Promoting the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

1. About SoTL at MSU
2. SoTL Steering Committee [1]
3. MSU SoTL Seminars and Professional Development Opportunities [2]
4. SoTL Instructional Resources [3]
   1. Online Instructional Resources (OIR) [4]
      1. Introduction [5]
      2. What is SoTL? [6]
      4. Bibliographies of Articles and Books on SoTL [8]
      5. SoTL Journals [9]
      6. Online SoTL Resources [10]
      8. SoTL Societies, Associations, Academies [12]
      9. SoTL on Campus [13]
     10. SoTL Resources [14]
   2. F&OD Consultation Services on Teaching and Learning [3]
   3. MSU Requirements and Resources for Conducting Classroom Research [15]
5. SoTL Funding Opportunities [16]
6. MSU Units Supporting SoTL Work [17]
7. MSU Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Symposium and 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Lilly Teaching Fellows Program [18]

About SoTL at MSU

What is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning? | Introduction to SoTL at MSU | MSU SoTL Symposium Overview
After the SoTL Symposium | SoTL Steering Committee [1]

What is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)?

SoTL is research on one’s teaching and learning made public.
In 1990, Ernest Boyer’s groundbreaking book Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate brought new, sharpened focus to the importance of teaching in higher education. Boyer introduced the concept of the “scholarship of teaching” that recognized the significance and complexities of teaching as a professional endeavor that merits the same systematic study, professional recognition, and public dissemination that higher education gives to other forms of scholarship. The “scholarship of teaching” became the “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” (SoTL) after an influential article in Change magazine by Robert B. Barr and John Tagg pointed out that a student-centered classroom requires a paradigm shift “From Teaching to Learning.” The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, now an international movement in higher education, provides a scholarly structure for those educators who wish to engage in discussion, research and publications that further our shared understanding of effective teaching, learning and assessment practices. Thus, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning investigates a challenge or innovation in one’s teaching in a systematic way and disseminates the results of that research to one’s colleagues.

Introduction to SoTL at MSU

For the past 20 years, MSU has engaged in the study of college teaching and learning. Since 1991, MSU has supported the Lilly Teaching Fellows Program in which Fellows have conducted focused research projects in which they study their own teaching and its impact on student learning. MSU has faculty, academic staff, and units across the University who engage in research on teaching and learning in a variety of disciplines. (See also MSU Units Supporting SoTL [17].) F&OD has engaged thousands of our colleagues in discussing research on college teaching and learning through Lilly Seminars, the Spring Institute on College Teaching and Learning, and discipline-based conferences supported by the colleges and units, including the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives, the Graduate School, and the Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, among others. Indeed, in 2004, in response to requests for sustained conversations on college teaching and learning, F&OD applied for membership in the Research University Consortium for the Advancement of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (RUCASTL), sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, with Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) at the core of our proposed campus project. In all these ways, MSU has set the stage for a campus-wide event such as the MSU SoTL Symposium to enable our SoTL scholars to share their work with others across MSU.

MSU SoTL Symposium Overview

The inaugural MSU Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Symposium will feature a keynote address followed by concurrent poster sessions, highlighting the innovative scholarship of teaching and learning conducted by MSU faculty and academic staff.

The inaugural keynote was presented by Dr. Frank Fear, Senior Associate Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, who presented Scholarship “of” and “in”: Reflections on Teaching, Learning, and the Faculty Life. This keynote examined the complex terrain of the faculty life, which sometimes includes a “sweet spot” for work devoted to teaching, learning, and advancing knowledge about student learning and development. Dr. Fear examined nuanced gradations of SoTL work, which cut across a range of efforts, from being recognized as “a good teacher” to being acknowledged as a “scholar” in the field. Additionally, he reflected on thirty years of experience at MSU—as faculty member; activist for
matters pertaining to teaching, learning, and student development; and academic administrator. He shared his current thinking about “what works” in SoTL with special reference to options for faculty engagement and strategies for institutional change.

After the Inaugural MSU SoTL Symposium: MSU Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Collaborative

F&OD is in the process of developing a Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Collaborative to promote the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at MSU. The proposed purposes of this Collaborative, as guided by a SoTL Steering Committee, are to identify and support work on the scholarship of teaching and learning, extend ongoing efforts at MSU, and to contribute to the continuing national and international conversations related to SoTL. If you are interested in joining this collaborative and/or learning more about SoTL opportunities at MSU, please email us at facdevel@msu.edu [19].

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