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Reflection:

The SoTL group has been a great educational, professional development, and inspirational tool for my career. It has shown me how interdisciplinary SoTL is. Our small group covers a large breadth from agriculture, education to intercultural development all with direct applications to SoTL. I have grown and learned from this community as a “junior” faculty member working with senior faculty. Participation in SoTL has helped me improve as an instructor, and writer and increased my collaboration across campus.

The importance of prioritizing, valuing and implementing SoTL for UW and its success as a land grant university is essential. SoTL meets Wyoming’s land-grant mission: “UW is a unifying force expanding intellectual opportunity., advancing economic and cultural vitality, and contributing to the well-being of the communities that call Wyoming home.” UW should continue to pursue and strengthen SoTL to grow the foundation of teaching as research while improving UW for both students and faculty.

To define what SoTL for UW I decided to engage with the research and here is one of the definitions:

SOTL definition:

According to [Schulman in 2000](#) “For an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should manifest at least three characteristics: it should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one’s scholarly community.”

Our SoTL faculty leader and mentor, Dr. Dilnoza Furkatovna Khasilova, introduced our faculty members to the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Inc. [The mission of ISSOTL](#) resonated with our focus on the faculty group.

The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Inc. serves faculty members, staff, and students who care about teaching and learning as serious intellectual work. Through building intellectual and collaborative infrastructure, the Society supports the associational life that fosters scholarly work about teaching and learning. The Society provides this support by:

- recognizing and encouraging scholarly work on teaching and learning in each discipline, within scholarly societies and across educational levels,
- promoting cross-disciplinary conversations to create synergy and prompt new lines of inquiry,
- facilitating the collaboration of scholars in different countries and the flow of new findings and applications across national boundaries,
- encouraging the integration of discovery, learning, and public engagement, and
- advocating for support, review, recognition, and appropriate uses of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

SoTL work is not without its challenges. “Members of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) worked since 2018 with iterative input and feedback from people around the world to identify five [Grand Challenges for SoTL](#), now being shared in 2023. Although these challenges are interdependent, they are described individually in this site to better support research efforts.” Below I chose to focus on #2 and #5 Related Grand Principles as they closely resemble the challenges I have and currently face as an instructor.

[Related Grand Principle #2](#) *SoTL practitioners study postsecondary teaching and learning to better understand and improve how to encourage students to be engaged in learning. Engaged learners are motivated to value how, why, and what they learn and to continue evolving as learners.*

How can I get students to be actively engaged in learning? This is a million-dollar question many educators ask themselves, especially post-COVID-19 pandemic. Having a strong SoTL focus across disciplines could help strengthen our student engagement through using different research based pedagogical methods that are shared amongst the teaching & research community.

There are limited research articles including the focus of SoTL in the agriculture field. Focusing in the area of agriculture in [NACTA journal](#) (North American College of Teachers of Agriculture) there were 3 out of 22 articles directly related to SoTL in agriculture. The other 19 articles were focused on teaching areas but not directly related to SoTL.

[Rudd \(2005\)](#) addresses the importance of SoTL in an agriculture education as defined by [Schulman in 2000](#) “For an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should manifest at least these characteristics: it should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one’s scholarly community .”

Inviting this rigor of research into our classrooms and sharing of knowledge publicly amongst the teaching community could greatly advance our teaching at all institutions, including my focus on agriculture.

The field of Agriculture is changing as must the curriculum taught to adapt to current times. [Parr et. al. \(2007\)](#) address the challenges that are demonstrated in changing the curriculum for Land Grant Universities within Sustainable Agriculture. This research has demonstrated the lack of engaging student pedagogies since the 1990s (Table 1, Checkland, 2000). Focus has been put on including engaging experiences instead of traditional memorization. Students emphasized 3 main areas in the Delphi survey ([Parr et. al. 2007](#)): the need for experiences in the classroom and the field, experiential learning, and the opportunity to apply learned theory into practice.

Experiential learning (EL) programs have answered this call to restructure curriculum with engaging students. “Experiential learning is an educational model that views learning as the result of an interaction between discovery and experience. This model is based on immersing students in an environment with relevant, “real-world” experiences that allow students to build upon prior knowledge and learn in a more meaningful fashion.” But it does fail to recognize the importance of social interactions and its importance in program development and evaluation ([Deslauriers et. al., 2016](#)).

I would be ignoring an essential and human piece of student engagement if I didn’t include the work done in 2020 by Felton. A key component to a student’s success in the classroom are relationships. Felten addresses this with the need and importance of relationships in his book [“Relationship Rich Education”](#). Students simply have a positive relationship experience at college and it is a driving factor in their failure or success. When faculty invest their time and make connections to students in the classroom it can increase their engagement with a single class and/or their entire academic career.

[Related Grand Principle #5](#) *SoTL practitioners study postsecondary teaching and learning to better understand and improve the practice, use, and growth of SoTL. SoTL practitioners explore, share, and translate the knowledge generated by its diverse research approaches in order to improve teaching, learning, and higher education more broadly.*

This grand principle draws attention to a challenge of how to support and grow the use of SoTL within existing academic systems. There must be support to pursue SoTL from within our teaching faculty and university administration, and tenure and promotion networks. With time being valuable and unique job descriptions that vary amongst faculty, a university system must place importance and emphasis on valuing their teaching efforts by their faculty. Without this emphasis being included in a tenure and promotion system there is little tangible value for faculty to pursue SoTL. There are possible career consequences of dedicating time in this area vs. others such as research in current tenure and promotion systems. The nationwide call for curriculum changes must be met with an equal

change in our tenure and promotion systems to value and reward teaching efforts. These changes will require a support network of training and professional development opportunities for faculty to advance their teaching skills.

As I have reviewed the agriculture literature in regards to SoTL and different teaching pedagogies I notice a 10-year “repeat” cycle. I recognize my literature review is focused only on teaching in agriculture. I noted the start estimated with Boyer in 1990 to the NRC call from changing agricultural curriculums in 1996 to [Schulman](#) defining SoTL in 2000, [Rudd](#) reviewing it in 2005, then again in 2012 ([Bracke](#)) with focus on how to evaluate journals in SoTL in agriculture, natural resources, and the life science, then resurfaced in 2022 ([Gansemer-Topf et.al.](#)) with research on how different universities have included SoTL in promotion and tenure artifacts. [Karcher](#) et. al., in the 2023 symposium gives examples of how to conduct SoTL projects to benefit students. This literature provides evidence-based research on how SoTL works and can help universities incorporate structure to support and promote SoTL on their campuses. Symposium speakers note an increase in students meeting course learning outcomes, increasing student curiosity and engagement, and increasing workforce career-ready students with SoTL research.

Questions for reflection:

Q. 1 Why should educators pursue SoTL?

Q. 2 How can a campus start to support and emphasize SoTL?

Q.3 How can agricultural education use the SoTL framework to align education with industry and cultural advancement?

Suggestions:

A. One small step at a time. Pursuing a structure to evaluate measures of teaching success can help measure a SoTL project. SoTL can improve teaching and learning to benefit students, instructors, and the university.

A. Creating a training and support network for faculty is essential for its success. The university also needs to have a focused effort to include SoTL into the tenure and promotion system. Some institutions have been successful utilizing teaching centers on campus to hold training and revitalizing tenure and promotion networks.

A. The world of agriculture is changing at a quick pace. Our agricultural technologies, student demographics, and culture as a nation have quickly outpaced teaching advancements in the classroom. Agricultural education programs must adapt and change to meet the needs of our nation as well as our ever changing student body. Utilizing SoTL concepts from Schulmann: be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one’s scholarly

community, we can help each other to improve our educational programs at a faster pace than working alone. SoTL is an essential tool for our agricultural programs to “catch up” with our advances in agriculture and continue to improve our teaching serving all in the university system. I encourage agriculture educators to pursue SoTL to help disseminate these advances in agricultural curriculum and teaching practices across disciplines.

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