

Institutional Transformation through SoTL: Initial Steps at South Alabama

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ABSTRACT: In her foreword to a recent publication [1], Mary Taylor Huber wrote “One of the questions many of us are often asked is whether engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning lead to improvements in student learning”. In this paper, we have flipped this question and present a scenario where participation in course redesign efforts aimed at improving student learning becomes the gateway to get faculty members engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

At our regional, public university in the United States, a faculty learning community (FLC) was organized to support professional development and encourage course redesign through the lens of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). One anticipated outcome of this project is to reduce the “puzzlement and frustration over the difficulties of documentation” [2] that can obfuscate the connection between faculty development and student learning.

As our institution shifts from a primary focus on teaching to one where scholarly productivity from all professional staff is expected - the SoTL Studio FLC provides the infrastructure to allow faculty members to participate in this shift while being supported in their transition. Through an application process, instructional staff can become part of a university-supported program, with tangible benefits towards making their scholarship public. A mini grant program supported the initial (2016-17) cohort of eight faculty members with four different SoTL projects. To participate in the program, faculty must: 1) identify a problem that affects mastery of student learning outcomes; 2) situate the problem in relevant literature; 3) analyse SoTL-based options for addressing the problem; 4) develop a plan that applies specific actions to increase productive student engagement; 4) design a SoTL project to determine impact; 5) implement the plan during fall and/or spring semester; 6) present or publish the results; and 7) serve as mentors in the next year's SoTL Studio.

In this paper we shall describe the kinds of projects being undertaken by our initial scholar cohort. In particular, we argue that our approach strikes a delicate balance between focusing on outcomes for learners and focusing on the faculty advancement and professional development.

REFERENCES

- [1] Condon, W., Iverson, E.R., Manduca, C.A., Rutz, C., and Willett, G. (2016), *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- [2] Hutchings, P., Huber, M. T., and Ciccone, A., (2011), *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered: Institutional Integration and Impact*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.