Research For Teaching And Learning

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ABSTRACT

Research is an important part of the careers of most academics. This article provides an introduction to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) and suggests that opportunities exist in this research area for faculty to begin or extend their publishing efforts. SOTL research is rapidly becoming more accepted as evidenced by the number of journals catering to research on teaching and learning. The authors detail ways in which to approach SOTL research, choose a topic and begin to submit articles to appropriate journals.

INTRODUCTION

$\mathcal{U}$niversity faculty are increasingly under pressure to publish in academic journals. Two of the authors are senior business professors in a large private university in the Southeast United States; the other author is a public school teacher who teaches as an adjunct for the same university. The senior authors have published books and articles in a variety of journals as well as participated in numerous conferences in their academic fields as well as the more general field of teaching and learning. Specifically, in the last ten years, the authors have become aficionados of online teaching and learning and have attended numerous conferences and presented papers on many facets of online pedagogy. During this rather nontraditional research path, it occurred to us that doing research in the field of teaching and learning can open up a valuable research trail to junior faculty as well as those who suddenly find themselves facing publication requirements after years of spending their time predominantly in the areas of teaching and service. We have also discovered that scholarship for teaching and learning (SOTL) is becoming a recognized field for faculty scholarship. (DeAngelis, 2003; Bender, 2005)

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the audience to the opportunities available to conduct research and write papers and articles in the areas of teaching and learning. We begin by reviewing why faculty typically do academic research at all.

WHY DO ACADEMIC RESEARCH?

Most faculty members are motivated by both professional and career-related motivations for doing research. Professional motivations include the simple joy of discovery, the desire to extend the knowledge in ones field, the allure of coming up with a new theory or model, and the desire to become known in ones field. Career-related motivation arises from the fact that many, if not most, faculty members need to do publishable research in order to continue their academic careers.

Some faculty begin this research stream during their doctoral studies and take positions at research-based institutions where the "publish or perish" culture is well-known and the rules of what is acceptable research are easily discerned. Other faculty follow a teaching focus and take jobs at teaching institutions where the main criteria for rank and promotion is teaching expertise and service to the field. Even in the latter type of institution, however, the trend seems to be to require more publishable research from faculty as colleges and universities continually strive to upgrade their reputations within the academic community in order to remain competitive in recruiting the best students.

For faculty who have not spent a sizeable amount of their time honing their research tools, this requirement to do publishable research may be daunting as they try to figure out how to become active in publishing.

GETTING STARTED IN TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH

The authors suggest that one good way to begin a stream of research is to write about something you know. For most faculty, this automatically brings to mind research in their field of expertise. While this is one way to proceed, there may be another area of research which is readily available to them—research into the area of teaching and learning. Before choosing this path, however, it is important to know the requirements of ones school as some deans require discipline-based research. Many teaching institutions, however, are just anxious to get faculty publishing and are less emphatic about what type of research is being done. Further, teaching institutions are more likely to recognize the importance of research in teaching and learning as it has direct application to the priority of the school—effective teaching.

The scholarship of teaching and learning, recently referred to as SOTL research, has gained new respect at many universities and provides a ready laboratory for teachers in all subject areas. Pioneered by the Carnegie Foundation in the early 1990s, SOTL research has proliferated since then. Says Carnegie Foundation President, Lee Shulman,

The basic notion is that the teaching and learning of one's own discipline or profession is itself a kind of living laboratory, a setting in which all sorts of intriguing, researchable questions quite specific to the discipline or profession develop. (DeAngelis, 2003, p. 54)

To get started in this area, become familiar with the journals in the area by reading selected articles to get a good feel for what is wanted. Studying submission guidelines is quite easy as they are almost always available online. The assortment of teaching and learning journals may surprise someone who has not looked at this literature lately. Figure 1 shows a representative assortment of these publications. There are many more. Information on all of these is available on the Internet. Note that some of these journals are general in nature while others focus on online teaching and learning or teaching and learning in a specific discipline like medicine or mathematics.

A quick examination of these journals shows that there are at least 4 categories of articles possible.

WHAT TYPES OF ARTICLES TO WRITE

For faculty deciding to publish in this field, it may be helpful to divide the types of SOTL research into four categories: pedagogy, curriculum, academic issues, and administrative topics.

Pedagogical Topics

Articles that deal with pedagogy are widely published. Topics might include pedagogical techniques that are appropriate for adult learners or online learners as well as comparison studies about how these groups learn as compared to traditional students. What methods are used effectively? How best can faculty and students achieve learning outcomes?   What types of testing works best with different student groups or in different learning environments? How do we create online learning environments? Examples of articles falling into this category are:

1. Alessio, H. (May 2004). Student perceptions about and performance in problem-based learning. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.* 4, 25-36.
2. *Chizmar, J. (2005). The effectiveness of assignments that utilize a time-efficient grading scheme. Journal on Excellence in College Teaching, 16(1), 5-21.*
3. Gibson, J. W. & Blackwell, C. W. (October 2005). Heading for cyberspace: Planning a strategy for success with online classes. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning* 2(10), 7-12.

Figure 1: Representative Teaching and Learning Publications

- *American Journal of Distance Education*
- *Art Education*
- *Distance Education*
- *Educational Philosophy and Theory*
- *The Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries*
- *European Journal of Open and Distance Learning*
- *International Journal for Mathematics Teaching and Learning*
- *International Journal of E-Learning*
- *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*
- *The Internet and Higher Education*
- *Inventio: Creative Thinking about Learning and Teaching*
- *Journal of Accounting Education*
- *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*
- *Journal of Distance Learning Administration*
- *Journal of Economic Education*
- *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*
- *Journal of Education for Business*
- *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*
- *Journal of Instruction Delivery Systems*
- *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*
- *Journal of Legal Education*
- *Journal of Marketing Education*
- *Journal of Nursing Education*
- *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*
- *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*
- *Journal of Teaching in International Business*
- *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*
- *Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning*
- *Literacy Teaching and Learning*
- *New Direction for Teaching and Learning*
- *Organizational Behavior Teaching Review*
- *Research in the Teaching of English*
- *Teaching and Learning Bridges Journal*
- *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*
- *Teaching and Change*
- *Teaching College*
- *Teaching of Psychology*
- *Technological Horizons in Education (T.H.E.) Journal*

Discipline-Based Articles

　　　　Many journals such as *The Journal of Economic Education, the Journal of Geography in Higher Education, the Journal of Intensive English Studies,* and *Hospitality & Tourism Educator* lend themselves to articles which are more discipline-based. Examples include:

1.　　　　Carlson, L., Cohen, R. & Ramsey, D. (2002). Implementing Hansen's proficiencies. *Journal of Economic Education,* 33(2), 180-192.

2.   Jeffers, B. (2002). Continuing education in research ethics for the clinical nurse. *Journal of Continuing Nursing Education,* 33(6), 265-269.
3.   Loomis, D. G. & Cox, J.E. Jr. (200). A course in economic forecasting: Rationale and content. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 31(4), 349-357.

Curriculum-Based Articles

In leafing through the SOTL literature, it is easy to find articles dealing with curricular innovation. New courses and programs can be written up for a variety of journals. These articles are largely anecdotal and read like case studies which can be applied by other faculty at their schools. Examples of this type of article include:

1.   Gibson, J.W. & Herrera, J. (January 1999) How to go from classroom based to online delivery in eighteen months or less: A case study in online program development. *T.H.E. Journal.* 26(6), 57-60.
2.   McKinney, K. (May 2004). How sociology majors learn sociology: Successful learners tell their stories. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,* 4, 15-24.
3.   Winchell, M., Graf, L, & Hemmasi, M. (2000). An interuniversity/multidisciplinary education experience for entrepreneurship and engineering students: A demonstration case. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education, 3.*

Academic Issues

There are a myriad of academic issues which provide good topics for teaching and learning articles. Some of these topics might include academic integrity, testing in the online environment, faculty load, academic freedom, and intellectual property. The following articles give examples.

1.   Chizmar, J. F. & Williams, D. B. (2001). What do faculty want? *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, 1, 18-24.
2.   Goddard, R. & Rudzki, R. (2005). Using an electronic text-matching tool (Turnitin) to detect plagiarism in a New Zealand university. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* 2(3b).
3.   Simione, K. & Rich, A. (October 2005). Identifying learning outcomes and the use of the discussion board in an online course. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning,* 2(10), 1-5.

Administrative Topics

Many faculty members have at least some administrative duties during their careers including such responsibilities as department chairs, administering grants, or chairing committees. Administrative topics of interest to the teaching and learning literature include faculty selection, the use of adjunct faculty, training, course loads, and development of faculty. An area of intense interest in recent years has been the preparation of faculty to teach online courses. Here are two examples of this type of article.

1.   Gibson, J. W. & Blackwell, C. W. (January 2005). Education without boundaries: Faculty training and support. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 1-6.
2.   Mueller, J. (July 2005). The authentic assessment toolbox: enhancing student learning through online faculty development. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching,* available at http://jolt.merlot.org/vol1_no1_mueller.htm.

Getting Articles Accepted

Deciding on a topic and an outlet for your resulting article may be the critical steps in getting articles accepted. The research methods you use to write the article will vary between observation, surveys, review of the literature, experiment, presenting a new model and case studies. The conclusions you draw should be done in such a way as to fit the domain of the journal you have targeted. Most of the SOTL literature draws some practical conclusions or recommendations for others. Figure 2 shows some practical questions to ask yourself before you submit the article. Only after answering yes to each of these questions should the article be submitted.

Figure 2: Questions to Ask before You Submit

- Is the article error free and well written?
- Does the format conform to the standards of the journal?
- Does the topic fit within the domain statement of the journal?
- Does the article add something new to the literature on the topic?
- Is the literature review, if appropriate, current?
- Are useful applications or implications included?
- Is there take-away value for the reader?
- Is there clear and appropriate use of language and style?
- Does the introduction clearly identify the purpose of the article?
- Does the conclusion sum up all key parts of the article?
- Does the abstract succinctly provide an executive summary?

Once you have submitted your article, expect it to go through the same process as any type of academic article. It will be initially scanned by the editor to see if it generally fits the journal. If so, it will be sent to one or more reviewers who will either reject your article outright or more likely give you suggestions for improving the article. There can be several rounds of reviews and rewrites before an article is actually accepted for publication. Perseverance is the name of the game in getting articles published. Even a reject letter is likely to come with valuable suggestions as to how to make your article publishable. You can update your article and submit it to another journal, but be sure to make necessary changes, because it is not unusual for a single reviewer to serve on several editorial boards. The worst thing that can happen is for the same reviewer to get the same paper, without changes, at another journal. This will almost assure you of another rejection. Expect this entire process to take months. In the meantime, you can be working on another article!

CONCLUSION

SOTL research provides a non-traditional path for academic research and publishing. It is rapidly becoming more accepted as evidenced by the number of journals catering to research on teaching and learning. It often provides real-time benefit to readers as opposed to the more esoteric value of traditional scholarly articles. All those who teach encounter researchable problems and issues on an almost daily basis. The authors have suggested ways in which to approach SOTL research, choose a topic and begin to submit articles to appropriate journals. Building the literature on the scholarship of teaching and learning seems a worthwhile way in which to add to ones publication record as well as provide benefit for many educators facing the same issues.

REFERENCES

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