Mentoring New Scholars of Teaching and Learning: The National CASTL Institute Model

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Abstract:
Since 2003, the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Institute: Developing Scholars of Teaching and Learning, has been committed to providing mentoring and support for emerging scholars. After conducting the Institute for several years, the Institute planning committee designed a more formal assessment of specific outcomes experienced by participants. Interviews and surveys of former Institute participants centered on four general areas of impact: personal; classroom and students; institutions, and; professional. Lessons learned included the personal and institutional impacts the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) has on faculty and staff participants and their home institutions, the value of modeling best practices for mentoring scholarly development, and the invaluable nature of being part of a community of scholars who share SOTL interests and values.

Key Words:
CASTL Institute, mentoring, outcomes, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.
Introduction

In 2003, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching introduced a new program element to encourage and develop research on teaching and learning. Founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1905 and chartered in 1906 by an act of the Congress of the United States of America, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is an independent policy and research center. Its current mission is to support needed transformations in American education through tighter connections between teaching practice, evidence of student learning, the communication and use of this evidence, and structured opportunities to build knowledge (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). As part of the existing CASTL program (Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning), the new program element called for the formation of “cluster” groups of colleges and universities to promote the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) at their institutions, within university systems, and nationally. These groups were reformed in 2006 and called the CASTL Leadership Program.

The CASTL program for higher education began in 1997 to give faculty members opportunities to address teaching and learning issues. The program had three components: one for individual faculty members to study their courses; one that addressed teaching and learning issues within disciplinary societies, and; a third, campus component for institutions to encourage this work among their faculty (Huber and Hutchings, 2005). The campus program evolved from individual campus work to teams or “clusters” of campuses to work on common issues. As one of the original cluster groups, the CASTL Institute: Developing Scholars of Teaching and Learning became part of the leadership program, with a commitment to provide mentoring and support for emerging SOTL scholars through 2010.

As the founding institution of this “mentoring cluster,” Rockhurst University had already hosted a SOTL conference in 2002, emphasizing disciplinary approaches to the work. Rockhurst University, located in Kansas City, Missouri, is a comprehensive university offering traditional 4-year baccalaureate programs in the Liberal Arts & Sciences, Business, and Pre-Professional programs. Master’s degrees are granted in Business Administration and Allied Health Professions (e.g., Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy). The private institution serves about 3,000 students with about 150 full-time faculty members. Anita Salem1, the guiding spirit of Rockhurst’s SOTL endeavors, wanted to replicate for others her intense SOTL experience as a fellow in CASTL’s individual scholar program, albeit on a smaller scale. Under Salem’s leadership, the “mentoring cluster” was joined by Columbia College Chicago (Illinois), Creighton University (Omaha, Nebraska), Truman State University (Kirksville, Missouri), Morehead State University (Kentucky), and the University of Houston-Clear Lake (Texas).

The first CASTL Institute was held at Rockhurst in June, 2003, followed by extensive long term planning by the cluster members at the American Association of Higher Education/Carnegie Summer Academy in Utah in July, 2003. Although the Institute evolved as it grew and changed locations, each summer Institute, held annually, lasted two and a half days and mentored 20 to 28 developing SOTL projects in sessions facilitated by National Carnegie Scholars. The projects were chosen by members of the “mentoring cluster” from those submitted by faculty members from the United States
and other countries. As the primary focus of the institute, the mentoring sessions provided a format for a focused exchange between mentors and new scholars. Mentoring as a strategy to improve work on teaching and learning is a notable one (Hutchings, 1996). And while not like formal mentoring programs that exist for an extended period of time (e.g., new faculty mentoring programs), the coaching from experienced SOTL scholars does parallel the expert/novice relationship in other programs. (See Cox & Richlin (2004) for a complete discussion of the important elements of faculty learning communities).

The institute also included participants who did not bring a project for mentoring, but who were invited to attend mentoring sessions and other elements of the institute. In addition to the mentoring sessions, Carnegie Scholars and contributors from cluster universities offered workshop sessions on basic and advanced SOTL topics. Keynote and plenary presentations by noteworthy SOTL researchers and movement leaders such as Lee Schulman², Pat Hutchings³, Craig Nelson⁴, Randy Bass⁵, Dan Bernstein⁶, and Richard Gale⁷ were main features of each Institute. Through mentoring sessions, workshops, and plenary sessions, attendees at each institute were engaged in SOTL themes and practices.

In 2005, the Institute moved from Rockhurst to Columbia College Chicago for three years. In 2006, a day-long pre-Institute leadership workshop for administrators and faculty developers was added. The Institute moved to Creighton University in 2008 for the final years of the CASTL Leadership Program. Key themes at the Institute have included the “Ethics of Inquiry,” “Creativity in the Classroom,” “Media Arts & New Literacies,” “Civic Engagement in the Classroom,” and “Professional Dispositions and Values.” In seven years, the Institute welcomed over 750 participants from at least four continents, almost every state, and a wide variety of institutions. Over 165 developing SOTL projects received Carnegie Scholar mentoring, and many became published works or served as the impetus for classroom or departmental pedagogical change.

**Examining Impacts of the CASTL Institute**

After conducting the Institute for several years, the Institute planning committee designed a more formal assessment of specific outcomes experienced by participants. Two areas of participation were examined to understand the possible impacts of the Institute for individuals as well as for Institutions. Hundreds of past Institute participants were asked to respond to a series of items on a survey hosted by Zoomerang, an online survey software service. The assessment also inquired about the impact felt on each of the mentor cluster campuses following years of planning, organizing, and supporting the Institute, and informal interviews with members of those campuses were conducted, by the member of the CASTL leadership group on that campus.

The survey invitation (374) was extended to a list of past institute attendees maintained by the host institutions. Seventy-two people responded to the invitation and completed the survey. Although a response rate of 19% limits the generalizability of the findings, a range of institute attendees participated in the survey. Of those completing the survey, 78% were faculty members, 12% were staff members, and 10% reported as other (e.g., library staff or retired faculty). In addition, 93% were full-time employees, and most respondents were female (65% female; 35% male). The majority of the survey
items assessed a range of disagreement to agreement with a statement. A small portion of items included response options of “yes” or “no.” The graphs representing survey results indicate question response options for clarification. The survey used was borrowed and adapted from one created by the University of Wisconsin system to assess their SOTL work. It was used here with permission.

The survey focused on four general areas of impact: 1) Personal Impact (personal behavior, attitudes, and values); 2) Classroom and Student Impact (classroom behavior and work with students); 3) Impact on Institutions (university, departments, programs); and, 4) Impact on Profession (sharing with disciplinary and interdisciplinary professional societies through presentations). The results reported below are organized around those four areas and include survey results as well as statements from participants and administrators from the mentor cluster institutions.

**Personal Impact**

One area strongly influenced by the Institute work included personal attitudes, values, and behaviors related to SOTL research. Responses to the survey showed that 70%-80% of former Institute participants agreed that they were affected positively; increased valuation of and interest in doing additional SOTL research was reported as well as their improved perceptions of their effectiveness as a teacher. Specific behaviors were also reported as changing; while 80% spend more time thinking about teaching and learning issues, 70% reported talking with their colleagues about issues of teaching and learning, and a little over half of Institute participants reported that they read more SOTL literature after attending the Institute (see Figures 1 and 2).

**Figure 1: Personal Impact – Values and Attitudes**

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![Bar Chart]

Teacher = I think I am a better teacher since becoming involved in SOTL initiatives.

Value = I value SOTL research more now than I did before I got involved in doing SOTL work.

More = I have become more interested in doing additional research on teaching and learning questions.
Individual faculty scholars reported that the mentoring session and overall environment created by the Institute transformed their thinking about teaching beyond the scholarly approach to the scholarship approach. Shreerekha\textsuperscript{8}, a scholar from the humanities, shared her perspective:

Since teaching involves, for many of us, an intense labor and productive passion, it is exciting to have participated and learned from faculty who are already practiced in the art of critical scholarship of teaching. I have set in motion a method with which I can gather good data to channel into my own teaching-related project but more importantly, I feel that CASTL helps set our ambitions high.

For this scholar, the Institute brought the collective focus of SOTL work to the forefront. In addition, she alluded to her new grasp of how research on teaching and learning raises expectations for teaching excellence.

Another scholar, Heather, shared, “The CASTL experience - being encouraged by colleagues and mentors - had a significant impact on my own desire to advance my level of research. It helped me to see the possibilities of my studies and recognize the opportunities before me. The end result was new found enthusiasm for my work!” Indeed, it is this broadening of the horizon that helps many scholars tap into the variety of perspectives that can be taken when building their research agenda. The interdisciplinary nature of the CASTL experience helps to make the research possibilities more transparent. Heather goes on to say,

“Attending CASTL aided in my understanding of the way SOTL research spans across disciplines and how it can serve as wonderful support and evidence to
improve my teaching. The collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the CASTL experience really helped me to become more aware of the resources and research that's available and how I can contribute to the body of knowledge."

Heather’s reflections echo the sentiments of many former scholars reporting that the Institute provided a space for developing research strategies focused on teaching excellence.

Classroom and Student Impact

Many survey respondents agreed that the Institute impacted their classroom approach. These responses suggest that Institute participants were able to take what they learned from the Institute sessions and mentoring and apply it to their own campuses and situations. Figure 3 shows that 60% of respondents reported that they teach differently because of the results of their SOTL work, and over 60% reported changing both course content and course design/pedagogy as a result of their SOTL research.

Figure 3: Classroom Impact

% of responses

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<th>Teach</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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Teach = I teach differently because of the results of my SOTL work.
Use = I incorporate the results of SOTL research into the design and teaching of my courses.
Change = I have changed the content of my courses based on SOTL work I have read or completed.

Beth, a former scholar from a member campus, shared her view that her “experience with CASTL last year was instrumental in both my classroom instruction and my research.” In fact, her mentoring session provided specific advice about classroom activities that might be used to enhance students’ critical thinking skills. Upon return from the Institute, she not only altered her course curriculum based on the feedback, but also incorporated surveys suggested by her peer-scholars and Carnegie Scholar mentor in order to effectively carry out the SOTL research. Kent, another former scholar, shared, “Just doing my research within the SOTL framework has made my teaching more rich and robust. It has led me to ask important questions about what I do in the classroom, things like, ‘How do I know this is working? What could I do to
maximize results?” Gintaras, a former scholar, sees the utility of the SOTL framework as it allows him to “ask specific questions and to look at methodologies and details to see if my students were actually learning the material I wanted them to. [SOTL] also allowed me to address problems I found in my teaching.”

The survey also asked whether respondents were bringing students into their research on teaching and learning as co-researchers. There was some agreement that the Institute had a strong impact in this area (see Figure 4). CASTL Institute Scholars often return to their work and bring students into their SOTL inquiries as researchers. One former scholar maintains a research lab of undergraduate and Master’s students with a constant series of SOTL studies underway. These students regularly present at regional and national conferences and several have become co-author on published journal articles on diversity courses and inclusive classrooms. Kathy, a two-time scholar, engages student research assistants, and observed that students “value that creativity and I think it gives them a wonderful viewpoint or a window into the fact that we think teaching is important to our practice (in occupational therapy) and that teaching matters” and feels “students really appreciate that.” At one of the cluster group universities (Truman State), students have served on SOTL inquiry teams. In fact, several students presented at the 2009 International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Conference on the topic of student-initiated courses. Additional students presented at an international conference on the connections between critical thinking and service-learning.

**Figure 4: Involvement of Students in Work**

![Bar chart showing percentages of responses regarding involving students in SOTL work.]

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<tr>
<td><strong>Tell</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Involve</strong></td>
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**Impact on Institution**

There was fairly strong impact reported on whether former Institute participants tried to involve their departmental colleagues in SOTL work and talked to them about such work. Over 70% talked with colleagues about their scholarship of teaching and learning. Just over 40% reported that they presented the work of their project to their department...
colleagues (see Figure 5), and 60% attempted to recruit their colleagues into SOTL work.

Figure 5: Impact in Department

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<th>% of responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involve = I have tried to involve my colleagues in SOTL work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talked = I talked with one or more of my colleagues about my SOTL work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presented = I presented my SOTL research findings to my departmental colleagues</td>
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A broader aspect of institutional influence emerged as former scholars returned to their home campuses and spread the word about the CASTL Institute opportunity. In fact, one former scholar, Kim, became a teaching center administrator and now recruits new CASTL Institute scholars from among the faculty.

My experiences as a CASTL Scholar led me to not only publish my own SOTL work, but also begin organizing faculty SOTL research groups. Since my time as a Scholar, I have become a SOTL recruiter of sorts on campus and am working to institutionalize this work as we transform our culture.

Additionally, Kathy “thinks of research and SOTL work as part of a culture of a department.” As a member of both the curriculum committee and a department that values SOTL, sharing SOTL research in order to transform the departmental and campus culture is an important goal for her. She understands that “the culture of SOTL shows students the importance of what we do as teachers and learners ourselves.”

The Theater Department at Columbia College Chicago is one example of how the Institute affected faculty culture. Four teams of full- and part-time faculty pursued SOTL projects examining learning outcomes in various program areas of the department, which were then further developed after mentoring at the Institute. This experience led to a broad understanding of SOTL among Theater faculty and the incorporation of two to three yearly SOTL projects into the department's assessment program. SOTL is now a part of the department culture.
Some scholars offered their own descriptions of the community building that occurred at the CASTL Institute:

CASTL relates to a model of community that we are supposed to have, to believe in: that we are a community of scholars, but it turns out in most practical cases, we’re not really a community at all. We’re isolated scholars pursuing esoteric questions in our own individual domains, and I thought the amusing and beautiful thing about CASTL was that it brought together such a diverse group of people that I got to sit down and talk with people in Communication, English, History, and Economics. And for the first time, I felt there was that community/scholarly model of the academy that was coming to fruition in CASTL that will hopefully be transforming our universities. (Gintaras)

As mentioned above, Kim formed interdisciplinary SOTL research groups that published their work. In addition, she now provides faculty SOTL training workshops as part of her teaching center role. At the University of Houston-Clear Lake, another cluster group campus, a former CASTL Scholar shared, “If I could tell new faculty one thing about what they could be doing in the first two years to further refine and develop their research agenda, it would be to attend the CASTL Institute and then to follow up with the feedback they receive.” This cluster group campus was fairly active in the CASTL Institute from early in its inception, supporting attendance at the Institute from anywhere from three to seven scholars and participants. One participant, who also serves as the Teaching-Learning Enhancement Center Director, shared,

The CASTL Institute is about much more than just refining and deliberating over research, it is about becoming part of a community of scholars who support and encourage each other from everything from refining a question to the nitty gritty involved in the follow through of a project. The follow through is what a campus community can often be so very instrumental in helping scholars to do when they return from the Institute.

This campus also provides open discussions once a month during the semester to allow for faculty to bring to the table any issues they are dealing with concerning not only pragmatic matters around their teaching but with research aspects as well. An example of yet another tool provided to faculty at this campus is a mid-term evaluation technique that provides faculty with supportive and constructive feedback from students about what is working and not working so well in the classroom environment. One faculty member gave this process credit for helping him refine his SOTL inquiry, since it shed light on what was not only of importance to him as the professor but also to the issues that the learning community at large were experiencing.

Summarizing the work at her institution, Julie Lochbaum of Truman State University described an innovative, pilot infrastructure for SOTL queries. To receive summer grants, faculty were encouraged to go beyond uncritically redesigning or updating courses to gathering meaningful data about effectiveness of changes that could be generalized to other faculty. SOTL research projects supported by Truman State’s Undergraduate Council included: efficacy of linked courses; interdisciplinarity in the freshman writing course; peer instructors in choral sectionals; undergraduate research in the classroom; and more (Truman SOTL, 2010).
Another impact area examined was the extent to which faculty worked on policies related to tenure and promotion at their institution. Since the CASTL Institute sessions are largely devoted to SOTL work at the faculty and classroom level, it was perhaps not surprising that only about half of participants reported that the Institute impacted their working towards policies that would include SOTL work in tenure and promotion guidelines (see Figure 6). However, some important impacts were felt, especially at the cluster group member campuses. Anita Salem, former Rockhurst University Dean and founder of the Institute said:

The impact at Rockhurst is clear. While it has always been acceptable to care about the quality of our teaching at Rockhurst, the discussions have focused mainly on the results of student attitude surveys rather than on investigations of the connection between course goals and student learning. This is changing. The faculty have accepted a statement written by members of our local Carnegie Seminar group that both defines SOTL and clearly states that it counts as scholarship in decisions of Rank & Tenure. Our deans are appointing members to the Rank & Tenure committee that understand the nature of this work and its clear relationship to our mission, and whose task is to make sure that faculty review processes both monitor and mentor faculty involved in SOTL. Of greatest importance is that we are finally beginning to ask the hard (and very messy) questions about how and what students are learning.

This shift in administrative perspectives on SOTL work as it relates to promotion and tenure opens the door for more faculty members to pursue these interests without the fear that it will hurt their chances for advancement.

Notable institutionalization of SOTL work has taken place at cluster group member campus, Truman State University. The personnel policies generated by the Faculty Senate and approved by the Board of Governors in 2009 include language permissive of SOTL work:

Whether scholarship is in pursuit of knowledge, application of knowledge, creative expression, or evaluation of teaching and learning strategies, it normally requires effective dissemination and feedback from peers in the profession (Truman State Faculty Senate, 2006).

The same policy lists higher education pedagogy as an example of appropriate research for faculty to undertake for purposes of promotion and tenure. Numerous departmental guidelines now explicitly approve SOTL work for promotion and tenure. For example, the policy of the Department of Society and Environment explicitly states that tenure and promotion must include peer-reviewed publications and may include “the scholarship of teaching and learning.” Part of the annual Promotion and Tenure Portfolio Workshop conducted by The Center for Teaching and Learning includes assisting faculty to identify samples of student work to include as evidence for assertions made in the narrative portion of their portfolios. The judiciously chosen student work appears in the portfolio appendices to support claims made for satisfactory teaching.
Figure 6: Work on Tenure & Promotion Policies

% of responses

Impact on Profession

The survey showed that between 40 – 50% of participants reported either attending SOTL related presentations or making presentations themselves based on the results of their CASTL Institute in-progress SOTL work to their professions (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Professional Presentations

% of responses

| Attend = attended a SOTL session at a national or regional disciplinary meeting |
| Present N = presented my SOTL work at a national disciplinary meeting |
| Present R = presented at a regional disciplinary meeting |
| Present In = presented at an interdisciplinary meeting (e.g., assessment, service-learning) |
Some CASTL Institute scholars utilized the suggestions and mentor advice as an avenue to completing the SOTL project and writing manuscripts for publication. One scholar from the 2006 Institute reported that she came back from Chicago energized to submit my work, spent the next few months writing manuscripts based on the feedback, and ended up with two published manuscripts the next year. The CASTL institute ultimately resulted in four published articles from my original SOTL study. Without the expert advice of my mentor, Alice Thomas, and the supportive environment of the Institute, these publications would not exist today. I consider my experience at the Institute as a true jumpstart to my career.

Science faculty who have undertaken SOTL work have also enjoyed success such as grant funding from the national discipline association to continue the work and the cover article of an edition of the national discipline association journal. Literature faculty members engaging in SOTL work have had their long-term project supported by the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT). Numerous faculty members whose SOTL inquiries focused on service-learning have enjoyed success presenting at state, national and international forums; and Truman State University consistently leads the state in amount of grant money won through its faculty’s proposals for service-learning.

**Conclusion**

The CASTL Institute appears to have made a very strong impact on individuals’ behaviors and attitudes, on their reported approaches to teaching and classroom behavior, and on sharing their work informally with departmental colleagues. These results parallel those found in the research on faculty learning communities and can lead to real change in student learning (Cox, 2004). The CASTL Institute provided an opportunity to publicly share scholarly projects, to be supported by a community of equally interested teachers from a diverse array of disciplines, and to be formally and informally mentored and encouraged in this scholarly investigation. Many of these early projects were formally presented at regional, national, and international conferences and published in a variety of disciplinary and SOTL journals. The National CASTL Institute achieved its primary goal of developing new(er) scholars of teaching and learning, and through the scholars’ public sharing of their work, advanced the SOTL field.

While the strongest impacts of the Institute were evidenced in faculty attitudes, values, classroom behaviors, and pedagogical advancements, survey responses also indicated that the Institute made a smaller impact on motivating participants to incorporate students into the SOTL process as researchers. This result is not unexpected as the original intent of the institute did not encompass promoting student work (i.e., there was another CASTL cluster who focused on student SOTL work. The book, Engaging Student Voices in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, edited by Carmen Werder and Megan Otis summarizes and samples the excellent work facilitated by that cluster group.), and it wasn’t until 2006 that the Institute began seriously considering the need to change campus culture and values as a way to support and sustain SOTL scholars’ work once they returned to their campuses (i.e., through a one-
day administrators’ leadership institute). Therefore, while greater impact through student researchers and deeper inculcation of the values of SOTL in campus practices (e.g., hiring, annual reviews, promotion and tenure cases) are desirable, the Institute’s influence on these domains is only beginning.

Although not directly reported in the survey, other dimensions of this program’s impact identified in campus interviews and post-institute reviews includes: (1) mentoring of faculty, (2) collaborations among a wide range of colleges and universities, and (3) the development of/for faculty development that necessitated “modeling” the best practices in teaching, learning, and SOTL. Faculty, both those who attended the Institute as scholars and those who participated, discussed the valuable role of being mentored and observing the mentoring process. The affirmation of the scholars’ work and the authentic engagement of the scholarly community modeled during the Institute often remind faculty why they chose the academic profession and what the community of scholars may provide them in professional development. While each scholar does not return to their home campus to replicate this, evidence suggests that faculty share their projects, talk about their findings with colleagues, and attempt to involve their colleagues in their work. The Institute participants, in many ways, serve as mentors their own home institutions.

For years, conversations, semi-annual planning, and active contributions of academic expertise produced a wonderful, collaborative effort among six institutions from several states representing different sizes and types of academic settings. This National CASTL Institute utilized best practices in teaching, embodied best principles of learning, and modeled the SOTL process. Seven years of Institutes allowed the cluster group members to refine this process, and present a model for possible replication elsewhere.

As faculty often find upon reflection, teachers learn more from the teaching enterprise than their students. As hosts of the National CASTL Institute, lessons learned included the personal and institutional impacts SOTL has on faculty and staff participants and their home institutions, the value of modeling best practices for mentoring scholarly development, and the invaluable nature of being part of a community of scholars who share SOTL interests and values.

References


Notes

1 Anita Salem, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics and Acting Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Rockhurst University from 2002-2004, She was the guiding spirit of SOTL endeavors at the school during her tenure.


4 Craig Nelson was Professor of Biology, Emeritus at Indiana University, a 2000-2001 Carnegie Scholar and the author of “Doing It: Examples of Several of the Different Genres of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” Journal on Excellence in College Teaching, 14(2), 85-94.

5 Randy Bass is Associate Professor of English at Georgetown University and Executive Director of Georgetown’s Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship. He is the author of “The Scholarship of Teaching: What’s the Problem?” Inventario: Creative Thinking about Learning and Teaching 1(1), 1-10.

6 Daniel J. Bernstein is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Kansas. He is the lead author of Making Teaching and Learning Visible: Course Portfolios and the Peer Review of Teaching, Bolton, MA: Anker, 2006.

7 Richard Gale was a Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and directed the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Higher Education Program until 2008.
Participants were contacted and given the option to use their real first names or to choose a pseudonym for this manuscript. All quoted participants chose to use their real first names.