

What is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in Higher Education?

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At Illinois State University, we have agreed to conceptualize SoTL as **“systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public.”**

In work at the Carnegie Foundation, the following definition has been used: **“problem posing about an issue of teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to the disciplinary epistemologies, applications of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer review”** (Cambridge, 2001).

Kreber and Cranton (2000) view SoTL as **“ongoing learning about teaching and the demonstration of such knowledge.”**

While Richlin (2001) argues, **“The scholarship part of the process involves composing selected portions of the investigation and findings [or integration or reflection] into a manuscript to be submitted to an appropriate journal or conference venue.”**

Martin, Benjamin, Prosser, and Trigwell (1999) argue that the scholarship of teaching is three related activities: **engagement with the existing knowledge on teaching and learning, self-reflection on teaching and learning in ones discipline, and public sharing of ideas about teaching and learning within the discipline.**

Pat Hutchings (2002), senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation, reminds us that SoTL **builds on many past traditions in higher education** including classroom and program assessment, K-12 action research, the reflective practice movement, peer review of teaching, traditional educational research, and faculty development efforts to enhance teaching and learning.

Though there are connections among them, it is important to distinguish good teaching from scholarly teaching from the scholarship of teaching and learning. Though **good teaching** has been defined and operationalized in many ways (e.g., student satisfaction ratings, peer observation judgments, self reflective portfolios), good teaching is that which promotes student learning and other desired student outcomes. Good teaching will support department, college, and institutional missions and objectives. Decades of SoTL and other educational research provide us with a great deal of information on the practices that help promote learning (e.g., Astin, 1993; Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Scholarly teaching involves taking a scholarly approach to teaching just as we would take a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice. Scholarly teachers view teaching as a profession and the knowledge base on teaching and learning as a second discipline in which to develop expertise. Thus, scholarly teachers do things such as reflect on their teaching, use classroom assessment techniques, discuss teaching issues with colleagues, try new things, and read and apply the literature on teaching and learning in their discipline and, perhaps, more generally. Scholarly teaching is closely linked to reflective practice (e.g., Brookfield, 1995; Schon, 1983). This conception of scholarly teaching is related to what Boyer (1990) labeled the scholarship of teaching.

The scholarship of teaching and learning involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations or publications. “Study” is broadly defined given disciplinary differences in epistemology and the need for interdisciplinary SoTL. Presentations and publications may be local, regional, national or international. SoTL, then, shares established criteria of scholarship in general, such as that it is made public, can be reviewed critically by members of the appropriate community, and can be built upon by others to advance the field (Shulman, 2001). SoTL focuses on teaching and learning at the college level, and is primarily classroom and disciplinary based. Ideally, SoTL also involves application and use.

For a detailed discussion of definitions of SoTL and other issues, see McKinney (in review).

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