

Jessie L. Moore, ELON UNIVERSITY, jmoore28@elon.edu
Sophie Miller, PURDUE UNIVERSITY, mill3532@purdue.edu
Buffie Longmire-Avital, ELON UNIVERSITY, bavital@elon.edu
Eric Hall, ELON UNIVERSITY, ehall@elon.edu
Ellery Ewell, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, elleryewell@gmail.com
Christina Wyatt, CAPITAL ONE, christinawyatt5@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL SECTION: TRUST

The Significance of Trust in Fostering Meaningful Learning

KEYWORDS

trust, engaged learning, higher education

In higher education, key practices for fostering engaged learning include “acknowledging students’ prior knowledge and experiences, facilitating relationships, offering feedback, framing connections to broader contexts, fostering reflection on learning and self, and promoting integration and transfer of knowledge and skills” (Moore 2021, 13; Moore 2023). Many of these conditions for meaningful learning thrive on trust. Trust is central to relationships and (reciprocal) trust is necessary when developing feedback cultures. Trust can foster reflective practices, and it can be a key component in external partnerships that facilitate students’ connections to broader contexts.

As Felten, Forsyth, and Sutherland (2023) note, however, trust is underexplored in higher education. Gibbs and Maassen (2021), focusing primarily on the trust of higher education in the United Kingdom and Norway, suggest that many “notions of trust refer to a human desire, individually and collectively, to alleviate uncertainty, risk and vulnerability” (5). Alternatively, existential trust “offers, in the face of our own negation, existential security. To trust others, we need to be open to them and trust in ourselves to grasp, in the course of creative activity, possibilities yet to be realised by ourselves and others” (Gibbs and Maassen 2021, 6). These and other views of trust typically are grounded in social contexts and norms, making it critical for SoTL scholars considering the role of trust in facilitating conditions for meaningful learning to examine not only the role of trust in higher education, writ large, but also the role of trust specifically in developing relationships, guiding student experiences with feedback, fostering reflective practices, and facilitating students’ connections to broader contexts during their university experiences.

The special section, “The Significance of Trust in Fostering Meaningful Learning,” takes on the challenge of exploring trust in each of these conditions for meaningful learning in higher education. The special section grows out of multi-institutional SoTL facilitated by Elon University’s [Center for Engaged Learning research seminars](#) (see also Felten, Moore, and Peeples 2019). We, as the research seminar’s leadership team, [co-led the 2020–2023 research seminar](#). Participants collaborated for three years on SoTL studies about conditions for meaningful learning experiences, including relationships (both peer-to-peer and academic staff-to-peer), feedback, and connections to broader concepts (specifically via internships).

When teams convened for our 2022 summer meeting, we noted that the idea of trust emerged repeatedly. That summer’s conversations prompted this special section, which shares four multi-

[CC-BY-NC License 4.0](#) This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons – Attribution License 4.0 International which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed.

institutional SoTL studies and one institutional SoTL study exploring the role of trust in fostering meaningful learning. Collectively, the special section represents SoTL scholars at 11 institutions in New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

We hope you enjoy reading their articles:

- “What is the Role of Trust in Peer Support Schemes for Underrepresented Students?” by Claire Hamshire, Mimi Benjamin, and Alan Soong Swee Kit; <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.13.8>
- “Expressions of Trust: How University STEM Teachers Describe the Role of Trust in their Teaching” by Kathryn A. Sutherland, Rachel Forsyth, and Peter Felten; <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.12.22>
- “Building Trust Through Feedback: A Conceptual Framework” by Breana Bayraktar, Katherine Troyer, and Kiruthika Ragupathi; <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.13.7>
- “Enhancing Trust and Embracing Vulnerability in the College Classroom: A Reflection on Ungrading and Co-Creation in Teaching and Learning” by Kristina Meinking and Eric Hall; <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.12.29>
- “The Roles of Supervisor Care and Trust and Sense of Belonging in Promoting Internship Satisfaction” by Melinda K. Adams and Jody Jessup-Anger; <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.13.6>

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Jessie L. Moore (USA) is professor of professional writing and rhetoric and director of the Center for Engaged Learning, an international research center, at Elon University.

Sophie Miller (USA) graduated from Elon University in 2024 earning her bachelor’s degree in psychology. She is now at Purdue University pursuing a PhD in human development and family sciences, conducting research in the Center for Early Learning lab.

Buffie Longmire-Avital (USA) is professor of psychology department and the inaugural director of the Black Lumen Project, an equity initiative, at Elon University.

Eric Hall (USA) is an assistant provost for scholarship and creative activity and professor of exercise science at Elon University. He is interested in co-creation and mentorship in undergraduate research, as well as assessment of high impact practices.

Ellery Ewell (USA) is a second-year occupational therapy student at the University of Southern California Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy. She earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology from Elon University in 2023.

Christina Wyatt (USA) is a financial analyst with experience in editing teaching and learning research, quantitative economics writing, and design thinking. She earned a bachelor’s degree in finance and economic consulting from Elon University in 2023 and currently works in Card Finance at Capital One.

REFERENCES

- Felten, Peter, Rachel Forsyth, and Kathryn A. Sutherland. 2023. "Building Trust in the Classroom: A Conceptual Model for Teachers, Scholars, and Academic Developers in Higher Education." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 11: 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.11.20>.
- Felten, Peter, Jessie L. Moore, and Tim Peeples. 2019. "Multi-Institutional SoTL: A Case Study of Practices and Outcomes." In *Applying the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Beyond the Individual Classroom*, edited by Jennifer Friberg and Kathleen McKinney, 149–161. Indiana University Press.
- Gibbs, Paul, and Peter Maassen. 2021. "Introduction: Trust and Higher Education." In *Trusting in Higher Education: A Multifaceted Discussion of Trust in and For Higher Education in Norway and the United Kingdom*, edited by Paul Gibbs and Peter Maassen, 1–14. Springer.
- Moore, Jessie L. 2023. *Key Practices for Fostering Engaged Learning: A Guide for Faculty and Staff*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Moore, Jessie L. 2021. "Key Practices for Fostering Engaged Learning." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 53 (6): 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2021.1987787>.



Copyright for the content of articles published in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* resides with the authors, and copyright for the publication layout resides with the journal. These copyright holders have agreed that this article should be available on open access under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited, and to cite *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* as the original place of publication. Readers are free to share these materials—as long as appropriate credit is given, a link to the license is provided, and any changes are indicated.