This chapter briefly describes the SoTL research development program and context at Mount Royal University, reports initial results from a study of the program's impact on participants' teaching and scholarly activities, and situates the findings regarding individual impact, department-level impact, institution-level impact, and discipline-level impact within the current literature and the Canadian context described in this special issue.

SoTL²: Inquiring into the Impact of Inquiry

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Engaging in SoTL can have many benefits for faculty and their students. Studies have demonstrated shifts towards more student-centred teaching approaches (Kember 2002) and improvements in student learning (Waterman et al. 2010; Trigwell,2013). Scholars have also reported that engaging in SoTL has had positive impacts in areas outside of teaching such as informing program assessment and assisting interdisciplinary work beyond SoTL (Bennet and Dewar 2013). For these reasons, it is no surprise that many colleges and universities are supporting SoTL.

Mount Royal's approach to developing SoTL was inspired by the faculty learning community work of Cox (2004) and others, and by the Carnegie Scholars initiative of the Carnegie Academy. Our Institute for SoTL was established in 2008 and its main SoTL development program, the Nexen Scholars Program, has operated annually since 2009. This chapter briefly describes the program and initial results from a study of its impact on scholars.

Background

In September 2009, almost 100 years after its inception, Mount Royal College became Mount Royal University (MRU). This seemingly simple change in name followed an extended period of transition which included the development of baccalaureate degrees, design of a new general education (liberal studies) provision, creation of teaching-service and teaching-service-scholarship faculty roles, creation of tenure and promotion procedures and faculty rank, and articulation of institutional research priorities. During the latter stages of its transition, Mount Royal affirmed its commitment to teaching and learning by establishing the Institute for SoTL. High-level institutional support for SoTL has been critical to the Institute's success. Such support is visible in tenure and promotion documents, the University's Strategic Research Plan (2012), and the most recent Academic Plan (2012). The strength and consistency of institutional support for SoTL at MRU has enabled the Institute to make significant headway with its programming and initiatives, and has energized successful fundraising efforts on its behalf.

Separate from our well-established teaching support centre, the Institute for SoTL reflects an institutional appreciation of SoTL as research, distinct from teaching-related professional development and scholarly teaching. Thus, the Institute operates as a research centre, encouraging and supporting SoTL inquiries, providing resources and coordinating initiatives, and building a culture of inquiry about teaching and learning. The Institute is self-supporting, relying on grants, donations and revenue-generation to fund its work. It sponsors a range of programs and initiatives including research and dissemination grants, conferences and events, community outreach, writing residencies, and the Nexen Scholars Program.

Program Description

The Nexen Scholars Program, developed by former Institute Director and Carnegie Scholar Richard Gale, supports an annual cohort of scholars who develop individual research projects to be conducted in a fall semester course. The annual request for proposals defined SoTL as "research into student learning, conducted within one's own class, that is evidence based, peer reviewed, and publicly shared; it is the investigation of fine-grained on-the-ground student learning outcomes of particular pedagogies; systematic scholarly inquiry into whatever influences the learning process".

From 2009-2013, the program consisted of three, three-day, off-site residencies over the course of one year, with monthly meetings in between (see Figure 1). Residencies involved participants working on their specific projects and discussing them in small groups with help from facilitators; after the first year, most facilitators were scholars from previous cohorts. Upon acceptance to the program, scholars were awarded a $2000 grant which they could use not only for research purposes but also for professional development initiatives. Upon completion of the program, they also had the opportunity to apply for "Going Public" travel awards, and to attend an optional five-day writing residency.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

From 2009-2013, 41 full-time faculty members, 8 contract faculty members, and 1 administrator participated in the program. Of these, 6 participants did not complete the program for reasons such as changes in teaching assignments or unexpected time constraints. Six scholars have also served in a facilitator role for subsequent cohorts. The

impact of the program has not previously been systematically investigated; before this study the only information collected was number of travel grants given (33) and papers published to date (9).

Assessing impact - the study

Recognizing the many conceptualizations and purposes of SoTL as well as the complexity of evaluating diverse and long-term outcomes, we took an open, inductive approach to investigating the impact of our program on its participants. We wanted to investigate whether the program has helped faculty meet their own goals for participation and whether it has influenced their teaching and scholarly activities. We also wanted to generate a baseline for more longitudinal studies and to understand any issues that could inform the design of the program and other faculty development activities going forward both at Mount Royal and elsewhere.

Four authors of this chapter served as facilitators for different cohorts of Nexen Scholars, and were the co-investigators for this study; three were also scholars in the first cohort and participants in the study. Therefore, the study methodology is a focused ethnography (Knoblauch 2005), in that the authors have a close familiarity and/or are members of the discrete community under investigation. Due to this familiarity, data collection can occur in short, intense phases, with the goal of understanding and describing social practices and inside perspectives (Higginbottom, Pillay and Boadu 2013). Iterative, cyclic and reflexive conversations amongst the co-investigator team occurred during the

entire interview and data analysis process. This study was cleared by Mount Royal University's Human Research Ethics Board.

Methods

Twenty-five scholars participated in the study, the first phase of which consisted of an online survey asking about scholars' goals and self-reported impact of the program. Survey responses were used to inform follow-up interviews, which were analyzed inductively.

       Recruitment and participants. Because our interests included scholars' goals for participation and their subsequent scholarly activity, all 50 MRU scholars who were accepted to the program in the years 2009-2013 were invited by email to participate in the study. A total of 25 scholars participated, with 22 scholars completing an online survey and 17 being interviewed. Participants were distributed across cohort years and provided good representation across all faculties.

       Data collection. Initial evidence was gathered from a confidential online survey from January to March 2014. Adapted from Chick, Brame and Wilsman (2013), the survey included five-point Likert-scale questions about how much impact scholars' projects and participation in the program had, as well as short answer questions asking scholars to give supporting examples. The questions are summarized as follows:

- What were your goals for participating and did you achieve them?
- Describe the study and outcome.
- How much impact did your project have on your teaching/subsequent scholarly activity? Explain.

- Do you continue to conduct SoTL investigations? Explain.

- Has participation in the Nexen program impacted your teaching/probability of pursuing subsequent SoTL projects/subsequent scholarly activity? Explain.

- Please describe your professional trajectory since participating in the program.

Scholars were also asked to participate in a follow-up interview. After reviewing the survey results for themes, we developed a semi-structured interview protocol using the questions from the survey as a guide, with the purpose of getting more in-depth responses to the survey questions. Participants were given the opportunity to request a particular interviewer from the co-investigators, and all but one expressed no preference. For this reason, and so that participants would feel free to speak as openly as possible, the investigator who had had the least involvement with the program conducted all but one interview. As the entire team of co-investigators met regularly over the period of the interviews to discuss emerging themes, we are confident this did not result in any inconsistency in the protocol. After 17 interviews we felt we had reached data saturation as no new themes were emerging. All interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed. An initial thematic analysis was conducted separately by co-researchers and then discussed to reach consensus. Clear patterns emerged in this initial analysis; more detailed systematic analysis is ongoing.

Results

For the purposes of this chapter we will summarize the survey results and emerging interview findings at a high level due to space constraints, with further work planned to delve into this rich data.

Survey findings. Participants most frequently reported goals related to developing their scholarship (40%), improving teaching (33%), and connecting with a community (20%). All but one said their original goals were met or exceeded. While less than half mentioned improved teaching as a goal, 89% rated impact of the program on their teaching at 4 or 5 on the Likert scale, identical to the proportion which reported impact on scholarship.

Open-ended questions allowed participants to provide more detail about their experiences. Several interesting patterns emerged. The majority of participants wanted to learn more about the research process, including funding and publication opportunities; some wanted to establish a research plan in the area of teaching and learning. Some participants described conscious decisions to move away from their disciplinary research while others described moving away from SoTL after the program. In describing impact on their teaching, participants noted increased attention to their roles as teachers and an increased intentionality in the consideration of pedagogical strategies and assessments. Some additionally noted a greater awareness of students' needs.

Interview findings. The semi-structured interviews probed these areas of influence more deeply. We also began to see four kinds of impact emerge and began to ask questions regarding individual, department-level, institution-level, and discipline-level impact.

Interview themes served to confirm or explain the survey findings. For example, at the individual level, while more participants identified a research goal rather than a teaching-focused goal for their participation in the program, participation changed their teaching practices. As one participant said,

"I didn't even think of it impacting my teaching and so I was quite surprised when it did. Especially since it made me re-examine a lot of my different assumptions around my discipline and around my students, and it challenged some of my deficit narratives [about what students can't do]. . . and it started me focusing more on what they were doing, rather than just my assumptions about what they could or couldn't do."

Three things stand out in this response: the underlying assumption going into the program that research on teaching is different from teaching, the uncomfortable recognition of complicity in students' difficulties, and an impact on teaching that goes beyond any single SoTL project. Many interviews describe variations of these elements, whether or not the participants were currently engaged in SoTL research. One participant, no longer involved in SoTL research, described a long-term impact on her teaching and her students:

"It has increased my interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning more broadly; so even though the project itself didn't do what I wanted it to do, understanding that there is a field out there and there are a lot of things that happen in that field has encouraged me to be

more engaged in what is going on. So it has changed my understanding of how students learn, but also how I teach right now and why I teach the way I do."

Program impact extends far beyond specific publications arising from the program even as the desire for publication was one of the main reasons participants applied in the first place.

One emergent pattern that may have implications for the development of and recruitment into SoTL programs is the relationship between time at institution and area of impact. Participants who were relatively new to the institution tended to talk about impact, whether on their scholarship, their teaching, or their career paths in individual terms while participants who had been at the institution for a longer period tended to talk about their departments, the institution, or their disciplines more often. We do not claim that participants were able to impact the institution or discipline at a broader level, but simply that this was how participants tended to frame their narratives.

This framing echoes, in some ways, the Macro/Meso/Micro model of institutional culture as described in Williams et al (2013) and elaborated in this volume by Verwood, Poole and Beery while Timmermans and Ellis, also in this volume, describe the contextual spheres of influence and impact. They argue for reciprocal relationships among individual, department, institution and community within a SoTL system. Here we have individuals describing their spheres of potential impact from multiple positions, depending in part on length of time at the institution. Length of time may indicate career stage, level of security as represented through tenure, and institutional or disciplinary networks outside of the SoTL context.

This pattern has implications for recruitment into a SoTL program depending on the institutional objectives. Participants relatively new to the institution described the program as a way to meet other people and learn about the institution; participants who had been at the institution for a longer time described the program as a way to shape the institution. They talked about having the connections and being visible enough to make a difference: "I am a believer in SoTL and I think sometimes people listen to me because I have been around a while, making a pretty public stand going into SoTL." This participant described her participation in terms of service to the institution and discipline. A SoTL program can be a way to acculturate individuals entering an institution; it can also be a way to change the culture of an institution. These two objectives, however, involve different populations who probably require different types of support.

Conclusion and Future work

This paper has focused on the relationship between goals and impact in data collected from the first five years of the Nexen Scholars program at Mount Royal University. The preliminary data analysis suggests most participants noted their original desire for scholarly growth and experienced a perhaps unanticipated impact on their actual teaching practice. Additionally, a faculty member's engagement with SoTL may vary in relation to their career stage as represented by the proxy of length of time at institution.

This study has yielded rich information in terms of impacts at the individual, departmental, institutional, and community/disciplinary levels. Further analysis and dissemination will explore this more deeply, as well as several other avenues of inquiry.

For example, we have not examined the types of support individuals require at different career stages. We also note that while SoTL can be transformational both at the level of teaching and scholarship, participation in SoTL often leads to a sense of discomfort though our participants attribute this discomfort to different factors. This discomfort will form an important avenue of further investigation.

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Figure 1. Scholars Program structure 2009-2013.