

Finding Balance: Research and Teaching at a New University

Lyn K. Baldwin, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

Sharon E. Brewer, Associate Professor of Chemistry

Penny Heaslip, Educator Emerita

Gary A. Hunt, Coordinator, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Joanne A. Jones, Senior Lecturer School of Nursing

David MacLennan, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Anthropology

Elizabeth Templeman, Coordinator, Supplemental Learning

Authors' Contact Information

Gary Hunt

Thompson Rivers University

900 McGill Rd Box 3010, Kamloops BC, Canada, V2C 5N3

Phone: 250-828-5461

email: gahunt@tru.ca

Abstract:

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) combines college and university models of postsecondary education. Over the last two decades, the institution has struggled to find a balance between its traditional teaching mandate and its new research mandate. This paper describes that struggle devoting particular attention to the development of scholarly teaching at the institution. Compared to teaching, disciplinary research has fared well and now enjoys considerable institutional support. In contrast, the various faculty-driven initiatives in teaching tell a story of modest progress in a climate of limited resources. Crucial to this progress has been the creation of links to external bodies like STLHE and CASTL. A survey of TRU faculty indicates that the degree of openness to new ideas about teaching varies across the campus community. However, increased attendance at annual events like the Teaching Practices Colloquium suggests many TRU faculty recognize that research and teaching belong together in an expanded vision of scholarship.

Key Words:

CASTL, scholarly teaching, scholarship of teaching and learning, university college.

Introduction

Over the last two decades Thompson Rivers University (TRU) has experienced rapid and fundamental change. Originally established as a community college in 1970, TRU became a university college in 1989 and attained university status in 2005. Since it was established as a university college, the institution has been viewed as a kind of hybrid, occupying a middle position between a community college and a university. This hybrid status meant that certain key elements of the institution's identity were subject to

debate. For example, administration and faculty had to reach some agreement about how research, one of the institution's new functions, would co-exist with teaching, one of its traditional functions. This paper compares the respective paths of research and teaching in the two decade period that began in 1989. Particular attention is devoted to tensions between research and teaching and to the emergence at TRU of an expanded notion of scholarship based the ideas of Ernest Boyer (1990).

Before describing the respective paths of research and teaching at TRU, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of its hybrid status. Elements of the college and university models of postsecondary education were combined in the university college created in Kamloops, British Columbia. The new university college, the University College of the Cariboo (UCC), absorbed the community college, Cariboo College, which had served students in Kamloops since 1970. Like other community colleges in B.C., Cariboo College was based on the California model (Dennison, 2005). Students were able to use their community college courses as university transfer or they could choose non-academic vocational programs. Because of this menu of academic and vocational options, the college was often described as a "comprehensive institution."

While the community college model was considered a great success, by the mid-1980's pressures for change were mounting. In Canada, as in other developed nations, there was increased recognition of the value of a university degree. In B.C., a regional disparity in degree completion was evident. Students from the urbanized south-western region of B.C., the location of all the province's universities, were over-represented among degree recipients. To remedy this disparity, the government proposed the university college model. University colleges were to be created in several mid-sized cities outside the heavily urbanized 'core,' thereby increasing access to university degrees for traditionally under-served populations (Dennison, 1992, 2005).

The meaning of hybrid in this context is clear. The university colleges would retain their traditional appeal as comprehensive institutions, but would add a university component, thus making them truly comprehensive, hybrid institutions. As part of this university component, a new category of faculty was created. These faculty would be designated as tripartite and their academic responsibilities included teaching, scholarship and service. This would distinguish them from bipartite faculty whose responsibilities continued to include teaching and service. Given this hybrid status of the university college and the range of faculty roles, it is not surprising that the question of how to balance research with teaching became an issue. Our account of the respective paths of research and teaching at TRU begins, therefore, in 1989, with the creation of the University College of the Cariboo.

The Growth of Research at TRU

The growth of research at TRU can best be understood with reference to two overlapping phases. The first phase extends from the creation of the university college in 1989 until the attainment of university status in 2005 and the creation of the research office. The defining feature of the first phase was the partnership with three established universities, the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, and Simon Fraser University. The third and fourth year academic courses were offered through

agreements with these universities. The universities provided guidance in the areas of course content and development as well as student assessment.

With this guidance, however, came pressure. The logic was straightforward: only university-like institutions could offer four year bachelor's degrees; to become university-like, some segment of university college faculty had to engage in research. In theory, the invitation to conduct research was issued to all. However, for tripartite faculty, research was an essential feature of the employment contract. This understanding about faculty research was a basic condition of the agreement between the established universities and the newly created university college.

What form this faculty research would take was a matter of some debate. The universities encouraged faculty teaching in the upper levels to engage in scholarly activity. Scholarly activity was the broad label under which this research took place; evidence of scholarly activity being first defined by institutional policy developed in 1990. The policy recognized published work as the primary evidence of scholarly activity, although it was recognized that other evidence may be appropriate depending on the discipline (University College of the Cariboo, 1990). The definition was meant to be inclusive given the comprehensiveness of programs offered at the institution. The definition did not, however, give any examples of what types of research constituted scholarly activity. Hence even before Boyer's (1990) expanded notion of scholarship became well-known in Canada, the idea of a flexible and inclusive definition of scholarly activity was promoted at UCC.

While external pressures played a central role in the development of research in this first phase, other forces also contributed. Faculty who had been recruited to teach in the university college, many with newly minted Ph.D.s, considered research a key part of their professional identity and regularly approached administration for support in their research endeavours. Administrators themselves began to appreciate that research might become part of the university college 'brand'. However, they continued to be wary of the idea of 'pure research', equating it with university rather than university college settings.

The establishment of the university, TRU, in 2005 marked the beginning of the second phase of research. There continued to be real limits placed on a full recognition of the new university's research function. For example, the special legislation that governed Thompson Rivers University stated that research should be done in support of degree programs (Thompson Rivers University Act, 2005). Furthermore, the university articulated the intent of research activities in its strategic plan as the "integration of research and scholarship with teaching and learning" (Thompson Rivers University, 2007). However, a new appreciation of the institutional value of research had emerged. Initially, the number of successful faculty research grant applications was limited, but it was clear that the administration of these grants would become a full time job. A new era of institutional support for research began in 2006, with the creation of a research office that was staffed by an Associate Vice-President of Research and Graduate Studies and several assistants. In her strategic plan, the AVP Research produced an impressive list of resources acquired by the institution as a result of the research initiatives of its faculty (Thompson Rivers University, 2009).

There were, then, powerful forces shaping the growth of institutional support for research at TRU. In the first phase, these forces were associated with a struggle for academic credibility driven in part by the external pressures placed on the institution by established universities. Later the recognition that research had a significant revenue generating potential became a crucial factor. No comparable forces were in play in the institutional support for teaching at TRU. As a result, teaching received less attention and fewer resources than research at the institution.

The Growth of Scholarly Teaching and SoTL at TRU

This account of organizational change in the area of research provides us with an instructive comparative perspective on the development of teaching at TRU. As with research, teaching developed through two key phases. In the first phase, immediately after the creation of the university college, there was limited formal attention to teaching. Because teaching was viewed as the traditional strength of the college model of postsecondary education, there was no external pressure to enhance teaching. Toward the end of the first phase, however, multiple grass-roots, faculty driven initiatives spurred the development of the second phase.

In the early years of phase one, faculty development in teaching was supported by Instructional Skills Workshops (ISW's) organized by the province's Ministry of Advanced Education. The ISW's were introduced during the pre-university college period in the 1980's, when the President provided funding for five faculty members to be trained as Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) facilitators (Thompson Rivers University, 2010). Because many faculty had limited teaching experience, all faculty were expected to complete the ISW. They offered faculty an opportunity to gain peer feedback on their teaching practices. While the ISW's encouraged faculty to reflect on their teaching, they were based in more practice than in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).

Several factors led a number of faculty to seek correction in this imbalance by promoting SoTL as an integral part of the institution's identity, and of their own identity as professionals. At the general level, one could point to changes in the 1990's in how postsecondary teaching was viewed, first in the US and then in Canada. Boyer's (1990) idea of the scholarship of teaching was the most influential catalyst for change. It contributed to an emerging consensus that effective teaching is teaching that is informed by theory, research and evidence (Glassick et. al. 1997). Inspired by these general changes in the culture of teaching, faculty at TRU began to attend teaching and learning conferences such as the annual Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) conference.

A turning point came in 2005, the year the university college became a university. At this point, a new contract was under negotiation and faculty roles were being redefined. Attempts were made to define standards for the evaluation and the relative weighting of research and teaching in faculty evaluation. There were established procedures for evaluating teaching, but methods for evaluation of research were still under development. To ensure faculty had input into the role of research on campus, faculty formed an informal advisory group, Faculty for the Advancement of Research (FAR). Members of FAR wanted to ensure that faculty views would be an integral part of how the institution defined, rewarded and supported faculty initiatives in this area. FAR not

only had significant input into the creation of a Research Committee of Senate. It also played a role in the expansion of the VP Research Office and the establishment of graduate programs and the Faculty of Graduate Studies. FAR remains an informal lobby group acting as an advocate for research concerns across campus.

This moment of faculty activism with regard to research was soon followed by a comparable development among another faculty group. This second group, which shared some members with FAR, was inspired by the expanded vision of scholarship and research outlined by Boyer (1990), and wanted to ensure that the university definitions of research incorporated Boyer's model (1990). There was concern among many faculty that SoTL may not be recognized as research at TRU. The formation of this second group, Faculty for the Advancement of Scholarly Teaching (FAST) in June 2006 represented a significant milestone in the path towards SoTL at TRU.

Much of the faculty activism represented by FAR and FAST was fuelled by the ongoing contract negotiations. An important goal of the TRUFA bargaining team was the incorporation of Boyer's definition of scholarship (Boyer, 1990) in to the collective agreement. When the agreement was finalized in 2006 (Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association 2006), its definition of scholarship reflected the idea of scholarship articulated by Boyer (1990). Departments and faculties across campus were then mandated to define academic standards which would be applied to promotion and tenure applications. While disciplinary research was clearly understood, SoTL was not. Using the collective agreement (Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association 2006) as a reference point, many individual departments and faculties incorporated Boyer's (1990) model into their academic standards for promotion and tenure.

During the period of contract negotiations, there were other key developments. In 2005 the first annual Teaching Practices Colloquium (TPC) was held at TRU. This was a grassroots faculty-driven initiative, which was inspired by an idea brought back from a STHLE conference. The colloquium is a one day on-campus event with approximately 80 faculty participating in the first year, supported in part by funding from administration. The numbers of both participants and proposals have grown steadily. In 2010 there were 180 registrants, representing approximately 30% of the on-campus faculty. Proposals are peer reviewed but not all are accepted. The TPC provides a forum for faculty to share scholarly teaching practices and approaches which foster effective learning in a post-secondary setting. The TPC also seeks to foster the ideas of SoTL. As a natural evolution from the success of this teaching focused initiative the interdisciplinary TPC committee is currently working on establishing an annual 'Teaching Scholars' grant to support faculty working on SoTL projects.

A chance to unify these faculty-driven initiatives came with the creation of a Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in 2006. A number of key events lead to the formation of the CTL. The first formal institutional support for a faculty development position was a 25% course release for the position of Coordinator, Instructional Development in 1986. Following retirement of the Coordinator in 2002, the position was vacant until 2006. The creation of the CTL was the outcome of work that commenced in 2000 with the formulation of a key strategic goal: to "Develop a Comprehensive and Coordinated Program of Instructional Development" (University College of the Cariboo, 2000).

After six years of planning, the CTL was staffed in May 2006 with a three-quarter-time coordinator and financed on year-to-year grant money from a student tuition fund. In fall of 2006, the coordinator position was made full-time by the VP Academic in recognition of the expectations and workload of the position. Because institutional base funding was not available, salary and operating budget are funded through a year-to-year grant from a student tuition fund called the Comprehensive University Enhancement Fund (CUEF). The CUEF Steering Committee is composed of four students, two faculty members and two administrators. Students, therefore, have an opportunity to comment on the proposed activities of the CTL and have significant input into making recommendations about how the fund is allocated. Currently, the CTL Coordinator is a full-time position and is funded primarily by year-to-year grants from the CUEF.

The TPC and the creation of CTL helped establish a presence for SoTL on campus. Both benefited from institutional support. In addition, FAST continued to lobby for an increased awareness of SoTL. FAST faculty wanted to foster the development of a SoTL culture across campus and increase interdisciplinary SoTL collaborations. The group began by organizing seminars which profiled research on teaching or SoTL activities across campus, and also began discussion and reading groups focusing on learning about scholarly teaching and SoTL as these were new terms for many faculty at TRU. Eventually, some members of FAST recognized the value of membership in a larger professional community. In the winter of 2006, with funding from the VP Academic, Thompson Rivers University became a charter institutional member of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). A formal institutional affiliation with STLHE signifies to faculty and administration that teaching and learning is an important priority. It also gives us voting rights and an opportunity for input into the activities of the Society.

An opportunity to belong to a larger international professional community came when members of FAST learned about the CASTL affiliate. Many of the goals of the Carnegie Academy for Scholarship for Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Affiliate program were shared by members of FAST. In the summer of 2007 several members of FAST prepared a CASTL Affiliate application. In order to apply, the support of TRU administration was required. The fact that TRU administration was willing to make this commitment was considered a significant achievement. Becoming a CASTL Affiliate in 2008 was considered an important step towards achieving the goal of increased awareness for the importance of teaching among faculty and administration. Many of the initial members of the CASTL team had been active in FAST and could build upon the strength of relationships that had been formed through its meetings. Moreover, it was believed that CASTL Affiliate status, both through its affiliation with the highly prestigious Carnegie Foundation and through the required support of the Academic Provost, would lend greater validity to a focus on SoTL at TRU

The main goals of becoming a CASTL Affiliate were to strengthen our foundation of student engagement and to strengthen our TRU community focused on SoTL. When we envisioned how we would document any change due to Affiliate status, we considered evaluation of student engagement by use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to be a valid approach. It was also timely given that TRU was just

beginning to participate in NSSE. In order to document and change in SoTL participation by faculty, we planned to not only track faculty participation in professional development teaching activities and the Centre for Teaching and Learning, but we also determined that we would undertake a faculty survey to give a snapshot of not only understanding of SoTL and participation in SoTL activities, but also understanding and activity in scholarly teaching.

Research on organizational change suggests that the institutionalization of new ideas and practices may vary across organizational divisions. To determine whether this was true at TRU, we designed and administered an online faculty survey. To develop the survey, we solicited information about surveys from colleagues at other institutions (E. Kustra, personal communication; Brawner et. al. 2001) and reviewed existing surveys such as the 2007 Higher Education Research Institute Survey of Faculty (to view current survey see <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/facoverview.php>). Once we had reviewed existing surveys, CASTL members met on a biweekly basis from January 2008 to August 2008 to develop survey questions. While our initial goal of the survey was to provide baseline data describing the state of teaching at TRU at the beginning of our CASTL affiliate status, we found that the scope of our survey broadened over time. Our final survey consisted of demographic questions (i.e., years of teaching, appointment track), and questions regarding the use of different teaching practices. We also asked respondents to explain what “scholarly teaching” and “the scholarship of teaching and learning” meant to them. Finally, we asked respondents about their degree of participation in scholarly teaching and in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The overall goal of the survey was to find out the extent to which faculty were familiar with Boyer’s (1990) ideas and how these ideas have informed teaching practices. The survey was made available online for the entire month of September 2008 and faculty members across campus received several email invitations to respond to the survey. Out of a possible 591 faculty employed in September 2008 (TRU Faculty Association, personal communication) 112 faculty completed our survey.

The first priority for analysis of the survey data was to determine the level of involvement in scholarly teaching (ST) and the scholarship of teaching and learning. We used respondents self-reported information about the extent to which their teaching was influenced by different sources (literature about teaching, research literature in field, personal reflection, peer feedback, and feedback from student course evaluations) to categorize individual faculty as low, medium, or high scholarly teachers. Faculty who replied that “never” or “rarely” to being influenced by three of the five sources were classified as low ST; faculty who responded “occasionally” to at least three of the five sources were classified as medium ST and faculty who replied “regularly” to consulting the literature about teaching and two at least two other sources were classified as high ST. To categorize individual faculty members with no, low, medium, or high involvement with SoTL, we used survey questions that asked about both their plans to disseminate information about their teaching practices as well as whether they either currently conducting research on teaching and learning or were planning on conducting research on teaching and learning.

The involvement of faculty in ST and SoTL varies in relationship to key faculty attributes. Faculty seniority was significantly associated with SOTL (Chi-square,

p=0.013) but not ST (Chi-square, p=0.898). Specifically, the percent of faculty reporting “no involvement” with SoTL decreased with the number of years of teaching (Figure 1). Low-level of SoTL involvement was particularly evident for faculty with low seniority. Several models of faculty development predict that the occurrence of scholarly teaching will increase with instructor experience (Kugel, 1993; Weston and McAlpine, 2001); however our data suggest that years of experience more strongly influence involvement in SoTL than with scholarly teaching.

Faculty discipline shows a different pattern. Faculty discipline is significantly associated with ST (Chi-square, p=0.003) but not with SoTL (Chi-square, p=0.365). Specifically, of the four categories analyzed, Nursing, Social Work and Human Services had by far the highest percentage of faculty classified as high ST (Figure 4). The influence of discipline on interpretations of SoTL has been clearly identified (Quinlan, 1994) and discipline may also influence development of scholarly teachers. It may be that the long tradition of teaching practitioners to be educators through clinical teaching has created a culture more receptive to scholarly teaching. In contrast, in faculties that have a strong research tradition, such as the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, showed a relatively low percentage of high ST faculty.

Overall, the survey results indicate that very few faculty at TRU are involved in high-level SoTL activities such as publishing peer-reviewed articles. The greatest percent of faculty responding to our survey were classified as having no involvement with SoTL (50 respondents). In comparison to SoTL involvement, there was a higher percentage of faculty involved in high-level scholarly teaching activities

We do caution that our results are very preliminary. We present them as an illustration of the type of work we believe our involvement in the Carnegie Affiliate program has facilitated. Most importantly, our results support a vision of TRU in which there has been differential embrace of scholarly teaching and SoTL.

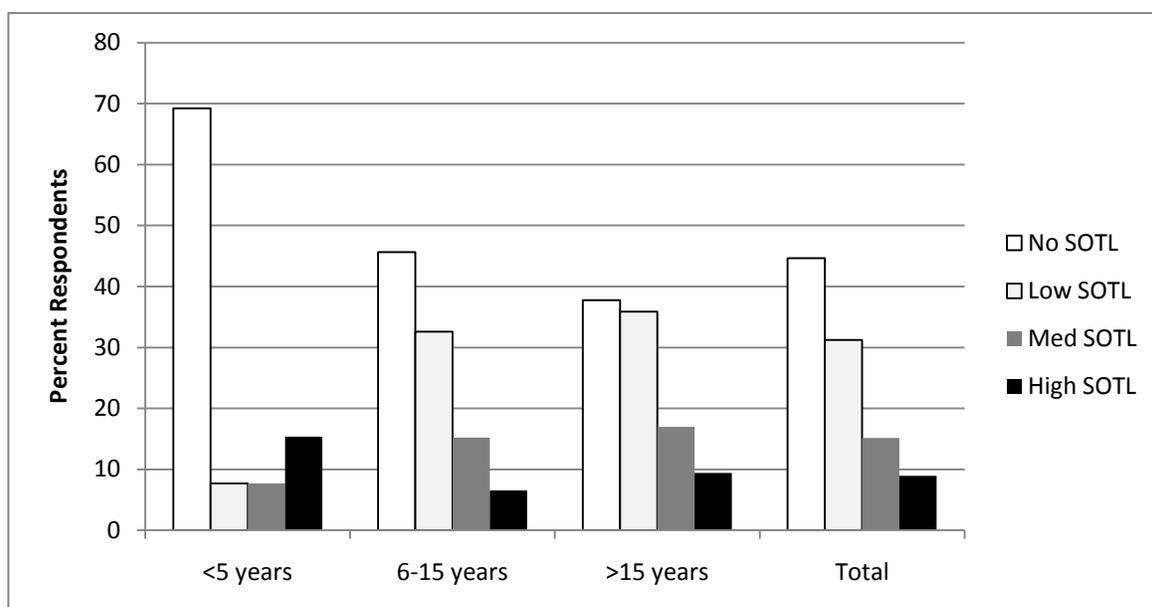


Figure 1. Percent of faculty respondents classified by their involvement in no, low, medium and high SOTL by years of teaching categories.

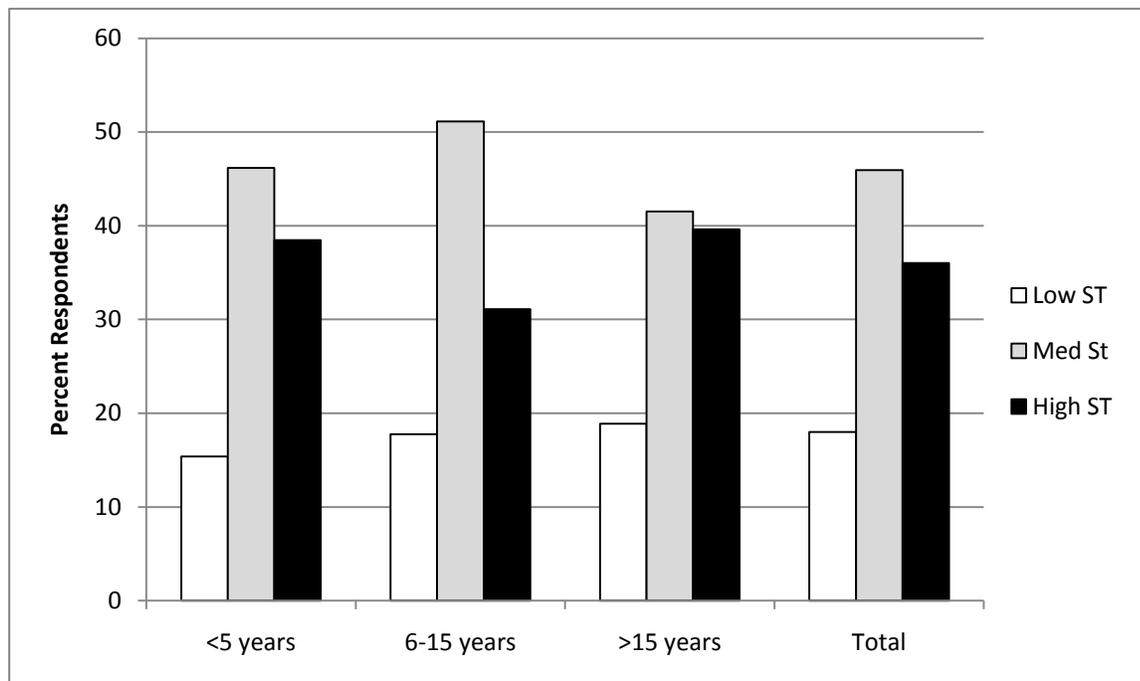


Figure 2. Percent of faculty respondents classified as low, medium and high scholarly teachers by faculty years of teaching categories

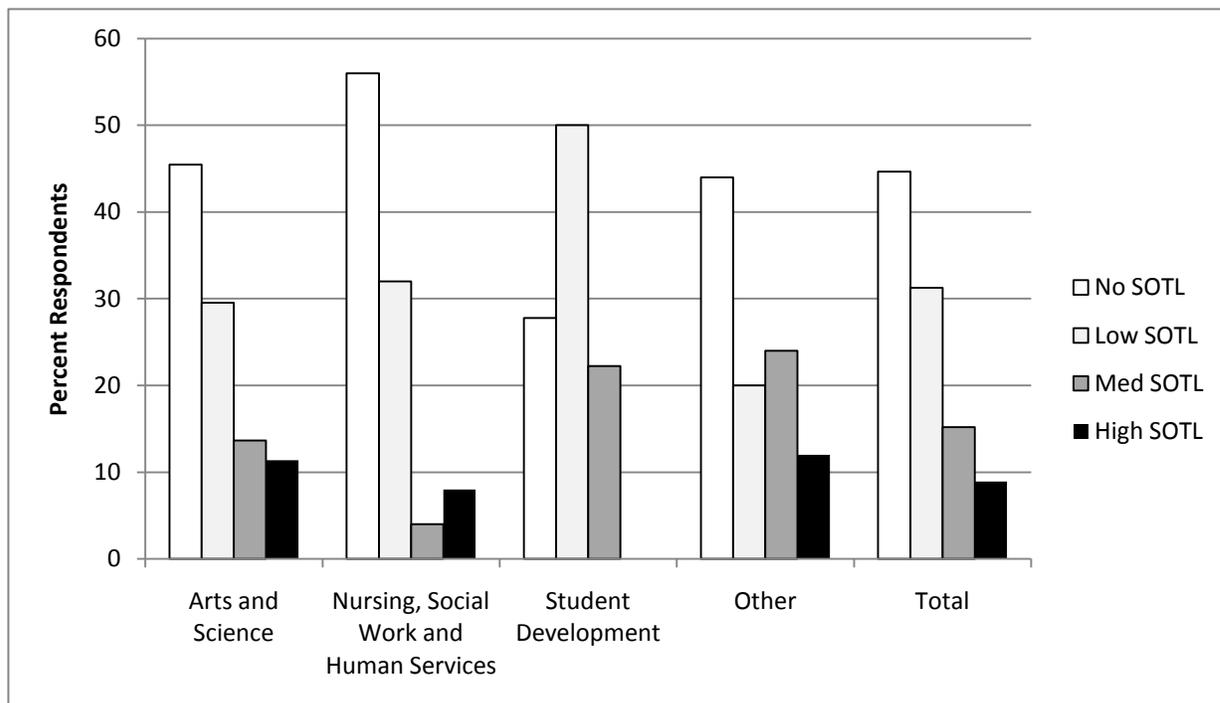


Figure 3. Percent of faculty respondents classified by their involvement in no, low, medium and high SOTL by disciplinary categories.

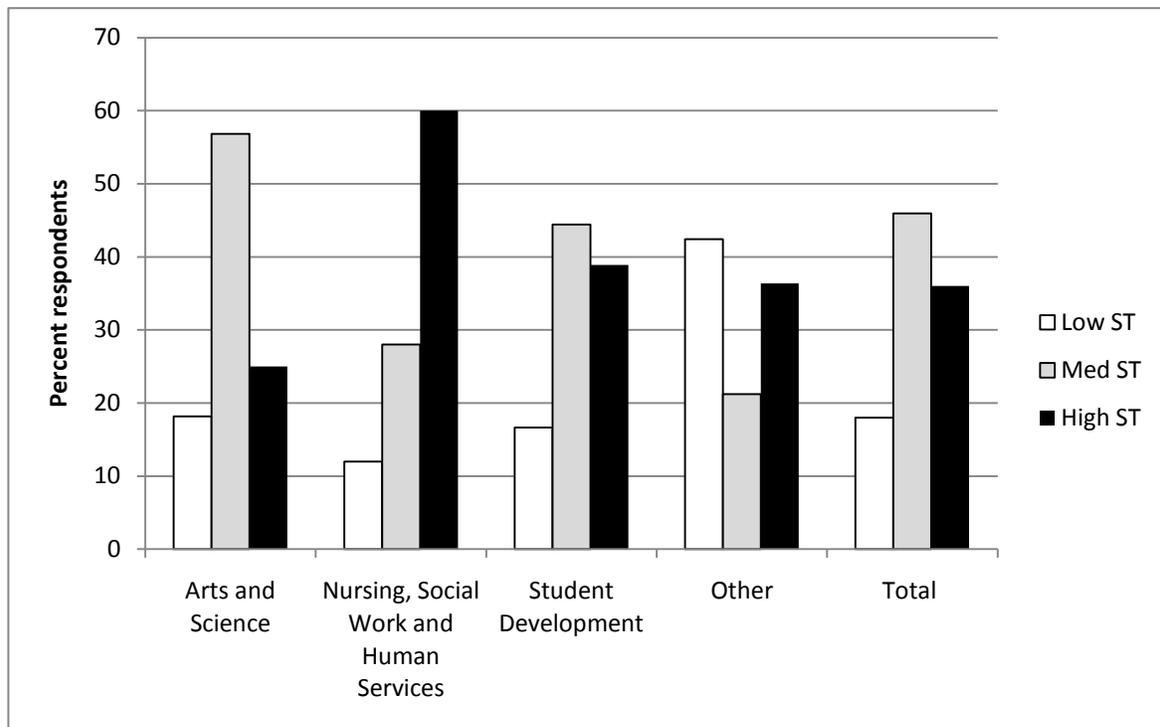


Figure 4. Percent of faculty respondents classified as low, medium and high scholarly teachers by disciplinary categories.

Conclusion

Over the last 20 years, TRU has struggled to find a balance between research and teaching. While research is now supported by significant institutional resources, teaching is not. Despite these constraints, there has been modest progress towards an approach to teaching influenced by Boyer's (1990) model of scholarship. The existence of Boyer's broadly defined modes of scholarship (1990) has inspired faculty to advocate for the legitimacy of SoTL at TRU.

Supported largely by faculty initiatives, SoTL at TRU has been promoted in a variety of ways. Each year, the TPC showcases faculty achievements in SoTL. The CTL distributes information to faculty about SoTL journals and conferences, and regularly offers workshops for TRU faculty. This year, TRU hosted the annual conference of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education-Educational Developers Caucus. The CTL is developing a plan to introduce a teaching and learning scholars program that will provide small grants for SoTL projects. In collaboration with the University of British Columbia-Okanagan, we are submitting a project proposal for funding to the Educational Developers Caucus. The purpose of the project is to educate and encourage faculty to investigate their teaching through scholarly approaches.

To summarize, those who wish to promote involvement in SoTL at TRU continue to face significant challenges. Faculty driven initiatives have created change in the institutional culture and a greater understanding of the principles of SoTL. However evidence suggests that understanding of SoTL varies across campus. The rapid pace of change at TRU may have provided opportunities to introduce a more inclusive approach

to scholarship—but these opportunities continued to be hampered by scarce resources and limited by a traditional faculty reward system.

Note: All authors contributed extensively to the work presented in this paper.

References

- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, N.J: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Brawner, C., Felder, R., Allen, R., & Brent, R. (2001). *1999-2000 SUCCEED faculty survey of teaching practices of institutional attitudes toward teaching*. Southeastern University and College Coalition for Engineering Education.
- Dennison, J.D. (1992). The university college idea. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 22 (1):109-124.
- Dennison, J.D. (2005). From community college to university: a personal commentary on the evolution of an institution. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 36 (2):107-124.
- Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., Maeroff, G. I. (1997) *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Kugel, P. (1993). How professors develop as teachers. *Studies in Higher Education*, 18(3), 315. doi: Article
- Quinlan, K. M. (1994). Uncovering Discipline-Specific Interpretations of the "Scholarship of Teaching": Peer Review and Faculty Perceptions of Scholarly Teaching. ASHE Annual Meeting Paper. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Tuscon, AZ. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.tru.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED375727&site=ehost-live>.
- Thompson Rivers University Act. (2005, March 3). Province of British Columbia, Queen's Printer, Retrieved Sept 15, 2009, from http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/freeside/--%20t%20-thompson%20rivers%20university%20act%20sbc%202005%20c.%2017/00_05017_01.xml.
- Thompson Rivers University, Board of Governors (2006, September 28), *Thompson Rivers University Policy Manual, Policy BRD-15-1*, Retrieved January 12, 2010 from http://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/brd15-15622.pdf.
- Thompson Rivers University (2007, September) *Thompson Rivers University Strategic Plan 2001-2012*, Retrieved from http://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/2007-2012_strategic_plan8326.pdf.
- Thompson Rivers University, Office of the Associate Vice President, Research and Graduate Studies (2009, April) *Strategic Research Plan*. Retrieved April 12, 2010 from http://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/Strategic_Research_Plan17668.pdf.
- Thompson Rivers University. (2010). Instructional Skills Workshop. Retrieved April 20 2010 from http://www.tru.ca/ctl/faculty_development/isw.html

Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association (2006), TRUFA collective agreement
Retrieved March 2010 from

[http://cariboo.tru.ca/trufa/Collective Agreement/TRUFA Collective Agreement 2004-2010.pdf](http://cariboo.tru.ca/trufa/Collective%20Agreement/TRUFA%20Collective%20Agreement%2004-2010.pdf)

University College of the Cariboo, Board of Governors (1990, June 6) *University College of the Cariboo Policy Manual, Policy ED-15-1* (TRU archived information).

University College of the Cariboo. (2000). *Building on Strengths and Uniqueness: A Strategic Plan for the University College of the Cariboo, 2000-2005*. Retrieved from [www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/ucc service plan 2004-05 may 2004 9607.pdf](http://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/ucc_service_plan_2004-05_may_2004_9607.pdf)

Weston, C., & McAlpine, L. (2001). Making explicit the development toward the scholarship of teaching. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 86, 89-98.