

## SoTL as Professional Development:

### *Participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as an LIS Graduate Student*

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) provides valuable pedagogical training to graduate students embarking on careers in academic and research libraries. Although SoTL is fairly new to information professionals, it is a discipline that can fill a recognized gap in LIS programs nationwide. Many LIS programs do not offer courses in pedagogical training even though information literacy instruction is an essential component of the mission and services of academic libraries. As an evidence-based pedagogical discipline, SoTL can serve as a valuable complement to the professional development of LIS graduate students. Practitioners and researchers in SoTL encourage student-centered pedagogical methods, reflection, interdisciplinary collaborations, and shared teaching practice.<sup>1</sup> This case study explores benefits, strategies, and recommendations for engaging in SoTL as an emerging library professional.

## The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and the ACRL *Framework*

With the adoption of the Association of College & Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* in 2016, information literacy instruction has welcomed a shift from skills-based database demonstrations to an emphasis on critical thinking. In order to help students navigate complex information structures, librarians need

to be able to engage students in inquiry-based, participatory learning. Indeed, the adoption of the *Framework* spurred a revision of the ACRL proficiencies of instruction librarians in April 2017. The change in role titles from “instructional librarian” to “teaching librarian” reveals the centrality of teaching to information literacy positions. Teacher librarians are emboldened to embrace “a learner-centered approach, encouraging learners to be agents in their own learning.”<sup>2</sup> It is clear that young professionals preparing for careers in academic teaching positions are expected to be able to actively engage students in their teaching, and yet the vast majority of LIS programs do not offer a course in pedagogy.

Evidence-based teaching practices from the SoTL literature can help fill the education gap. While many information professionals have discussed the importance of pedagogical training for teaching librarians, SoTL is a fairly new discipline to librarians. SoTL practitioners ask questions related to the teaching process, design and implement classroom interventions, reflect upon outcomes, and share the results with the greater community. The variety of ways to engage with SoTL ranges from reflection and implementation of classroom interventions to formal peer-review research studies.<sup>3</sup> In her work, “Navigating the SoTL Landscape: A Compass, Map and Some Tools for Getting Started,” Mia O’Brien describes four principles of SoTL research practices. She emphasizes the importance of (1) centering research questions around student needs, (2) creating a “deliberate design” or research plan that engages with SoTL inquiry, (3) applying the design in the classroom and analyzing the findings, and (4) sharing the research findings in order to “contribute ... to SoTL knowledge and practice.”<sup>4</sup> While participants may be drawn at first to the reflective benefits of evidence-based teaching practice, they may later advance to more formal research projects.

Drawing from the author’s experience of participating in SoTL as an LIS graduate student, this case study explores how young professionals can engage with SoTL communities to effectively provide learner-centered instruction. Evidence-based pedagogy skills can be cultivated both through informal reflective practice and more formally designed SoTL projects.<sup>5</sup> After discussing how the author progressed through stages of SoTL research, general strategies and recommendations for participating in SoTL as an emerging library professional are provided.

## SoTL and the Graduate Student Experience

In the course of her work as a graduate assistant at the Teaching and Learning Services unit at the University of Maryland (UMD) Libraries, the author taught information literacy (IL) sessions for first-year students at the University of Maryland, College Park. This university serves more than 41,000 students, has an average annual budget of \$1.9 million, and is the major public research institution in the state.<sup>6</sup> The Teaching and Learning Services unit oversees the large-scale information literacy program at UMD Libraries by serving close to four thousand undergraduate students each year in one-shot and occasional two-shot information literacy sessions of the required English 101 Academic Writing course. In preparation for teaching IL sessions, the author participated in pedagogy training

developed by the Head of the Teaching and Learning Services unit and the First-Year Experience Librarian for the Research and Teaching Fellowship program at the University of Maryland, College Park. This program is designed to mentor LIS graduate assistants and fellows who teach information literacy sessions at UMD Libraries and prepare them for careers as academic instruction librarians. The mentorship program comprises of readings in evidence-based pedagogical theory and practice, discussion board postings, journal club discussions, a teaching-as-research project, and teaching observations and reflections.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to participating in the Research and Teaching Fellowship program as a graduate assistant, the author also joined the University Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC) training program. This program enables graduate students from all disciplines to participate in pedagogy workshops, take a credit-bearing pedagogy course, develop a teaching philosophy, and engage in a teaching-as-research project. Three levels of graduate student participation are offered—associate, practitioner, and scholar—in order to scaffold pedagogy skills through increasing levels of proficiency.<sup>8</sup> The author first learned of SoTL while participating in these professional development programs and was immediately drawn to the discipline's commitment to educational inquiry and student-centered teaching.

Encouraged by her readings and classroom reflections from both the library Teaching and Research Fellowship program and TLTC professional development program, the author thought about ways to better empower the undergraduate students she taught in one-shot information literacy sessions. The author noticed that many students seemed hesitant to voice questions about their research in class. In order to encourage student inquiry, the author placed a sticky note at each of the desks before the start of class and asked students to write down a question as they settled into their seats. During the middle of the session, the author collected the student responses and organized the search strategy portion of the class based on the questions they asked. By initiating this simple teaching intervention, the author worked to give voice to even the shyest of students and transform the classroom environment to one of student-directed learning. She was inspired by her pedagogy readings and trainings to make changes to her teaching in order to involve more active learning techniques.<sup>9</sup> As the author continued with her pedagogy studies, she discovered ways in which her classroom intervention aligned with critical feminist pedagogy. As scholars bell hooks and Maria Accardi discuss, feminist pedagogy centers student perspective in the classroom and empowers students to contribute to a co-constructed learning community.<sup>10</sup> Using sticky notes in the classroom was a means of welcoming all student perspectives in addition to those who already felt comfortable sharing their questions aloud in the classroom.

Knowing that shared pedagogy practices are an important part of the teaching community, the author included her intervention as part of a poster she presented on active learning in one-shot library sessions at the 2017 Library Orientation Exchange (LOEX) instruction conference.<sup>11</sup> This experience, which involved observing the classroom environment, developing a simple teaching intervention, and sharing knowledge with the greater teaching community, can highlight a path forward for LIS students to advance the

quality of their teaching. While the author's project was based on teaching reflections and a simple classroom intervention, she found that her foray into active learning interventions invigorated her one-shot information literacy sessions, increased her confidence as a teacher, and inspired future plans to develop a more formal research and teaching scholarship project.

During her final year as an LIS student, the author developed and implemented a SoTL project as part of her professional development program. After noticing that many students struggled to apply information literacy concepts from classroom group activities to their individual research assignments, the author reflected on ways to encourage student self-directed learning. What materials or activities could be provided in the classroom to help students apply general concepts to their individual research assignments? Drawing upon literature regarding self-regulated learning, the author decided to include space in the lesson for students to reflect on their own research process. She developed a class handout based on the Teaching and Learning Services lesson outline to guide students through the process of setting a personal research goal, narrowing their research topic, and selecting keywords. It was important to the author that the class session remain a collaborative space, and she designed the handout as a resource to complement class discussions and group activities rather than replace them.<sup>12</sup>

The author outlined her teaching-as-research project in a two-page proposal that included her research questions, a brief discussion of related literature, description of the classroom intervention, and method for collecting student responses. She created a survey using Google forms to collect student reflections regarding the usefulness of the handout and their progress on their research topics. After meeting with an advisor in the University Teaching and Learning Program to review her project proposal, the author submitted a description of her project and assessment methods to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Maryland. During the process of implementing the handout in her IL sessions, the author observed the classroom environment. How did the inclusion of the handout change the dynamics of the class session? How did it help or hinder students as they worked on their individual research assignments? After evaluating her reflections and the student responses, the author submitted a final report of the teaching-as-research project for the University Teaching and Learning Program practitioner certificate. A week later, she shared classroom strategies for empowering student-directed learning at a campus research and learning conference.<sup>13</sup>

The experience of designing, implementing, and evaluating a SoTL project allowed the author to better understand the needs of her students and adjust her teaching in efforts to advance their research progress. The author was able to reflect on her teaching experience and formulate a research question relating to student needs. She developed a classroom intervention that engaged with pedagogical literature. She implemented the design in the classroom, evaluated results, and shared her practice of encouraging student self-directed learning with the campus community.

The author's project can be understood in relation to the SoTL research steps recommended by O'Brien (see table 28.1). By pursuing her project, the author developed

a greater ability to support student-directed learning and now looks forward to advancing future SoTL projects as a teaching librarian.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 28.1. Research Process for SoTL Project**

O'Brien's SoTL Research Steps <sup>15</sup>	1) Center a research question on student needs.	2) Create a research plan.	3) Apply the research design and analyze results.	4) Share research findings.
Author's SoTL Research Project	1) Author reflected on classroom instruction and developed research question. What materials could be provided in the classroom to help students apply general concepts to their individual research assignments?	2) Developed a handout to guide students through the research process, prepared the collection of student responses using Google forms, wrote a two-page research proposal, cleared research design with campus IRB.	3) Implemented the handout in sessions of ENGL 101, compared student responses in sessions with and without the handout, reported findings to the University Teaching and Learning Center.	4) Presented a lightning talk on strategies for empowering student-directed learning at campus Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference.

## Recommendations for Graduate Student Engagement in SoTL

There are many points of entry to the SoTL community. Whether or not one has accessibility to a formal professional development program, LIS graduate students everywhere can still engage in valuable SoTL experiences. At its heart, the discipline of SoTL seeks to improve the quality of the learning experience. LIS students can seek out part-time employment, an internship, or summer work that features teaching responsibilities or collaboration with an instruction librarian at an academic library. Hands-on teaching experience brings SoTL principles and projects to life. While completing LIS coursework, it is valuable for graduate students to find out if their institution supports a teaching and learning center.<sup>16</sup>

LIS students in any program can build a portfolio of teaching sessions they have observed, maintain a reflective teaching journal, and request mentorship from a teaching librarian, supervisor, or faculty member. Emerging professionals can develop a SoTL project organized according to O'Brien's categories of research, such as centering inquiry on student learning, creating a research design, applying the intervention in the classroom, analyzing results, and sharing findings with the SoTL community. Building pedagogical knowledge builds confidence to seek out teaching opportunities, whether in LIS class projects or through internship and employment experience. Developing a teaching project

and sharing results at a graduate conference or during a poster presentation session can set a course for future student-centered teaching.<sup>17</sup>

When designing a SoTL project for the first time, it can be very helpful to consult a practical guide. McKinney provides a step-by-step approach in her work *Enhancing Learning through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Challenges and Joys of Juggling*. Felten discusses best principles and practices of the discipline, and O'Brien distills complicated aspects into a helpful framework. A robust journal literature supplies examples and case studies of SoTL research. When applying SoTL to library information literacy sessions, it can be helpful to read how librarians have participated in SoTL in a variety of reference and teaching roles.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, it is important to share teaching practices and classroom interventions with the greater SoTL community. While publishing a full-length article might seem daunting to new SoTL practitioners, there are a variety of other scholarship opportunities. LIS graduate students may first decide to present their findings in a poster session. Some of the major SoTL conferences include the International Society for Teaching and Learning, SoTL Commons, and the Lilly Conferences on Evidence-Based Teaching and Learning. In addition, the Library Orientation Exchange, LOEX, highlights best library information literacy praxis and reserves the poster session for graduate student and fellow presentations.<sup>19</sup>

Sharing SoTL research with a broader community builds professional networks and equips LIS graduate students to conduct future research as academic librarians. The author found that contributing to scholarly teaching and learning conversations provided opportunities to build connections with faculty across campus. While presenting her lightning talk on empowering student autonomy in the classroom, the author was placed on the same panel with an English instructor who taught in the first-year academic writing program that partnered with the library. The interdisciplinary nature of SoTL allows for a shared vocabulary of pedagogy practices that can help cultivate relationships across campus departments. In addition, the author's experience proved valuable during the job search, as she was able to discuss examples of her scholarly interests and research activities.

Regardless of whether LIS students participate in SoTL in a formalized program or through personalized professional development, the process of learning evidence-based practices, designing research projects, and sharing results with colleagues can advance sound information literacy practices. The author found that the experience of engaging in SoTL allowed her to formulate teaching and research interests while transitioning from LIS student to library professional. The SoTL literature and teaching interventions complement the shift from skills-based information literacy standards to the student-centered teaching encouraged by the ACRL *Framework*, thus preparing practitioners for careers as academic teaching librarians. In these ways, participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning illuminates a path of pedagogical inquiry and professional development for emerging teaching librarians.

## ENDNOTES

1. With sincere thanks to Rachel W. Gammons and Lindsay I. Carpenter for their mentorship and support during my MLIS studies. Regarding LIS pedagogical offerings and academic librarians, see Russell A. Hall, "Beyond the Job Ad: Employers and Library Instruction," *College and Research Libraries* 74, no. 1 (2013): 24–38; Susan Andriette Arieu, "How We Got Here: A Historical Look at the Academic Teaching Library and the Role of the Teaching Librarian," *Communications in Information Literacy* 8, no. 2 (2014): 208–24; Dani Brecher and Kevin Michael Klipfel, "Education Training for Instruction Librarians: A Shared Perspective," *Communications in Information Literacy* 8, no. 1, (2014): 43–49. Regarding SoTL benefits to librarians, see for example, Cara Bradley, "The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Opportunities for Librarians," *College and Research Libraries News* 70, no. 5 (2009): 276–78; Michael Perini, "Enhancing Collaboration through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *Collaborative Librarianship* 6, no. 1 (2014): 52–55.
2. Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), *Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians*, adopted April 28, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/teachinglibrarians> (quotations); Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, adopted by the ACRL Board, January 11, 2016, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>. On inquiry-based learning, see Nicole Pagowsky, "A Pedagogy of Inquiry," *Communications in Information Literacy* 9, no. 2 (2005): 136–42.
3. Bradley, "The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," 276–78; Perini, "Enhancing Collaboration," 52–55; Pat Hutchings, Mary Taylor Huber, Anthony Ciccone, and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered: Institutional Integration and Impact* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 50–51; Janice Miller-Young and Michelle Yeo, "Conceptualizing and Communicating SoTL: A Framework for the Field," *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 3, no. 2 (2015): 37–53; Peter Felten, "Principles of Good Practice in SoTL," *Teaching & Learning Inquiry: The ISSOTL Journal* 1, no. 1 (2013): 121–25.
4. Mia O'Brien, "Navigating the SoTL Landscape: A Compass, Map and Some Tools for Getting Started," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 2, no. 2 (2008): 1–20.
5. For literature on generalized graduate student participation in SoTL, see for example Nancy L. Chick and Cynthia Brame, "An Investigation of the Products and Impact of Graduate Student SoTL Programs: Observations and Recommendations from a Single Institution," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning* 9, no. 1 (2015): 1–23; Annetta Tsang, "Reflective Learning as a Student and an Educator: Connecting the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning* 3, no. 2 (2009): 1–4; April L. McGrath, "Personal Reflection: An Early Introduction to SoTL and the Shaping of an Academic Career," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning* 6, no. 2 (2012): 1–4. For recommendations from instruction librarians, see Brecher and Klipfel, "Education Training for Instruction Librarians"; Pagowsky, "A Pedagogy of Inquiry"; Hall, "Beyond the Job Ad." For readings in library engagement in SoTL research, see Lisa N. Mitchell and Erik T. Mitchell, "Using SoTL as a Lens to Reflect and Explore for Innovation in Education and Librarianship," *Technical Services Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2015): 46–58; Jeanette McVeigh, "Librarians, Faculty and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *Pennsylvania Library Association Bulletin* 66, no. 2 (2011): 13–16; Perini, "Enhancing Collaboration"; and Asako Yoshida, "Information Literacy and Research Development Skills: Advancing Librarian's Participation in Pedagogical Research," *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries* 4, (2014): 865–77.
6. University of Maryland, "About the University of Maryland," accessed December 7, 2018, <https://www.umdrightnow.umd.edu/about-university-maryland>.

7. On the Research and Teaching Fellowship program, see Rachel Wilder Gammons and Lindsay Taylor Inge, "Using the ACRL Framework to Develop a Student-Centered Model for Program-Level Assessment," *Communications In Information Literacy* 11, no. 1 (2017): 168–84; Teaching and Learning Services, University of Maryland, "Research and Teaching Fellowship," <https://www.lib.umd.edu/tl/fellowship>; Rachel W. Gammons, Alexander J. Carroll, and Lindsay Inge Carpenter, "I Never Knew I Could Be a Teacher': A Student-Centered MLIS Fellowship for Future Teacher-Librarians," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 18, no. 2 (2018): 331–62.
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9. The author learned ideas for classroom activities and formative assessments through readings and training; see for example Mary Snyder Broussard, Rachel Hickoff-Cresko, and Jessica Urick Oberlin, *Snapshots of Reality: A Practical Guide to Formative Assessment in Library Instruction* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2014).
10. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Maria T. Accardi, *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction* (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013). Maria T. Accardi, "Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction," Library Juice Academy course, completed August 2017, <http://libraryjuiceacademy.com/065-feminist-pedagogy.php>.
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14. O'Brien, "Navigating the SoTL Landscape," 1–2.
15. Ibid.
16. McVeigh, "Librarians, Faculty," 14; Bradley, "The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning" 276–77; Hutchings et. al., *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered*, 2, 12, 45–46.
17. See recommendations by Hall, "Beyond the Job Ad"; Brecher and Klipfel, "Education Training" 46–48; O'Brien, "Navigating the SoTL Landscape," 1–2.
18. Kathleen McKinney, *Enhancing Learning through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Challenges and Joys of Juggling* (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company Inc., 2007); O'Brien, "Navigating the SoTL Landscape," 1–2; Felten, "Principles of Good Practice in SoTL." On additional case studies and examples, see Pat Hutchings, ed. and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (Menlo Park, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2000); Miller-Young and Yeo, "Conceptualizing and Communicating." For articles by library professionals, see Bradley, "The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning"; Mitchell and Mitchell,

- “Using SoTL as a Lens”; Perini, “Enhancing Collaboration”; Yoshida, “Information Literacy and Research Development Skills”; and McVeigh, “Librarians, Faculty”
19. For conference recommendations see Lauren Hays and Melissa Mallon, “Keeping Up With... The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” September 2017, accessed October 27, 2017, [http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping\\_up\\_with/sotl](http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping_up_with/sotl); McKinney, *Enhancing Learning*, 93; Teaching and Learning Transformation Center, “Professionalization Opportunities for GTA’s, <https://tltc.umd.edu/professionalization-opportunities-gtas>; Lilly Conference Series on College and University Teaching and Learning: Evidence-Based Teaching and Learning, <http://lillyconferences.com/>; “LOEX,” <http://www.loex.org/>; and LOEX, “Poster Session Proposals,” <http://www.loexconference.org/posterproposals.html>.

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