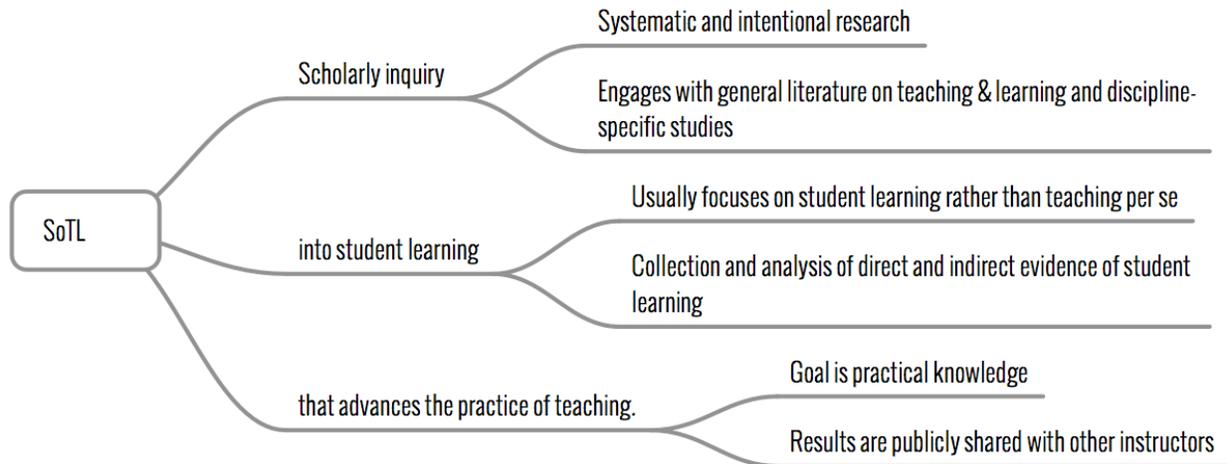


## WHAT IS THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING?

BY DAVID J. VOELKER

There have been many attempts to define the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in the years since 1990, when Ernest Boyer coined the phrase “scholarship of teaching,” but perhaps the most pithy definition comes from Anthony Ciccone (Emeritus, UW-Milwaukee), former co-director of the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars program, who has defined SoTL as “Scholarly inquiry into student learning [that] advances the practice of teaching.”<sup>1</sup>



This definition casts SoTL as serious scholarship—as rigorous as our disciplinary research, but likely with more flexible methods. The focus of SoTL, most of the time, is the relationship between teaching and learning. We want this relationship to be as strong and positive as possible! SoTL researchers thus study the relevant scholarly literature, collect and analyze evidence of student learning, and share their work in order to help improve teaching effectiveness.

Although SoTL is informed by cognitive science and SoTL practitioners sometimes use social scientific methods, SoTL is not reducible to cognitive or educational psychology. Rather, educators from across the academy (arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional studies) apply the scholarly values and techniques of their own disciplines to the study of student learning, borrowing methods from other disciplines as needed to answer their specific research questions. **In the most expansive sense, SoTL is an evolving way of thinking about how to improve teaching and learning and an ongoing strategy for doing so, embodied in an interdisciplinary, scholarly discourse.** As such, SoTL provides a means of enhancing teaching and protecting the integrity of higher education (especially when used to support institutional assessment).

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Ciccone, “Advancing the Practice of Teaching Through Inquiry into Student Learning” [workshop packet], OPID Faculty College 2006, p. 1. Ciccone notes that this working definition of SoTL was developed in collaboration with OPID and UW-Milwaukee colleagues. For a more recent effort to define SoTL, see Michael K. Potter and Erika D. H. Kustra, “The Relationship between Scholarly Teaching and SoTL: Models, Distinctions, and Clarifications,” *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 23.

There are many different kinds of SoTL projects, but they usually come back to student learning in one way or another. To help you develop a SoTL project focused on a learning problem faced by students, you might consider Pat Hutchings's influential taxonomy for SoTL research questions:

- What is the case? (This sort of project seeks to describe current teaching and learning practice in order to gain a better understanding of a learning problem.)
- What works? (This sort of project seeks to evaluate a traditional or innovative teaching and learning practice in order to assess its effectiveness.)
- What if? (This sort of project explores the possibilities not only of new teaching and learning practices but also of new teaching and learning goals.)
- Theory-Building (This sort of project seeks to develop ways of conceptualizing teaching and learning, often within a particular discipline.)<sup>2</sup>

These categories might help you envision a project, but you will also need to work on defining desired learning outcomes, identifying learning problems, imagining solutions, and figuring out what sort of evidence you might collect in order to assess student learning. The templates in this packet will help guide you through this process.



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<sup>2</sup> Taxonomy adapted from Pat Hutchings, "Approaching the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, edited by Pat Hutchings (Menlo Park, Calif.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2000), 4-6, online at: <http://tinyurl.com/h1tp5mc>.