Narrative

I have taught in higher education for 11 years across two institutions. In that time, I have taught

These results suggest that teaching students evaluation skills will result in greater learning gains in critical thinking than teaching synthesis skills. This is no small finding, as it suggests the traditional "research paper" model, which has been used for decades to teach critical thinking in the social sciences, may not be the most effective way.

That project also illustrates a common theme in much of my SoTL research: questioning previously unquestioned assumptions about students, faculty, and "best practices." I have never been one to believe that just because a teaching method is well-established that it means that method is effective, or that just because a method is effective, no better or more effective method could exist. It is no less important to push the frontiers of knowledge in SoTL than it is in .

to rate an instructor poorly for a low grade if course evaluations were important to faculty employment than if they were unrelated to faculty employment.

The *methods* for this investigation involved 17 courses I taught over a two-year period. Each course was assigned to one of three conditions: Revenge, Neutral, and Control. Students in the Revenge condition were explicitly told when course evaluations were administered that the results would be used by administrators in decisions to retain, dismiss, promote, or tenure me (i.e., given an opportunity to "take revenge"). Students in the Neutral condition were told only to take the evaluations seriously. Students in the Control condition were told the results would never be seen by university administrators and would have no impact on decisions to retain, dismiss, promote, or tenure me (i.e., denied any opportunity to "take revenge"). Results failed to reveal any significant differences in evaluation scores between the conditions, controlling for students' self-reported expected grades. That is, students who were given an explicit opportunity to "take revenge" on an instructor for a low grade were no more likely to rate the instructor poorly than students who were explicitly denied any opportunity to "take revenge."

These results roundly defeated the revenge explanation. Rather, the most parsimonious interpretation of the observed relationship between expected grades and instructor evaluations is simple cognitive dissonance. Contrary to many faculty claims, students do not appear motivated to "punish" their professors for low grades, even when given the opportunity to do so.

A final example of this theme of examining unquestioned assumptions can be found in my work exploring post-exam attendance (Maurer et al., 2009). Although many prior SoTL investigations have examined student attendance generally, none have focused on student attendance for the class period a

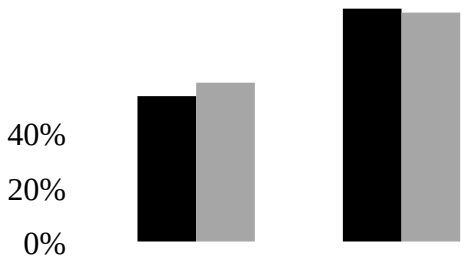
determine if faculty could develop more effective strategies for encouraging student attendance. The primary *theory* used in this investigation was Commodification Theory (Hassel & Lourey, 2005), which argues that students view a college education as a commodity they have paid for and if they have paid for a class, it is entirely up to them if they want (or need) to attend or not. More specifically, it posits that as long as students believe they can get the grade they want without attending class, they believe they shouldn't have to attend class if they don't want to. Thus, Commodification Theory says student attendance hinges on extrinsic motivation and predicts that students with high levels of extrinsic motivation to attend class (e.g., in-class quizzes, penalties for absences, etc.) will be more likely to actually attend class.

The *methods* of this investigation involved surveying students university-wide about their own post-exam attendance, their peers' post-exam attendance, and their beliefs about the consequences of absenteeism during the class period post-exam. The results revealed that whereas the Commodification Theory may be an effective explanation for general patterns of student attendance, it is completely inconsistent with student attendance patterns on the day after an exam. Specifically, no difference in attendance was reported regardless of the post-exam day curriculum or the course attendance policy. That is, absenteeism was the same in classes that reviewed student mistakes on the exam as it was in classes that started a new unit, and it was the same in classes with penalties for absences as it was in classes where attendance wasn't taken. Thus, it did not appear that faculty could extrinsically motivate students to attend. Rather, the qualitative analyses suggested that student motivation for absenteeism that period was internal, with students stating their reason for absence was because they were "too tired" or "needed a break" [from learning], regardless of the consequences. These results have far-reaching consequences for higher education as they fundamentally question the assumption that faculty have both the power and ability to influence student attendance through extrinsic motivators. If student attendance is a product of intrinsic motivation, we need to reexamine both our methods for encouraging student attendance and our expectations for faculty to realistically do so.

In summary, my SoTL research has focused on student learning, behaviors, and motivations in individual courses, across my courses, and across the entire university. My projects were deliberately selected to question previously unquestioned assumptions about "best practices" in teaching and learning and to challenge many deeply held, but anecdotal, beliefs about students and faculty. In the next section, I discuss in further depth my broad approach to SoTL and the impact of my SoTL work on my students, others' students, and other faculty.

Impact of Projects on Teaching & Learning

I cast a wide net with my SoTL projects, designing many of them to have broad appeal beyond my classroom into the classrooms of others both within and outside my discipline. This wider orientation to conducting SoTL is deliberate: my primary goal is generative in nature. That is, I wish to disseminate my SoTL work to as many people as possible, influencing the maximum number of other teachers and scholars and encouraging them to take a SoTL-based approach to their own teaching. My discipline, Family Science, is very small compared to many others. If I were to focus exclusively on SoTL applications within my discipline, the ultimate impact of that work would be quite limited. However, my discipline also has an established interdisciplinary orientation, seeing multiple connections with many other disciplines and both borrowing from and giving back to those disciplines in a symbiotic fashion. By focusing my work on SoTL projects that overlap with other disciplines, I maximize the potential of any one proj



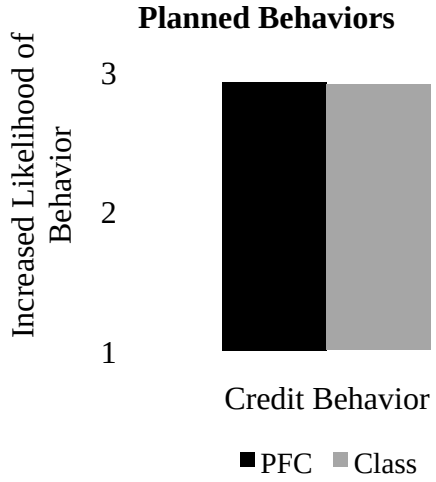
Although the 10-point section showed higher average scores on the daily quizzes, and higher self-reported levels of reading compliance for both this course and their other courses, those differences were not statistically significant. (However, the small sample size in both sections did limit power, so it is possible that with larger replications a significant difference may emerge.) Still, the two sections averaged between 65-75% daily reading compliance, which is a substantial increase over the national average of less than 20% reported in the SoTL literature (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000). These results suggest that the mere presence of a daily quiz, rather than its point value, significantly motivated students to do the assigned readings. This is further supported by the fact that there was no difference between the sections in their grades on any other class component (i.e., "non-quiz avg."). To further clarify this possibility, in Fall 2010 I will be replicating this experiment with one section receiving a daily ungraded quiz (i.e., a simple compliance check) and one section receiving no quiz at all. The results of that data wave should be able to help confirm the initial conclusion.

As noted above, this project is an example of how my SoTL work extends beyond the Family Science classroom. There is nothing about the topic of reading compliance that is limited specifically to Family Science, nor anything about the methodology of this project that is limited to Family Science. Simple reading compliance quizzes could be administered in virtually any discipline and this project provides the necessary empirical foundation to justify replication in any other discipline.

A second example of how my SoTL work extends beyond the Family Science classroom can be seen in a two-year investigation I have just completed that explored the effectiveness of using a Peer Financial Counseling program to teach basic financial literacy skills similar to those I teach in my Family Economic Environment course. Here, the knowledge and skill sets being taught did originate within a Family Science classroom, but the focus of the project was to explore alternative modes of delivery that could reach a wider pool of students in a shorter amount of time than a traditional semester-long course. In the traditional

course, students learn about dozens of Family Economic issues from a college professor over the course of a full semester. In contrast, Peer Financial Counseling [PFC] sessions focus narrowly on only one issue (e.g., budgeting, credit), are taught by other undergraduate students who have mastered the material, and last less than one hour. Clearly, the traditional course covers far more material and in far greater depth, but for the purposes of teaching just basic financial literacy skills, it is possible the PFC sessions may be a more cost-effective alternative. The results of my investigation confirm that possibility.

Students in the traditional Family Economic Environment course and students completing the PFC session on credit were both given a pretest/posttest assessment of their knowledge of basic principles of credit. Five of the questions concerned material covered in both the traditional course and the PFC session ("Credit Core") with an additional five questions about related material that was only covered in the traditional course, but not the PFC session ("Credit Extra"). The average increase in knowledge from pretest to posttest on the Credit Core questions was over 20% for students in both groups. In contrast, only students in the traditional course showed any increase in knowledge at posttest on the Credit Extra questions (over 30%), as would be expected given that they were the only students exposed to that material. Additionally, students in both groups were asked five questions about planned future behaviors with respect to the use of credit on a three point scale (1=less likely, 3=more likely) and the average score for both groups was 2.9/3.0, indicating no difference between the groups in their planned future behaviors.



This project demonstrates that many Family Science skills and concepts need not be limited to the Family Science classroom, but can be taught in a limited fashion outside the classroom in other venues, maximizing the dissemination of important life skills across a broad spectrum of university students. This is reflective of my approach to SoTL: rather than focusing narrowly on how to better teach the concepts in my classroom, I focus broadly on how to reach more students outside my classroom and how to better ensure that the maximum number of students possible benefit from this research.

Collaboration with Other Faculty

The majority of my SoTL projects have also involved at least one collaborator, and in some cases as many as six from six different disciplines. Again, this is not coincidental, but deliberate. My goals in conducting SoTL research are not limited to improving teaching and student learning, but include a generative aspect—involving other teacher-scholars in SoTL, facilitating connections between them, and encouraging and inspiring them to continue conducting SoTL on their own and in collaboration with others after our collaborations are over. Such interdisciplinary collaborations have the added benefit of adding a richness and diversity of perspectives to any joint project. For example, the Faculty Learning Community on SoTL,

which I chair, this year conducted a research project investigating student and faculty perceptions of group work. Members of this group came from the fields of nutrition, health, nursing, accountancy, and foreign languages. Each member of the group used some form of group work in their classes, but all for different pedagogical reasons to achieve different learning objectives. In some cases, group work was used to simulate "real world" experiences. In others, it was used to require students to teach specific skills to their peers, skills they would need to teach to others in professional settings in their field. By uncovering these differences early in the process, it allowed us to focus our project on exploring not just what students and faculty thought about group work, but also how they used it since we noted a broad range of uses even among our members. Our results were quite surprising. When faculty and students were asked a broad, open-ended question about why they used group work in their own classes (or why their professors used group work in their classes), the most frequent response given by students (33%) was that faculty use group work to provide students with opportunities to learn to work together in "real life" situations. In contrast, the most frequent response given by faculty (18%) was that group work allows for learning from one's peers, consistent with Vygotskian theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

1=Learn to work in groups/"real life" situations; 2=Less work for professor; 3=Allows for peer learning; 4=More student interaction/sharing ideas.

What is most interesting here is not that faculty did not use group work to teach students how to learn to work in groups or that students did not perceive faculty to use group work to facilitate peer learning; they clearly did. Rather, it is that the reasons faculty used group work, and the

peer learning

peer roles students

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Condensed Curriculum Vitae: SoTL Work

PEER-REVIEWED

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Laura D. Frost, Ph.D.
Department of Chemistry
P.O. BOX 8064
STATESBORO, GEORGIA 30460-8064
TELEPHONE (912) 478-0850
FAX (912) 478-0699
http://cost.georgiasouthern.edu/chemistry/

Dr. Linda Noble
Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs
University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334-1450

April 27, 2010

Dear Dr. Noble and the Awards Committee:

As a past recipient of the 2007 Regents' Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Award I am delighted to offer this letter of support for my colleague, Dr. Trent Maurer with whom I have been working on SoTL projects and dissemination since the Fall of 2007 where we met as members of a GSU faculty learning community dedicated to SoTL. Dr. Maurer has been the facilitator for the SoTL faculty learning community for several years, collaborating with all faculty interested. He continually promotes SoTL with great enthusiasm. Since meeting in the faculty learning community, we have both become even more involved promoting SoTL at GSU, in the University System, and through the Southeast Region.

Dr. Maurer's scholarship is the area of family social sciences. He has published quite a long list of papers during his tenure at Georgia Southern. Because Trent views research as collaborative, he has authored papers and presentations in several diverse areas. It is this effort that I feel completely embodies SoTL. He has identified holes in the literature through his own scholarly teaching and has chosen to fill in the gaps through his own scholarly contributions.

I am co-author with Dr. Maurer on a paper involving student and faculty perceptions of post-exam attendance. Trent lead this charge through the faculty learning community by organizing all the co-authors on tasks that fit their strengths. I worked with him on the quantitative data analysis. I was impressed with his approach to statistical analysis and evaluation. Together we were able to draw several publishable conclusions. He organized the original draft, asked for input, and re-organized the article for final submission. It is impressive how deeply he considered the content of the paper and any possible points of contention for reviewers. This sort of consideration made the paper an iron-clad success.

Dr. Maurer is a teaching scholar and is continually improving his teaching through evidence-based

where a SoTL scholar like Trent could have a great impact on teaching social sciences in higher education.

In summary, Dr. Trent Maurer is one of Georgia Southern's most prolific SoTL scholars. He is a strong promoter of SoTL at many levels. He practices teaching *and* scholarship every day when he enters the classroom, offering not only the best to the students in his classes but future students in the social sciences through his research. I offer my full support for his nomination.

Sincerely,

Laura Frost, Ph.D.

Laura Frost, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Chemistry

May 11, 2010

May 19, 2010

Dr. Linda Noble
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs
Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334-1450

Dear Dr. Noble,

I am honored to nominate Dr. Trent Maurer, Associate Professor of Family Science, for the FY 2011 Regents' Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Award. I simply cannot imagine a more worthy candidate. Throughout his tenure, Dr. Maurer has actively pursued the scholarship of teaching and learning, demonstrating that not only is he a devoted and reflective practitioner of his pedagogy, but he also reflects deliberatively on the SoTL projects he pursues, who he involves in his research, and where he disseminates his work to achieve the broadest possible impact within the larger SoTL community.

Given the relatively small size of his discipline, Dr. Maurer intentionally reaches out beyond disciplinary boundaries, connecting with faculty from other disciplines and "both borrowing from and giving back to those disciplines in a symbiotic fashion." For example, he recently led an effort to study student and faculty perceptions of group work done during class time. Disciplines represented included nutrition, health, nursing, accounting, foreign languages, and family studies. Despite using group work in different ways, results indicated that students perceived the purpose of group work as learning to apply theoretical knowledge to "real world" situations while the faculty members' goals were to have students learn from each other during group work activities. These findings indicate that teachers need to be more forthcoming with students in explaining the rationale behind group work. Dr. Maurer believes that collaborating with other faculty across disciplines not only improves teaching and student learning, but also involves other teachers-scholars and encourages and facilitates their SoTL research. In his own words, "such interdisciplinary collaborations have the added benefit of adding a richness and diversity of perspectives to any joint project."

Similarly, his selection of topics is designed specifically to have broader appeal in order to impact SoTL scholarship beyond his own disciplinary boundaries (e.g., "can faculty extrinsically motivate students to complete assigned reading on time by increasing the point value of daily readings for the course?" and a two-year study on the "effectiveness of using a Peer Financial Counseling program to teach basic financial literacy skills"). In disseminating his results, he targets national and international venues. Within the last two years, he has published four of five SoTL projects in journals with an "explicit international focus and readership." At Georgia Southern, he has led the Faculty Learning Community for SoTL since its inception in 2006, sits on the SoTL Leadership Team, and co-sponsored the first annual SoTL Expo (2010).

In closing, Georgia Southern is very fortunate to count Dr. Maurer among our faculty, and I am proud to nominate him for the FY 2011 Regent's Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award.

Sincerely,

Gary Means
Interim Provost and Vice