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Faculty and Student Partnerships in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Evaluation of an Institutional Model

ABSTRACT

We present the design and evaluation of an institutional support model for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL): the SoTL Seed Program. In this model, faculty from across disciplines partner with graduate students with expertise in educational and social science methodologies to implement SoTL investigations. We interviewed and obtained feedback from both faculty and graduate students about their experiences. A qualitative approach based on grounded theory suggests that organized and sustained partnership between faculty and graduate students offers a viable institutional framework to support SoTL across academic disciplines. In our institution, partnerships in SoTL have resulted in facilitating academic and professional development for both faculty and graduate students, establishing communities of practice for SoTL, and providing infrastructure for systematic engagement with SoTL.

KEYWORDS

faculty and student partnership, institutional support, community of practice, academic and professional development

INTRODUCTION

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) often requires faculty to extend beyond their common disciplinary knowledge and engage with methodological and epistemological frameworks in social research that may fall outside their disciplinary training (Hubball and Clarke 2010). To make SoTL accessible to a greater number of practitioners, higher education institutions develop programs and support structures to scaffold and sustain faculty engagement with SoTL both within and across academic disciplines (Dobbins 2008; Webb, Wong, and Hubball 2013). Research-intensive institutions, in particular, have incorporated and advanced SoTL by 1) broadening the recognition and institutional value of the role of teaching, 2) funding centres for teaching and learning to support professional development in teaching, and 3) incorporating strategic and systematic support for SoTL leadership programs (Kenny, Watson, and Desmarais 2016; Myatt et al. 2018; Webb and Tierney 2019).

While SoTL can offer an *in situ* approach to professional development (Chalmers 2011; Fanghanel 2013) and enable reflection on practice, it often presents faculty with methodological challenges including the understanding of issues such as validity, reliability, and practicality (Hubball, Clarke, and Poole 2010). These challenges can make SoTL pursuits daunting for some faculty, especially

when faced with other competing priorities and heavy workloads (Gehrke and Kezar 2015). Strategic support can help “faculty members to move beyond disciplinary research boundaries, embrace broader social science methodologies, and collaborate with students, colleagues, and key stakeholders in the field” (Hubball, Pearson, and Clarke 2013, 51). Felten (2013) suggests that such support should be grounded in the context of one’s classroom. Thus, supplementing the disciplinary expertise of faculty with knowledge of education research methods can scaffold faculty’s engagement with SoTL. Prior studies have highlighted the role of the educational development centers in “establishing social links that bridge disciplinary lines” (Kenny, Watson, and Desmarais 2016, 91) and outlined the significance of procedures and processes to guide student involvement, interdisciplinary, and intra-institutional collaborations (McKinney 2006, 47).

In this context, this paper presents an institutional support model, the SoTL Seed Program, where faculty from the disciplines and graduate students with competencies in research methodology and education sciences collaborate as partners in SoTL projects. Although the topic of students as partners in pedagogy and research has seen growing attention in both classrooms and departments (see respectively Bonney 2018; Cho et al. 2020; Werder, Pope-Ruark, and Verwoord 2016), there remains a gap in the literature of sustainable institutional models of partnership with attention to professional and academic development of both faculty and students. We describe a collaborative model where faculty and graduate students work together on the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of SoTL. After providing an overview of the SoTL Seed Program, we focus on the qualitative data obtained from both faculty and graduate students about their experience in the program. Our case study indicates organized and facilitated partnerships between faculty and graduate students can provide both professional and academic development for both groups. Sustaining this partnership support model has 1) centralized efforts to support faculty in their SoTL inquiries; 2) increased institutional recognition of SoTL; 3) supported the professional development of faculty and students alike as SoTL researchers; and 4) contributed to the creation of communities of practice.

Institutional support model: The SoTL Seed Program

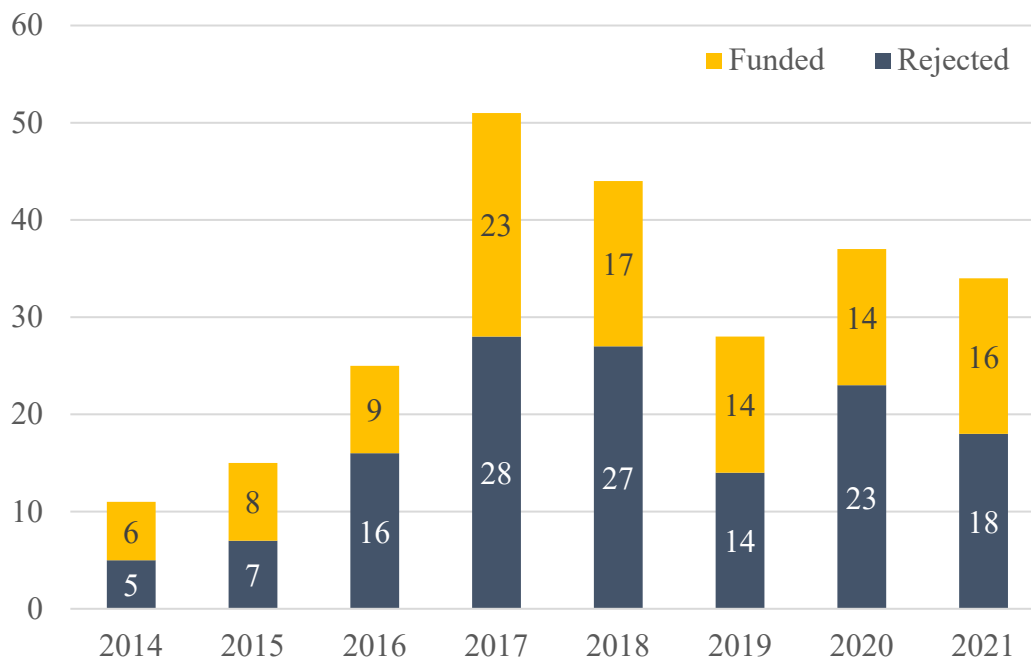
The Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISoTL) at the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) established the SoTL Seed Program in 2014 with the goals of (a) supporting faculty members in reflective practices and pedagogical research across disciplines; (b) increasing faculty members’ agency as independent SoTL researchers; (c) promoting an institutional level recognition of SoTL; and (d) including student perspectives on teaching and learning processes. To effectively attain the program goals the following strategies were initiated: (i) facilitating the establishment of a contractual partnership between faculty and graduate students with knowledge of learning theories and education research methodologies; (ii) providing workshops and resources that increase awareness of evidence-based pedagogies; (iii) supporting faculty in SoTL projects, from inception to dissemination; and (iv) scaffolding ongoing faculty engagement by fostering a community of practice to promote and share SoTL across campus.

Entry to the SoTL Seed Program is competitive, and interested faculty are invited to apply through the ISoTL website. In their application, they explain a pedagogical problem, Bass (1999) propose a research question, provide a focus of inquiry, and in connection with the existing literature, indicate the potential contribution of their proposal to their classroom context and beyond. The application helps faculty conceptualize a methodological approach by asking them to indicate areas of

support they will need to advance their inquiry. Proposals are reviewed by an adjudication committee composed of two faculty members, the ISoTL director, one ISoTL/CTLT staff member, and one graduate student from the SoTL Seed team. Adjudication considers pedagogy, impact on teaching and learning within discipline, relevancy to the SoTL, and scope of the required support.

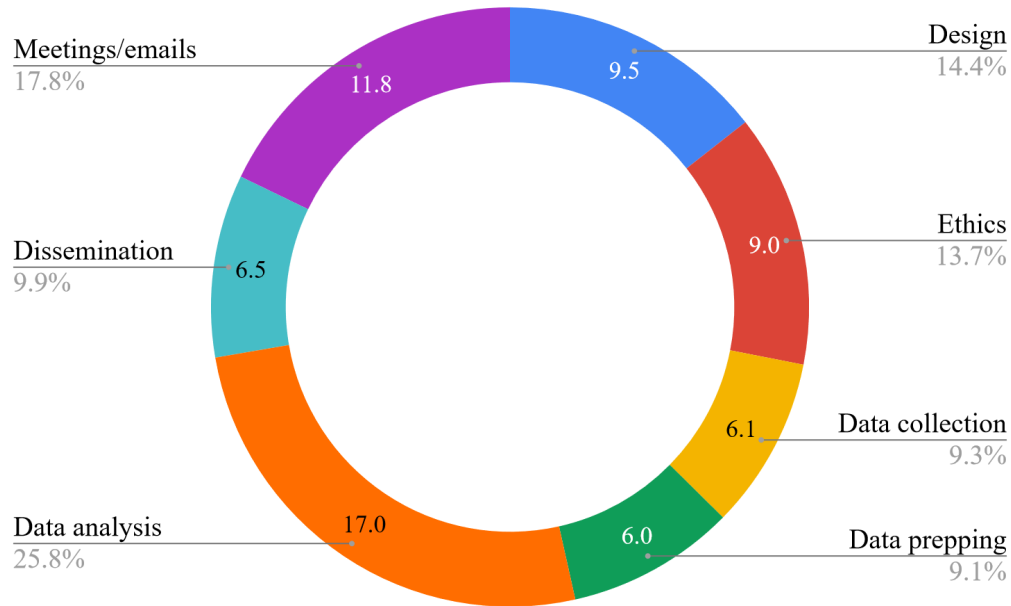
As of June 2021, the SoTL Seed Program has supported a total of 102 SoTL projects, of which 61 have been successfully completed, 33 are in progress, and eight have been cancelled. The number of SoTL Seed applications received each year saw a steady growth until reaching a stable state in 2018 (Figure 1). Overall acceptance rate stands at roughly 40% per year (range: 36–62%). The SoTL Seed Program has supported projects led by faculty from diverse departments, with the majority of accepted applications led by educational leadership faculty, followed by contract faculty, research stream faculty, and clinical faculty (for more details please visit <https://isotl.cctl.ubc.ca/services/sotl-seed-program/>).

Figure 1. SoTL Seed proposals submitted and accepted per year



Successful applicants receive 70 hours of Graduate Academic Assistant (GAA) support and discretionary funds for research (e.g., participant incentives) and dissemination expenses (e.g. SoTL meetings and conferences). The number of hours for support reflects how long a project typically takes to complete. While each project varies in terms of where support is needed/provided, the typical project life cycle (in support hours) is illustrated in Figure 2. The total value of the SoTL Seed package is estimated around \$5,000 CAD, the bulk of which goes to the GAAs hired and mentored by the ISoTL team. The GAAs were hired because of their competency in research methodology and/or backgrounds in behavioural sciences and education. Through their involvement in SoTL projects, they also gain further expertise and are thus known as SoTL Specialists. Notably, this support focuses on the research and evaluation aspects of projects and not on learning design, which is managed by the faculty member.

Figure 2. Average number of hours spent on a SoTL Seed project and percentage of SoTL Specialist time by activity (based on 60 completed projects)



There are three stakeholders in the SoTL Seed Program: a) the instructors who bring a research focus and disciplinary knowledge to the projects; b) the SoTL Specialists who advise and assist instructors in the design and implementation of SoTL inquiries; c) the ISoTL/CTLT staff who administer the program, introduce and facilitate the partnership system, cultivate the knowledge each group brings to the partnership, and host professional opportunities for the community of practice.

The SoTL Specialists

The job posting for SoTL Specialists was advertised to all students. After recruitment, SoTL Specialists collaborate on SoTL projects that require mastery of a range of methods. Each SoTL Specialist typically manages three to five SoTL Seed projects concurrently, and their continued participation across multiple projects allows them to connect individual SoTL projects with larger institutional initiatives. Furthermore, SoTL Specialists support their peers on additional projects, when their expertise is needed. Such connections have further fostered an institutional SoTL culture.

The internal communication and collaboration among SoTL Specialists are nurtured proactively by the ISoTL/CTLT staff by establishing regular individual and group meetings. Biweekly team meetings are scheduled in advance and are held with two aims: 1) sharing and receiving feedback on current projects, facilitated by the specialists and 2) professional development on topics relevant to teaching and learning (e.g., equity and inclusion, decolonizing higher education, scholarly conduct policies, student wellbeing, etc.). These meetings are often facilitated by institutional experts and have been central to building collegiality among the SoTL Specialists, who work collaboratively on specific projects that require mixed-methods expertise. Aside from regular team meetings, SoTL Specialists may contact their colleagues for one-on-one support and/or seek advice from the entire team through email. The internal communication email list is also for sharing resources, ideas, and events.

New SoTL Specialists are paired with a more experienced Specialist (who have begun and completed four SoTL projects or more) and receive one-on-one mentorship for their first projects. Through mentorship, biweekly team meetings, and monthly individual check-ins with ISoTL/CTLT staff, SoTL Specialists receive ongoing support with issues that range from methodological approaches to project management and interpersonal communications with faculty. Additionally, all team members have access to curated resources (e.g., ethical research guidance, survey examples, focus group procedures, and literature reviews) designed to assist Specialists throughout the life cycle of projects. The Specialists are financially compensated for their time in all SoTL Seed related activities.

METHODOLOGY

From 2016 to 2021, the ISoTL/CTLT staff sought ongoing feedback via interviews and written questionnaires from faculty and individual interviews and focus groups with SoTL Specialists. Faculty and SoTL Specialists were asked similar sets of open-ended questions that aimed to explore their experiences in the program. Our main intentions in collecting feedback were 1) to learn whether the SoTL Seed Program was meeting any of its goals (see above) and 2) to identify areas for improvement. In 2016, we conducted individual interviews with eight faculty members, and five more were interviewed in 2019 shortly after completion of their SoTL projects. Interviews were structured with the goal of understanding their experiences with the SoTL Seed Program as well as evaluating the efficacy of their partnership with SoTL Specialists. The interviews were transcribed and analysed in 2017 and 2019. A person external to the ISoTL team conducted individual interviews with six active SoTL Specialists in 2018. The Specialists were asked to reflect on their experiences and comment on their perceptions of the program. In 2019, we conducted three focus groups with 10 SoTL Specialists with differing levels of seniority where we sought their perspectives on ways to improve the program and to address their needs. In 2021, we also analyzed open ended responses to 44 faculty questionnaires from SoTL Seed project closure reports.

We relied on grounded theory to analyse the feedback. According to Creswell et al. (2007), in contrast to priori approach, grounded theory enables for an open-ended approach in analysis with attention to actions, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences. Our sources of data included: faculty interviews, faculty response to closure report questionnaires, SoTL Specialists interviews, and focus groups. We identified initial ideas in each data source and combined recurring themes for each group of participants (Braun and Clarke 2006). In total four staff members contributed to the first round of analysis. The second stage involved approaching transcripts through detailed analysis of experiences and then organizing and identifying themes and sub-themes across sources of data. The process of theme development was informed by focusing “on the explicit description of the content of communication” (Vaismoradi et al. 2016, 101) and included four stages: 1) reading and writing reflective notes; 2) labeling and classifying concepts; 3) relating themes to the overall context of interviews; and 4) developing a comprehensive narrative to disseminate the results (103). Theme agreements, in stages three and four, were established by the first and second author and in consultation with the two interviewers who have separately contributed to stages one and two. Below, we organized our thematic findings by group, faculty members then graduate students, recognizing that each group is in a different stage of academic and professional development.

FINDINGS

Impact on faculty

In our analysis of faculty interviews and closure reports we identified themes of confidence, community, and institutional capacity. During the interviews, faculty reflected on their SoTL Seed experiences. Their reflections often included SoTL Specialists' contributions to their SoTL projects. Faculty described their partnerships with SoTL Specialists as important to conducting SoTL and often attributed these collaborations to their gaining a better understanding of educational processes. The methodological competencies of the SoTL Specialists channeled faculty members' attention to conceptual frameworks in research as well as to the pedagogical relationships between faculty and students which, as a result, offered a safe space for reflection on classroom practice. This was particularly the case when faculty and SoTL Specialists came from different disciplinary backgrounds. Faculty expressed that their collaboration with someone with an education background had significance in supplementing their own disciplinary background. When asked about the value of the SoTL Seed Program, one faculty member noted:

One thing I learned is the value of collaboration, and that someone with a strong background in educational studies can allow me to do studies [that] my own training really wouldn't allow me to do—but that are potentially quite useful for the field.

Other faculty members observed and attributed a “major shift” in their teaching as a result of their engagement in the program.

Faculty reported the “shift” was gradual but it helped them grow more comfortable with the adoption and implementation of different teaching approaches. This was evident in comments where faculty acknowledged that the methodical approach to collecting student feedback provided rationale for adjusting the course and led to curricular improvement. In the words of one faculty member, the process of data collection supported by a SoTL Specialist enabled them to look at their classroom “with a new point of view, which absolutely made a difference in my [sic] teaching.” In the words of another faculty member, engaging with different approaches and methodologies made them “confident” to revise their approach to teaching in light of the feedback they received from their students. Another faculty member went even further and stated: “I have learnt that there are always opportunities to learn from what we are doing in the classroom.” Such a statement suggests confidence was bounded by opportunities to learn from teaching practices. The collaborative nature of SoTL Seed Program oriented faculty to student feedback and increased capacities to reflect on teaching and learning processes.

Faculty expressed that the SoTL Specialists provided an objective eye to assessing teaching practices. This often contributed to the level of confidence faculty felt in making changes to their course in light of students' feedback. The theme of “gaining confidence,” however, was expressed differently by different faculty and was at times inseparable from both professional and academic development. For instance, one faculty member mentioned that their engagement with SoTL through the program led to increased confidence around career progression:

[E]ven though the focus groups and reflections opened me up to criticism from students, despite that, it's actually made me more confident in what I'm trying to do, even though I'm not doing it perfectly. I think that's important for young professors, but particularly important for

people on the instructor track where so much of our tenure is whether or not we're an effective teacher, and we were all hired because we love teaching, and we think we're good at it. But to actually have the time to reflect on how to become better is making me feel more confident moving towards tenure, which is nice.

In this comment, we witness reflectivity on teaching due to increased ability to evaluate teaching and learning processes and willingness to implement inquiry-based pedagogies in the future attributed to an increased sense of confidence. The SoTL Seed Program oriented faculty to the complexities of teaching and learning and was often referenced as a process that initiated them in scholarly inquiries. The collaboration with the SoTL Specialists supported faculty members' professional development as educators and researchers.

For most of the faculty, the theme of confidence accompanied the subtheme of competency in conducting SoTL projects by themselves. For example, one faculty noted:

[I am] more confident now than at the start, in terms of talking about course design and teaching strategies and developing pedagogy within the discipline that I am in, but to label myself as a "SoTL expert," I think, "not yet," only because... I don't think I'm crystal clear about SoTL.

The conveyed element of "not yet" suggests sufficient knowledge of SoTL and reflections on distinction between SoTL and discipline-based educational research. It also demonstrates familiarity with the interdisciplinary nature of SoTL requires time, practice, and possible changes to one's preconceived disciplinary assumptions in teaching and learning inquiry.

Faculty members indicated that the process of meaning-making through methods and metaphors of SoTL was an ongoing process. As an overall result of this iterative process, faculty gained familiarity and capacity to conduct independent inquiries. One faculty mentioned that their "ability to think of research questions and methods has definitely grown throughout this process." Such articulated notion of growth often accompanied recognition of the role of the SoTL Specialists. One faculty member indicated: "For me, it was designing the experiment. And I could not have done any of the analysis without [the SoTL Specialist's] help." Similar comments were offered, indicating that the SoTL Specialists were essential partners during every stage of the projects.

Faculty conveyed appreciation for the role SoTL Specialists played as co-decisionmakers of the research plan and coordinators in gathering and analyzing data. SoTL Specialists also played a vital role in communicating project outcomes for both conference presentations and curricular revision proposals to departments. Faculty also recognized that the SoTL Specialists built capacity for curricular changes that were transferable to other courses within and across respective academic departments. The theme of building capacity was expressed succinctly by one faculty in relation to the overall model:

I am really impressed with the model you have created. For example, it's great that you are not giving me funds and, instead, are mentoring and paying [the SoTL Specialist]. He [/she] is learning and getting paid, [and] our team is also learning, from [the SoTL Specialist] and also from each other.

We infer the theme of institutional impact from similar comments that connect the partnership model to aspects of community building. Because the SoTL Specialists drew from their expertise, on-campus resources, and examples from previous SoTL projects, faculty learned from the SoTL Specialists and other SoTL initiatives on-campus. In this respect, during the interviews, faculty appreciated how the model connected them to a community of practice through meetings and general opportunities to interact with fellow SoTL Seed recipients.

One faculty member noted that the ongoing development of a community of practice helped with “recognition and legitimacy for scholarly teaching and exposed professorial people to what I do and what my teaching is about, and what I do when I’m not teaching.” Another faculty member expressed: “I believe there is interest amongst my colleagues to learn from my SoTL experience.”

However, there were also indications that there is still a long way to go in changing institutional culture. For example, one faculty stated: “I wish this kind of work was valued for tenure and promotion, but my sense of that is that it is not heavily valued.” The SoTL Seed Program has not yet been able to remediate the perceived institutional gap between disciplinary research and SoTL in our large research-intensive university. However, it has taken a step towards the recognition of scholarly teaching. Since 2016, the SoTL Seed Program has increased its institutional visibility and continues to scaffold faculty’s academic development in educational research and aid their participation in academic conferences and publications.

The interviewed faculty identified two main areas of improvement for the SoTL Seed Program. First, some faculty called for strengthening connections among faculty who are active SoTL practitioners within and across departments. The second area of improvement was a request for increased resources to help with the dissemination and publication of SoTL. These two challenges were intertwined in that both relate to encouraging connections and collaborations within and outside of their institutions.

Impact on graduate students

The analysis of the interviews and focus groups with our SoTL Specialists suggests the SoTL Seed Program made a positive contribution to their experience as graduate students at University of British Columbia. Feelings of belonging, building collegial relationships, and gaining professional experience in teaching, research, and service were among the central themes detected from conversations with SoTL Specialists. In the individual interviews, the eight SoTL Specialists converged on the theme of belonging, expressed in terms of being part of a team, the ISoTL team that valued teaching and research. Team meetings, social events, and online communications helped with building personal and collegial connections among SoTL Specialists. In the words of one SoTL Specialist:

This kind of community is exceptional, and it is more than just working in a lab. It is this wonderfully diverse team; it is this wonderfully supportive and friendly team. As a PhD student, I end up doing a lot of work on my own, and having a community of practice is very helpful. And it is motivating too because, you know, other people are doing similar things, and you want to share.

Interpersonal connections provided the opportunity for professional growth and knowledge transmission, particularly among those with different methodological expertise. Such connections strengthened the dialogues about best practices in SoTL. One SoTL Specialist explained: “Because we

work as a team, I learn about how my other colleagues carry projects,” and continued, “. . . we do talk among ourselves about research methodologies, for example, and that has contributed to my own understanding as a graduate student.” According to another SoTL Specialist, the feedback received during the project-sharing team meetings encouraged “think[ing] outside of the box.” However, this was not limited to a particular SoTL project.

Because SoTL projects differed in scope, focus, and methodology, SoTL Specialists often noted that they were given an opportunity to become familiar with different approaches to social research through their experience with faculty and the ISoTL team. Apart from the sense of community, they also indicated appreciation of the independence and autonomy they were given when working with faculty. The acknowledgment of autonomy accompanied reflections that they were valued as professionals with specialized knowledge in research. The other source of impact on the SoTL Specialists’ confidence as researchers came from their own observations that their contributions had significance to faculty’s teaching practice and, in many cases, led to academic publications and conference presentations. Since the SoTL Specialists often made significant intellectual contributions in research design, data collection, and write up of analysis, they were included as co-authors on publications and presentations. The application of their work materialized in classroom teaching and research publications promoted motivation and co-ownership of the SoTL Seed projects, but it also added, as mentioned by one SoTL Specialist, a “galvanized learning” aspect to their own research as graduate students.

Aside from personal and academic growth, graduate students also obtained professional skills from their work with faculty. One SoTL Specialist noted that “the ability to collaborate with faculty across disciplines has been truly unique.” This SoTL Specialist elaborated that the opportunity for collaboration with different departments (e.g. chemistry, physics, and land and foods systems) may have never emerged if it were not for the interdisciplinary nature of the SoTL Seed Program. Conversations with faculty from different disciplinary backgrounds helped the SoTL Specialists gain institutional knowledge about how research in teaching and learning is approached in different fields. One SoTL Specialist also acknowledged that the opportunity to work with faculty across disciplines helped them better understand the constructed barriers to pedagogical dialogues across disciplines in higher education. SoTL Specialists also gained insight into the complexities of teaching and learning.

The SoTL Specialists shared two main challenges about their work with faculty members: 1) communicating boundaries about the role and 2) managing project timelines. The former concern was associated with clarifying the nature and scope of their assistance to faculty. Specialists at times needed to convey that their support remains within the boundaries of SoTL and the SoTL Seed Program guidelines (for example, their support on data analysis did not include per verbatim transcriptions of focus groups). The second concern was connected to working towards project milestones and managing different aspects of a project’s timeline that, at times, required additional flexibility. In relation to the first concern, one SoTL Specialist mentioned that “when I first started, I found it challenging to know what to do.” The comment was made in reference to clarifying roles (e.g. what is done by faculty and what is done by SoTL Specialists) during the SoTL process. Both recurrent challenges of expectations and timelines were managed more effectively by the experienced SoTL Specialists who indicated that, over time, they became better at handling conversations around expectations and navigating timelines of SoTL projects. They also acknowledged that it was helpful to consult with ISoTL/CTLT staff when and if they needed support in communicating their role to the faculty.

Although the SoTL Specialists generally found their work valued and their expertise respected by faculty, some suggested an additional challenge pertaining to design of the project and obtaining reliable feedback from students. For example, one SoTL Specialist noted: “There is a lot of politics behind our research” as some faculty search for confirming “proof” that they are “great teacher[s]” and look for evidence that fits their claims. This perception was derived from the SoTL Specialist’s experience in co-designing a survey with faculty that did not “offer opportunities for students to share their perception or to disagree.” Similar comments hinted that SoTL Specialists, at times, felt that rigor in research could have improved by conversations around method (qualitative and quantitative) and planning. Unfortunately, in our interviews, we did not follow up on how SoTL Specialists negotiated with faculty in this context although more experienced SoTL Specialists felt comfortable navigating difficult conversations and implementing best practices over time.

DISCUSSIONS

The feedback received from faculty members and SoTL Specialists suggests that faculty and graduate student partnerships provide both individual and institutional benefits. Following the inductive reasoning efforted by grounded theory in the analysis of the qualitative data, we reflect on three major outcomes of institutional framework of SoTL Seed Program:

Professional and academic development for faculty

The literature often defines professional development (i.e., discovery of best practices in teaching) and academic development (i.e., familiarity with education research) as parallel but separate aims of SoTL (Danielson 2012; Geertsema 2016). Our analysis indicates that when individual and contextual support is provided, professional development efforts can include academic development. This is particularly evident for the faculty who joined the SoTL Seed Program with minimal level of prior background in learning theories and behavioural/social research. The interviews with faculty highlighted that our support model allowed for reflection upon one’s practice and emphasized integration of educational theory in SoTL inquiries (Miller-Young and Yeo 2015). As stated by faculty, such support was contextualized within their discipline and extended to curricular and pedagogical improvements. Kelly, Nesbit, and Oliver (2012) note that “different disciplines have different ways of presenting evidence and argument” and this often “gives rise to different ways of inquiring about the teaching and learning of that subject matter” (8). Our data indicates that faculty shared this view, and their comments suggest that through their SoTL Seed projects they gained insights about barriers and bridges between their respective disciplines and the fields of education and social sciences. SoTL Specialists’ assistance with the design and administration of SoTL projects built capacity for future scholarly inquiry.

Experiential collaborative opportunities for graduate students

Although the SoTL Seed Program was focused on bridging the gap between disciplinary expertise and methodological barriers for faculty conducting SoTL, an additional benefit of the program was its contribution to the professional development for graduate students. The program created a community in which the SoTL Specialists were able to apply their methodological expertise, become involved in SoTL across campus, and further develop their research skills. They also gained hands-on experience in inquiry while developing better understanding of teaching and learning processes. They

saw their contributions materialize in teaching practices, took part in SoTL presentations and publications, and learned about higher learning institutions by engaging in conversations outside of their academic fields. These opportunities have become possible by the program model, allowing graduate students to contribute and learn from each project. All Specialists also received professional development funds (\$100/year plus 2% of their yearly ISoTL earnings) to enhance their learning and involvement in SoTL. These funds were established and made available for SoTL conferences and events.

Institutional support for a culture of SoTL

Over the years, the Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning has become the hallmark in a suite of SoTL support initiatives, which have helped to address feedback received from faculty members. For instance, in 2016 faculty pointed to the necessity of further institutional support for scholarly dissemination of SoTL work. In response, since 2018 events have been created and sponsored by ISoTL with the goal of increasing scholarly exchange and cross-disciplinary dialogues within and outside our institution. ISoTL has initiated an annual one-day event, “Celebrate SoTL,” which brings faculty, SoTL Specialists, and staff from across disciplines together and offers opportunities for exchange through workshop sessions, poster presentations, and panel discussions. The annual event has also increased institutional visibility of SoTL and provided networking opportunities for SoTL practitioners. ISoTL has also hosted a series of faculty-led poster presentations of their SoTL activities on evidence-based practice, different approaches to teaching and learning (i.e., community engagement, novel assessments, peer feedback), and the implementation of SoTL in the classroom. ISoTL has also increased offerings of staff-led workshops on evaluation guidelines (i.e., survey design, ethical practices) and dissemination principles to support implementation and distribution of SoTL. These efforts are promoted with ISoTL’s bi-monthly newsletter, which includes resources, faculty spotlights, and SoTL events within and outside our institution. In addition, with recurring support from the provost office, ISoTL/CTLT staff oversee the SoTL dissemination fund, which reimburses faculty for conference attendance (e.g., flights, accommodations, registration fees) and article processing charges. This fund supplements the SoTL Seed Program in supporting faculty with the dissemination of their SoTL work to national and international audiences.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the SoTL Seed Program suggests that a facilitated partnership model leads to professional development and benefits both faculty and graduate students. Faculty who engaged in the program acknowledged SoTL Specialists’ contributions to the advancement of evidence-based teaching practice. Faculty also gained familiarity with evaluation frameworks and educational research protocols and felt confident to undertake future inquiries independently. Apart from the methodological expertise offered by SoTL Specialists, other potential factors contributed to the faculty’s overall positive experiences with the partnership model. For example, SoTL Specialists were able to apply a student lens to the different stages of SoTL, thus allowing faculty to consider student perspectives in the design of their SoTL projects. Another contributing factor, highlighted by faculty, was the project management support provided by the SoTL Specialists. According to faculty, this was essential for keeping track of the timing of the different elements of the SoTL Seed projects.

SoTL Specialists benefited from working in a supportive environment that valued their expertise. They brought methodical rigor to teaching and learning inquiries, contributed time and labor, and provided faculty with support for reflective and evidence-informed practice. The Specialists also gained hands-on experience in SoTL and extended their knowledge of teaching, service and research in higher education. The connection to a community of like-minded graduate students, interested in research and passionate to improve teaching, contributed to SoTL Specialists' sense of belonging in professional and personal communities. Collaborations with faculty across our institution provided graduate students with opportunities for interdisciplinary work experience and a greater understanding of higher education institutions.

In light of the ongoing feedback for improvement collected from both faculty and SoTL Specialists, the SoTL Seed Program has added scaffolding such as one-on-one consultations, staff-led presentations, faculty poster-presentations, and panel discussions. Despite these additions, the model of facilitated partnership between faculty and graduate students remains the central element of the program. The feedback from faculty and graduate students on the SoTL Seed Program provided encouraging indicators that the partnership model increased institutional capacity for SoTL with attention to both academic and professional development. Given that the program has been developed and improved over time through the ongoing professional and administrative support provided by ISoTL/CTLT staff, other institutions looking to use or adapt the support model in their own contexts should consider the associated institutional investments and administrative requirements.

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