "building teaching as community property" (Shulman, 1993). Because new faculty may feel isolated as they attempt to cope with a new job in a new environment, the structure of this group is less formal than the lunches or the SoTL-focused learning communities. As such, we do not limit the topics of discussion to teaching issues but also discuss tenure and promotion policies and procedures, campus politics, and any other issues relevant to faculty adapting to the institution. The group meets biweekly with a relatively informal atmosphere and a theme for the discussion. Guest speakers have included campus counseling and academic support services. Relevant readings are occasionally distributed to facilitate discussion. Again, by discussing teaching and institutional issues openly as soon as faculty arrive, we hope to acculturate them to continue an open atmosphere of critical reflection and discussion of teaching practices.

Along with the SoTL lunch series, these learning communities have been an excellent means of building assessment knowledge and skills across the faculty. They have resulted in interdisciplinary dialogue and new assessment efforts. To use the language of Huber and Hutchings (2006), these efforts have helped to create a "teaching commons," a culture of faculty engagement in the development of intentional teaching and learning.

SoTL Summer Grants

The SoTL center has run a summer grant program for three consecutive years. The goal of the grants program is to help move SoTL projects forward so that they can be shared through a peer-reviewed format such as a conference or publication. Funding is competitive and projects at any stage of development are welcome, as long as the project includes some form of assessment of student learning and the project is of sufficient quality that presentation off campus or in print is plausible. Single author projects are eligible for \$1200 grants and multiple author projects are eligible for \$2000 grants. The money can be spent entirely on faculty salaries or on materials needed to implement the SoTL projects. Half of the grant is awarded immediately and the other half is awarded when the grant recipients submit their grant report at the end of the summer. Successful applicants are obligated to a SoTL lunch presentation in the following academic year.

Overview of Costs

One original goal of the center was to be cost-effective. Our initial grant of \$149,500 from the Teagle Foundation funded the center for the initial three years. We have tracked our expenditures and break down our costs in to personnel and non-personnel costs below.

Non-personnel costs are the easiest to track and explain. Our current budget allows for \$4,700 in SoTL summer grants, \$3,100 in food expenses to cover the learning communities and lunches, \$2,500 in office and instructional supplies, \$2,600 in additional programming and wine expenses, and \$1,500 in travel money which can be used to sponsor a speaker or send a member of the SoTL board to a SoTL conference. These figures total \$14,400, which is a relatively small sum to support a culture of faculty engagement in the discussion and assessment of teaching and learning.

The personnel costs can vary greatly depending on the SoTL board membership in any given year. Half of the director's compensation is billed to the SoTL center so this amount can be half the compensation of an assistant, associate, or full professor depending on the individual. The director-designate and past director each receives a course release and the center is billed for one adjunct course rate for each. Again, this cost will vary depending on the adjunct course rate at different institutions. It is worth noting that only the costs associated with paying adjunct faculty to teach the courses lost via release time represent an increase in the personnel budget beyond what would be the case without the center.

These are relatively small costs to create a culture of assessment on campus. Faculty engagement in SoTL activities is incredibly high with approximately 25% of our faculty attending any one SoTL lunch, 3-5 faculty receiving financial support to advance a SoTL project in the summer months, and 10-17 faculty engaging in learning communities that support ongoing dialogues about teaching and student learning - including developing course portfolios that help to demonstrate actual student learning. Given the increasing focus on accountability and assessment in higher education, we feel the center has proven to be a cost-effective means to help build relationships as well as the knowledge and skills necessary for the assessment of teaching and learning across the institution.

Overview of Administrative Support

From the beginning, we have had strong administrative support from our Provost. Provost James J. Lakso supported faculty travel to conferences so that they could learn about SoTL and teaching and learning centers. When two of our faculty returned from a SoTL conference, the Provost agreed to provide lunches for a bi-weekly SoTL lunch series. During this same year, he also sponsored an inter-semester SoTL workshop and supported our grant application to the Teagle Foundation to establish a SoTL center on campus. The Provost recognized early on that SoTL was a good fit for our institution because of our focus as a teaching-centered college. The Provost has also been a regular attendee at SoTL lunch lunches which makes his interest and support visible to faculty attending.

At the initial stages of the center's development, the faculty handbook was being revised. During this time, with both Provost and faculty support, the definition of professional development in the faculty handbook was expanded to explicitly include the SoTL. Although

activities in the SoTL are still viewed differently by individuals and departments across campus, having SoTL explicitly included in the professional development definition for tenure and promotion is a clear sign that there is institutional support for engagement in the SoTL at our institution.

During the final year of the Teagle Foundation grant that founded the center (2010-2011), the administration (without Provost Lakso's knowledge) began a fund-raising campaign to create the *James J. Lakso Endowment for Professional Development*. This endowment was developed in recognition of his long-standing support and service to the institution. One of the main professional development sources to be funded by this endowment was the SoTL center. At the end of the 2010-2011 academic year, the endowment was announced, much to the Provost's surprise.

Having a clearly identified source of funds was an important development for the SoTL center as our three-year Teagle Foundation grant came to an end that same year. In order to show our genuine gratitude for the Provost's long-standing support for SoTL, and to acknowledge the new funding source for the center, the SoTL board unanimously voted to officially change the name of the center from the *Juniata Center for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* to the *James J. Lakso Center for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*.

Overview of Challenges

From anecdotal evidence and our participation data, it does appear that our institution hires faculty truly interested in teaching. It is likely that larger research-oriented institutions have greater barriers for faculty participation in the SoTL. For example, SoTL is often not valued in the same way as disciplinary research in the tenure and promotion process (Shapiro, 2006). While this barrier is reduced at small teaching-oriented colleges, it is not eliminated. Acceptance of SoTL research at our institution varies across departments. Some departments view SoTL as sufficient for the professional development of their faculty. However, some departments have made it clear to their faculty that while participation in SoTL is nice, it cannot replace traditional disciplinary research. If SoTL research is added to the already high demands on time imposed by teaching loads and disciplinary research, it becomes unsustainable. Junior faculty in particular feel the heavy demands of the tenure and promotion process without any involvement in SoTL. This is a significant obstacle and one occasionally expressed by our junior faculty. If their academic department does not view SoTL research as significant for promotion and tenure, it becomes an additional time demand on their already demanding schedules. This is especially true for faculty who perceive the methodological skills needed for SoTL as being distinctly different from those required by their discipline. Similarly, junior faculty may worry that if they need to search for an academic position elsewhere, SoTL research may not be as valuable as disciplinary research. In short, there is still a stigma associated with SoTL research. Independent of any perception of stigma, many faculty enjoy their disciplinary research enough that it exhausts the time that might reasonably be devoted to research. Further, the need to provide research opportunities for students requires significant faculty commitment to disciplinary research.

Another potential obstacle has to do with recruiting faculty to be on the SoTL advisory board. We have some faculty who are interested in this role and are active members of our SoTL community but because they come from small departments, they do not believe it

feasible to receive the half-time teaching release necessary to be the director. For example, if you are the only person at your institution qualified to teach important courses necessary for majors in your department, you may not be able to forgo those courses for a year. Accepting a position on the SoTL board then becomes dependent on finding suitable adjuncts to teach the necessary courses, a big challenge when living in a rural community.

From the beginning we recognized that the largest challenge to involvement in SoTL activities was going to be time. Demand on faculty time has increased across all types of institutions in recent decades (Wright et al., 2004) and any new activity is likely to be met with resistance for this reason. We attempted to deal with this limitation in several ways. First, we deliberately built release time in to SoTL board membership giving the most release time (half-time release) to the director. Second, we acknowledged that many faculty would be interested in learning about SoTL literature and practice even though they may not have the time to be active scholars in this area. This low-bar for entry in to the SoTL conversation is meant to help promote a culture of knowledgeable faculty and open dialogues about teaching and learning even among those not engaged in the production of SoTL research. Simply attending SoTL lunches helps faculty build the knowledge and skills necessary to assess student-learning outcomes. Given the increased focus on assessment by accrediting bodies, the SoTL center provides a vital professional development service that was not previously available. Third, we developed a SoTL summer grant program to reward faculty for working on SoTL in the summer when they have more time. The additional stipend serves as reward and recognition for faculty taking time to systematically investigate their teaching, examine student learning outcomes, and share their findings with a broader audience.

Conclusion

Prior work on centers for teaching and learning has focused on large institutions such as Indiana University Bloomington, which has approximately 42,000 students (Robinson & Nelson, 2003). Our case study shows that a “teaching commons” (Huber & Hutchings, 2006) can be created at a small college (approximately 1600 students) with relatively little expense. Thanks to a grant from the Teagle Foundation, we were able to establish a SoTL center on our campus. Prior to the establishment of our SoTL center, one could argue that our institution was guilty of, as Reder (2007) might say, taking quality teaching for granted. We had no structural support to help faculty address issues related to teaching and learning. We also had no structural support in place to help faculty build the knowledge and skills necessary for the increased assessment demands of today’s accrediting bodies. Due to the intrinsic interest of our faculty and the consistent support of our provost, we have begun to establish a climate of open and continued discussion about teaching and learning.

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