

Examining the Impact of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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A crucial part of our understanding of the scholarship of teaching and learning is that the work can be built upon by others. In other words, by definition, SoTL work must have an impact beyond the teacher/scholar and his or her individual classroom.

Where should we look for evidence of this impact? How has the scholarship of teaching and learning changed the landscape of the profession? How has it affected the way individuals, disciplines, and institutions understand and support teaching and learning?

At a convening of the twelve leaders of the CASTL Institutional Leadership Program in December 2008, the CASTL Staff Team (Pat Hutchings, Mary Huber, Barbara Cambridge, and Tony Ciccone) outlined ten crosscutting areas of impact, with specific examples provided as starting points. They are reproduced here with modifications suggested by the participants.

Documenting impact in any of these areas poses a number of interesting challenges. For instance, many of us have experienced first-hand various ways that the scholarship of teaching and learning can improve student learning. But the link is not always direct. Thus, we may want to document ways that the scholarship of teaching and learning has enhanced *our knowledge of the factors that affect* student learning and contributed to the *environment for* student learning and success.

Participants suggested a similar “one-step-back” approach to other areas of impact. For example, “The scholarship of teaching and learning has improved *our knowledge of the conditions that affect* the exchange and improvement of pedagogy,” or “The scholarship of teaching and learning *contributes to our knowledge of the factors that affect* how teachers teach.”

Indeed, some support for the idea of making “knowledge-building” a separate area of impact reflects a healthy tension within the SoTL community in defining the work as both a scholarship of *discovery* and a scholarship of *application*. Scholars of teaching and learning seek to *understand* teaching and learning in ways that can be made public and built upon by others. At the same time, their work is anchored in a local context whose conditions and effectiveness they seek to *improve*. Any discussion of impact must take this dual purpose into account.

We offer this document as a starting point for discussion that can lead to a better understanding of the nature of SoTL impact, as well as to evidence or information about this impact that either already exists or can be gathered.

Please email your examples, elaborations, suggestions, and complications to me at ciccone@carnegiefoundation.org. They will be an important contribution to CASTL’s work.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Areas of Impact

The scholarship of teaching and learning

1. **contributes to important agendas and initiatives in higher education:** e.g., assessment and accountability, retention, educating for citizenship, service learning, undergraduate research, use of instructional (dissemination) technology, liberal and general education reform, first-year experience, civic engagement
2. **changes how teachers teach and contributes to our knowledge of the factors that make change happen:** e.g., changes in values, dispositions, beliefs; range of pedagogies, formative assessment, peer review.
3. **changes how we understand and talk about learning:** e.g., in a discipline, in a certain format (e.g., on line); as a source of interesting questions.
4. **has direct and indirect effects on student learning and success:** e.g., engagement in learning, retention, deeper understanding of subject matter.
5. **contributes to our knowledge of the conditions that affect the exchange and improvement of pedagogy:** e.g., the commons, communities of practice (networks, alliances and collaborative processes), multiple means of sharing scholarly knowledge about teaching.
6. **strengthens development programs for higher education professionals:** e.g., graduate students, instructional staff, faculty, administrators; preparation, continuing development, leadership development
7. **informs changes in the policies and procedures of the institution:** e.g., infrastructure, tenure and promotion policies, IRB policies, recognition of the importance of quality teaching and learning, allocation of resources and budgeting, inclusion of scholarship of teaching and learning in accreditation claims.
8. **affects the culture of academic life:** e.g., morale (of faculty, students and administrators), role and participation of students (leadership for learning, community building)
9. **leads to changes in how we define and evaluate scholarship:** e.g., dissemination and impact of scholarly work, acceptance of multiple modes of scholarship; documenting changes directly connected to the work; representation designed with impact in mind.
10. **is growing and evolving as a movement:** e.g., the intellectual richness of the work; scope and depth of questions asked, breadth of disciplines and institutions involved, number of individuals doing, supporting and using the work; new venues and outlets for the work; a growing teaching commons.