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From Two Box Lunches to Buffets: Fulfilling the Promise of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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The author argues that examples of success in achieving the goals of scholarship of teaching and learning initiatives on campuses are needed. The conceptual basis, critical aspects of implementation, and outcomes of a two-year initiative in a Research I university are described. The results show that a scholarship of teaching and learning initiative may attract greater faculty participation than other teaching-related initiatives, that elements of developmental scaffolding for aspiring scholars are essential, and that once these elements are in place, the desired scholarly products begin to emerge.

Background

Those thousands of us faculty, faculty developers, and administrators who invest significant portions of our lives to reforming or transforming our institutions need tales of success—with evidence that such ventures succeeded. Models of success are especially valuable if the setting seems unlikely or the outcomes defy predictions, as, for example, in an effort to increase attention to teaching in a Research I university. This is such a story.

Craig Nelson, professor of biology at Indiana University Bloomington, and I had our first conversation over two box lunches at a faculty development conference in October 1998. Craig's contributions to teaching and learning are nationally known. My wish was to build a climate of excellence in teaching at our research university, and I was new on the
scene. Craig thought that the best hope might lie in a scholarship of teaching initiative. This story began with that conversation.

Later, we drew an associate dean of the faculties, Moya L. Andrews, into the conversation. (Within a year, Moya became the dean of the faculties.) She also wished to advance teaching and immediately grasped the potential of the scholarship of teaching in a research environment. We three, a top-level campus administrator, a faculty member, and a faculty developer, stayed at the core of the initiative for the duration of the effort. Without the strengths and resources that each of us brought, the initiative might have had a very different ending.

A Conceptual Basis for an Initiative

A clear conceptualization of the scholarship of teaching and its relation to teaching is necessary if a campus initiative to advance this scholarship is to be articulated and constructed. Many conceptualizations have been offered (Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Richlin, 2001; Shulman, 1999). Ours evolved over a year or more into the set of relationships represented by the Venn diagram shown in Figure 1.

In this conceptualization, every teaching-related act can be represented as a point somewhere within the three elliptical regions representing from left to right, teaching, scholarly teaching, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Elliptical shapes are chosen solely for the convenience of representation. All acts that teachers perform in the name of carrying out their teaching assignments can be imagined as individual points within the large ellipse labeled “teaching.” Such points include the acts of materials development, grading, individual tutoring—every teaching activity in or out of the classroom.

Within this collection of teaching acts, some include specific criteria that characterize scholarly teaching, which Hutchings & Shulman (1999) define as follows:

Teaching that entails certain practices of classroom assessment and evidence gathering; teaching that is informed not only by the latest ideas in the field but by current ideas about teaching generally and specifically in the field; and teaching that invites peer collaboration or review. (p. 13)

Scholarly teaching involves objective inquiry into learning conditions and effectiveness. A critical requirement of scholarly teaching is that it incorporate current knowledge of teaching and learning as well as of the discipline. Finally, scholarly teaching must be open to review by one’s peers.

The smallest (rightmost) ellipse in Figure 1 represents the scholarship of teaching and learning. The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is rooted in teaching but extends beyond it. Shulman (1999) characterized this scholarship in the following way:

An act of intelligence or artistic creation becomes scholarship when it possesses at least three attributes: it becomes public, it becomes an object of critical review and evaluation by members of one’s community, and members of one’s community begin to use, build upon, and develop those acts of mind and creation. (p. 15)

The SoTL involves the creation and dissemination of original work that makes a useful contribution to knowledge and practice of other teachers. The broadened interpretation of scholarship represented by Shulman’s conditions is entirely consistent with prevailing thought among key educational reformers such as Schön (1995), Rice (1996), and Cross and Steadman (1996), who have attempted to make the scholarship of teaching operational since Boyer first popularized the term (1990).

Teachers should be encouraged to move those acts of teaching that are characterized by points exclusively in the large leftmost ellipse of Figure 1 toward the middle ellipse—in other words, toward scholarly teaching. To the extent that teachers adopt practices of scholarly teaching, their teaching will probably improve. Similarly, if teachers undertake acts of the SoTL, it will probably also improve their teaching, as well as
help develop them professionally and add to the body of useful knowledge about practice. These assertions stop short, however, of accepting either the proposition that scholarly teaching implies excellent teaching or the converse.

"Teaching excellence" is often confused with scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching. Yet scholarly teaching practices do not necessarily confer excellence on teaching. Conversely, all seasoned faculty know of colleagues who are excellent teachers—that is, those who excel in terms of achieving superb learning outcomes in students—without achieving any of the criteria of scholarly teaching. Indignation and opposition to the SoTL initiatives are justifiably engendered by the notion that scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching are what one must do to be considered an excellent teacher.

No ascending hierarchy of teaching excellence can necessarily be associated with movement from left to right or bottom to top in the Venn diagram. To represent excellence, we must invoke a third dimension perpendicular to the plane of the diagram. In this three-dimensional conception (see Figure 2) each teaching-related act represented by a point in the diagram has associated with it an arrow (a "quality vector") representing excellence. The length and direction of the arrow indicate to what extent the act is above or below an effectiveness norm in teaching.

Into what realm beyond teaching does the scholarship of teaching extend? The rightmost ellipse in Figure 3 can be interpreted as analogous to the leftmost one: It is the set of points representing acts that scholars perform in their disciplinary or professional fields in the name of research and creative activity.

Boyer's notion that the scholarship of teaching and learning spans the "tired teaching vs. research debate" is depicted in Figure 3 by the position of the SoTL ellipse between the two big ellipses. We can distinguish between the SoTL as an academic activity and as a campus initiative. As an academic activity, what the SoTL means is defined by the interior of the smallest ellipse. As a campus initiative, what the SoTL means may encompass the entire three leftmost ellipses. In other words, a SoTL initiative may embrace all teaching-related activities of faculty. Indeed, a SoTL initiative that does not embrace teaching and its scholarship risks being perceived as dividing faculty into two camps: those who improve teaching and those who write about it. A broadly conceived SoTL initiative can provide a resource-rich and opportunity-laden environment for faculty members who aspire simply to teach excellently as well as for those who perceive themselves primarily as scholars (that is, "researchers"). In fact, we have observed compelling evidence that faculty who have been unresponsive to teaching improvement initiatives can be attracted to a SoTL initiative because of its research orientation. This phenomenon may be visualized in Figure 3 as the activities of faculty converging toward the scholarship of teaching and learning not only from the large ellipse on the left but also from the one on the right.

Finally, what is the goal of a campus SoTL initiative? Over time, the SoTL initiative should exert a subtle influence, much like a gentle current in water, to move the teaching-related acts of faculty members to the right in the Figure 3 diagram. An initiative can be considered successful if the majority whose entry positions are located exclusively in the leftmost ellipse adopt only one or more of the criteria for scholarly teaching and if the majority of those whose entry positions are in the middle ellipse simply make their explorations more systematic and public.
From Conceptualization to a SoTL Program

A Celebratory Kickoff

Our SoTL initiative at Indiana University was launched with a “Celebration of Teaching” in February 1999. We sent personal invitations to winners of teaching awards, recipients of teaching-related grants, teachers of pedagogy courses for graduate students, and all others who had shown their interest in teaching in an identifiable way within the recent past. At an appropriate point during the celebration, each individual was asked to stand so that his or her contributions to teaching could be acknowledged. Personal invitations also went to deans of colleges and schools, department chairs, and promotion and tenure committee members. The president, dean of the faculties, and other key administrators and faculty members gave short talks of support and intent. A “Chancellor’s Professor” delivered the keynote address: Why Research on Teaching and Learning: Why Now? About 200 faculty members attended, more than in anyone’s memory for a teaching-related event. Sign-up lists were available for those wanting to become involved in further SoTL-related activities."

From Campus Conversations to Faculty Advisory Council

With the initial inauguration of the SoTL initiative to the national

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school to expand formally the vision of the university’s research mission to include the SoTL. The vice president complied and gave the first presentation in the first year’s program of presentations (see the next section). The partnership between the two primary academic offices on campus, Research and Academic Affairs, impelled faculty from both research and teaching orientations toward the SoTL.

We sought to include in the SoTL initiative all campus units associated with teaching and research missions. We consciously reached out to tenure and nontenure faculty in all seasons of academic life, professional staff in academic affairs and student affairs, librarians, graduate and undergraduate students. Furthermore, the SoTL initiative strove to collaborate with all existing teaching-related initiatives and programs rather than to compete with any of them. For example, an enormously effective collaboration occurred between the campus course portfolio initiative, which grew out of the AAHE-sponsored national course portfolio initiative, and the SoTL initiative. We were opportunistic in imagining innovative ways and themes for collaboration to advance the goals of all stakeholders through the two binding interests of teaching and the pursuit of new knowledge.

Another example of partnering with stakeholders involved the university’s librarians. Librarians generally see themselves as academics but do not always feel that others see them in that light. When invited to join and help grow the SoTL initiative, the librarians were pleased with the opportunity to participate with faculty in an obviously academic enterprise. They volunteered as consultants to individual faculty investigators needing assistance in locating unfamiliar teaching and learning literature, gave presentations to demonstrate the use of information technology to access SoTL-related resources, made free document delivery systematically available to scholars of teaching, acquired multiple copies of critical books on pedagogy and put them on reserve for faculty, and served on working committees of the faculty advisory council. The librarians found involvement in the SoTL endeavor to be both invigorating and meaningful.3

Making Scholars and the Scholarship of Teaching Visible to All

We decided that our own faculty, not outside faculty or faculty developers, should become the engines of involvement for the university community. Many campuses have faculty who have contributed to the scholarship of teaching for years. However, these scholars are not necessarily well known on their own campuses, especially if such scholarship does not count in local reward systems. We offered small grants ($1000) for scholars of teaching to present work already completed or well underway. These unusual “presentation” grants—given not only for projects still to be done but also a posteriori for work that may already have been done—were intended to make existing teaching scholars and their projects visible as campus-wide models. Later—“research” grants to undertake new investigative projects were added, as were “travel” grants to attend teaching-related conferences and make demonstrable returns to the campus SoTL initiative.

How expensive was the SoTL initiative? The total budget for all elements described in this paper was less than $25,000 per year. However, the SoTL initiative also used substantial human resources, office equipment, and material already in place and paid for through other budgets.

Many campuses already have small teaching-improvement grant programs. These can often be tweaked to enhance their productivity by making them SoTL-based. For example, a grant that was previously used to implement a teaching innovation would, as a SoTL project, also require data gathering and analysis to assess the effect of the innovation as well as disseminate results to peers.

We decided to cast the SoTL initiative as a coherent annual program of events, which was described in a professional quality brochure distributed to more than 2000 members of the academic community at the start of each academic year. In addition to describing goals and support for the overall SoTL initiative, the brochure contained photographs of presenters, their biographical sketches, and descriptions of their events. The brochure afforded plenty of advance notice and description of all events—13 events in the first year’s brochure and 10 in the second. Seventeen faculty gave presentations in the first year’s program and nineteen in the second. As an additional publicity measure, an e-mail announcement of each event was disseminated campus wide 7-14 days prior to the event. Event formats, times in the week, and locations were regularized in the hope that faculty would become accustomed to them. Most events were at noon, with buffet lunches provided as an added inducement for participation. In many respects, the brochure resembled a course syllabus, and the program of events an executive seminar. The American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) and the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) requested more than 200 copies of the brochure per year for dissemination to other scholars and institutions.

From whence came the presenters and topics for the annual SoTL pro-
Program Outcomes

The program has produced three types of identifiable outcomes: participation levels as measures of success in involving the academic community; new scaffolding or infrastructure elements as measures of support and reward for scholars of teaching; and scholarly products, such as instructional materials, presentations, papers, and the like as measures of advancement in the knowledge of teaching and learning.

Participation Levels

Initially, seasoned observers expressed concern at the cost of the SoTL initiative and doubt over its effectiveness in attracting greater faculty participation than other teaching initiatives. It turned out, however, that initial participation in SoTL events was more than twice as great as participation in previous teaching-related workshops. Then critics opined that the high participation was a temporary surge induced by the novelty of the program and that it represented an unsustainable level of effort. In particular, they found incredulous the notion that the high initial levels of participation could be sustained over 15 events, 13 in the original program and two that were added later, or about one event every two weeks in the fall and spring terms. When participation remained at or exceeded initial levels, skeptics ascribed it to the same faction of “teaching fanatics” attending every event. However, careful analysis identified that there were over 500 different individual participants in the first year and over 900 by the end of the second year. The average participation level per event in the second year rose from 53 to 75. By the end of the second year, almost 1800 stomachs and minds had been nourished at SoTL buffets.

Creation of Scaffolding or Infrastructure

The formation of a campus SoTL community was seen as a critical element of support infrastructure. The number of faculty working actively to advance the SoTL at this writing is difficult to count, but it is estimated at well over 100. Most important to the nurturing of the campus SoTL initiative is that the community encourages and supports its members and their work, transcends disciplinary cultures, and brings a vast array of resources to bear on issues and problems in this domain of scholarship. Some examples have already been cited. Faculty and staff members with specific expertise in SoTL-related topics such as framing questions, research design, qualitative and quantitative methods, and external fund sources also consulted with prospective scholars of teaching across the full spectrum of disciplines.

Altering the institutional reward structure to validate and reward the SoTL as an avenue of faculty work was another goal critical to its institutionalization. Variability in the way scholarship of teaching counts in reward systems across academic units is high. Prior to the SoTL initiative, the university’s summary report form for individual teaching activities required of each faculty member annually in all units was as shown in the left column of Table 1. Similar forms are used in many institutions. There are also sections on the form (not shown) for “research and creative activity” and “service.”

Category B of reportable teaching activities in the left column of Table 1 is generally interpreted as the development of new curriculum. Activities associated with improvement of pedagogy or with demonstrable evidence of improved student learning are not acknowledged or requested on such a report. Prompted by the SoTL initiative, the form was revised to include the new Category B shown in the right column of Table 1. Over time, the annual completion of this form by all faculty should help institutionalize the SoTL as a dimension of faculty work that is recognized and rewarded.

Campus interpretation of federal policy for SoTL efforts is also critical for studies in which students are human subjects. Interpretation of federal regulations that does not consider the uniqueness of SoTL issues, or application procedures that may appear excessively burdensome to prospective scholars of teaching, can thwart a SoTL initiative. Partly motivated by the initiative, campus-level administrators undertook a review of the university’s human subjects policy. Two SoTL community members served on the review committee. Others sent statements to the committee. The result was a revised, but sound, policy that significantly reduced the impediments to the burgeoning scholarship.

Access to institutional research or registrar data is also essential to scholars of teaching. Inability to gain access to background data regard-
### Table 1

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<th>Prior to Academic Year 1999-2000</th>
<th>Academic Year 1999-2000 and later</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A.</strong> Courses taught (weekly contact hours reported by course number in tabular form)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B.</strong> Development or major revision of course(s) during the year</td>
<td><strong>B.</strong> Activities directed at improving instruction, learning, or course administration. (Please describe rationale for/description of innovations, methods/measures for assessing outcomes, and results.)</td>
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<td><strong>C.</strong> Dissertation, research, and field work committees</td>
<td><strong>C.</strong> Development or major revision of course(s) during the year</td>
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<td><strong>D.</strong> Teaching awards and honors, including those of your students</td>
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<td><strong>E.</strong> Teaching awards and honors, including those of your students</td>
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for necessary access to institutional data. Once again, our campus administrators worked with the SoTL community to separate the factors and establish a policy for limited access to institutional data that met the essential needs of faculty investigators.

### Products of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

The productivity of a SoTL initiative follows and depends on the success of the two preceding stages: achieving faculty participation and developing essential infrastructure. Therefore, productivity may not become evident until the second or third year of the initiative, or even later. Furthermore, scholarly products influenced by the SoTL initiative may emerge in ways that are difficult to detect, especially on a large and diverse campus.

This concern notwithstanding, many projects, presentations, and papers were produced by the end of the second year of the SoTL initiative. For example, two projects led to well-attended and well-received sessions at the Lilly Atlantic Conference on College and University Teaching in April 2001. One was a project to investigate student misconceptions and naive theories in philosophy that expanded into a cross-disciplinary project involving misconceptions in journalism and biology as well. The other project was conceived and completed entirely within the scaffolding afforded by the SoTL community. A medical sciences faculty member describing herself as a “neophyte” with no prior experience in this domain of scholarship carried out the research. Her work illustrated the importance of institutional data access and other critical elements of scaffolding. Her studies are ongoing, and the SoTL initiative may fairly be said to have opened up a new avenue of professional endeavor for her.

### Conclusions

The reader who is heartened by this story of a successful SoTL initiative may well ask what the essential ingredients were and under what conditions a similar initiative might succeed elsewhere.

The first essential ingredient—latent faculty interest in teaching and learning—exists on all campuses, but often we neither acknowledge it nor use it effectively. Most faculty members, even in Research 1 institutions, derive their greatest focus and sense of accomplishment from working with students. Our experience in Bloomington confirms that faculty members do see teaching as a significant intellectual activity. Therefore, it is not necessary to create interest in the investigation of teach-
ing and learning issues, but merely to channel the existing interest into constructive and rewarding directions. A SoTL initiative may do this more effectively than any other teaching-related initiative.

The second essential ingredient of a successful initiative is scaffolding. To move from participation in events where other scholars present their work to the production of one's own scholarship is a significant step. Failure to accommodate the full spectrum of faculty needs for accomplishing this form of scholarship—needs as perceived by faculty themselves—can be a critical pitfall of a SoTL initiative. Moreover, the faculty themselves must be allowed to own and operate the SoTL initiative, with a little help from their colleagues in administration.

The final ingredient of a successful SoTL initiative is the resources provided by external initiatives, both regional and national. These include, but are not limited to, initiatives intended specifically to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning, such as those of the Lilly Conferences, the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), and the Carnegie Foundation. Other external resources include national initiatives to prepare future faculty and to advance course portfolios, as well as teaching academies. These resources offer rich possibilities for enhancing the success of a campus SoTL initiative. It is important to draw upon them.

Footnotes

1 See http://www.aahe.org/teaching/Teaching_Initiative_Home.htm.
2 Later this talk was given to representatives of research universities under AAHE sponsorship. The paper is available at http://www.indiana.edu/~deanfac/SoTL/0924sum.html.
3 Other examples of partnering are available at http://www.indiana.edu/~deanfac/SoTL/eventsdesc.html#events.
4 A statement (unpublished) summarizing SoTL issues for consideration of the process review committee in revising local human subjects policy was submitted to the committee and is available from the author.
5 The final report (including recommendations) of the process review committee reveals the influence of the SoTL initiative. At this writing, the report is available at http://www.indiana.edu/~rugs/irb_review.htm, and the essence of the revised policy is available at http://www.indiana.edu/~resrisk/hmpg.html.
6 For papers and presentations issuing from the SoTL initiative, browse "Event Descriptions and Event Materials" under "Events" and "IUB Resources" under "Resources" at http://www.indiana.edu/~deanfac/