

## **Many Are Called, But Few Show Up: Building Scholarly Communities in a Busy University**

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"Herding cats", "prima donnas", "extreme individualists", "working in silos" - when applied to faculty and the academic units in which faculty reside, they seem to describe a kind of surrealistic hall of fame for misogynic hermits, rather than a pantheon of caring scholar-teachers. How did university faculty come by these labels? Are they unfair slurs and over-reaching stereotypes about the banes of office politics that seems to pervade every nook and cranny of universities? Or, are they largely accurate portrayals of very smart people who seemingly behave worse than the panoply of jerks, back-stabbers, and whiners so prominent in today's reality shows?

Wherever the truth may lie, it is indeed a challenge to those who desire to build faculty communities across the wide array of disciplines and administrative complexities that haunt the ivy covered walls of today's institutions of higher learning. By their very nature, universities are complex organizations fragmented along vertical lines that reflect 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. As a senior colleague said to me in the early days of my career: "The biggest single factor for building prestige in your speciality is longevity, so, stay on the same thing and don't bounce around too much by collaborating with colleagues aren't doing the same kind of thing." Fortunately, I ignored his advice.

Sometimes a faculty member's zealous drive to build the perfect dossier tiptoes on and then stumbles over the borderline of honesty and ethics. A 48 minute guest lecture in an undergraduate class looks much better, for example, when it is listed under "unpublished scholarly presentations" within the dossier's research output section, so long as the candidate's tenure and promotion committee does not notice.

Unfortunately, the organization and culture of institutions of higher learning too often produces a patch-quilt of segmented academic units and faculty mind-sets focused on recognition from colleagues of the same type everywhere else but the places where they work as teachers and researchers. Under these conditions, cooperation across disciplinary boundaries within a single institution of higher learning is difficult to initiate and even more daunting to sustain.

Yet, there are faculty and administrators who bravely resist these organizational pressures, and know full well that a truly great university is one where educators feel a sense of community, and is a place where they understand the value of "rubbing elbows" with others who share the same challenges of applying quality scholarship in their undergraduate and graduate courses. Sharing information on the joys of teaching, the techniques for teaching well, effective testing tips, ways to evaluate one's own teaching, and how to test and measure learning among students — when done frequently and in the true spirit of mentoring, a scholarly community is indeed achieved.

#### Building Community in a Busy University

My academic background is sociology, and when I think about the core problem of building scholarly communities for quality teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), I think in sociological terms. I realize that the modal experience of those interested in promoting the scholarly dimensions of great teaching through organization of seminars, brown bag lunches, conferences and other forms of community building are best described by the title of this essay: "many are called, but few show up."

My field of sociology helps me to understand this situation in terms of a concept called "political economy" (i.e., roughly defined as the reward systems of groups, organizations and societies, and the cultures that teach us how to compete for those rewards). As OSU has grown in size and complexity, so too have the demands on faculty to successfully engage in the competitive games of publishing in peer-reviewed venues and winning grants from government agencies and foundations. These demands compete directly with faculty time devoted to teaching, and most often win. It is not even a "dirty little secret" that publishing in journals with good impact ratings (as measured by a citation index) and

getting grants from highly respected sources like the National Science Foundation have far more weight in the tenure and promotion process 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 and promotion, and merit raises, grows stronger, while the horizontal structures reflecting faculty communities seeking to share ways for improvement of teaching and the enhancement of student learning, suffer in turn. Further, these same vertical pressures explain the difficulties faced by those who seek to develop interdisciplinary teams for research, but since this essay is written for Talking about Teaching, we will keep the focus on building communities for the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Universities are not alone. Robert Putnam's 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 precipitously. Time-consuming jobs, along with a slew of new technology like the internet, e-mail, cell phones, and I-Pods, which most of us cannot imagine how we ever got along without, challenge the ability of all Americans to take time to talk to their neighbors and to volunteer for civic organizations and youth groups. Even church membership has shifted from neighborhood-based places of worship to "mega-churches" that draw members across much larger geographies, making for a curious parallel to most Americans' preference today for super-sized Wal-Mart's over smaller, neighborhood based "mom and pop" stores.

For a sociologist, the essence of social capital is organization. Universities are filled with faculty, students and staff who have a vast array of individual or human resources. But unless individual resources are organized, it is not social capital. The problem, however, is not that faculty (and others) are unorganized. Indeed, the descriptors used at the beginning of this essay are wrong in the sense of suggesting most are isolated and too individualistic to be good team players. The real issue is that social capital 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 faculty communities.

There are two types of social capital, sometimes referred to as "bonding capital" and "bridging capital." Bonding capital are relationships internal to a group, reflecting dimensions of loyalty and cohesion. Bridging capital are relationships held by individuals across groups. Universities like OSU have plenty of bonding capital as expressed through the reward system for promotion, tenure, and merit raises within its hundred plus 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 of the same discipline at other universities, but little encouragement of bridging capital across to others from different disciplines but within the same institution.

Those who have given leadership to promoting interdisciplinary research teams know full well the challenges of building bridging capital within the same university, even with a university's bias toward peer-reviewed research publications and competitive grants in the P&T process and annual reviews for a merit raise. Now, consider the same challenges on the teaching side of things, the side that has less relative weight in the political economy of large and busy universities like OSU. Is there any hope? Yes, indeed, there is. However, it is not a simple matter of announcing more seminars and brown bags on teaching techniques, 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, let's convert the concept of social capital to one I will call "SoTL" capital and discuss a variety of interrelated/reinforcing types. The graphic below illustrates four kinds of SoTL capital built along a simple schema that mimics the concepts of bonding capital and bridging capital. On the vertical axis is one's discipline. SoTL capital can be built both within a discipline and between disciplines. On the horizontal axis is one's university. Again, SoTL capital can be built both within a university and between academics (and academic units) at different universities.

# Building SoTL Capital

## 4 sources of SoTL Capital (examples):

		University	
		Within	Between
D I S C I P L I N E	Within	<b>Departmental: Observing &amp; mentoring</b>	<b>Professional Societies</b>
	Between	<b>TOAST / OSU Academy of Teaching</b>	<b>ISSOTL / Carnegie Foundation</b>

The first type 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 observation of teaching. Fortunately, a greater emphasis on required documentation of teaching performance in promotion and tenure dossiers has benefitted the development of this form of SoTL capital. Here at OSU, multiple forms of evidence related to teaching quality has become more commonplace than in the past, including the famous (perhaps infamous is the better term) SEI's, along with peer review of teaching and an analysis of students' written comments about an instructor by a member of the faculty with higher rank. 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 not in all fields of study). Regardless, an article in a journal representing a faculty member's research specialty is given more weight, prestige and importance on the annual review of performance than an equally rigorous article in the discipline's teaching journal. Perhaps, overtime, this will change.

The second type of SoTL capital is within the discipline but between universities. One example of this type of SoTL capital are the awards of recognition 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 does the plaque help hide the cracks and scuffs on one's office wall, but builds the promotion and tenure dossier as well. Yet, there is much more that can be done here as well. Linking back to the first type of SoTL capital, someone has to put in the time necessary to complete a nomination that enhances one's chance of receiving the award. This does not happen easily without a very dedicated and generous faculty who give of their time, or a dedicated departmental committee whose responsibility is to nominate faculty for professional achievement awards for both teaching and research.

Some readers of this essay may be puzzled by the word "TOAST" as an example in the third type of SoTL capital. The third type represents the juxtaposition of "between" disciplines but "within" a single university. TOAST refers to The Ohio State University Association for Scholarly Teaching. It is an informal group who meets for breakfast (usually on Thursday), at the Blackwell to discuss various aspects of quality teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning. The acronym TOAST started out as a form of gallows humor in response to somewhat uneven service provided with the breakfast buffet, but soon took on a life of its own. TOAST has been around since 2005. The discussions are lively, and there is always something to learn. As well, there is a listserv for TOAST. Simply contact the office of Faculty and TA Development for more information on becoming a member of TOAST.

Although the TOAST listserv now numbers more than 60 faculty, TA's and staff interested in teaching and learning, attendance rarely exceeds 10. This in itself reflects the strong vertical pressures typical of a large university acting as a type of counterforce against the development of horizontally integrated communities as typified by TOAST. 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, Faculty and TA Development (FTAD) at OSU provides several opportunities for faculty to participate in scholarly communities centered on quality teaching. In fact, TOAST itself is a spin-off of FTAD's Mid-Career and Senior Faculty program for Enhancing Quality Teaching. The faculty in the 2003 edition of

that program decided to meet informally through the next year, and quicker than a second to the motion for adjournment of a faculty meeting, TOAST was born.

The final type of SoTL capital is between both disciplines and universities. The best current example is the recently established International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) and the various inter-university consortiums sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. ISSOTL meets annually and is a vehicle for anyone interested in SoTL work to present a paper, hence building the dossier, and to meet scholars with similar interests from other universities.

Through the efforts of TOAST and FTAD, OSU applied for and is now the lead institution for a seven university consortium on building scholarly communities sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation. The other six universities include the University of Glasgow (Scotland), Kwantlen University (British Columbia), Queen's University and Ryerson (Ontario), Dartmouth University (New Hampshire) and Southeast Missouri State University. Over a four year period, representatives from each of the 7 institutions meet annually to compare ways they have successfully developed, or unsuccessfully tried to develop, SoTL capital.

The simple assumption of this 2X2 typology is that building any form of SoTL capital is a good thing for all faculty, 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 each other, 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 busy university the size of OSU, it will remain true that on occasion,

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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 these occurrences rare rather than frequent.

#### Final Note

The reader may have noticed that I skipped over one example in the 2x2 graphic. Under the third type (between disciplines, within a university) was listed the OSU Academy of Teaching. It is indeed a scholarly community, with members bonded together because they are all recipients of the OSU Alumni Association Award for Distinguished Teaching. Ten faculty members receive this award each year, and it carries with it both prestige and a nice increase in one's base salary, in accordance with the realities of worker motivation within the political economy of academic settings. Founded in 1992 by President Gee, it has organized and sponsored numerous seminars promoting quality teaching for the OSU community, which is itself a form of bridging capital. In 2007, the Academy inaugurated a "mini-conference" on teaching, with the hopes that the mini conference can be held annually as a service to the university community. As well, the Academy's ambition is to publish an annual edition of Talking about Teaching as a type of SoTL journal where everyone who is a member of the OSU community can share and read about issues related to scholarship, teaching, and learning.

Perhaps, about twenty years from now, someone here at OSU will pick up this third volume of Talking about Teaching, read this particular essay, arrive at this specific paragraph, then call me up and tell me if my optimistic predictions for building SoTL capital at OSU came true. Before you do, dear reader, be sure to check in the phone directory under assisted living.

#### References

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