

FAQs About SoTL, FYI

December, 2019

Teaching and Learning Services

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: I hear my colleagues at MacEwan talking about getting involved in something that sounds like “So Tull.” What does this mean?

Answer: You’re hearing your colleagues say the acronym “SoTL” (they might also say “Saw Tull”). This stands for “the scholarship of teaching and learning.” There are many definitions of SoTL, but one of the most compact is “scholarly inquiry into student learning [that] advances the practice of teaching” (Cicccone, as cited in Voelker, 2016).

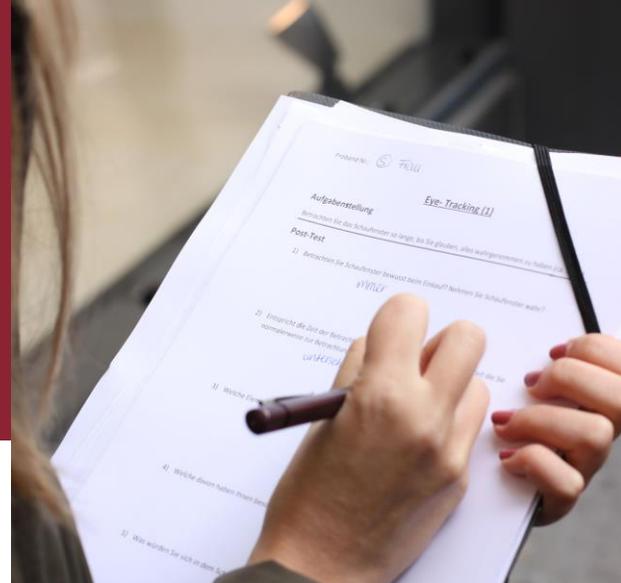
Question: So, SoTL is research?

Answer: Yes. SoTL research starts with a question you have about student learning. Hutchings (2000) identifies four types of SoTL questions. Maybe you’re interested in “what works” - the approaches you take towards enhancing student learning. Or maybe you want to explore “what is” - the contexts that set the stage for learning. Perhaps you’re dreaming big, asking what could be possible for learning in your discipline, but doesn’t currently exist. If you’re interested in theory-building, you might develop a study that is aimed at building a conceptual framework for furthering practice in your discipline.

Question: What do I do after I’ve developed a question about student learning?

Answer: You explore the issue initially by accessing the literature on teaching and learning, as well as discipline-specific studies that address your question. What discoveries have other researchers made about your question? How can you add to what’s already been discovered? After you’ve developed this foundation for your study, you consider what type of methodology will help you to explore the question with your own students.

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is a movement of scholarly thought that involves inquiry into teaching and learning in higher education contexts.



Further Reading

For more information about this topic, please see the following resources:

Hutchings, P. (2000). Introduction. In P. Hutchings (Ed.), *Approaches to the scholarship of teaching and learning* (pp. 1-10). Menlo Park, CA: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Voelker, D. (2016). *What is the scholarship of teaching and learning?* Retrieved from <http://davidjvoelker.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/What-Is-SoTL.pdf>

Or visit the following journals:

- Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Teaching and Learning Inquiry



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Frequently Asked Questions Continued...

Question: Are there publication possibilities for SoTL research?

Answer: Absolutely. SoTL research involves developing practical knowledge about effective teaching, not only to improve your own teaching, but to assist other instructors with whom you share your results. There are a variety of conferences and journals that want to access what you've discovered in your study.

Question: Now that I know what SoTL is, I remember that I've got some student essays from last year that I could use as data for a SoTL study. I want to analyze the essays to identify whether they made fewer spelling errors at the end of the term because of the spelling tutorials I used with them during the term. Can I just go ahead and begin this SoTL project?

Answer: I like your enthusiasm, but the answer to your question is an emphatic "no." All SoTL research must receive research ethics approval before you begin the project. You can't use data for your project that you collected previously.

Question: Research ethics approval? I've never done that before. SoTL sounds more complicated than I thought. I'm still interested in getting involved, but I feel kind of overwhelmed. Is there anyone at MacEwan who can help me get started with a project?

Answer: There are several sources of help on campus. You can book an appointment with Pamela Young in the Office of Teaching and Learning Services. No matter what your background is in research, she can help you to develop a research question, figure out methodology options, and support you in writing the ethics review application. Down the road, she can offer you "just in time support" and ideas for dissemination of your results. The Office of Teaching and Learning Services facilitates frequent presentations on various aspects of SoTL. Also, watch for an announcement of the first SoTL Faculty Learning Community meeting in early 2020. You'll be able to meet other SoTL researchers, hear about their projects, and get feedback and advice on your own.

