Plan for a SoTL Project

by Angela Rozema, Conestoga College

|  |
| --- |
| **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?  How does a student’s perceived stress level affect their performance in college-level courses?  I am curious to find out how much of an impact perceived stress has on student performance in college-level courses. As stress is subjective, their perceived level of stress is more important that objective markers for stress such as assignment due dates or other measures. |
| **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.  Using an existing or created scale, have the students record their relative stress level at different times throughout the semester such as: before starting school (sent by email), the first day of class, before a test/assessment etc. These results could then be plotted against their performance scores throughout the semester to see how their overall and specific subjective stress level affected their performance. This process would use both qualitative and quantitative methods. |
| **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.  By evaluating students’ perception of stress, teaching and supplemental supports (from the school’s CARE team, as an example) could be implemented more strategically to improve student performance in their course. |
| **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?  Different valuation assignments would be applied to different categories such as; personal life, school life, work etc. This would highlight different areas, perhaps housing or food security, as being areas that might require greater investment into alleviating them as stressors for students.  By presenting data to the college and external third parties (governments etc.) evidence may be provided to encourage spending and support to improve students’ stress levels. |
| **How and where would you publish, present, or disseminate this work?** Starting small, I would share the findings with the students and other teachers within the program. This would help the students and teachers to recognize where stress might affect students’ performance within the course/program. Next, I would hope to take it to Teaching and Learning as well as the CARE team to gain some support in addressing it school-wide. Finally, perhaps I could expand the study throughout my networks as well as the school’s and hope to garner more data and move towards academic journal publishing. |

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/>