Institutionalizing SoTL in the Community College:

An Examination of a Community College-University Research Partnership

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Introduction

While research had long been viewed as outside the scope of community college faculty responsibility, it is now becoming an integral part of faculty life (Vaughan, 1991). Within community colleges, faculty research has come to be based on the concept of “the scholarship of teaching and learning,” or SoTL (Herteis, 2002). Rather than concerned purely with original theory-based research, the current concept of research relies more on classroom practices and student outcomes as the objects of scholarly investigation. This type of scholarly research is now evident in such community college faculty assessments as tenure review and faculty self-evaluation, and is considered a desirable qualification for the hiring of new faculty members.

In this chapter, I examine the role that scholarly research plays in the institutional culture of Kapi‘olani Community College (KCC) and provide an example of a scholarly research partnership involving faculty members of KCC and the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa (UHM). I begin in the first section of the chapter by describing the socio-political context of the issue of scholarly research at KCC, followed by a framework useful for analyzing the role of research in the community college context. Afterwards, I provide a brief review of the literature most directly relevant to scholarly research. In the next section of the chapter, I give a narrative analysis of scholarly research at KCC using the proposed theoretical framework. In the third section of the chapter, “Professional Resonance,” I provide an example of a scholarly research project between KCC and UHM that effectively promoted the notion of SoTL within the ESOL Program at KCC. I conclude the chapter with the implications of scholarly research partnerships.
between community colleges and universities on scholarly research within the community college.

**FRAMING THE ISSUE**

Research is not a required function of community college faculty members, primarily because it traditionally is not part of the mission of the college (Vaughan, 1991). Furthermore, requirements for research are not explicitly tied to hiring guidelines for community college faculty. In light of these parameters, research in the community college can be described best as a desirable function of faculty (1), in that it promotes professionalism and collegiality within the college culture and (2), stimulates professional development. It is a desirable function for university system administration in that it helps fulfill the university’s mission to conduct research and often times attracts funds by way of research grants.

With a growing emphasis on scholarship, research in the community college now is being seen in a new light (Isaacson, 2000). Colleges across the US, including KCC, are examining ways to integrate research concepts into college mission statements (Vaughan, 1991). By doing so, research may become a more explicit function of college faculty. However, this change in attitudes towards research is fraught with challenges, such as discussions between faculty and college administration over increased workload and support, and agreements between college and university system administration over the differentiations of institutional missions and roles.

**Theoretical Framework**

To analyze the issue of scholarly research in the community college context, Easton’s systems analysis framework (Wirt & Kirst, 2001) is quite useful and informative. This

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1 The University of Hawai‘i System is a statewide higher education system composed of 10 campuses and dozens of educational, training and research centers across the Hawaiian Islands, including one Carnegie 1 Research institution, one research university, two B.A. degree-granting institutions, and seven community colleges. (http://www.hawaii.edu/about/)
framework allows for a very broad scope of analysis for this focused yet complex issue, incorporating the community college governance system as the central unit of analysis, the external pressures that affect the system as inputs, the results of the political activity within the system as outputs, and the process by which the outputs are fed back into the system again as inputs. Figure 1 shows a modified version of Easton’s framework based on the governance system of KCC.

Figure 1: Governance System of Kapi‘olani Community College
Adapted from Wirt & Kirst, 2001, p. 59

Following Easton’s model, the key players in the governance system of KCC include the college administration, the college faculty, and the university system administration (specifically, the University of Hawai‘i president and the Board of Regents), which acts to oversee the functioning of the entire college. The interactions of these groups with one another represent the core interactions of this community college governance system.

Major environmental factors that affect scholarly research within this system include accreditation and the concept of “the scholarship of teaching and learning.” These factors place the demands of improved instruction and improved student outcomes on the governance system.
in the form of inputs. When the key players at KCC have come into conflict over these inputs, the players have generated internal pressures, such as struggles over student and faculty assessment guidelines and support for faculty research, that have interacted with the inputs, which eventually have lead to outputs, such as goal statements, institutional guidelines, and increased institutional support for scholarly research.

To complete this model, some of the outputs previously mentioned are in the implementation phase of the governance system framework. For example, the University of Hawai‘i Kapi‘olani Community College Strategic Plan 2003-2010 (http://www.kcc.hawaii.edu/object/IO_405.html) explicitly contains a commitment to supporting faculty research. It is expected that the implementation of these outputs will lead to institutional outcomes, such as increased faculty research and additional support for conducting faculty research, which will in turn affect the inputs of the governance system, thus completing the cycle.

**Literature Review**

Historically, scholarly research in the two-year college was seen as an unnecessary function for individual faculty members, with their energies best directed towards the primary tasks of teaching or training their students (Monroe, 1972; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Most research activities, excluding institutional research (see for example Carter, 1986), were left to four-year colleges or specialized research institutes. In fact, Monroe (1971, p. 246) declared that “[t]he community college faculty is usually not interested in research” and suggested that the community college institution in general had a great deal of animosity towards research-oriented professors who were more interested in their own academic pursuits rather than teaching
students. These sentiments reflect the attitudes towards research that had developed within community college culture throughout most of the twentieth century.

However, a profound shift occurred across the domain of two-year colleges with the publication of George Vaughan’s (1988) seminal article “Scholarship in Community Colleges: The Path to Respect”, in which he called on community college educators to re-examine their views of research and scholarship. Afterwards, Vaughan (1991) and Palmer (1991) articulated a view of research and scholarship “that goes beyond original research without diminishing the rigor of the work involved or relieving the scholar of his or her responsibility to remain accountable to the results” (Palmer, 1991, p. 69). Activities suggested as scholarly under this view of research include editorials, curriculum development, instructional materials, technical innovations, classroom-based or ‘action’ research, and art exhibits. A major requirement of this extended definition of research is that the work must still be made public and offered for peer criticism.

This modern view of research and scholarship in teaching was further modified by scholars such as Patricia Cross (1998) who argued that more emphasis should be placed on student learning. She suggested that research into the pedagogic application of research was necessary. Her call was echoed by additional scholars who recognized that the activities of teaching and learning are inseparable. As a result, the concept of “the scholarship of teaching and learning” (SoTL) was born (Herteis, 2002). To facilitate investigation into this newly defined area of research, educational scholars soon found classroom action research (CAR) as a useful methodology because of its focus on examining classroom teaching practices with the goal of improving student learning (Mettetal, 2001).
In order to help promote SoTL among higher-education faculty, education departments of several institutions around the world have sponsored online forums to publish research and to disseminate information. For example, Indiana University South Bend publishes *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (http://titans.iusb.edu/josotl/), the University of Saskatchewan publishes *Teaching and Learning Bridges Journal* (http://www.usask.ca/tlc/bridges/), and the University of Western Australia produces the “Issues in Teaching and Learning” newsletter (http://www.catl.osds.uwa.edu.au/publications/ITL). In addition, several authors have proposed institutional models for supporting community college faculty in their pursuits of teaching and learning scholarship, with focuses on professional development and student outcomes (Gibson-Harman, Rodriguez, & Grant Haworth, 2002; Miller, Rodrigo, Pantoja, & Roen, 2004).

As a result of this increased emphasis on research, community colleges have responded by altering their missions and strategic plans to accommodate SoTL. At KCC, a comparison of its Strategic Plans developed in 1997 and 2002 reveals this change. In the Kapi‘olani Community College Strategic Plan 1997-2007 (Strategic Planning Council, 1997), there was no mention whatsoever of research – faculty, institutional or otherwise. However, the University of Hawai‘i Kapi‘olani Community College Strategic Plan 2003-2010 (http://www.kcc.hawaii.edu/object/IO_405.html) contains an entire goal devoted to this issue:

**Goal 5** To Invest in People: Professionals in a Learning Organization

**Objective 1** Redefine faculty roles and rewards to promote the scholarship of teaching.

**Objective 2** Redefine staff roles and rewards to promote careers of professional development.
 Associated action strategies are also included to help achieve the objectives and goal, including
“Acquire sufficient resources to allow faculty and staff expanded opportunities for research,
curriculum development, student advising, and college service,” and “Develop a comprehensive
faculty development program driven by the College's strategic plan”.

NARRATIVE

Analysis of SoTL at KCC

With an understanding of the context of the issue, I provide an analysis based on Easton’s
framework (see Figure 1) of the political role of research at KCC, beginning with the
environmental factors that affect the governance system. The environmental factor that has the
greatest impact on this system with regards to scholarly research seems to be that of
accreditation. KCC receives its regional accreditation from the governing body ACCJC-WASC,
the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges- Western Association of
Schools and Colleges (http://www.accjc.org/). While accreditation status does not seem to be
contingent explicitly on displaying activities associated with SoTL per se, evidence of such
activities that show an institutional commitment to professional development and student
outcomes contribute towards favorable accreditation status (ACCJC- WASC, 2002). Needless to
say, KCC is highly motivated to maintain its accreditation status so that it can remain a
recognized and accepted institution of higher learning.

This focus on teaching and learning as an aspect of accreditation places demands on the
college to improve instruction and student outcomes. These demands serve as the primary inputs
to the governance system and directly affect the role of research at KCC.

Within the governance system, the key players – the college administrators, the college
faculty, and the university system administrators – have responded to these primary inputs in part
through SoTL. KCC administrators are interested in scholarly research because it has been shown to improve professionalism and collegiality (Palmer, 1991; Gibson-Harman, Rodriguez, & Grant Haworth, 2002), which in turn are expected to have positive effects on instruction and student outcomes. KCC faculty members are interested in SoTL because it is seen as a convenient and immediately relevant means of professional development (Mettetal, 2001). All faculty members, regardless of their status (i.e., full time/part time, tenured/non-tenured), must show evidence of professional development in their required performance reviews; CAR is one method to fulfill this requirement. Furthermore, CAR is used by faculty to directly improve their instructional practices. In addition, faculty members recognize that improvements in their instruction will lead to improvements in student learning. University of Hawai‘i system administrators are interested in SoTL primarily because of their commitment to research across the university system (President’s Advisory Council, 2002). University administrators are also very interested in the possibility of the increased funding that could result from scholarly research at KCC.

While all of the key players in the college seem to recognize the benefits that SoTL may bring, the adoption of scholarly research at KCC is not without challenges. First of all, both faculty and college administration recognize the need to provide adequate support for faculty to pursue research. Challenges in the area of support include funding and training for faculty to conduct research and present findings in appropriate venues. Another controversy concerns faculty release time (i.e., paid or otherwise compensated leave). It is generally accepted that scholarly work adds to faculty workload, and without release time, research in the community college can be very difficult, if not impossible (Palmer, 1991). These issues of support and
release time are so significant because they are contingent on adequate budgets. Without funding, support and release time for faculty research are not possible.

A further issue relates to student and faculty assessment. Although the key players recognize the need for these types of assessments, some segments of the KCC faculty are resistant to linking faculty assessment in any way with either student assessment or scholarly research activities. Since student outcomes are not entirely dependent on instruction, these faculty members argue that faculty assessments should not be based on student outcomes. However, a major assumption of SoTL is that teaching and learning are inextricably linked. This assumption has led to a concern among some faculty that they may be assessed unfairly. Furthermore, since research is not a professional requirement of community college faculty, faculty members argue that faculty assessments should in no way include conducting research as a consideration.

As the major players at the college have interacted with one another over the issue of scholarly research, their agreements and concerns have led to a number of changes to the governance system in the forms of outputs. Most notably, conflict regarding the concept of SoTL has led to a change in KCC’s strategic plan. The current plan includes an entire goal devoted to professional development, which includes an objective to support scholarly teaching (http://www.kcc.hawaii.edu/object/IO_405.html). An additional change has been an increase in institutional support of scholarly activities in the university community college system. For example, as a result of an endowment from the Wo Family, administrators developed the Wo Learning Champions, a program that supports professional development and scholarly activities of community college faculty members (http://wlc.kcc.hawaii.edu/).
These outputs are currently in the implementation phase of the governance system. It is still too early to tell whether or not the current Strategic Plan or institutional support mechanisms will yield positive outcomes for the college in terms of SoTL. However, opinions from KCC faculty members seem to indicate an increasing interest in the idea of scholarly research.

**PROFESSIONAL RESONANCE**

One factor contributing to this increased interest in scholarly research is a project between KCC and UHM that effectively promoted the notion of SoTL within the ESOL Program at KCC. This example is provided as a model for 2- and 4-year college partnerships that stimulate scholarly research activities.

**Background**

During the mid-1990s, the ESOL Program at KCC experienced a major shift in its student population. International student numbers decreased as immigrant student numbers increased rapidly. This change was due in large part to the simultaneous phenomena of shrinking Asian economies and increasing Asian and Pacific Island immigration to the US during this period of time. With this change in student population, the ESOL Program was faced with the growing problem of low student performance. It seemed that overall this new population of immigrant students was not performing in college as well as international students. These new immigrants seemed to have very different backgrounds, developmental patterns, and linguistic needs from the international students, whose linguistic and other needs were better known.

In 1997, the ESOL Program director presented a paper to a group of community college ESL teachers about this new population of immigrant students, then referred to in the field as ‘developmental bilinguals’. The ESOL Program director and faculty were concerned about students who seemed to be “falling through the cracks” of Hawaii’s educational system, in
particular those enrolled in KCC. Although the college was charged with the task of preparing these students for future academic programs or for entry to the workforce, the institution as a whole was not prepared to address the unique needs of this new population. Conference participants responded well to the ESOL program director’s paper at the conference, and he learned that many others in ESL were looking at the same student population and issues. However, community colleges, and particularly KCC, apparently had no mechanisms for conducting research, such as needs analysis and curriculum development, on these students.

Later that year, the ESOL Program director approached the chair of the Department of Second Language Studies (DSLS) at UHM about research assistance on developmental bilinguals. The DSLS chair thought it was an interesting and worthwhile topic, and he referred the ESOL Program director to the director of the Center for Second Language Research (CSLR), a research and program development unit of the DSLS that engages in research, curriculum development, and teacher training projects in the area of second language education (http://www.hawaii.edu/cslr/). A specialist in bilingual/ multicultural research, the CSLR director was steering her program in that direction and had several PhD and MA students studying with her who were also interested in bilingual/ multicultural issues. She introduced these students to the ESOL Program director, and they had their first meeting in early 1999 to develop a research plan.

**Scholarly Research Partnership**

ESOL faculty members and the CSLR research students developed a longitudinal, critical-ethnographic analysis of the educational experiences and needs of KCC’s developmental bilingual students, who by this time were referred to in the TESOL literature as “generation 1.5” (G-1.5) students, following Rumbaut and Ima’s (1988, as cited in Harklau, Losey, & Siegal,
1999: vii) characterization of these students. This needs analysis included a dozen ESOL Program instructors, six UHM graduate research students, and two program directors, one each from KCC and UHM.

The purpose of the needs analysis was to gather data that would help the research team develop the foundations of a participatory curriculum for G-1.5 students. As a result, the research team spent three semesters (nearly 1-1/2 years) between 1990 and 2000 conducting more than 50 interviews with G-1.5 students and KCC teachers, counselors, and administrators, and observing nearly two dozen classrooms during the course of the project. Additionally, the team collected a variety of relevant materials, including official KCC and ESOL Program documents, classroom syllabi and assignments, student background information questionnaires, e-mails, and miscellaneous written material relevant to the ESOL program. In the process, ESOL Program faculty members also engaged in reflective practice, reviewed literature, conducted numerous action research projects, and analyzed student outcomes in efforts to positively affect teaching and learning.

The team worked collaboratively to collect and analyze the research data. A report of the findings from the critical needs analysis showed that many of the problems that G-1.5 students had at KCC stemmed from:

- unfamiliarity with communication in the academic setting;
- unfamiliarity with requirements of academia;
- unchallenging academic activities and tasks; and
- discouragement of bilingual abilities.

Based on these findings, the research team concluded that G-1.5 students would benefit from a process approach to teaching and learning, one that recognized students’ abilities and identities,
made their interests and concerns central to their learning experiences, and addressed their special needs. Furthermore, the team recommended that G-1.5 students would benefit from apprenticeship into the KCC community of practice by investigating the rules and requirements of academia through a student-as-ethnographer approach to language learning. These findings from the critical needs analysis contributed to the development of a unique curriculum for G-1.5 students, not discussed here due to focal and space limitations.

**Outcomes of the Research Partnership**

At the beginning of the research partnership, the ESOL Program director was looking for just one researcher. He didn’t imagine a team of instructors and graduate students collaborating on an entire research project devoted to examining G-1.5 students. All he had initially thought about was help with doing research, not about the process or any of the results of the research exactly. However, one of the major effects of the research process was the stimulation of professional development among ESOL Program faculty through scholarly analysis of teaching and learning. In addition to reflective practice and action research, ESOL Program faculty members wrote scholarly papers and presented at local and national conferences. As a result, ESOL instructors are much more accepting of research by seeing how it benefited them and the program.

Regarding results of the research partnership, the most immediate was that it influenced the curriculum of the whole ESOL Program. At all levels, from low-intermediate to advanced, student-as-researcher is emphasized. For example, students research the requirements of academia, they investigate communication norms and rules in academia, and they engage in various content-based research projects. Furthermore, students are encouraged to draw on and reflect on their background knowledge and experiences throughout the learning process.
Perhaps the greatest result of the research project within the ESOL Program was that it increased awareness and knowledge about G-1.5 students that eventually extended throughout the entire college community. The ESOL Program has become a regular consultant on immigrant student issues at KCC, which has helped increase the visibility and status of the program on the campus. Moreover, the research partnership has greatly increased collegiality and dialog between programs and departments at KCC and UHM. The university no longer seems the “ivory tower” of old to ESOL faculty members.

In addition to the positive effects that the research partnership had on the ESOL Program, the G-1.5 project benefited the CSLR in numerous ways. First of all, results of the research influenced the research design and curriculum development of a project in a local high school involving Pacific Island G-1.5 students. Findings also influenced the development of the undergraduate Bilingual Studies Program, directed by the CSLR. Finally, the ESOL-CSLR research project influenced many other DSLS graduate students in their own research activities.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Although there were numerous positive results of the KCC-UHM research partnership, several institutional challenges emerged through the project. One challenge has to do with the different approaches that the college and the university take towards research. Another challenge has to do with the role that KCC plays in education in the wider community.

Research as Problem Solving

Community colleges are often at the cutting edge of solving problems because they are generally flexible and responsive to business and community needs. As such, community college administrators and faculty are interested in research to solve problems that arise in the college and in the community; therefore, research is viewed as problem solving and is approached in this
manner. A problem arises in the institution or community, research is conducted to understand
the problem and propose a solution (e.g., action research, institutional research, needs analysis),
the problem is fixed, normal activity resumes, a problem arises, and the process repeats itself.
One major challenge to this process is that community colleges are often times ill equipped to
deal with large research issues due to institutional foci and constraints.

In contrast, universities are interested in research as an institutional requirement and
function of faculty members. As a result, universities tend to seek out problems and even
problematize issues in order to conduct research. Universities are often times in need of ‘good
problems’. This contrasting situation provides a unique opportunity for collaboration.
Community colleges can supply the sites, entrée, subjects, and problems, whereas universities
can supply the researchers, support, and experience. This dynamic was the case with the KCC-
UHM research partnership.

Role as Immigrant Advocate

In the broader field of education, KCC is caught between two huge political systems: the
state Department of Education and the university system. With regards to immigrant students,
neither system is adequately prepared to meet their educational needs, although for different
reasons (see Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999 for further discussion). At the middle and secondary
levels, educational institutions are unable to meet immigrant student needs primarily due to
under-funding, under-staffing, and poor teacher-training. At the university level, the institution is
unwilling to address immigrant student needs due to restrictive admissions standards (SAT
scores, placement tests) that effectively exclude many immigrant students, and prevalent socio-
cultural attitudes about teaching and learning that often disadvantage immigrant students who do
gain access to the university. This situation leaves KCC, with its open-door policy for
admissions, increasingly with the task of teaching and training immigrants for their future careers, either in higher education or in the workforce. Furthermore, because of the state’s current focus on P-20 education, KCC is becoming primarily a transfer institution. Two-year degrees are becoming things of the past; instead, KCC is now focusing on transfer to 4-year colleges and on ‘certificate pathways’ for worker training. This trend places further pressures on KCC to prepare immigrant students for their next steps outside of the college. As a result, research into the needs of immigrant students is becoming even more important and necessary than before.

**EXTENDING THE DIALOG**

Easton’s framework is very useful for examining the governance role that research plays at KCC because this framework provides for a wide scope of analysis of how the college operates. Additionally, Easton’s framework allows for unique insights into the factors that not only affect the pursuit of scholarly research in the community college, but also the core governance structure. Findings of the analysis indicate that scholarly research is becoming a more desirable, and even an expected, function of KCC faculty because it promotes professional development and collegiality within the college, and it directly contributes to problem solving within the institution.

Findings of the KCC-UHM research partnership show that such relationships provide fruitful means of promoting SoTL within the community college. ESOL Program faculty are much more accepting of research by seeing how it benefited both them as individual educators and the program: the research partnership directly influenced curriculum, it increased college faculty awareness and knowledge about G-1.5 students and their developmental issues, and it
contributed towards the professional development activities of many ESOL Program faculty members.

Furthermore, the partnership increased dialog and collegiality between KCC and UHM programs and departments. In addition, the research partnership had positive effects within the university that even extended into the local community. Research findings from the partnership influenced numerous graduate student researchers of the DSLS, the creation of the Bilingual Studies Program at UHM, and a curriculum development and implementation project at a local high school.

In conclusion, KCC has articulated its commitment to scholarly research in the form of goal statements in its current strategic plan. However, this institutional commitment to research requires adequate support in the forms of faculty commitment to conduct research and institutionalized mechanisms that assist faculty in their pursuits of research. With adequate support, SoTL may become a common, institutionalized function of faculty members at KCC, raising instructional assessments and student outcomes to ever-higher levels.

**THE WRITER**

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**RESOURCES**


