

FACULTY GUIDE TO THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING





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Welcome to WCU's Guide to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) enables faculty to integrate their roles as teachers and scholars within their own classrooms. At its core, SoTL involves systematically investigating questions about student learning and implementing evidence-based approaches to enhance educational experiences. Many faculty across our campus are already engaged in SoTL work, often without recognizing that their research fits this category. This guide serves as a resource for your SoTL journey and provides opportunities to connect with peers engaged in similar scholarly pursuits at WCU.

Developed by the Teaching and Learning Center in partnership with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, this guide incorporates valuable input from members of the 2023–2025 Pedagogical Innovations Faculty Learning Community. We hope it will inspire your scholarly explorations and facilitate connections with colleagues who are pursuing similar questions about teaching and learning.

Integrating Scholarship and Teaching: SoTL and WCU's Teacher-Scholar Model

As a faculty member at WCU, SoTL offers you a way to align with teacher-scholar models by integrating your scholarship and teaching into a unified practice. While teacher-scholar models vary across departments at our institution, engaging in SoTL may be a way for you to bridge the boundary between these two essential aspects of your academic identity. Rather than treating teaching and scholarship as competing demands on your time, SoTL enables you to pursue them as complementary activities that strengthen each other. This integrated approach helps you embody the teacher-scholar ideal—enhancing your students' learning while advancing your scholarly agenda in a process that benefits both your professional development and your students' educational experiences.

It is worth noting that SoTL typically differs from traditional disciplinary scholarship in its focus and methodology, offering you an additional pathway for scholarly inquiry centered on your pedagogical practice.

What is Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)?

At its core, SoTL is about systematically exploring questions about how your students learn and using evidence-based approaches to enhance their educational experience. When you engage in SoTL, you investigate questions that matter to your teaching practice: "Are my students reaching their learning goals?" and "How can I better support their success?" These inquiries become the foundation for pedagogical innovation, whether in your specific discipline or through broader pedagogical approaches.

Ethical considerations are fundamental to SoTL work. As you investigate your teaching and student learning, you must maintain rigorous ethical standards in your research design, data collection, and analysis. This includes obtaining appropriate institutional review board (IRB) approval, ensuring student privacy and confidentiality, practicing informed consent, and considering the potential impacts of your research on all students. Ethical SoTL work recognizes power dynamics in the classroom and seeks to mitigate their influence on research outcomes.

The benefits of SoTL extend in multiple directions. For you as a faculty member, it provides a framework to enhance student engagement, address diverse learning needs, and create more inclusive learning environments. For your students, SoTL translates into increased engagement and improved outcomes, particularly for those with diverse learning needs.

SoTL is a great vehicle for engaging in reflective teaching. At an institutional level, SoTL helps cultivate a culture where questioning and improving teaching practices is valued and leveraged to advance and support evidence-based pedagogical practices across campus.

By engaging with SoTL, you join a community of educators committed to continuous improvement and student success.

Resources

[Public SoTL: Amplifying the Purposes, Audiences, and Products of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning](#). (Chick, N): This chapter explains the various perspectives of purposes for doing SoTL. Also, it articulates how SoTL has opened up conversations for professors to discuss strategies to teach their students in spaces outside of the classroom and with

people not in the exact field of the professor, such as an English professor discussing SoTL with a math professor. Furthermore, it lists examples of SoTL successfully making positive changes.

[SoTL's Impact on Teaching Goals: A Case Study from a Regional University.](#) (Shaffer, K et al): This article goes into detail about how SoTL positively shapes professors' teaching goals. Moreover, it articulates how the teaching goals being effective better students' engagement in the classroom, and the positive impacts it has on professors and institutions. Finally, it has a study that found that many professors and students benefit from SoTL because it greatly helps professors to evaluate and modify their teaching goals.

Ethical Considerations in SoTL Research

When conducting SoTL research with your students as participants, several important ethical dimensions require your thoughtful attention. As both researcher and instructor, you navigate unique responsibilities that deserve careful consideration:

Power Dynamics

The inherent power relationship between you and your students creates ethical complexities in SoTL research. As their professor, you evaluate their work and assign grades that impact their academic future. When these same students become research participants, you must establish clear boundaries to ensure:

- Student participation remains genuinely voluntary
- Grading practices remain fair and consistent for all students
- Students feel comfortable declining participation without fear of consequences

Research-Influenced Teaching Decisions

SoTL research naturally influences how you view student work and design your curriculum. When implementing your study:

- Be transparent about how research questions might shape assignments
- Maintain focus on learning outcomes while collecting data
- Regularly reflect on whether research interests are appropriately balanced with educational responsibilities
- Ensure assessment practices serve both research and pedagogical goals without compromising either

Professional Advancement Considerations

As SoTL research becomes part of your scholarly identity and career trajectory:

- Establish safeguards to prevent career motivations from influencing how you treat student participants
- Implement blind grading protocols when possible
- Consider having colleagues review assessment practices for potential bias
- Document your decision-making processes to ensure transparency

By thoughtfully addressing these ethical considerations, you demonstrate respect for your students as both learners and research participants, strengthening the integrity of your SoTL work and its contribution to the broader teaching and learning community.

Resources

[Being Ethically Minded: Practising the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in an Ethical Manner \(2013\)](#): This article discusses challenges of being ethical while doing SoTL research and proposes strategies for addressing the challenges.

[Key Principles and Strategies for Ethical Practice \(University of Calgary\)](#): This source has a chart that explains the main principles are to do SoTL ethically. It also includes strategies for how to apply these key principles for ethics in your SoTL research.

West Chester University, [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#): This website has a couple of links to research articles on conducting the IRB process ethically. It also has a link to the CITY Training which is needed in order to complete an IRB protocol.

Conducting Your SoTL Project: A Step-by-Step Process

Ready to begin your SoTL journey? This guide walks you through the process of designing and implementing a meaningful Scholarship of Teaching and Learning project that can transform your teaching practice. These steps are summarized from the book *Engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (2012) by Cathy Bishop-Clark and Beth Dietz-Uhler.

Step 1: Identify Your Research Question

Start with what matters most in your classroom:

- What aspect of student learning interests or concerns you?
- Where do students consistently struggle in your course?
- What teaching innovation are you curious about evaluating?

Frame your curiosity as a specific, answerable question. For example, instead of asking "How can I improve student engagement?" consider "How does implementing think-pair-share activities affect participation rates in introductory biology?"

Resources

SoTL Research Questions: This website has very specific examples of research questions a professor could ask themselves, underneath frequent categories used to generate SoTL research questions. It also has a concise overview of the main points of what effective research questions should consist of. (Community College of Rhode Island's Center for Teaching Excellence).

[How to Get Started with SoTL: Reflections from a Novice SoTL Researcher](#) (Schmedding-Bartley, J (2024)): This article uses both scientifically proven SoTL strategies and the researcher's personal journey written in an academic and personal journal notebook style, as a newcomer generating research ideas. It also has a very clear chart of the author's research questions and their classifications.

Step 2: Design Your Study

Develop a clear methodology that aligns with your research question:

1. **Review relevant literature:** Explore existing SoTL research and pedagogical approaches in your discipline or more general teaching and learning literature
2. **Select appropriate research methods:** Quantitative (surveys, assessment scores), qualitative (interviews, reflections), or mixed methods
3. **Determine your timeline:** When will you implement interventions and collect data?
4. **Identify participants:** Which course sections or student populations will be involved?
5. **Plan data collection tools:** Create or adapt surveys, rubrics, interview protocols, etc.

Resources

[SoTL Worksheets](#): This website has the same blank guided chart and a completed-out chart, for finding a research question and planning a SoTL project. The filled-out chart has examples of how they found their research question. It is also divided by the purpose explained for the information they found. (*University System of Georgia, Teaching and Learning Excellence*)

[SoTL Project Planning Template](#): This website has a concise checklist with to the point directions for designing a SoTL study. It also has a visual chart with different colors that have bullet points of the basic overview of steps required to complete a SoTL design. Furthermore, underneath each step, it has links to additional resources for how to do that step. (Constega Center for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning)

[Conducting a Literature Review](#): This source is written in an informative blog format that has links to literature databases to do literature reviews within its paragraphs. It also has examples of search terms for literature reviews and a link to a resource to find search terms for literature reviews.

[Tips for Finding SoTL Research Studies](#): This source is written in a blog format with examples of databases that you can use to search for published SoTL research studies. The resource includes a section sharing tips for using keywords when searching for SoTL research.

[Reviewing the Literature on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning \(SoTL\)](#): This article includes a graph that explains how to do a SoTL literature review. It also has paragraphs that have overviews of different types of literature reviews that you can conduct.

Step 3: Collect Data

Ensure your project respects student rights while gathering evidence:

- Submit your project to your Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- Develop informed consent procedures for participants
- Document your process thoroughly as you implement your study
- Maintain consistency in data collection methods
- Keep detailed notes about implementation nuances

Step 4: Analyze Your Results

Analyze your data:

- Use appropriate analytical methods for your data type
- Look beyond confirming your expectations to what the data actually reveals
- Consider alternative explanations for your findings
- Identify connections to existing literature

Resources

[SoTL Data Collection and Analysis](#): This website has brief descriptions or directions on how to complete various data collection methods, along with an example of the method being applied in real life. It has the same exact format for how to do data analysis. (Deakin University)

[SoTL Inquiry Methods](#): This website has the three main SoTL research methods and the strategies used to conduct research for them. Moreover, it has the definition of the research method to explain its goal, links to an example of each research method being used in SoTL research studies. Finally, it has a link or links to additional resources for the SoTL research method. (Elon Center for Engaged Learning)

Step 5: Apply and Share Your Findings

The full potential of your SoTL project is realized when you:

- Implement changes in your teaching based on your findings
- Present at campus teaching events or disciplinary conferences
- Publish in SoTL or disciplinary teaching journals
- Engage colleagues in discussions about your discoveries
- Reflect on what worked well and identify new questions for future projects

Remember that SoTL research often leads to incremental improvements rather than dramatic transformations. Your contribution adds to our collective understanding of effective teaching and learning, benefiting both your students and the broader academic community.

Resources

[Sharing your findings](#): This blog shares with tips for sharing your SoTL research findings. It also has a video that has strategies for sharing your SoTL research.

[SoTL Journals](#): This resource has a list of journals where you can publish your SoTL research including general SoTL journals to discipline-specific SoTL journals. It also includes a list of conferences where you can share your SoTL research and groups for niche disciplines in SoTL research.

[Getting SoTL Articles Published – A Few Tips](#): This website has tips on how to publish your articles in SoTL journals.

Support for Your SoTL Journey

As you embark on your SoTL journey, WCU offers resources to support your work. If you need guidance, peer review, or collaborative opportunities for your SoTL project, our Teaching and Learning Center can connect you with valuable campus resources. While many departments recognize SoTL as legitimate research for promotion and tenure considerations, this varies across disciplines. If you need help demonstrating the scholarly value of your SoTL work to your department, we can provide resources and advocacy support to strengthen your case.

Your SoTL journey need not be solitary. We encourage collaboration as essential to effective SoTL work. Consider reaching out to faculty members from the 2023-2024 Pedagogical Innovations Faculty Learning Community who have experience with SoTL projects and can offer valuable insights. Also monitor announcements from the TLC and ORSP for additional SoTL opportunities throughout the academic year.