Chapter 7
SoTL as a Professional Development Tool for Non–Standard Faculty

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ABSTRACT

Non-standard faculty are individuals with faculty appointments, but whose responsibilities fall outside the traditional faculty role. Non-standard faculty are often overlooked in conversations about SoTL, but they play an integral part in the teaching and learning that occurs on post-secondary campuses. Due to the focus on local context within SoTL, non-standard faculty greatly benefit from this type of professional development. Using the micro, meso, macro, and mega framework, the authors of this chapter describe how educational developers can support non-standard faculty in using SoTL for professional development. This common SoTL framework helps educational developers bring non-standard faculty into SoTL conversations while also recognizing the unique teaching environments in which they work.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are inherently learning organizations. Everyone who works with students is responsible for helping them gain new knowledge, grow, and learn. While academic teaching faculty are primarily responsible for teaching and learning, faculty whose responsibilities include instructing outside the traditional class setting also have a great deal to learn from SoTL. In the absence of a generally-accepted term for faculty in these roles, the term “non-standard” faculty will be used for the purposes of this chapter. Non-standard faculty may be faculty members who are expected to produce scholarship...
and engage in professional development, and who may teach or interact with students in a way that could benefit from closer scholarly inquiry, but whose responsibilities do not primarily involve teaching full credit courses. In Canada and the United States, these non-standard faculty include librarians, clinical faculty, counselors, and learning specialists. Each of these positions supports the academic institution’s instructional mission. The non-standard faculty role is in contrast to the standard faculty role. In this chapter, a standard faculty role is defined as a faculty member whose primary responsibilities include teaching, service, and scholarship. Their teaching is conducted in for-credit course settings where they are the principal instructor.

Librarians in the majority of Canadian academic institutions have academic status, defined as “recognition that the duties performed are integral to the academic mission of the institution, but that all the rights and responsibilities associated with faculty status are not necessarily to be expected” (Jacobs, 2013, pp. 9-10). Academic status approximates faculty status to different degrees depending on the institution. Many academic librarians in Canada are expected to engage in teaching, research, and service in order to achieve the equivalent of tenure at their institutions. Walters (2016) found that librarians at 52% of American research universities have faculty status. Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada also includes counselors in their faculty collective agreement, while other institutions have expanded their scope even further. Grant MacEwan University (2017) in Alberta, Canada, for example, includes “Professional Resource Faculty members” in their collective agreement, and these include counselors, learning specialists, librarians, Nursing Laboratory Resource Professionals, and Writing and Learning Consultants. Similarly, Antelope Valley College (2017) in Lancaster, California includes “counselors, librarians, transfer center coordinator, writing center specialist, learning disabilities specialist, math learning specialist, and any other regular, contract, or temporary faculty employees who are non-administrative academic personnel” (p. 4) in their faculty agreement. Likewise, Lakeland College (2016) in Canada includes counselors, public services librarians, learner success strategists, and the Faculty Development Coordinator or Researcher in their collective agreement.

At many schools, clinical faculty primarily have responsibilities for clinical supervision and direction outside of the traditional classroom. Individuals falling into these categories often work very closely with students in a variety of capacities and are also expected to produce scholarly work. They may not be aware of SoTL as a potential avenue for this, or they may need support as one of the few, if not the only person in their unit, who is working in this area.

The mission of university teaching centers is to support faculty in their teaching (Wright, Lohe, & Little, 2018). Instructional development programs have aided in the growth of teaching and learning on many college campuses. However, due to the focus on learning outcomes, many non-standard faculty may be unintentionally excluded from professional development opportunities hosted by educational developers because the teaching role of non-standard faculty is not as clearly aligned with institutional learning outcomes. Due to institutional shifts in teaching cultures to decentralized models (Wright et al., 2018), all individuals who impact learning need to be involved in professional development.

Educational developers who are responsible for assisting the professional growth of faculty in the area of teaching and learning also need to be aware that studies have shown a persisting need for more practical research development (Cilliers & Herman, 2010; Stes & Van Petegem, 2011). Typically, SoTL is thought of as a movement focused on teaching and learning within the classroom. However, SoTL has implications for the broad institutional teaching culture (Schroeder, 2007). For faculty whose responsibilities fall outside the norm, using SoTL as a professional development tool can help foster growth in all facets of teaching and learning.