SOTL AT ISU

A Celebration of SoTL

Maria Moore, Communication and SoTL Scholar-Mentor

The Cross Chair for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) hosted an event to celebrate accomplishments of faculty, students, and staff at Illinois State University on April 17th at the Bone Student Center. ISU President Larry Dietz and former Provost Sheri Noren Everts addressed the gathered SoTL scholars, acknowledging the critical and strategic importance of SoTL scholarship in supporting the vision and mission of our university.

The event included a discussion of SoTL work presented by The Dr. John Chizmar & Dr. Anthony Ostrosky Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award winner for 2014, Professor Cheri Simonds. The attendees were delighted to acknowledge the presence of Dr. Chizmar at this celebration.

In discussing her SoTL scholarship in the Communication discipline, Simonds stated that the link between teaching and learning is communication, a clear justification for her research agenda. She discussed her research into the best practices of teaching communication competencies, a particular interest in her role as the Director of Communication and Critical Inquiry, which provides communication teachers with the tools they need to effectively teach Com 110. Simonds also discussed her seminal research work in assessment and speech evaluation.

The new edition of *Gauisus: Selected Scholarship on Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University, 2014* was unveiled, honoring the authors, editors, reviewers, and support team responsible for creating and producing the electronic journal. The newly designed, fully online publication can be found at http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu. Other campus-wide SoTL accomplishments acknowledged were the Fall and Spring SoTL Scholar-Mentors; SoTL workshop attendees from the past year; members of the Spring SoTL writing circle; small grant and travel grant recipients; the SoTL summer mentoring program; the Spencer Grant team; and the SoTL Resource group.

Cross Chair in SoTL, Kathleen McKinney, described the event. "We have many people involved in SoTL in various ways here at ISU. It is wonderful to take the time for public celebration of their efforts to study, or support the study, of our students' learning and share our findings in order to enhance our students' development, learning, and success." Phyllis McCluskey-Titus, 2014 SoTL Scholar-Mentor and Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Administration & Foundations added "SoTL research makes it possible for faculty and staff to intentionally structure learning opportunities for students both inside and outside the classroom. This celebration is one way to recognize the scholarship currently taking place and for the campus community to learn more about how we all can use this important research in practice."

Recipients of FY15 SoTL Small Grants

The required focus of grants for FY15 was SoTL research on student learning outcomes from participation in research, scholarship, or creative activities. The following teams received grants from $3,200 to $4,500.

Rebekka Darner Gougis & Janet Stomberg, BIO, *A Future Teacher and a Graduate Student's Differential Benefits of Participation as a Member of an Educational Research Team: A Comparative Case Study.*

Richard Hughes, HIS (and graduate student to be named) *Historians and History Teachers: Collaborative Conversations*

Lydia Kyei-Blankson & Parul Gupta, EAF, *Student Involvement in the Production of Scholarly Publications:* *Practices, Challenges, and Lessons Learned from Faculty Research Mentorships and Collaborations*

Phyllis McCluskey-Titus and team of current and past graduate students, EAF, *How Participation in Out-of-Class Research and Assessment Projects Contributed to Learning Outcomes in a Student Affairs Graduate Program*

Kevin Rich (and student to be named), THE, *Experiential Learning through Creation of a Performance Piece about YouthBuild*

Corinne Zimmerman, Thomas Critchfield, & Emilio Lobato, PSY, *An Examination of Psychology Students' Beliefs about the Nature of Science: The Role of Research Experience*

The ISU Mentorship Program: Identifying Critical "Soft Skill" Outcomes (A SoTL Small Grant Report)

Gary Creasey, Psychology

The development of content knowledge is a highly prized skill in the classroom context. However, in a survey of Fortune 1000 executives, the development of "soft skills"—such as relationship building, self-efficacy and self-direction—were the most diagnostic of a trainable, retainable, well-rounded new employee (Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2011). Whereas such skills may be attainable in traditional classroom environments, youth development programs with a civic engagement component may hold considerable promise in the development of these critical dispositions (Larson, 2006). The acquisition of "soft skills" in civic engagement work has not been well documented via SoTL professionals (Connor, 2010). To address this gap, the ontogeny of soft skill acquisition in college student mentors in the CONNECT Program was assessed.

CONNECT (*Civic Opportunities to Network Needs for Educational and Community Transformation*) involves pairing ISU students with middle school youth attending high-need public schools. The program involves face-to-face and weekly SKYPE interactions, with a focus on connecting the middle school youth to the collegiate experience. A capstone activity involves a community enhancement project developed by the mentees and mentors over the course of the year. CONNECT is currently located at three Chicago schools and Bloomington Junior High School (45 total mentor/mentee pairings).

Over the course of the program, the college student mentors completed assessments of mentor-mentee relationship development, intentions to assume employment in high need communities, civic commitment, and expressed confidence in working in urban communities.

The study results indicated that the college student mentors displayed little growth in civic commitment and intentions to work in high need communities. However, they did indicate that their mentees had established close, trusting relationships with them and expressed significant gains in urban teaching self-efficacy. The mentors felt that they could more effectively work with youth in high need communities, enlist parent involvement and create community-engaged classrooms.

At first glance, the nonsignificant results indicate that certain aspects of the program failed to make a difference in core soft skill areas. However, CONNECT mentors undergo an intensive interview process and are questioned about their intentions to work in high need communities. Applicants who express little enthusiasm to do so are not admitted into the program. Thus, as CONNECT mentors scored very high on these measures at intake—one could argue that a ceiling effect was in place. Mentors did experience growth in relationship building and urban teaching self-efficacy over time. The latter skills are important, because there is a difference in an expressed desire to do something and whether or not you have the confidence to be an effective, change agent. In many regards, this was the most powerful outcome of this research. (References available from glcrease@ilstu.edu)

Reflections from a SoTL Scholar-Mentor

Maria Moore, Communication and SoTL Scholar-Mentor

When I first learned of the SoTL Scholar-Mentor program, I suspected that it would be a challenging yet worthwhile opportunity. As junior faculty, going into my tenurable year, I leapt at the chance to apply, as it seemed to be the right culminating experience to my early-career scholarly journey. I did not know about SoTL at all until I joined my first writing circle in the summer of 2009 after my first year teaching at ISU. But SoTL quickly became a critical research agenda for me as I built my body of work going up for tenure. It formed a key foundation as I was awarded both pre-tenure teaching and research awards—informing many of my publications, creative works, and conference presentations.

So it was with high expectations that I applied for, and was granted, the privilege of being a SoTL Scholar-Mentor in Spring 2014. I brought a slightly unique set of skills to the scholar-mentor team as an experienced creator of digital works. I was granted the chance to oversee the development of the *Gauisus* website and to continue the evolution of the SoTL site. My biggest responsibility came with the planning and execution of the *A SoTL Celebration* event held in April. While the amount of time required for my mentor duties at times seemed daunting, I was always able to prioritize this work as it was in service to others.

One of the best parts of the SoTL Scholar-Mentor experience was the collaborative nature of working with the other mentors and with Kathleen McKinney as our leader. As the other scholars came from different disciplines, I was able to learn a great deal from them and through their own mentor activities. There was such a wonderful creative spirit to our collaborative work, and it was deeply rewarding to see the success they had in their own initiatives.

If asked, I would encourage any SoTL scholar, at any career stage, to consider the mentoring opportunity. The work is enormously satisfying and the experience is transformative. And, you get to hang out with some pretty sweet colleagues as well.

The "Making SoTL Public" Summer Experience
Jen Friberg, Communication Sciences and Disorders and SoTL Scholar-Mentor

Over the 2014 summer session, six faculty members from across campus were selected through a competitive process to participate in the inaugural *Making SoTL Public Mentorship Program*. This program matched individuals in the process of completing a SoTL project with an experienced SoTL mentor to assist in the development of a product representing their SoTL study to be made public. Participants met formally and informally with their mentor to discuss issues related to their SoTL research projects and to advance their work toward public dissemination.

All program participants produced a completed draft of their SoTL work and an action plan for editing and submitting their work to outlets for sharing with others. Participants, with titles for their SoTL papers, are listed below.

• Bill Anderson (FCS): *Interrupted case studies: Connecting theory and critical thinking in a Human Development class*

• Shelley Clevenger (CJS): *Creative and Active Learning Strategies for Teaching about Domestic Violence in a College Classroom*

• Nicholas Hartlep (EAF): *Unwilling or Unable? Measuring Implicit Biases of Pre-Service Teachers in Order to Impact Teacher Effectiveness*

• Elahe Javadi (IT): *Online Discussion Patterns, Familiarity Fault lines, and Students' Performance in the Course*

• Julie Schumacher (FCS): *Implementation of Instructional Podcasts to Support Thesis Writing: Student and Committee Member Perceptions*

• James Wolf (IT): *The Role of Grit in Predicting Student Performance in Introductory Programming Courses*

Congratulations to the FY15 SoTL Scholar-Mentors

The scholar-mentors will work with the Cross Chair on all forms of faculty development and support for SoTL on campus, as well as on their own SoTL projects. This year's scholar-mentors are listed below.

• Jennifer Friberg, Communication Sciences and Disorders (in the fall semester)

• Michaelene Cox, Politics and Government (in the fall and spring semesters)

• Various faculty members and/or a graduate assistant on special projects (in the spring semester)

Developing a Disciplinary Position Statement for SoTL
Jen Friberg, Communication Sciences and Disorders and SoTL Scholar-Mentor

I have had the opportunity to chair the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Committee for the Council on Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CAPCSD) for the last three years. CAPCSD is an organization charged with supporting the development of high-quality educational programs that promote quality and innovation for training future audiologists and speech-language pathologists. As chair, I provided resources to assist faculty in developing or deepening their SoTL research agendas. Recently, I was tasked with overseeing the creation of my discipline's first position statement on SoTL.

Organizational change isn't easy, nor is it typically fast moving. This position paper needed to appeal to a variety of stakeholders, each with their own opinion of SoTL and its role in contributing to high-quality educational practices. My committee reviewed SoTL position papers from other professions, outlined our priorities, created a draft, then engaged in the process of editing and review until we had a solid paper to send to the CAPCSD Board for approval. Happily, the SoTL position statement was adopted by the Board unanimously in April 2014. Our position paper can be seen at: http://capcsd.org/resources/sotl_position.php.

Reflecting on this process, it seems as though the entire endeavor was successful due to a convergence of three critical considerations: timing, interest, and need.

In terms of CAPCSD, the Board expressed that the "time was right" to move forward, as resources (finances, personnel, interest) were in place to support the creation of this position paper.

As for interest, there was a group of faculty strongly advocating for a SoTL Position Paper within the CAPCSD organization. They sought guidance, support and input from experts to help advocate for SoTL as scholarly work.

Finally, this position paper was viewed as necessary advocacy by many CSD faculty to make the discipline of CSD more hospitable to SoTL work across the board. CSD departments across the country have varied in their acceptance of SoTL as true scholarship, and the idea that CAPCSD was willing to take the stance that SoTL research was important work worthy of recognition constituted a large step forward for CSD as a profession and for individual faculty seeking support for their SoTL efforts.

Perhaps you've noticed a lack of a position statement in your discipline to support SoTL. If so, the timing might be perfect to investigate the drafting of a statement to support SoTL as meaningful and meritorious to all within your discipline. The Cross Chair in SoTL, Kathleen McKinney (kmckinne@ilstu.edu), or I (jfribe@ilstu.edu) would be happy to support you in any such efforts. Feel free to email either of us for additional resources or support.

Final Reminder — Three Time Sensitive Deadlines

SoTL Idea/Project Brainstorming Session: Have a SoTL idea/project you are considering, planning, or have in progress? A brainstorming session on September 17 will be held from 3:00 to 4:30pm. Participants will work in small groups, talk through their projects, and obtain ideas from other group members. Resourses and support for SoTL on campus will be shared. Attendees will receive two SoTL books and refreshments. **RSVP by September 12** with a brief statement of your SoTL idea to sotl@ilstu.edu.

FY15 SoTL Presentation Travel Grants: These provide partial funding (up to $700 per application) for travel to present SoTL work. Funds may be used for conference registration and/or travel costs for a trip taken (and not fully reimbursed), or to be taken, to present SoTL work by June 30, 2015. We expect to award 10 grants. There are two application deadlines: **September 15, 2014**, and January 5, 2015. (http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu/grants/funding/)

The Dr. John Chizmar & Dr. Anthony Ostrosky Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award Call for Applications: This University-level award recognizes and encourages high quality and quantity of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) work at Illinois State University and in the discipline beyond ISU that contributes to the SoTL field, body of knowledge, improved teaching, and enhanced student learning. Full applications are due **September 30, 2014.** (http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu/award.shtml)

SoTL Writing Circle
Phyllis McCluskey-Titus, Educational Admin. & Foundations and SoTL Scholar-Mentor

This past spring and summer eight people participated in a writing circle where they had the opportunity to have draft SoTL manuscripts reviewed by the other participants. About a week before each meeting one group member provided a copy of their manuscript and directions about the sorts of feedback they were seeking to all the other members of the writing circle. The participants read and commented about the piece of writing in preparation for our group discussion. The author of the draft paper then led the discussion about the research and writing.

Meeting provided an opportunity to discuss not only the article itself and the type of feedback requested, but our individual philosophies behind teaching and student learning, the merits of different kinds of research methods to assess learning, alternative directions for the manuscript to take, and possible literature resources and publication outlets.

Topics of the draft papers included best practices in both college teacher evaluation and for teaching research methods courses, the relationship of student grit to success in instructional technology courses, differences in teaching methods and student learning in four applied disciplines, and how/whether research and theory learned in classes translates into practice in a field placement setting.

The group members, who were diverse in terms of academic disciplines and experience with SoTL research projects, have been able to share helpful positive and constructive feedback to assist each other with moving their writing projects toward publication.

Opportunities to Publicize/Share Your SoTL Work Locally

Gauisus is the ISU internal, peer-reviewed, online, multi-media SoTL publication. SoTL on Illinois State students is represented as research papers, notes, essays, posters, websites, videos, etc. *Gauisus* is published each spring with submissions due in late fall. Submission details are at http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/GauisusCFP2014.pdf

The *SoTL at ISU* newsletter is published biannually. We welcome 250-400 word summaries of your SoTL work about the teaching and learning of Illinois State students. Submissions are due August 1 or December 1 as a word file to sotl@ilstu.edu.

Authors in *Gauisus* are profiled in the **'profile box'** on our SoTL home page. Other active SoTL researchers at ISU may be profiled here. Send your name, department, photo, and a 2-3 sentence summary of your SoTL work (with a url link if you wish) to sotl@ilstu.edu for consideration.

If you have made your past or current SoTL work public beyond the local level (through published work, video, web site…), please share citations to that work (sotl@ilstu.edu). They will be added to the **list of SoTL publications** by ISU authors on our website at http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu/scholarship/faculty-staff_pubs.shtml.

Each January a **university-wide symposium on teaching and learning** at Illinois State is organized by the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology. Papers and posters on scholarly teaching and SoTL are presented. Please submit your SoTL work to share with your ISU colleagues (http://ctlt.illinoisstate.edu/events/symposium/).