

Plan for a SoTL Project

by Charlotte, University of Guelph

I selected the following image to represent the direction I would like to follow with this SoTL research project.

The main reason behind my selection was to highlight the importance of creating an online community. By modifying and trialing research strategies and using student feedback, I hope to create a positive learning experience for my students.



Source: Brooke Cagle, <https://unsplash.com/photos/g1Kr4Ozfoac>

Reflective response:

My overall research question – “Does student participation in discussion boards promote online engagement resulting in greater fluency in the course material?” was formulated based on experiences as an instructor for a distance education course. I was interested in promoting student-student, student-instructor/coordinator/teaching assistant relationships. Prior research was based on student feedback (both student opinion surveys, student conversations, emails, consultation with teaching staff members). A literature search will also be performed to find out more information about the use of discussion boards.

For the research design, I plan on administering surveys, collecting both qualitative and quantitative information about students' opinions regarding discussion boards. We will seek REB approval for administering the surveys.

We will also compare student performance and their participation in discussion boards. However, while we are collecting data (grades) no student identifiers (for. e.g. names) will be used.

My dissemination strategy will include potentially presenting my work to: students who are interested in the findings, my peers both at the college level and at biology pedagogy based meetings

I would be interested in possibly publishing/disseminating my work in a pedagogy based journal such as the Journal of Educators Online (JEO).

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?

With large classes, it is important to create an online community. We have students who are located throughout the globe. I am interested in introducing strategies to improve student engagement in online environments. With increased student engagement, hopefully this will translate to greater student success.

Question – Does student participation in discussion boards promote online engagement resulting in greater fluency in the course material?

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.

Outcome

By the end of this course, students will be able to explain concepts to their peers.

Challenges

How do we identify strategies which will improve student engagement?

How do we evaluate student success?

What markers can we use to measure student success?

We can design and post specific questions related to course material. Students have the option to respond to the questions or comments from their peers. We can request a grader to evaluate the discussion posts for content. We can design rubrics to evaluate the discussion posts.

In addition, we would like to offer an optional survey to request student feedback regarding discussion boards. I would use my initial survey, but also include an option for students to include detailed written feedback.

To measure overall student success, we could compare the grades for the posts and their overall course grade to see if there is a correlation.

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

Discussion boards have been an optional component, with varied student participation. I have previously introduced discussion boards as a means to promote student participation and engagement. I have linked student contribution to discussion boards to a grade component to encourage student participation, sharing and exchanging of ideas. I am interested in including a more detailed requirements for student participation in discussion boards in future courses. Contributing to discussion boards will continue to be a graded component, however I would like to update the requirements. This will help to address the learning outcome.

I would update the requirements, by ensuring students are posting new ideas. Students would be required to post a minimum of 10 posts with course content.

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?

I have previously collected survey data and emails from students regarding student use of discussion boards. This information provided me with both qualitative and quantitative information about students' opinions regarding discussion boards.

We will seek REB approval for administering the surveys.
Surveys will be designed and administered using Qualtrics. Invitations to participate in the surveys will be requested by a faculty member/teaching staff who is not part of the study. Student participation will be voluntary based. We will inform students that non-participation will not impact their course grades.

To further test this, I would need to compare student participation and the correlation with grades in the presence/absence of discussion boards. I can compare student performance with the same course when discussion boards are mandatory versus an optional assessment. If there is a grade difference this would suggest that this approach may be helpful.

When collecting data (grades) no student identifiers will be used.

If possible, I would be interested in upper year student opinions about discussion boards and if they found this tool useful.

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

My initial approach would be to potentially present my work to:

Students who are interested in the findings

My peers at the college level

My peers at biology pedagogy based meetings

I would be interested in possibly publishing/disseminating my work:

e.g. Journal of Educators Online (JEO)

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

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