

# SOTL AT ISU

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University  
“*systematic reflection/study on teaching and learning made public*”

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## Congratulations to FY2010 SoTL Initiative Grant Recipients

Two Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Initiative Grants, each for \$10,000, were awarded to the Mennonite College of Nursing and the Urban Teacher Preparation/Pipeline Program for FY2010. Brief descriptions of their initiatives follow.

“Building Social Capital to Foster Development of New Nursing Professionals,” investigators are *Sheryl Jenkins, Elizabeth Carlson, Deb Stenger, Jamie Penrod, Cindy Kerber, Susan Kossman, Jessica Sullivan, Jose Mantilla-Acevedo, and Melissa Fox.*

Mennonite College of Nursing (MCN) graduating students consistently show less satisfaction with their classmates in relation to camaraderie, academic integrity, and ability to work in groups than with other aspects of the program. Additionally, faculty note a degree of incivility in interactions among students and between students and faculty. These findings raise concern about graduates’ development of collaboration skills. This project will explore the dimensions of student dissatisfaction with classmates and incivility to others and then develop strategies to build social capital. In Fall 2009, all MCN students will complete a survey rating classmates in the areas of camaraderie, academic integrity, and ability to work in groups. This same survey will be administered at the end of Spring 2010, as will a standardized program assessment completed by graduates. During Fall semester, ten senior student researchers will gather qualitative data through interviews with prelicensure students about dimensions of these areas. The student researchers will participate in monthly Journal Clubs whose focus will be to examine nursing literature on social capital, collaboration, collegiality and civility. The student researchers will be charged with incorporating these qualities as they interact with other students throughout the year. Student researchers will be asked to keep a journal noting their development of understanding these concepts.

“Becoming an Urban Educator: Intellectual Growth and Development of Social Justice in Re-Designed Courses Serving the Urban Teacher Preparation Program,” investigators are *Gary Creasey, Carol Benson, Judith Briggs, Elizabeth Hatmaker, Lucille Eckrich, Robert Lee, Kimberly McCord, Kathy Mountjoy, Dakota Pawlicki, Rachel Perveiler, Mark Temple, Jill Thomas, Laken Rippentrop and Emily Baudino.*

Since 2004, ISU has successfully partnered with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Enlace-Chicago to create the *Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline Program*. This initiative contains partnership programs that include pre-college preparation/recruitment of CPS students interested in pursuing teaching careers, urban teacher preparation and clinical field experiences for ISU pre-service teachers, and continuing support for ISU graduates who are now CPS teachers. One of the cornerstone programs in the Pipeline effort is the *ISU Urban Teacher Preparation Course Development Grant (CDG)*. The rationale for this program is to provide resources to faculty across colleges to redesign an existing course to better prepare pre-service teachers to work in underserved, urban communities. To date, 24 courses over three cohorts have been re-designed. Thus, the purpose of this SoTL project is to evaluate the efficacy of this multidisciplinary CDG Program. It is expected that students who take a re-designed class that has an urban education focus will display more positive knowledge/beliefs about urban education, more confidence about working in urban settings, a stronger intention to work in these contexts, and a growing sense of social justice as they negotiate this experience. These hypotheses will be tested by contrasting students who are enrolled in a re-designed course to their counterparts who are taking a parallel class at two time points during the semester. An innovative feature of this project is that the study hypotheses will be tested using a blend of quantitative and qualitative analyses that will target survey, interview, and course artifact data.

# SoTL Working Group Reflections

Cyndee Brown, Gary Creasey, Maria Moore, Josh Reid, Jim Thompson and Kathleen McKinney

In the Spring 2009 semester, six faculty/academic staff members participated in a semester-long SoTL Working Group. Each participant came to the group with a SoTL project in mind or in progress. The group met every other week for the semester using each meeting for various activities (e.g., discussing methodological issues and SoTL, offering advice and resources for publication/presentation, engaging in peer review of draft writing) to help support and move each other along on their individual SoTL projects. For their efforts, participants each received a \$250 stipend and three books on SoTL. Below are common themes about the experience that emerged from our discussion of written reflections by each member.

- The group was beneficial for both beginner/novice and expert/advanced SoTLers.
- The group brainstorming was important; we benefited from the insights of others.
- The collaboration and the peer support was wonderful.
- We were interested in and learned from each others' projects.
- The interdisciplinary composition of faculty/academic staff provided opportunities to learn from other fields.
- The flexibility of the sessions, where topics and activities varied and could be adjusted, allowed us to focus on what we as members needed and when.
- Accountability (having tasks accomplished, being at the meetings, giving peer feedback, leading meetings) helped us accomplish more.
- Shared leadership built collaboration, accountability, and a useful focus at the meetings.
- We all felt inspired and energized in furthering other SoTL pursuits.

A few example quotes from the reflections illustrate some of these themes.

“I am not certain which became of more interest during the course of our meetings, my own research agenda, or those of my colleagues.”

“...this experience has been an important reminder that collegiality is as important as everything else! So much of what we do, as we research our seemingly isolated areas of interest, is connected – we often lack only the time or intellectual curiosity to get together to see how exciting SoTL scholarship can be when we not only connect with our own areas of expertise, but with each other as well.”

“I knew little about SoTL before, and my exposure to this dynamic field has revitalized both my administrative and instructional personas. ... Inspired by the possibilities of SoTL-related research, I have already conceived a new SoTL project which I hope to share at the next academic conference in my field.”

“Even though our proposed studies were quite different, it was stimulating to note that different aspects of our research (e.g., theory; measurement; IRB concerns) tended to intersect at critical points. This process allowed for some very interesting “group brainstorming” and I am convinced that all of the projects are stronger as a result of the work group experience.”

“Group session by session, my nuanced understanding of SoTL deepened. It is rigorous scholarship. It is important and substantive. It is peer reviewed. There are public forums through journals and conferences to make SoTL research public, thereby improving our understanding of our profession. And, since SoTL focuses on the magic that can happen between teacher and students in the pursuit of knowledge, it is a joyful and hopeful activity.”

“Each of us shared leadership roles for the group, with our unique personalities influencing the experience of the sessions we led. My colleagues treated this SoTL-novice as a respected and valued peer, never condescending, always constructive, genuinely supportive.”

In conclusion, we strongly recommend involvement in a future SoTL Working Group if you want to learn and grow as a teacher via sotl, want to collaborate with colleagues from multiple disciplines, have a sotl project in mind or started, are willing to be accountable for progress, are willing to be a friendly critic for your peers, and are willing to share the work and leadership to run the group.

## Selected Websites Related to SoTL

<http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu> (Illinois State University SoTL site)

<http://www.indiana.edu/~sotl/> (Indiana University SoTL site)

<http://www4.uwm.edu/LeadershipSite/> (University of Wisconsin System SoTL site)

<http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/> (Carnegie Foundation Gallery of Projects)

<https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/vkp/> (Georgetown Visible Knowledge site)

<http://www.courseportfolio.org/peer/pages/index.jsp> (Nebraska Course Portfolio site)

# How Do Graduate Students Become Autonomous Learners? A Student-Faculty-Staff Conversation

Patricia Jarvis and Kelly Kraft, Psychology

On April 9, 2009 a conversation between faculty, students, and staff about promoting learner autonomy with graduate students took place. Dr. Patricia Jarvis, Professor of Psychology and Summer SoTL Scholar, led the discussion. The 20 attendees included graduate and undergraduate students, as well as faculty and staff. The audience members suggested that learner autonomy in graduate students included taking more ownership for one's learning, working more independently than while an undergraduate, and being intrinsically motivated to be a life long learner. Graduate students high in learner autonomy were seen as those who seek experiences beyond that which is required, volunteer and are proactive in seeking learning opportunities, and are self-reflective and open-minded. It was suggested that faculty might increase learner autonomy

by giving graduate students greater choice in assignments and being mindful that certain classroom practices may undermine autonomy (e.g., too much lecture). Finally, it was suggested that instructors should model learner autonomy and reward it in their graduate students as well as inform students about learning opportunities beyond the classroom that might increase learner autonomy.

Notes from the event contain a more in depth report of this discussion and are posted on the Learner Autonomy web page (<http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/castlAahe/autoWeb.shtml>). Notes from two similar conversations are posted there as well. A big thank you to Kelly Kraft, an undergraduate, who took notes for the event and to Chasity Logan at CTLT for helping set up the space for the conversation and helping with the refreshments.

## Three SoTL ISU Workshops a Success

On February 27, 2009, sixteen graduate students representing six academic departments on campus attended a four-hour beginner's workshop on the scholarship of teaching and learning. Each student received three SoTL books, an usb, a certificate of completion, and breakfast. Students learned some of the basics about doing SoTL work and began to design a SoTL study. The students were a great group!

On July 22, 2009, 17 Illinois State faculty and staff new to SoTL attended a four-hour workshop about the basics of SoTL. Each participant received \$200, a book, and lunch.

On September 11, 2009, we conducted a workshop on SoTL and IRB issues and forms. Approximately twelve participants were able to work on their IRB Protocol during the workshop.

## Selected Upcoming Events and Opportunities to Support SoTL Work

### *New ISU SoTL Publication*

Throughout the summer and fall of 2009, members of the Illinois State University community are producing a publication of brief "reflective essays" and "research notes" of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning work about Illinois State students that has been conducted in the last six years. We hope to have about 15 papers in the publication. Limited hard copies will be printed. Look for an on-line version in spring 2010.

### *Upcoming SoTL Working Group*

We hope to offer another SoTL Working Group opportunity in fall of 2010. See the article in this issue describing the Spring 2009 SoTL Working Group.

### *Individual Consulting for SoTL Projects*

Thinking about a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) project? Need some advice on design? Working on a draft SoTL abstract or paper or presentation? Would you like some feedback on your draft submission or ideas for making your work public? Contact Kathleen McKinney at [kmckinne@ilstu.edu](mailto:kmckinne@ilstu.edu) for a meeting and/or send written work via email and I will send feedback promptly to you.

### *SoTL Scholars Group*

We are planning a larger, long-term SoTL Scholars Research Group to collaborate, share, and for peer support and review of SoTL projects. More information will be forthcoming.

## SoTL Travel Grants Awarded in 2008-2009

In FY09, the Cross Chair offered two rounds of SoTL travel grants to partially support travel to share SoTL work. Across the two rounds of grants, 25 individuals applied; 14 people from 12 departments were funded up to \$700 each for a total of \$7,150.00. Below are two travel grant reports from this larger group.

*Phyllis McCluskey-Titus, Educational Administration and Foundations*

With the support provided through the SoTL Travel Grant process, I attended the NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) Conference in March. This conference is for student affairs administrators and typically program sessions are focused on applied research that supports excellence in practice. It has been my mission since being introduced to SoTL to show student affairs practitioners the value of assessing learning in the many out-of-class educational activities and programs that are developed and presented by my colleagues. I was fortunate enough to have two programs about my teaching and learning research (SoTL) accepted for presentation at this conference.

Program #1: *Shared Service-Shared Learning: First Year and Graduate Student Partnerships* presented the results of four years of research about what undergraduate and graduate students learned while working together on a service project. I co-presented with my EAF colleague Wendy Troxel and we represented other ISU faculty and staff, Jodi Hallsten and Erin Pearce, who also have been participants in this research project. We had 20 people attend our session and there was good interaction (through creative activities) and dialogue about the methodology and the preliminary results of our research.

Program #2: *Faculty Fellows Research Forum: Highlighting Current Work of Senior Faculty* was a research seminar highlighting two major research projects, one quantitative and completed, and my SoTL research study which is qualitative and in process. The focus of my presentation was to outline the research study and share the rationale and background, discuss the methodology, and explain to the audience the process used to develop the study and collect the data. There were 40 people in attendance and the feedback we received was outstanding. So great was the response to this presentation that I have been asked to present again next year and share some of the results of this research study.

*Craig C. McLaughlan, Chemistry*

I attended the “Inaugural Conference on Classroom Response Systems: Innovations and Best Practices” in November. The conference objectives were: 1. Compare and contrast innovations in classroom response systems that lead to better student engagement, foster greater critical thinking, provide effective assessment and evaluation, and offer other benefits for faculty and students. 2. Describe “best practices” in the use of classroom response systems.

The greatest impact of the conference for me came from the keynote addresses by Dr. Doug Duncan and Dr. Tim Stelzer. Their insights from over ten years experience in using clickers in physics classrooms were very valuable. Although I feel that I have a good grasp of the literature in the clicker field and how to use the technology well, they provided up-to-date references and data from their Colorado and UIUC studies, respectively, which will help in my classroom. For instance, I presented about getting students to “buy in” to the technology use, but I will change my methods based on their talks – it seems that stressing the meta-cognitive value of the method to the students has been shown to increase their participation with the technology. Relatively recent results stressing the value of good, insightful questions and the advantages of peer instruction were highlighted. As such, I will continue to improve my question base and to more widely disseminate my work. Exposure to literature from disparate disciplines showed many working towards the same goals but unaware of each others’ work.

I presented in the Health Sciences session, as my paper was deemed of sufficient general interest to be presented outside my STEM area. It included data from 4 semesters of pilot studies on engagement and involvement in general and advanced chemistry courses. Most of my data concern perception, and my own analyses showed no significant course grade gains from semester to semester. By listening to others, however, I discovered possible new ways to analyze this data and ways to better assess the efficacy of new methods. In terms of SoTL, this was the highlight of the conference for me. The main message of the conference was that student engagement is an important part of student learning and, most importantly, that faculty can directly impact this engagement through their actions. The technology of clickers alone cannot increase engagement but through *effective* use, we as faculty can increase student engagement and, therefore, promote learning outcomes.

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