SOTL AT ISU

ISSOTL Conference in Sydney, Australia

I had the privilege of attending and presenting at the 4th annual meeting, from July 2-5, of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (http://www.issotl.org/index.html) in Sydney, Australia. The conference was full of ideas and resources related to doing, and to the research results of, SoTL. About 500 people mostly from Australasia, the UK, Canada, and the United States attended the meetings held on the Kensington Campus of the University of New South Wales. I came back with my usual post-conference list of new connections and ideas. For example, I am considering using some funds in FY09 for a possible Illinois State University department or college level grant opportunity related to SoTL.

I hope to gather, virtually, a group of sociologists from around the world who are interested in SoTL. I made additional connections related to the Illinois State involvement in CASTL (Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship on Teaching and Learning). I gave a three-hour workshop on making SoTL public to 22 people from around the globe. I was reminded of the importance of using theory from my own discipline, when appropriate, in my SoTL work. Australia was gorgeous and the people were wonderful. The 5th annual meeting is set for Edmonton, Alberta, Canada from October 16-19, 2008 (http://www.indiana.edu/~issotl08/).

2007-2008 SoTL Grant Recipients and Project Titles

The following five SoTL grants were selected for funding this year (peer reviewed by four faculty members). Grant awards range from $4,000 to $4,500. All include a student member on the research team and focus on promoting learner autonomy, broadly defined.

Documenting Learner Autonomy in an Ethnographic Field School - Gina Bessa and Joe Marino, Sociology and Anthropology

The Development of Learner Autonomy: The Importance of Classroom Goal Structure, Teacher Immediacy, and Student-Instructor Relationships - Patricia Jarvis, Gary Creasey, and Denise Faigao, Psychology

Autonomous Learning in a Large Lecture Hall: POGIL and 'Clickers' - Guang Jin, Tom Bierma, and Lucy Loftus, Health Sciences

Developing and Assessing Student Autonomy in the First-Year Experience of Psychology Majors - Dawn McBride, Corinne Zimmerman, and Derek Herrmann, Psychology

A Comparative Analysis of Student Engagement, Satisfaction, Success and Learning in Lecture Hall and Online Learning Settings - Cara Rabe-Hemp, Criminal Justice Sciences and Susan Woollen, Educational Administration and Foundations

SoTL at Illinois State: Five-Year Follow-up Questionnaire Results

Deb Gentry, College of Applied Science and Technology; Pat Jarvis, Psychology

Editor's Note: Upon the creation of the Cross Chair in SoTL in 2002, we undertook a survey of the status of SoTL at Illinois State. This past spring we conducted a five-year, follow-up survey. In this and the next newsletter, we offer some of the results from the survey. Though the focus of the survey was on SoTL, we also asked about two topics related to our CASTL work: promoting learner autonomy and interest in writing circles. In this issue, Pat Jarvis shares results related to Learner Autonomy and Deb Gentry offers the results related to Writing Circles. IRB approval was obtained for the survey. The email message to the online survey was sent to the just over 1000 faculty members who had indicated willingness to receive online surveys. The response rate after one reminder was 15%. In January, we will provide some of the results on the status of SoTL at Illinois State and compare 2007 data with 2002 data.

Learner Autonomy

The SoTL survey results indicated that faculty perceptions of the general level of learner autonomy exhibited by various groups of students at Illinois State generally increased with class rank such that 70% of the sample indicated that graduate students exhibited significant learner autonomy in their area of study and somewhat less in areas outside their field of study.

However, there was an interesting major/non-major difference in the survey. Undergraduate junior and senior students in areas outside their major were perceived to exhibit greater learner autonomy than students in their majors. Less surprising though was that undergraduate freshmen and sophomore non-majors were perceived to hold little learner autonomy according to 60% of the respondents.

The SoTL Survey results further indicated that 50% of the 126 people responding believed that increasing learner autonomy would improve student learning 'very much'; while an additional 44% indicated that increasing learner autonomy would improve student learning 'to some extent.'

Finally, respondents believed that they have increased learner autonomy in their students in the following ways:

- Providing interesting readings
- Utilizing reflective and experiential learning tasks
- Stating clear expectations about importance of analytical writing in assignments
- Facilitating student-led class discussions
- Offering students choices regarding projects and fostering student ownership of work
- Requiring a reading journal
- Spelling out course assignments clearly in the syllabus
- Teaching beyond the syllabus (asking for deeper thinking)
- Using group projects
- Using reading reflection

Writing Circles

Though not every survey participant answered the questions asking about his/her interest in and attitudes about participating in a writing circle/group/team, of those that did (130), slightly more than half (55%) expressed some degree of openness to doing so. About the same percentage (57%) of respondents indicated they thought writing circles/groups/teams could be helpful in facilitating scholarly writing. Close to a third (31.5%) of those who answered the question regarding how many different writing circles they had previously been a member of had indeed been a part of such a group sometime in the past. Most persons had done so just once or twice. Respondents reported considerable variability in the duration of these writing circle experiences. The mean number of months for which their longest circle lasted was 17.55 months. Such results suggest that writing circles/groups/teams are not widely engaged in or utilized, yet are perceived as a worthy enterprise to consider.

Respondents were also asked to answer a series of survey questions pertaining to perceived barriers to becoming actively involved in writing circles/groups/teams. Difficulty in finding a common, convenient time for every circle member to meet was perceived as a barrier by 78 percent of the respondents. This barrier was viewed as somewhat problematic. Finding time to write was thought to be a barrier by 81 percent of the respondents and, to most, this was a fairly significant problem. Forty-three percent of the respondents indicated lack of interest in such an activity by their colleagues could serve as a barrier to finding and getting involved in a writing circle. Yet, this was viewed as a relatively minor potential impediment. Half of the respondents reported that the expectation to have one's own material ready for reading by a deadline would serve as a barrier to writing circle membership. This concern was a modest one. Of minimal concern was the possible discomfort with the peer review process and the likely criticism of one's work that would be received from fellow circle members. Only 19 percent of respondents perceived these intertwining concerns to be much of a barrier to their committing themselves to a writing circle.

Eleven respondents described a barrier; often one they perceived was significant in their eyes that the survey had not addressed. Several persons mentioned that their own preferences for working alone or independently would keep them from seriously considering membership in a writing circle. Several others perceived that too few colleagues that might populate a writing circle would

"get" or satisfactorily understand their discipline or subject matter specialty. Others expressed dissatisfaction with past experiences with writing circles when it was the case that they devoted disproportionately more time giving feedback to fellow circle members as compared to the amount of helpful attention their work was given by others.

Some perceived that their fellow circle members had not abided by ground rules and expectations to the degree they had and that this was both frustrating and disappointing. One person expressed worry that a fellow circle member might, upon learning of his/her good ideas and efforts, unethically "steal" those away for their own use. Finally, a number of respondents said the lack of knowing about existing writing circles that were open to new members or about newly forming circles was a barrier.

While most barriers were not viewed as overwhelming and unmanageable, the fact is that these barriers do exist for many. Perhaps the next set of questions to be asked would involve possible remedies or counteractions to these barriers to writing circle participation.

Grant Update for Employing Active Learning Strategies to Promote Autonomous Learning in Criminal Justice Research Methods Courses: An Assessment
Jeffrey A. Walsh, Donna M. Vandiver and Carrie Grotts, Criminal Justice

A need exists to empirically assess teaching strategies in the field of criminal justice education, particularly in courses involving critical thinking and evaluation skills. Research methods courses provide this evaluative opportunity by preparing students to be discerning consumers of research rather than acquiescent believers of research, lessons that can serve them throughout their lives as they sift through the raft of findings being disseminated on everything from crime and justice related issues to medical research. Regrettably, research methods courses often provoke anxiety in students and are hindered by the fact that many students find integral methodological concepts vague and void of meaning, and understanding of their practical application elusive. The objective of this work is to assess active learning teaching strategies used to promote autonomous student learning in criminal justice research methods courses with inherently complex material not conducive to passive learning.

The research involves an assessment of approximately 160 undergraduate criminal justice students enrolled in research methods courses who have engaged in a semester-long, tiered assignment, research project which actively engages students in the research process and facilitates the development of autonomous learning skills (i.e., learning how to ask critical questions and empirically investigate issues that directly affect them). The completed project involves both a pre and post-test assessment of students who have been taught to conduct original research through the use of active learning strategies intended to promote and facilitate autonomous lifelong learning. The assessment measures student (1) motivation/attitude toward active learning and learner autonomy, (2) changes in student's skill level (to seek new information, use critical thinking skills, and application of information), (3) and their potential to become lifelong learners.

Students are provided a structure to work both independently and in the context of a group. This is achieved primarily through in-class exercises. Students learn to empirically investigate the world around them, in part by assessing a sample of their peers' attitudes and behaviors as they apply to the chosen research topic. The goal is for students to learn to think critically about research, a skill that will promote life-long learner autonomy and application. At present the project is still underway. The hypothesized results include that the course design and assignments will contribute to (1) a more favorable attitude toward conducting research (and using active learning skills), and (2) increased autonomous learning skills (seeking new information, developing critical thinking skills, and applying new information), which provide a framework for lifelong learning. These outcomes will be measured specifically by comparing student responses to pre and post-test survey questions. Look for our results in the near future posted to the SoTL web page under examples of SoTL work.

New SoTL Book in the CTLT Instructional Commons

McKinney, K. 2007. *Enhancing Student Learning through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning The Challenges and Joys of Juggling.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Anker.

SoTL Institute Held on August 28 and 30

The goals of this interactive institute included providing an opportunity for Illinois State University faculty, staff with teaching assignments, and graduate students to do the following: learn more about the scholarship of teaching and learning, including what it is, available resources, how to conduct it, how to make it public, how to document it for evaluation, and how to use it to enhance teaching and learning; begin working on ideas for doing and/or making public a SoTL project; and share ideas and information about SoTL with colleagues. The 22 participants who attended all five hours of the institute each received $150 in operating funds and two SoTL books, as well as refreshments. Institute participants represented 17 academic units. We hope to repeat the institute later this year.

SoTL Websites of Interest

Illinois State University (ISU) SoTL main web page (http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/). This is our main SoTL page and it is full of information, resources, examples and links related to the scholarship of teaching and learning at Illinois State and on the national and international higher education scene. Thanks to Tom Silvia of CTLT for maintaining our web page.

SoTL Research Collaboration site (http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/sotlcollaboration/). Anyone doing or interested in doing SoTL work can register their interests and contact information in this database as well as search for colleagues by topic, discipline, or institution. We encourage you to register and to send this URL to colleagues at other schools who do SoTL work.

ISU Repository of Web Snapshots of SoTL projects (http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/examples/KEEPShots.shtml) using the KEEP Toolkit. This is a new page where we are collecting descriptions of ISU SoTL projects created using the Carnegie KEEP Toolkit for making web snapshots. Please take a look at the snapshots already created and posted. We encourage you to try out KEEP and create a snapshot of your SoTL work. Send the URL for you snapshot to kmckinne@ilstu.edu.

SoTL Conferences (http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/sotlConf/) are listed on this page. The key conference in this area is that of the International Society of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (IS-SoTL).

The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This organization offers intra- and inter- disciplinary and national collaborations on SoTL, a newsletter, and annual conference (The 2008 meetings will be held in October 2008 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada), opportunities for related groups to affiliate with ISSOTL, and more. Information on this organization can be found at http://www.issotl.org/.

Coming in the January 2008 SoTL Newsletter...

- An article on the results of the status of SoTL at Illinois State University.
- A report on our trip, with two Illinois State students, to a SoTL meeting in Las Vegas, NV.
- Another brief report based on an Illinois State SoTL grant project.
- Preliminary information on the FY09 Call for SoTL Grants.
- A more in-depth report on the SoTL Institute held by the Cross Chair in late August 2007.