

Introduction to the Special Issue

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Introduction

In scholarship and research, having a problem is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative process and activity revolves. But in one's teaching, a problem' is something you don't want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it . . . Changing the status of the problem in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation is precisely what the movement for the scholarship of teaching is all about. (Bass, 1999, p. 1)

One "problem" in higher education and in the classroom is determining whether students are learning. Derek Bok, former president of Harvard, found little evidence to suggest that students are learning more than they did 50 years ago and argued that improved pedagogy, increased student engagement, and an overall strengthening of faculty development is critical for assessing postsecondary education (Bok, 2006). The American Association of Colleges and Universities (2007) echoed Bok's recommendation with a statement advocating for pedagogical reform including assessment of student learning outcomes. Outcome-based education and validated instructional practices have been a focus of accreditation bodies for both disciplines and colleges/universities (e.g., Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Programs [COAPRT], Committee on Accreditation of Recreation Therapy Education, Council on Higher Education Accreditation, Western Association of Schools and Colleges).

However, even with accumulating evidence for empirically based assessment and teaching methods, faculty and institutions of higher education have been slow to adopt

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research-based pedagogy (Buskist & Groccia, 2011). Buskist and Groccia observed, “it is ironic that within higher education institutions dedicated to the discovery, transformation, and dissemination of knowledge, the choice of teaching strategies is based largely on experiential, commonsense, or anecdotal evidence” (p. 6). The move from “teaching tips” to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has and continues to be a challenge. One barrier involves implementation and includes faculty unfamiliarity and inexperience, lack of incentives, limited resources, and resistance to change (PCAST, 2012).

The purpose of *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education* is to address the need for SoTL in our discipline, and to answer Shulman’s (1993) call to end “pedagogical solitude” and make teaching “community property.” Shulman argued that for teaching to be considered scholarship, the work “should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by members of one’s scholarly community” (p. 6). These criteria are consistent with other SoTL scholars’ definitions (Dewey, 2008; Kreber, 2005; Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Martin, Benjamin, Prosser, & Trigwell, 1999; Potter & Kustra, 2011; Richlin, 2001; Schulman, 2011). Specifically, this issue attempts to provide a forum for faculty to share empirical studies that explore the measurement of student learning outcomes, which will strengthen the professional preparation of our students as well as advance the process of addressing COAPRT standards.

This issue begins with three invited papers. Michael Blazey, COAPRT Chair, leads off with an overview of COAPRT and a rationale for assessing student learning outcomes. In the second paper, Gary Ellis, Department Head at Texas A&M, provides the reader with an overview of their accreditation process (one of five beta programs piloting the 2013 standards), and offers a framework and associated strategies that could be used by other programs conducting an outcome assessment. Similar to Boyer (1990), the third paper by Keri Schwab, Brian Greenwood, and Daniel Dustin, expands on traditional scholarship of discovery and provides a strong argument for the scholarship of community engagement.

In addition, this issue is comprised of six refereed articles that describe a number of assessment methods or approaches available to measure student learning, and the various lessons learned from the perspectives of both students and faculty. Assessment of student learning outcomes is essential and required for program accreditation. Successful assessment depends heavily on collecting data, which provides a solid foundation for evaluating student learning outcomes. The articles range from the importance of choosing quality, reliable measurement instruments for assessing student learning to pedagogical methods and techniques applied in the actual classroom. The Student Assessment Learning Gains (SALG) discussed by Scholl and Olsen and the Entry-Level Competency Assessment (ELCA) instrument described by Hurd, Elkins, and Beggs both measure student learning outcomes. Pierce, Wanless, and Johnson used a quasi-experiment research design to assess learning outcomes using a field experience assignment (FEA). Scholl and Olsen reviewed the assessment movement with an emphasis on student learning accountability and accreditation requirements.

Indirect measurements are generally self-reported perceptions from students themselves about the quality of their academic experiences. Hurd, Elkins, and Beggs measured competencies needed by entry level professional and how well students per-

ceive their abilities prior to their senior internship experience. Several qualitative studies are provided that solicit student feedback and reflection. Olsen and Burk described the use of reflective journaling as a means of assessment while Losekoot, Legget, Neill, and Wood shared the value and challenges of implementing poster presentations as a form of a summative assessment tool with feedback from academic staff and student responses as a form of assessment. Gaining student perspectives of their own learning experience by participating in a four-week leisure education service learning program is described in further detail by Cooke and Kemeny using a content analysis approach. Collectively, these articles provide unique and innovative techniques for facilitating student learning and improving the academic experience.

We hope this issue will both inform and inspire our discipline to embrace “problems” and SoTL. Lee Shulman, past president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, argued that “ultimately, investigative work into teaching and learning will not be an intriguing aside, or add-on, but an essential facet of good teaching—built into the expected repertoire of scholarly practice [e.g., outcome-based assessment]” (2000, p. 97).

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