Book Review


Overall, William E. Becker and Moya L. Andrews (editors) organized a collection of important, insightful contributions from the perspective of research universities toward the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). The book starts from an institutional perspective, considering several alternatives to facilitate the integration of discipline-based research and scholarship of teaching and learning. The next set of chapters focuses on specific course adoptions of discipline-based methodologies. The focus then shifts toward integration of broader assessment goals. The book ends with a discussion of an innovative program, across campus and department boundaries, that helped integrate disciplines, teaching and research. The text provides some critical insights, provocative personal stories, and potential frameworks to contribute to the SoTL. However, I felt the tone of the book, and the presumed superiority of comprehensive doctoral granting institutions to other members of the academy, undermined the potential universal appeal of the various chapters. In fairness to the contributing authors, the central question of the editors was to consider the “contributions that research universities make to pedagogical advances” (p. 1). Of concern, as a reviewer, is that the tonal superiority became a distraction and moved the contributing authors from providing a set of broad comprehensive guidelines, to a narrow (and at times unjustified) defense of the centrality of research universities, all of which diminished the potential contributions of the collection of insights. Regardless, the book is still an excellent, thought-provoking resource for educators and SoTL scholars.

Shulman starts the book by proposing four teaching academy frameworks (interdisciplinary center, graduate education, technology, and distributed) that may be adopted at an institutional level to assist in the integration of teaching and research. Shulman’s primer (along with the general introduction by Becker and Andrews) helps to provide the context for the remaining chapters.

The next set of authors discusses the integration of research and teaching. Cookman provides the base for the main point of the book, that is, to teach students not just content but methodology, in this
case the examination of historical photographic records. Sept discusses the development of several technological tools to assist students in shifting the focus from passive learner to active researcher, examining anthropological records, albeit with mixed results and significant resources. Andrews applies the lessons learned from the context of one-on-one clinical instructions, in particular, the adaptation of the clinical model to help develop perspective faculty members during their doctoral programs. Becker and Greene discuss the application of quantitative methods to classroom instruction in this case, a computer classroom. The chapter provides an excellent primer on basic statistics to consider in undergraduate instruction. Nelson provides a different perspective, discussing how a focus on instructional effectiveness, particularly the development of critical thinking, may actually inform and re-direct research. Pescosolido and associates considers the approach that many institutions follow, which is some type of freshman seminar or orientation program to help develop intellectual curiosity, and address student success concerns. Although the results were limited and the resources extensive, one take away was the learning not only of undergraduate students, but the graduate teaching assistants (in terms of better perspective teachers and researchers). While each chapter provides value in establishing the link of research universities to SoTL, proving potential frameworks for integrating discipline-based research and classroom instructions, it was the personal journeys of discovery, particularly those of Cookman and Nelson, which were the exemplary contributions for the section.

The book then moves from the application of discipline-based scholarship toward the integration of assessment and teaching effectiveness. Kuh provides a fascinating history of assessment, student development and engagement, and the parallels of assessment to SoTL that is the highlight for this section. McCabe and Powell address head on the assumptions of faculty in terms of grade inflation. Although it would have helped to provide some additional quantitative analysis (to help contextualize the findings), the purpose was to explore the underlying assumptions of faculty and our self-serving bias in relation to grades and grade inflation. Bao and Redish reinforce the complexity of student learning and the need for refined instruments and analysis that better account for the interactions between students, the material, and the environment to assess actual learning. Becker ends the section on assessment by focusing on the various limitations found in current SoTL research. The critiques are not only applicable to SoTL, but also to empirical research in general.
Finally, the last chapter provides an overview of an ambitious, integrative approach to teaching that focuses on a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach (in this case the teaching of mathematics) that provides creative ideas for other institutions to potentially consider.

Although the accounts clearly demonstrate each author’s value to SoTL, it is important to note that these are individual contributions, rather than a systemic focus of research universities toward teaching. While it is clear that the resources and level of sophistication possible at research universities is potentially higher than that at non-research institutions, the distinction is less valuable than the overall question of how to integrate our scholarship (regardless of level) with our teaching (regardless of institution), toward assisting our own development and the learning of our students. Finally, the book continues the misguided (and unsubstantiated) assumption that excellent scholarship leads to excellent teaching. Although I concur that integrating teaching and scholarship produces a positive impact on student learning, particularly at the graduate level, the reality is they are distinct skill sets and that teaching excellence (as well as teaching insights) occurs at all levels of the academy.

Craig R. Seal, Assistant Professor, California State University
San Bernardino, California