

## **Many Are Called, But Few Show Up: Building Scholarly Communities of Teachers**

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### **Abstract:**

*Strengthening the bonds among university educators for the scholarship of teaching and learning is indeed an arduous task. The pursuit of tenure and promotion, the establishment of an international reputation for one's research among colleagues in the same narrow specialty areas, and other features of university life present substantial challenges to building scholarly communities of faculty and staff across the complex structures and rewards systems of modern universities. This essay introduces the concept of "SoTL capital" and describes four interrelated types of capital associated with the promotion of scholarly communities devoted to inquiry regarding teaching excellence. It discusses the development and strengthening of "horizontal networks" of like-minded faculty within the context of a large and busy university, such as Ohio State.*

### **Key Words:**

SoTL capital, horizontal networks, scholarship of teaching and learning, tenure and promotion, challenges.

## **Introduction and Institutional Context**

The Ohio State University in Columbus is the largest university campus in the US, with more than 52,000 students (c. 60,000 for all campuses). A public University with very high research activity, Ohio State has five Colleges (Faculties) in the Arts & Sciences consortium, as well as a Graduate School and 14 other colleges and schools. The university offers 167 undergraduate majors, 130 masters programs, 107 doctoral degrees and seven professional degrees. An estimated 12,000 classes are offered each term. We have over 3000 regular (tenure track) faculty, nearly 500 clinical faculty, about 50 research faculty, 2000 plus auxiliary faculty (adjuncts, part-time, lecturers, etc.), and approximately 2300 graduate teaching associates.

While research is clearly the primary focus of most faculty members and the administration, there is strong support, rhetorical and concrete, for teaching. The University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT) has 5 full-time consultants, a program coordinator, an office administrator, and several Graduate Administrative Associates. We report directly to the Office of Academic Affairs and receive strong support for our programming, even in difficult economic times.

Two groups of faculty members (with some overlap in membership) at Ohio State are affiliated with UCAT in supporting work in the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning. First, The Ohio State University Association for Scholarly Teaching (TOAST) is an informal group of faculty and staff formed in 2005, some of whom meet regularly to discuss various aspects of quality teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning. The discussions are lively, and there is always something to learn. As well, there is a TOAST listserv, which has a subscription of approximately 80 faculty, TA's and staff interested in teaching and learning. Second, The Ohio State Academy of Teaching consists of those members of our regular faculty who have received the Alumni Association Award for Distinguished Teaching. Ten individuals receive this award each year; in 2009, more than 1000 were nominated. The Academy promotes SoTL work in several ways; primary among them is its sponsorship of an annual mini-conference on "Great Teaching" each Spring Quarter, which is attended by 100-150 interested faculty, staff and TA's.

While two of the authors of this paper (Alan Kalish and Teresa Johnson) are instructional consultants with UCAT, the first author, Joe Donnermeyer is a Professor of Rural Sociology, chair of the Executive Council for the Academy of Teaching, and a founding member of TOAST. All three authors have been active in Ohio State's efforts as the lead institution for the "Building Scholarly Communities" cluster in the CASTL Institutional Leadership Program.

The authors discuss the concept of learning communities and applies it to building and strengthening community among faculty, staff and administrators who share a common desire to enable and enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning at their university. They also debate several challenges in academic culture that reduce participation in this work and propose a schema that adapts the concept of social capital to support SoTL work, locating this at the intersection of academic disciplines and institutional axes.

Portions of this article, also titled “Many are Called, but Few Show Up,” appeared in the Ohio State Academy of Teaching journal, *Talking about Teaching* (volume 3, pp. 66-73). *Talking about Teaching* is published annually through the Knowledge Bank of The Ohio State University Library system (<https://kb.osu.edu>), under the page reserved for the Ohio State Academy of Teaching. In that earlier essay, Donnermeyer explored the stereotypes of university faculty members as “extreme individualists, working in silos”, rather than as caring scholar-teachers. He identified the individualism of academics as a challenge to those who desire to build faculty communities across the wide array of disciplines and administrative complexities that characterize institutions of higher learning.

By their very nature, universities are complex organizations fragmented along vertical lines that reflect disciplinarily-defined, administrative patterns of decision-making and accountability. Faculty learn as early as their first year in graduate school that building a resume for the academic marketplace is based mostly on national and international standing within one’s own discipline. Unfortunately, the organization and culture of many institutions of higher learning too often produce a patchwork quilt of segmented academic units and faculty mind-sets focused on recognition from disciplinary colleagues located everywhere but in the home institution. Under these conditions, cooperation across disciplinary boundaries within a single institution of higher learning can be difficult to initiate and even more daunting to sustain.

Yet, there are faculty and administrators who resist these organizational pressures, and know full well that a truly great university is a place where educators feel a sense of community and understand the value of “rubbing elbows” with others who share the same challenges of applying quality scholarship to their undergraduate and graduate courses. In sharing information on the joys of teaching, techniques for teaching well, student-centered learning practices, effective testing tips, ways to evaluate one’s own teaching, and testing and measuring learning among students, frequently and in the true spirit of mentoring, a scholarly community may indeed be achieved.

### **Community and SOTL**

Community can be defined in a variety of ways (Liepins, 2000), but, ultimately, it is a relationship of physical contiguity among members of a social system. Without a doubt, the university campus is both a physical place and a social system, even though the proverbial right hand of the system may not always know what the left hand is doing. Faculty live and work at the same place, but often have little idea what faculty in the same academic unit (i.e., their neighbors) do, and may care little about their work, unless they share the same narrow interests and attend the same annual professional society meetings at some far off convention site.

Liepins (2000) builds on Foucault’s concept of *habitas* to describe four essential dimensions of community: people, practices, perceptions, and spaces/structures. For Liepins (2000), people are an essential component of community not so much as individuals, but for the multiple networks and groups in which they simultaneously participate. Practices and perceptions are both ways in which individuals, through these various networks and groups, engage in community-based activities and think about their experiences as members of a community. These actions and how they are

experienced and thought about occur at specific locations, and, in fact, the physical environment itself shapes and is shaped by the interplay of people, practices and perceptions. When all four are united into a single concept, a community becomes a place with “temporally and locationally specific terrains of power and discourse” (Liepins, 2000, p. 29).

Within the community of every university are many networks that are the myriad departments, schools, colleges and other academic and administrative units that appear as little boxes on the formal organizational chart kept in the President’s office. Most of the lines on that chart are vertical, expressing forms of accountability up and down the university system. Each unit is akin to a neighborhood. Both within each neighborhood of a university and across its whole structure are contested meanings and practices related to teaching, research, and service that are expressed within politicized environments where rewards are distributed unevenly for the work accomplished. Hence, all perceptions and practices within the academy are “contested” along “terrains” of power and discourse.

Readers should note that we eschew a romanticized portrait of community as a form of human organization where everyone gets along with everyone else. Instead, for Liepins (2000) and for us, a community is merely a place where people are organized, whether the organization is primarily in the form of divisive, conflictual relationships, or in more collaborative and cooperative arrangements. In this sense, the key question is not whether a university is a community, but, rather, what type of community it is. Is it a community balanced in its recognition of teaching, research, and service? Does it encourage collegial relationships among faculty across the disciplines by sharing work related to SoTL and other forms of collaborative, horizontally organized networks as well? Or, is the university community less multi-dimensional, recognizing and rewarding only certain forms of rigorous scholarship, such as journals and research grants?

Over the past several decades, many universities have seen the strengthening of the vertical structures promoting recognition of research over the horizontal structures promoting great teaching and SoTL. However, the horizontal is fighting back through the creation of a variety of professional development resources related to SOTL to which faculty can avail themselves, including centers of teaching excellence, academies of teaching, and consortiums aimed at building faculty communities. Yet, universities are not alone or unique in the great challenges they face in their efforts to build more civil and cooperative communities. When professors leave their offices for their homes, they find the same situation in the cities, towns, and villages where they live. Robert Putnam’s (1996; 2000) provocative works on “Bowling Alone” describe a contemporary American society in which more and more people participate in the leisure activity of bowling even as the number of bowling leagues (i.e., community) declines. Time-consuming jobs, along with many new technologies like the internet, e-mail, cell phones, and iPods, which most of us cannot imagine how we ever got along without, challenge the ability of all to take time to talk to their neighbors and to volunteer for civic organizations (i.e., horizontal integration) even as they have become more connected to the world (i.e., vertical integration).

## **Building Community in a Busy University**

We recognize that the experience of those interested in exploring the scholarly dimensions of great teaching through seminars, brown bag lunches, conferences, and other forms of community building may best be described by the title of this article: “many are called, but few show up.” Much of this can be attributed to the so-called “political economy” of universities, which can be defined as the reward systems of groups, professional organizations and societies, and the cultures that teach us how to compete for those rewards within institutions of higher learning. As universities have grown in size and complexity, so too have the demands on faculty to successfully engage in competition to publish (sole-authored papers) in peer-reviewed venues and win grants from government agencies and foundations. These demands compete directly with faculty time devoted to teaching, and, most often, win out over teaching. It is not even a “dirty little secret” that publishing in journals with great impact ratings (as measured by a citation index) and getting grants from highly respected sources like the National Science and Engineering Research Council in Canada or the National Science Foundation in the United States carry far more weight in the tenure and promotion process at many if not most universities than similarly high standards for the demonstration of scholarship in teaching and learning. Hence, the vertical structures of most big and busy universities, reflecting departmental cultures defined by disciplines, tenure, promotion, and merit raises, grows stronger, while the horizontal structures reflecting faculty communities seeking to share methods for improvement of teaching and the enhancement of student learning, suffer in turn.

Kilgore and Cook (2007), in reviewing the literature on faculty decisions to participate in SoTL, list similar impediments, such as public/institutional policy, a reward structure that gives greater emphasis to research over teaching, and faculty members’ perceptions about the relative superiority of research over teaching in their own disciplines, as among the most important factors. Ultimately, however, they contend that the resistance to valuing scholarship in all of its forms within the teaching and learning functions of a university is “inherent in the habits and practices of faculty members themselves, even those who are scholarly teachers” (Kilgore & Cook, 2007, p. 144). Without a doubt, they are describing community exactly as Liepins (2000) conceives it: as “temporally and locationally specific terrains of power and discourse.”

## **Establishing SoTL Capital**

The essence of social capital is a network of people organized on the basis of norms of reciprocity and mutual trust (Coleman, 1988). Universities are filled with faculty, students, and staff who have a vast array of individual talents, or, if you like, human resources. But unless individual resources are organized, they do not become social capital. The problem, however, is not that faculty (and others) are unorganized. The real issue is that social capital within universities is organized vertically, and, as one would expect, faculty and other university personnel rationally behave according to the contexts or environments in which they find themselves. Hence, developing and sustaining communities to strengthen the scholarship of teaching and learning is largely a fundamental issue of building social capital along horizontal lines and overcoming vertical impediments to sustainable, horizontally-based faculty communities.

There are two types of social capital, sometimes referred to as “bonding capital” and “bridging capital” (Granovetter, 1973; Freudenburg, 1986; Flora & Flora, 2003). Bonding capital is exemplified by the relationships internal to a group, reflecting dimensions of loyalty and cohesion. Bridging capital includes relationships held by individuals across groups. It is worth saying, again, that universities like Ohio State have plenty of bonding capital as expressed through the reward system for promotion, tenure, and merit raises within their many colleges, schools, divisions, departments, and centers. Bridging capital is another matter, however. There is plenty of support for bridging capital in terms of relationships faculty may have with colleagues in the same discipline at other universities, but there is little institutional encouragement to develop bridging capital to others from different disciplines within the same institution.

Even within the arena of Scholarship of Discovery, which matches most universities biases toward peer-reviewed research publications and competitive grants in rewarding faculty work, there are significant challenges to building bridging capital within the same university. The same challenges apply to SoTL, and these challenges are exacerbated by the lesser relative weight that teaching holds in the political economy of universities like Ohio State. While we have hope that we can build and sustain communities of teacher-scholars, it is not simply a matter of announcing more seminars and brown bags on teaching techniques and expecting a horde of faculty and staff to show up, but of thinking strategically about multiple types of capital and how these interact or reinforce each other to build more sustainable communities for quality teaching and SoTL.

With this in mind, we have adapted the concept of social capital to what we call “SoTL capital” so that we are able to discuss a variety of interrelated/reinforcing types. The graphic (Table 1) below illustrates four kinds of SoTL capital built along a simple schema that mimics the concepts of bonding capital and bridging capital. The vertical axis describes the continuum of embeddedness associated with one’s discipline. SoTL capital can be built both within a discipline and among disciplines. The horizontal axis is one’s university. Again, SoTL capital can be built both within a university and among academics (and academic units) at different universities. All four should be viewed as essential and mutually reinforcing.

Table 1: Four Types of SoTL Capital

<b>BUILDING SoTL CAPITAL</b>			
<b>Four Types of SoTL Capital</b>			
Disciplinary	Institutional		
		within	among
	within	<b>Local Disciplinary (L-D)</b> Departmental Support for SoTL and Mentoring	<b>Global Disciplinary (G-D)</b> Professional Societies
	among	<b>Local Cross-Disciplinary (L-CD)</b> Interdisciplinary SoTL Communities	<b>Global Cross-Disciplinary (G-CD)</b> ISSOTL and CASTL

Local Disciplinary (L-D) SoTL capital is internal to both the discipline and the university, and refers mostly to activities that take place within a single academic unit. Much of this is mentoring and peer review of teaching. Fortunately, a greater emphasis on required documentation of the outcomes of teaching in promotion and tenure dossiers has benefited the development of this form of SoTL capital. In most universities, multiple forms of evidence related to teaching quality have become more commonplace than in the past, including the standardized student evaluation of instruction. Along with peer review of teaching, some artifacts of teaching such as a course portfolio, analysis of students' written comments about an instructor, and, one hopes, a self-evaluative statement by the instructor, there are plenty of opportunities to gather evidence related to quality teaching. Compared to the past, department chairs today more likely encourage junior faculty to document teaching performance and improvement from the moment the tenure clock begins ticking. Yet, there is much more that can be done within departments.

Nearly all disciplines have journals devoted to teaching, and, in some disciplines, these journals are well respected, although this is not the case in all fields of study. Many scholars involved in SoTL do SoTL work at a radically local level, within their own classes, departments, disciplines and institutions. A SoTL article in a journal representing a faculty member's research specialty may be given more weight, prestige, and importance on the annual review of performance than an equally rigorous article in the discipline's teaching journal. Either way, publication in venues respected in the discipline paves the way for a broader form of SoTL capital.

Global Disciplinary (G-D) SoTL capital is within the discipline and among universities; sociologists around the world might share Global Disciplinary capital. One example of this type of SoTL capital is the recognition provided by awards for excellence in teaching that are sponsored by various professional societies. These awards can be prestigious and even come with small monetary rewards. Further, not only do plaques for such awards help hide the cracks and scuffs on one's office wall, but they help build promotion and tenure dossiers as well. Some disciplines have active and extensive collaborations in SoTL work. For example, historians in the UK, Australia, the US and Canada have been devoting increasing energy to systematic exploration of the learning of history at the college level. Historians have created an international society, a website (<http://www.indiana.edu/~histsotl/blog/>), and an electronic newsletter to share and support SoTL within their field. This does not happen easily without a very dedicated and generous faculty who give of their time.

Local Cross-disciplinary SoTL capital (L-CD) represents the juxtaposition of "among" disciplines but "within" a single university. Our local example of an interdisciplinary community in support of SoTL is the TOAST group mentioned earlier. Yet, TOAST is but one example of the way interdisciplinary groups can be developed within a university. For example, with the support of the Office of Academic Affairs, the University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT) at Ohio State provides several opportunities for faculty to participate in scholarly communities centered on quality teaching. In fact, TOAST itself is a spin-off of UCAT's Mid-Career and Senior Faculty community. Several members of the 2003 edition of that program decided to meet informally through the next year, and this group transformed into TOAST.

Much cross-disciplinary effort is encouraged within institutions by teaching and learning centers. These offices are often established as central, autonomous entities, under the aegis of the Provost's office, with a budget generated through student fees or the administrative overhead of the institution. Such funding allows these centers to operate with a sense of stability and continuity, and to employ staff members who are experts in professional development principles and activities related to scholarship in teaching and learning. The offices become centers for contesting meanings and practices associated with those parts of a university that may not fully value high quality and scholarly teaching. However, their position within the university structure may present other challenges. They are not usually integrated into the cultures of any specific discipline. Sometimes they are located in marginal spaces that are not perceived as a central part of the campus. They sponsor, co-sponsor, host, and facilitate activities that attract only a small percentage of a university community, a small set of attendees who become the "usual suspects" but whose over-all impact on the university may be small and incremental. While teaching and learning experts report that SoTL is an important issue to be addressed, they also see their services generally do not match this perceived importance (Sorcinelli et al., 2005).

In L-CD SoTL capital, the challenge of building, strengthening and sustaining faculty communities comes into play. It must tap into L-D and G-D SoTL capital in order to attract faculty who ordinarily would not be interested. L-CD capital must provide easy opportunities for attendance at events and activities related to the scholarship of



teaching and learning. Marketing techniques must be clever and aggressive to draw the appropriate crowd.

The final type of SoTL capital, Global Cross-disciplinary (G-CD), exists at the intersection among disciplines and institutions, yet it is vitally important to the strengthening of horizontal ties within places like The Ohio State University as expressed through the other three forms of SoTL capital. The activities sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching since the publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered* have built a large reservoir of SoTL capital. The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning generated this sort of capital in several threads over the course of more than a decade, beginning with the Carnegie Scholars Programs, which involved 140 faculty members from many different fields and institutions. This highly competitive program supported five cohorts of scholars to develop their skills in SoTL and to spend focused time investigating teaching and learning and publishing this work. The individual CASTL Fellows probably each gained significant capital in this process, and the fact that their work was sponsored by Carnegie likely raised the importance and value their home institutions placed upon it.

To expand G-CD capital beyond work of individual scholars, CASTL has also organized two programs that recruited and grouped teams from many institutions around shared themes and interests in order to “cultivate the conditions necessary to support the scholarship of teaching and learning” ([carnegiefoundation.org](http://carnegiefoundation.org)). Twelve clusters of institutions worked on a range of projects between 2002 and 2005 in the Campus Leadership Clusters program, and another fourteen leadership theme groups have been a part of the Institutional Leadership Program between 2006 and 2009. In all, at least 242 institutions were represented in these projects, and many others were involved as affiliates. These programs greatly expanded the conversations about teaching and learning and the awareness of, the commitment to, and the capacity for SoTL across disciplines and in numerous institutions.

Under the auspices of the Institutional Leadership Program, the group that is providing the essays for this issue of *Transformative Dialogues* was brought together. This consortium on building scholarly communities includes The Ohio State University, The University of Glasgow (Scotland), Kwantlen Polytechnic University (British Columbia), Queen’s University and Ryerson University (Ontario), and Southeast Missouri State University. Over a four-year period, representatives from these institutions have met regularly and communicated electronically even more frequently to compare ways they have successfully developed, or unsuccessfully tried to develop, SoTL capital within their own universities and among communities of their faculty colleagues.

Another venue for the creation of G-CD SoTL capital is the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL). Founded in 2004, this organization has provided a vehicle for the dissemination of SoTL and a prestigious, peer reviewed conference structure to validate work in this area. ISSOTL meets annually and allows scholars to present papers, hence building traditionally recognized entries in their dossier and allowing people working in SoTL to meet others with similar interests from universities across the world. This society has grown extensively since its founding by 67 scholars. They have held five annual conferences to date, in the US, Canada, and

Australia, with the 2010 meeting planned for the UK. More than 400 attended the first conference (Bloomington, IN), 672 the second meeting (Vancouver BC), almost 800 the third (Washington DC), around 400 the fourth (Sydney, Australia), and about 530 the fifth meeting (Edmonton AB). Given that learned societies, professional meetings, and peer-reviewed journals are the generally accepted ways that scholarly capital is communicated across disciplinary and institutional boundaries in academe, ISSTOL is a crucial site for the generation and validation of the other three forms of SoTL capital.

## Conclusions

The assumption underlying this typology is that building any form of SoTL capital is good for higher education, and can do nothing but help improve quality teaching and the scholarship that goes into teaching and learning at institutions of higher learning. It also assumes that the four types of SoTL capital reinforce one another and further suggests that those who desire to build scholarly communities should think in terms of a coordinated set of strategies that operate at multiple levels. Finally, it should be recognized that no matter how much SoTL capital exists at a university the size of The Ohio State University, it will remain true that on occasion, the audience size for a seminar or roundtable on quality teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning will reflect the title of this essay: "Many are Called, but Few Show Up". The goal, however, through the dedicated and strategic building of SoTL capital, is to make the impact of those few felt more widely, and their work to be more highly valued.

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