


Building Your SoTL Community

A Community Approach to SoTL

SoTL is best done in community – through partnerships and discussions with students, faculty, staff, and community members. A community approach to SoTL recognizes that we learn more through sharing, discussing, reflecting, and building upon each other's questions and discoveries.

Sharing learning with others is a core principle of SoTL and magnifies our impact beyond individual learning experiences. SoTL communities value inclusivity and are particularly welcoming to newcomers. Most of us who engage in SoTL first developed disciplinary expertise outside of SoTL scholarship.

If you are at UCalgary, joining our [SoTL@UCalgary MS Teams Community Channel](#)  is a great way to begin connecting with others who engage in SoTL. In this online community, you can explore SoTL resources, learn about others' work, start conversations, participate in opportunities, find mentors, and build your network.

SoTL Community: professional connections and collaborations among individuals engaged in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Building a SoTL community involves intentional relationship building with fellow educators, researchers, and practitioners interested in advancing understanding of teaching and learning practices.

Critical SoTL Friends

When engaging in SoTL, it can be important to form a **Critical Friend Group** of faculty, staff, students, and/or community members who are interested in your questions, approach, or learnings. These critical friends support you through your work and are available for you to go to for active, honest, and constructive feedback.

Activity Learning Outcomes:

- Identify Critical SoTL Friends and how they support you.
- Reflect on your Critical Friend Group and think about inviting new members.
- Find new Critical Friends who may expand your academic interests.
- Start a coffee conversation with a potential Critical SoTL friend.
- Join our diverse SoTL community.

1: How to identify and reflect on your SoTL critical friend group

1. List five to ten individuals you've recently had a conversation with about academic or professional topics. Think about colleagues you've brainstormed with, sought advice from, or discussed opportunities with.

2. Consider the ABCDs of your critical friend group: Affiliation, Breadth, Connectivity, Dynamism*. Reflect on the set of individuals listed above, including strengths and gaps.

Criteria	Strengths	Gaps
Breadth: Having connections with a wide range of individuals representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives within the SoTL community.		Which perspectives might be missing?
Connectivity: Having access to individuals beyond your field/discipline or connecting with individuals who can introduce you to someone outside your area of expertise.		Who would you like to connect with?
Dynamism: Having relationships that may help you prepare for future opportunities.		

<p>Affiliation: Consider the Breadth, Connectivity, and Dynamism within your current community, and in a few words, reflect on areas of improvement.</p>	
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**Adapted from Ibarra, H. (2015). Act like a leader, think like a leader. Harvard Business School Press.*

2: Growing and fostering your critical friend group

Based on your reflections, consider whether and in what ways you might want to expand your Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) critical friend group.

If you are interested in finding new potential connections, you may find the following resources helpful to get started:

You can connect with our UCalgary SoTL community through:

- Joining our [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning \(SoTL\) MS Teams Channel](#)
- Reaching out to recipients of the University of Calgary Teaching & Learning Grants <https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/grants/past-recipients>
- Booking a [One-on-one consultation](#) with a teaching and learning expert from the Taylor Institute for Teaching & Learning
- Attending the University of Calgary Conference on Postsecondary Learning & Teaching <https://taylor-institute.ucalgary.ca/conference>
- Attending UCalgary Teaching Days <https://taylor-institute.ucalgary.ca/teaching-days>

You may also consider:

- Reaching out to SoTL scholars at disciplinary or education conferences. A list of SoTL conferences is available here <https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/c.php?g=455466&p=3146781>
- Participating in online forums, for example, <https://issotl.com/icwg/>

Setting up Coffee-Conversations

Cultivating a SoTL critical friend group is like tending a garden—it requires care, curiosity, and a dash of initiative. After having identified potential critical friends, sending out an

invitation for a 15–20-minute coffee conversation is a great way to learn more about SoTL, and start building connections.

Example: An informational interview on SoTL. If you are meeting with someone for the first time, it could be good to prepare 5-10 questions ahead of time. A few suggestions for questions you might ask during an “informational interview” might be:

- How/when did you become interested in SoTL? What initially sparked your interest or motivated you?
- How did you first get involved in SoTL?
- What goals or objectives do you hope to achieve through your involvement in SoTL? Have your interests or motivations changed over time?
- In your view, what are the most significant benefits or rewards of engaging in SoTL?
- Do you partner with other colleagues or students in your SoTL work? What do these partnerships look like?
- What area of teaching and learning scholarship do you find most interesting, most in need of attention, or that you would most like to study?
- Have you faced any challenges or barriers when conducting SoTL research or implementing teaching and learning innovations?
- How do you find time to engage in SoTL alongside your other academic responsibilities?
- Do you have recommendations for [getting started; funding; finding collaborators; professional development/learning more; partnering with students; etc]?
- Who would you recommend I connect with next?

Reflecting after a coffee conversation

Grab a pen and paper (or your favourite digital note-taking tool) and set a timer for 5 minutes. Reflect on your conversation. A few reflection prompts could be:

- **What sparked your interest the most?** Was it a specific idea, a shared experience, or a new perspective on teaching? Write it down and explore why it resonated with you.
- **Did anything shift?** Did the conversation challenge your current approach to teaching and learning or scholarship? How so? Jot down some notes about how this might influence your future practice.
- **What emotions surfaced?** Curiosity, excitement, inspiration? Capture the feeling in a few words or emojis.

- **Action time!** Based on this conversation, what's one thing you can do today to move forward? Write it down! Did they mention resources you want to explore? Note them down for later.

3: Stay Connected & Going Beyond

To cultivate a vibrant Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) community, you may engage in various activities to stay connected with your critical friends, supporters, and mentors. This could include scheduling regular check-ins, setting up a formal mentorship agreement, or launching a project together.