Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

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This issue marks two academic publication milestones. First—on a more localized scale, it is the inaugural special issue of the JTRH. This is a stellar accomplishment for a journal that has just begun its second year of publication. Second—from a more universal perspective, it is the first known special issue within the discipline of hospitality/tourism studies to provide a focus on the topic of SoTL research. The managing editor’s office was intrigued to hear from five editors representing prestigious institutions in the U.S. and Australia that volunteered to serve on this publication upon the first inkling that we planned to produce it.

In a twist of irony, the tourism/hospitality discipline that had fought the difficult battle of institutional mainstream acceptance over relatively recent years was among the last to accept SoTL research as a viable academic stream. SoTL research was first formalized as a field of academic study by the Carnegie Foundation more than twenty years ago. Academics in the U.S. know this foundation as the accrediting body that determines the status of research institutions on a national level. It has evaluated and stratified research institutional accreditation for about 200 years. All U.S. research institutions strive to accomplish Level I rankings. And hence, SoTL research slowly became an area of institutional interest among high ranking leaders within academic institutions.

As might be expected among academics, the specific definition of the nature of SoTL scholarship remains a topic of debate. However, a few commonly acceptable tenets have been agreed to by pertinent researchers.

One aspect of agreement is that SoTL is exclusively focused on the area of higher education, meaning tertiary undergraduate and graduate studies. Another is that the topical area is applicable to the study of teaching and learning processes and outcomes across all academic disciplines. Still another point of agreement is that the research is theoretically grounded in classic and modern learning constructs extending back to the findings from the early 1900s by pioneers such as, Piaget and Dewey. Many current studies rely upon variations of modernistic constructivist learning theory models. These are particularly useful for research related to hospitality/tourism education programs, which are classified as professional studies majors within institutions.

The overall intent of the Carnegie Foundation was to provide a mechanism for formal, peer-reviewed investigations in the delivery process of scholarly teaching and resultant learner knowledge assimilation in higher education settings. The purpose of this mechanism is to enhance the body of knowledge concerning theory and practice of related processes and outcomes within institutions and across academic disciplines. Assuming the study of tourism/hospitality is a legitimate academic discipline, it would logically follow that SoTL inquiry is an appropriate research activity.