

Plan for a SoTL Project

by Miranda Mckenzie, Laurentian University

Research Question

- What are you curious about?
- What would you like to know about strategies that might hinder and/or help students to learn, in your course?
- Do you want to know if an activity, assignment, or teaching strategy “works?”
- Do you have a question about how to help your students learn a particular skill?

We are most curious about which strategy will work best in order to identify which information and support we can streamline for students (that always remain easily accessible for reference purposes). The goal/result is to avoid repetitive content and instructions and improve student satisfaction regarding course structure and navigation.

Identify challenge/outcome related to learning that is related to your question.

Describe the learning in a way that suggests how you might *measure* it using either qualitative or quantitative methods.

We want students to focus more on the course tasks and less on how to find key information and instructions, so the strategies to employ are what we will be researching and trialing. We will use end-of-term surveys to hear directly from students about the improved course content and navigation.

Some of the past student feedback (that we will use as a starting point):

- It is difficult to find basic course information (summative tasks, due dates, course policies)
- It is not always clear what the task expectations and evaluation criteria are (rubrics are rarely specific to a particular task)

Describe the instructional activity, assignment, or teaching strategy that will promote student learning on the outcome you identified.

We plan to create and include a pre-module (similar to a mini-course orientation) and integrated course syllabus for a more seamless course experience for our students. This is an updated practice from a PDF format syllabus used and distributed manually in the past, which caused a lot of issues with finding and referring to course information (assignment instructions, summative task rubrics and important policies) and negatively affected the student experience.

SoTL projects might investigate the impact of a *modification* to an existing strategy or assignment. Describe how the new approach differs from the old approach and why this modification might change student learning on this outcome.

Step 1: identify the information we will keep from the original PDF syllabus

Step 2: identify new information to include to fill in any gaps

Step 3: explore technology options and any potential accessibility barriers

Step 4: decide on an order and structure to the information (content, documents, visuals) presented

Step 5: put all the pieces together in a draft module (in a document for now, to be put in LMS later)

Step 6: review and finalize

Step 7: integrate

Step 8: launch and 'market' the new strategy

Step 9: reassess after 1-3 semesters for feedback from all users (students and instructors)

Describe the evidence that would persuade an external audience that the new or modified teaching strategy improves student learning on the targeted learning outcome.

Describe the evidence you would need to collect to answer questions about the impact or value of this teaching strategy. How would you convince others that this approach is better than other approaches? What comparisons should you make? Examine students; skill before and after the assignment? Compare students who complete the learning activity to another group of students – what comparisons would be meaningful?

We will be collecting student feedback over the course of multiple semesters to get a sense of their overall experience in the course and identify any common issues raised. We will also check in with our instructors to see if the information we curated is sufficient so that we can know what to keep/change/remove. This project is dynamic and will be updated on an as needed basis.

NEXT STEP: In order to gather the most relevant feedback, we need to modify the end-of-term survey to ask specific questions related to course navigation and the information presented and seek out any additional information students are expecting to see. Since we will keep all data gathered completely anonymous, there are no major ethical concerns during the research phase.

How and where would you publish, present, or disseminate this work?

This work will be published in our LMS as a separate module in our courses.

NEXT STEP: Soft-launch the final project in a sample of courses in order to receive immediate feedback from instructors and students to confirm the need to include this in all of our courses.

REFLECTION: While the research itself of this project is non-traditional, it is still an important exercise to complete because we know that students are expecting a better overall experience in our courses and we must strive to meet their needs in a more logical and comprehensive way. Course design is an on-going process, which is what this will entail since we will continue to collect their feedback so that any other needs that are not met or information that is lacking can be modified from one semester to the next. The content itself is housed in our LMS, but part of the

dissemination process could also include the sharing of our module structure and an outline of the information identified as essential for a positive learning experience.

Disseminating this work should include:

- Sharing in our Community of Practice (or which all our instructors are a part), both for awareness and feedback purposes
- Broadening our scope to include all academic units in our faculty (once enough data is gathered)
- Sharing university-wide to encourage other departments to adapt our approach and implement similar strategies

Adapted from: C. J. Stanny, E. M. El-Sheikh, & H-M. Chung (2009) *Getting Started with a SoTL Project*

Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment <http://uwf.edu/cutla/>

*Updates to the original plan are highlighted.

*Dissemination plan has been added to the final section, under 'REFLECTION'.