

The Ceremony of a SoTL Welcome: The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as a Case Study

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Abstract

Two scholars explore the forms of welcome and moments of invitation experienced both as scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) scholars and as longtime members of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Their experiences of welcome into SoTL work represent invitations for mutual inquiry, sustained encouragement, and finding continuity in fostering the same for others, through ISSOTL conferences and through published work. The goal in this article is to present our insights into the ceremony of welcome in ISSOTL as a case study for other transdisciplinary intellectual societies and spaces, in order that they may reflect intentionally on the ways in which they do, and do not yet, fully welcome scholars into their academic community.

Keywords

academic hospitality, ceremony, invitation, relationships, scholarship, SoTL, transdisciplinarity, welcome practices

Introduction

Conversations about transdisciplinary scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), the intensive focus on student learning that spans disciplines and fields, prompted two experienced colleagues to reflect on their own moments of welcome to SoTL and more specifically, the moments of welcome they have experienced within the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL), the flagship international scholarly community for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Moments of welcome within the Society can lead to sustained, collegial relationships across generations of scholars as they navigate SoTL disciplinary and transdisciplinary communities. Indeed, we believe that transdisciplinary spaces, which frequently ask scholars to explore new areas of investigation and ways of knowing, new aspects of their

identities, and new scholarly communities, are spaces in which welcoming actions are most critical. And yet, we recognize that not all scholars have access to the experience of a ceremonial welcome within ISSOTL nor do they experience a “relentless welcome” (Scobey as quoted in Felten & Lambert, 2020, p. 14). In this article, therefore, we first explore *what, how, and who* facilitated our welcomes to SoTL generally, and ISSOTL specifically, before exploring the principles and actions of welcome that ISSOTL has intentionally structured within the structures and procedures of the Society. Throughout, we attend to the opportunities that remain within ISSOTL in order to move the Society closer towards its mission of being a truly international society that welcomes all scholars. Finally, our goal in this article is to present our reflections and insights into ISSOTL as a case study for other transdisciplinary societies and communities, in order that they may reflect intentionally on the ways in which they do, and do not yet, fully welcome scholars into their intellectual community.

A Transdisciplinary Welcome in Academia and SoTL

Before exploring our own entry points and experiences of welcome in SoTL, we queried the scholarship that outlines the entry points to academia, juxtaposed with the entry points to SoTL. In particular, forms of hospitality and welcome in academia provided guiding principles to thinking about both the entry points that we experienced and what is and should be sustained within ISSOTL. As Chick et al. (2019) write, “A quick look at many of the publications, conferences, and development programs at teaching and learning centers across the world demonstrates that SoTL is always inviting—not just welcoming, but actively *inviting* newcomers. These newcomers come from across the academy. They are disciplinary and professional experts and teachers who are stepping (sometimes far) outside of their areas of expertise” (p. 187). We wonder: What does it mean to be “always inviting” and “always welcoming” within an academic community? What are the forms of hospitality and engagement that sustain inquiry and relationships within SoTL? And what might we learn from ceremonies of welcome in other academic spaces that might benefit the ISSOTL community as well?

The Ceremony of Initial Welcome

The welcome that one experiences as they enter into a new community, academic or otherwise, is a social and ritualistic act. An oft-cited article on welcome by Phipps and Barnett (2007), entitled “Academic Hospitality,” asks readers to consider the following questions: “What are the rules of the ceremonies of academic welcome? And what of the academic guest?” (p. 237). The authors argue that there are multiple forms of hospitality that operate in academia and contribute to the ceremony of welcome. The first form is *material hospitality*, which relates to the carving out of physical space and time to host and invite individuals to join a community. The second is *epistemological hospitality*, which is demonstrated when hosts are curious to learn from and value the ideas that their guests bring to the space. Thirdly, *linguistic hospitality* refers to translational work that hosts can engage, either through actual translation of text into additional languages or through conceptual translation, by helping to connect ideas and interests across seemingly disconnected spaces. Finally, *touristic hospitality* is the practice of cultivating connections to people and places, as well as metaphoric tourism, through the visiting of a new disciplinary lens or approach and the host’s efforts to help visitors connect with these new disciplinary modes and norms. These four forms of hospitality—honoring space and time, valuing ideas brought to the

table, connecting ideas and language around teaching, and building relationships—resonate with the forms of welcome we later describe as having personally experienced within ISSOTL.

It is true that entering into a new institution, department, or scholarly community poses a suite of challenges for academics in terms of navigating experiences and perceptions of welcome. Invoking Trowler and Knight (1999), Jan Smith (2020) writes that entry points take place within a “‘*cultural configuration*’ of academic practices, shaped by local discourses, some of which may appear alien or troublesome” (p. 6). We recognize that supporting newcomers as they seek to make sense of these “alien or troublesome” practices is important, especially for individuals who are seeking to bridge disciplines or engage in transdisciplinary SoTL. As Poole et al. (2007) write, “In practice communities of all kinds, the flow and transformation of knowledge takes place most readily across tightly knit groups who share a common practice environment, such as an academic department” (p. 7). Departmental, institutional, and societal newcomers are navigating academic identity formation as well as existing norms and assumptions, all the while attempting to build meaningful relationships and scholarship; supporting new colleagues in their entrance into these spaces necessitates careful attention by the academic hosts to their responsibilities for creating hospitable, productive environments. When such welcome is established, there is an opportunity for the creation of what Galison (1997) describes as “trading zones,” in which both the newcomer and more senior members of the community can find points of mutual congruence and exchange, with an “understand[ing] that the continuation of exchange is a prerequisite to the survival of the larger culture of which they are part” (p. 146). The initial perceptions of welcome determine the nature of continued engagement.

Mentorship as an Ongoing Form of Welcome

After the initial entry into an intellectual space, mentoring relationships serve as intermediate and sustained forms of welcome in academia. In terms of material hospitality, a guiding host welcomes a novice guest into new spaces, providing time and space for getting to know each other and for honest conversational exchange. Mentors also serve as important SoTL linguistic hosts, translating frameworks and terminology for the new scholar in order to help them expand and make connections across disparate ideas. Much has been written about the essential role of mentorship in affirming and growing SoTL scholars. In a recent piece by Friberg and colleagues (2021), the authors discuss their experiences as “newcomers” to SoTL and the mentorship experiences that helped them develop their SoTL practices alongside their academic identities. In the outline of their SoTL mentorship framework, they articulate the importance of “mentoring in,” or the process of linguistic hospitality via mentoring novices in their acquisition of SoTL jargon, practices, and frameworks, while also acknowledging that “no single approach to mentoring [is] superior, but instead ... successful mentoring relationships are dynamic and that roles and functions of such relationships evolve to meet the needs, contexts, and stages of the individuals involved” (p. 398).

Similar “mentoring in” moves of academic welcome are present in Hubball et al.’s (2010) reflection on a ten-year program of SoTL mentorship at the University of British Columbia–Vancouver campus. The authors refer to the processes of welcome in this program as those of modeling, facilitating, and networking. In line with epistemological hospitality, Hubball, Clarke, and Poole (2010) describe modeling of “interpersonal skills” and adopting an “‘I’m here to learn from you too’ attitude,” which enabled a “continuous two-way exchange of SoTL ideas” (p. 124). Consistent with linguistic hospitality, the authors also state that “being a critical guide required

mentors to situate diverse individual SoTL projects in a ‘bigger picture’ of SoTL literature and academic practice” (p. 124). Finally, in terms of touristic hospitality, the SoTL mentors at University of British Columbia “were able to ‘open doors’ in the academic community by introducing faculty to key people who shared similar SoTL interests and/or academic units and SoTL networks that can help ‘make things happen’” (p. 124). The authors assert the importance of mentoring roles as crucial to the growth of SoTL as a supportive mechanism of transformation at their institution.

The Psychological Experiences of Welcome/Welcoming

Finally, we explored how the process of moving into new spaces of welcome as scholars can elicit exploratory processes related to professional identities, as well as experiences of vulnerability and discomfort, for both newcomers and more seasoned experts in the disciplinary space (e.g., Arthur, 2016; Chick, 2014; Simmons et al., 2013). Arthur (2016) writes about communities of practice being spaces which “demonstrate both change and continuity over time. They reproduce themselves through the gradual introduction and assimilation of newcomers, and these communities also evolve as new members join, negotiate different meanings and learn from each other” (Arthur, 2016, p. 233). It is this knowledge exchange among newcomers and experienced mentors that SoTL spaces promote; bi-directional knowledge exchange can prompt powerful and yet sometimes also troubling transformations, as we rethink and complicate both our work and our identities. Simmons and colleagues (2013) identify SoTL as a space of supporting scholars as they navigate their professional identities, saying, “SoTL as a community has long been an alternative site of developing mentoring relationships that sustain us as professionals in new and unfamiliar fields of practice in contexts where these fields are not adequately supported, either intellectually or materially” (p. 16). And yet, because the process of learning and relearning who we are as SoTL scholars can elicit feelings of vulnerability, especially when navigating the complexities of transdisciplinarity, Chick (2014) calls for an “imperative of understanding.” She writes, “[A]s we gather under this big tent, let’s keep the conversation going, but be gentle with each other, knowing that we all struggle with who we are and what we do when we step across that threshold” (p. 10). From invitation to attendance to engagement and sustained collegiality, therefore, navigating the “unfamiliar fields” of SoTL necessitates a range of welcomes and compassion for colleagues, new and less new, to the field.

Firsthand ISSOTL Welcomes

For the following section, each author first shares their reflections on their early ISSOTL experiences, in order to investigate the moments of welcome they experienced into the field of scholarship of teaching and learning and into ISSOTL more specifically. We then present a discussion of the common themes that emerged from these individual narratives and how these themes relate to the components of academic welcome articulated above. Finally, we’ll turn to an analysis of the structures and processes of ISSOTL, to explore where welcome happens within the Society and where it may be further bolstered.

Sarah: Guiding Prompts into ISSOTL

When I was first introduced to ISSOTL, I had no idea what I was stepping into. I was a second-year graduate student, finishing my first year of working at the University of Kansas Center for

Teaching Excellence (CTE) under the directorship of Dan Bernstein, one of the founders and past presidents of the Society. While I was pursuing my graduate studies in developmental psychology with Andrea (Dea) Greenhoot, I knew that I was interested in a career in which teaching featured prominently; I was lucky that when I needed a job to supplement my meager graduate student stipend, Dea recommended that I interview at the CTE.

That first year, Dan invited me to join him in two presentations, one focused on the pedagogical strategies that we were employing in an undergraduate course that he was teaching and I was supporting as a graduate teaching assistant (although he would say, even in the beginning, that we were co-teaching the class). The other paper was titled, “Improving self report methods in the scholarship of teaching and learning through consideration of research evidence.” What I didn’t realize at the time was that he was very intentionally extending an ISSOTL welcome to me, because to prepare for this second presentation, we engaged in in-depth reading and discussions of the literature about the origin and field of SoTL, the kinds of questions that SoTL scholars ask, and the range of evidence employed to address those questions. All of this work was new to me at the time, but he patiently guided me into the research. At the same time, however, he was inviting me to contribute my own emerging expertise in these conversations, about psychological science methodologies and the impact of cognitive and affective states on the nature of self-reports. He had positioned me in the dialogue as a co-learner and co-constructor of SoTL; as such, when we presented these papers at ISSOTL 2007 in Sydney, I felt a true sense of shared ownership and investment in the work.

The conference itself was like passing through a portal into a different world; one that I wanted to spend more time in. I was thrilled by each of the sessions I attended. Outside of the CTE, I had never heard large groups of people talk in sustained, invested, and curious ways about teaching and learning! The presentations provided intentional time for questions to be asked, and the Q & A sessions felt warm and supportive of the presenters, as if the goal was really to improve the work and help the authors meet their goals for teaching, rather than the combative or performative “questions” I had observed at my disciplinary conferences. I felt so comfortable that I even raised my hand and asked several questions across the conference!

In between the sessions, there were coffee breaks where people would reach out to introduce themselves and seek to learn who I was, a poster session where I was invited into conversations with a wide range of scholars (many of whom are still dear friends and colleagues), and dinner invitations (coordinated by Dan) to join groups of what I now know were many of the leading voices in ISSOTL. A lot has happened between my entry into the world of ISSOTL in 2007 and where I sit now in 2024, having recently completed 12 years on the ISSOTL Board. And yet the lessons of my experience of the ceremony of an ISSOTL welcome, and many similar experiences since that time, are guiding prompts for me as I seek to welcome others into the field.

Susannah: Connections Inherent in ISSOTL

In the early 2000s, I worked as an instructional designer for the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship at Georgetown University. We received a five-year grant for a national SoTL project in the humanities working with 70 faculty members from multiple institutions to develop long-term projects around teaching and learning. This project, the Visible Knowledge Project (VKP), constituted my introduction and entry into scholarship of teaching and learning as

a form of professional development led by Randy Bass, one of the founders of the society. As part of our “high touch” approach to SoTL support, we hosted an annual gathering to discuss progress as well as multiple touchpoints throughout the year, with small group meetings and individual coaching sessions. Our focus was on change and how to encourage instructors to adapt their teaching approaches using SoTL as a guiding framework to investigate questions around student learning.

Yet the challenge to welcome colleagues to an environment promoting change, investigation, and analysis warranted a *radical welcome*, one that signaled community and integrity and a commitment to work towards understanding student learning, sometimes at the expense of what is expected in academia. In my experience, academic staff who are invested in taking their teaching as seriously as their research responsibilities often experience questions, uncertainty or ‘productive disruptions’ around their professional identity (Trede et al., 2012). While faculty are experts in many ways, reflecting on the process of teaching and learning might seem like a new frontier posing many risks and uncertainties both intellectually and professionally.

Through my supportive role, I quickly learned that SoTL conversations required more than providing one-off advice on course design; the conversations within the national project were extended, engaged reflections on learning often done in pairs, triads, or small groups. Towards the end of the Visible Knowledge Project in 2006, I supported five history professors (Coventry et al., 2006) in developing their articles for the *Journal of American History* about the use of new media in the history classroom to develop disciplinary skills. Each professor represented the range of disciplinary experience from early career to full professor, yet each of them were asking questions about student learning in their classrooms, and they were new to SoTL inquiry methodologies. Each historian approached the use of new media in his or her classroom through a careful examination of assignment design, an analysis of student evidence, and a detailed account of findings and observations significant to learning in their discipline. It is important to note that each member of this group was “new” to SoTL but not new to asking questions about teaching and learning. The difference was the opportunity to be in this group together, to ask questions together, and to receive feedback on what was happening at the classroom level. At the time, my role in this process was merely to be the project liaison to this particular writing group. Over time, I became part of their circle through asking questions, listening, reviewing drafts, providing feedback, and pointing out moments of commonalities and convergence.

I am unable to specify an exact moment when in the process this happened, but it was significant that the authors agreed to including me as a co-author (denoted as “with” in the author title list). It was a form of welcoming that bestowed an “academic blessing” of mentorship and recognition to me, an early career educational developer. At the time, the act of supporting an engaged, critical group was welcome enough; however, it also signified a welcome to the writing process, the “going public” aspect of SoTL that Shulman (1999) described as, “an object of critical review and evaluation by members of one’s community; and members of one’s community begin to use, build upon, and develop those acts of mind and creation” (p. 15). I had been viewing my contribution to the group as only support in nature; however, my act of support turned into an act of creation and collaborative inquiry.

When attending the first ISSOTL gathering in 2004, we, the staff of VKP, attended as active scholars in the field eager to meet international colleagues engaged in similar work. In the

dissemination of VKP findings in the years after the project ended, I attended more academic conferences where we received questions on *how* we carried out the work among the 70 faculty participants over what we learned. One moment in particular stands out to me, when an individual commented on how we interacted with each other through collegiality and camaraderie, noting that this way of being with each other was not common within traditional academic spaces. My welcome to SoTL was a messy one, but it was also a welcome that demonstrated not just the process of SoTL but also the particular ethos of SoTL work. Inherent in this SoTL ethos is an endless welcome, which seeks to build and sustain connections with colleagues through intentional listening, constructive feedback, and the investment in people and inquiry over time.

Notable Themes across our Personal Narratives of Welcome in ISSOTL

There are some commonalities across each of our experiences that we identify as potential markers or components of an ISSOTL welcome. First, there is within ISSOTL what Susannah described above as a **relentless welcome**, a term usually reserved for student success, but can also apply to the form of invitation to a community that disrupts traditional (hierarchical) academic ways of being. Our common themes encompass an invitation or prompt to collaborate rather than compete; to perform curiosity rather than perfection; to be included rather than excluded; to form collegial connections across transdisciplinary spaces.

Additionally, **the ISSOTL welcome is an invitation to engage in mutual inquiry**. An ISSOTL welcome invites new scholars not merely to learn from others in the field, but to bring their disciplinary, pedagogical, and interpersonal knowledge into transdisciplinary conversation, to expand what is known and to ask new questions. In both vignettes, Sarah was asked to contribute her disciplinary expertise to a SoTL inquiry project; Susannah was invited to contribute her developer skills of sense-making and facilitation to the SoTL work of a group of historians. Many scholars enter into SOTL having already acquired expertise as scholars of a discipline, who then seek to apply their disciplinary ways of knowing to questions of teaching and learning in or beyond the discipline. In an ISSOTL welcome, we invite scholars into mutual inquiry by creating avenues for all participants to bring their expertise and ways of knowing to new questions of teaching and learning.

The ISSOTL welcome provides developmental support and encouragement. We are, at our core, both teachers and learners, and as Kathryn Sutherland reminded many of us at her keynote address at ICED 2022, there is no teaching without learning (Sutherland, 2022). Keeping this idea front of mind, an ISSOTL welcome keeps the learners' current level of expertise in mind, providing finely tuned feedback and formative questions to support the scholar's thinking, in a way that will hopefully be positively received and incorporated into their teaching. Sarah was not initially expected to locate, let alone make sense of, research in the field of SoTL on her own, but was rather provided with prompts, a set of core readings to initiate her to the conversation, and ongoing discussion to guide her to increased understanding. The ISSOTL developmental framework is also present in the context of providing feedback to new SoTL scholars, to nurture their ideas and support their thinking; in Susannah's co-authorship work with her historian colleagues, she learned how to provide, and respond to, formative developmental feedback in SoTL. If the ultimate goal is to increase the number of people thinking and talking about teaching and learning, and more than that, to improve teaching and learning across higher education, we

need to bring people in, rather than push them away. The developmental approach to an ISSOTL welcome strives to do just that.

Finally, **the ISSOTL welcome is relational**, and we see this manifest in several ways. First, there is *an investment in people as whole people*. Many of the connecting conversations that are facilitated during an ISSOTL welcome intentionally connect people around shared scholarly interests. At the same time, these conversations are attentive to the people doing the scholarship—their values, their personal life, their goals and hopes, and even their desire for friendship and joy. It is no wonder that Susannah and Sarah have lasting friendships and collaborations with the people who have served as their ISSOTL points of welcome (as well as each other!), and we hazard to guess that many of you reading this article are thinking fondly of your many ISSOTL friends who welcomed you and whom you have welcomed. People in ISSOTL tend to know each other beyond the professional—we often know about each other’s partners, pets, hobbies, favorite places, and yes, even each other’s anxieties and worries. Perhaps it is the nature of SOTL that creates a culture of shared vulnerability? In the doing of SoTL, we invite people to name what they do not yet know or understand (Bass, 1999) and to explore moments of failure (Timmermans & Sutherland, 2020); these actions can activate vulnerability, especially for scholars who operate in the academy where knowledge construction and expertise is highly valued. As scholars of teaching and learning, we operate in a developmental space, one in which the naming of challenges and experiences of failures (Timmermans & Sutherland, 2020) is expected and encouraged. How we interact with each other within and between conference sessions is intended to nurture and allow for feelings of vulnerability and openness to learning. Because we value vulnerability in our scholarship, perhaps that contributes to a more relational culture in which we feel comfortable sharing more of ourselves with each other, alongside a sense of trust that this sharing will be received with openness and appreciation.

Another relational aspect of the ISSOTL welcome is that, when one is extended, it is done so with a *commitment to sustaining the relationship over time*. The warmth of reunions that occur at ISSOTL annual conferences speak to how meaningful these sustained relationships are. While a number of us work with each other across the year, on scholarly endeavors and/or Society operations, many more of us look forward to the ISSOTL conference as the singular moment of the year to reconnect. And finally, an ISSOTL welcome involves an awareness that the goal is not to be the solo connecting node for a person new to ISSOTL. Rather, the ceremony of welcome reaches out, making a *concerted effort to fostering and expanding networks* where possible. Susannah was connected to a network of VKP scholars; the dinners coordinated by Dan at ISSOTL 2007 connected Sarah with a wealth of mentors and collaborators. This aspect of ISSOTL’s relational welcome leads to the establishment of a scholarly community, rather than a singular supportive relationship in the Society—a more sustaining and more sustainable form of welcome for scholars entering the fold.

Where Does Welcome Happen in ISSOTL as an Organization?

In this section, we turn to forms of welcome that are embedded within the structures and principles of ISSOTL, as well as challenges that may constrain the full expression of welcome. The intention in this section is not to dive deeply into ISSOTL for archival or historical purposes (although there are a *small* number of people in the Society who may enjoy this section for that purpose alone). Instead, it is our hope that there are transferable lessons from the how, who, what, and when of an

ISSOTL welcome within the societal structures that can inform readers' approach to departmental processes, committee practices, and other spaces in which new individuals are welcomed to join an intellectual community.

The ISSOTL Annual Conference

Once a year, ISSOTL hosts its annual conference; this event serves as the physical convergence of colleagues from around the world, joining to share their scholarship, to learn from and with each other, and to host and be hosted. While the number of people who have attended every ISSOTL conference since its founding in 2004 can fit on two hands, a large number of ISSOTL attendees come year after year, as often as schedules and finances allow. They look forward to seeing old friends and connecting with new people, new ideas, and new physical places. The conference has been very successful in convening a diverse set of scholars from all over the world who are interested in improving teaching and learning; these scholars bring with them a wide range of disciplinary expectations for how scholarship is shared and how we interact with each other in intellectual exchange. In response, ISSOTL colleagues Nancy Chick, Sarah Bunnell, Peter Felten, Bettie Higgs, Aaron Long, Karen Manarin, Beth Marquis, Katarina Mårtensson, Kelly Matthews, Jessie Moore, and Lauren Scharff drafted a document in 2017 to attempt to make explicit some of the shared norms and expectations of an ISSOTL conference, to serve as a means of both reflecting on our practices and creating transparent guidelines for welcoming conference practices (see <https://issotl.com/issotl-conference-pedagogy/>). The five principles of the ISSOTL conference are:

1. We embrace the “S” of SoTL by taking a scholarly approach.
2. We are engaged with our audiences, and share our work interactively.
3. Because SoTL is situated in the particular contexts of discipline, institution, country, culture, language, etc., ISSOTL invites and embraces diversity.
4. We support this diversity by being inclusive, making our work accessible, and providing a variety of ways for people to engage.
5. Because we are committed to ISSOTL's diversity, we are collegial in ways that express inclusivity.

The conference pedagogy is a form of hospitality to those who are new to the ISSOTL conference: It defines what it means to take a scholarly approach to teaching, it outlines expectations for audience engagement (rather than passive receipt) with presentations, and it demands that presentations be accessible so that all participants can access materials and be fully welcomed into the space. The explicit articulation of conference norms and operational definitions is an example of welcome that is counter-cultural relative to many disciplinary conferences, in line with the intention of a relentless welcome. While all academic communities have expectations for scholarly and professional behaviors and interactions, senior members of the community typically have knowledge of (and are allowed to both shape and at times violate) those norms, while newcomers are often forced to osmotically learn and attempt to assimilate into the existing societal culture. The ISSOTL conference pedagogy attempts to disrupt those hierarchical dynamics.

Further, the conference pedagogy also articulates expectations for the developmental approach to feedback and conversation that we expect of each other as we engage with scholarly ideas and

presentations at ISSOTL. We model this framework in conference sessions by asking questions that are intended to bolster the scholar, highlight the contributions made by the scholarship, and strengthen the work. We also encourage individuals to model this framework in their work as reviewers for the conference, by providing explicit criteria for evaluation of proposals and encouraging reviewers to provide feedback that will encourage and improve the scholarship, whether it is ultimately accepted for presentation or not. Taken together, the conference pedagogy captures the spirit of ISSOTL's encouragement and support for all scholars regardless of either their experience in the field or the nuance of their questions about teaching and learning. In this way, it articulates our goal of creating an epistemologically welcoming community.

The ISSOTL conference site is a critical aspect of both meeting the international reach that ISSOTL aspires to, and an important way of extending an ISSOTL welcome to new areas of the world. Reading through the 2019 ISSOTL Strategic Plan, the first item listed within the Vision for 2034 states: "When we imagine ISSOTL at the beginning of our third decade in 2034, we hope to have a robust membership drawn from every world region and every continent" (<https://issotl.com/strategic-plan/>). Examining annual membership numbers and a regional breakdown of conference attendees at ISSOTL conferences consistently reveals that the location of the ISSOTL conference sparks a large number of scholars from that region to attend ISSOTL for the first time; the location matters! Because the pricing model of ISSOTL membership is one that is designed to encourage ongoing engagement with the Society beyond the conference itself, it is more cost-effective for individuals to purchase a membership and register for the conference as a member than it is for them to register for the conference as a non-member. The added benefit is that they then have access to a year of additional ISSOTL connections, such as the ISSOTL newsletter, notifications about new articles published in the journal, and online sessions offered in between the annual conference calendar. It is the hope that this practice offers an extension of the initial welcome that individuals experienced at the conference, and sustains the experience of welcome throughout the academic year.

All that being said, the process of identifying the location of the conference each year is not simple. Under the purview of the ISSOTL Convenings Committee, there is a cycle of calls for expressions of interest (EOIs) followed by full proposals. One of the priorities for evaluating the EOIs is the location; the desire is to rotate the conference such that it is held in a non-North American location every other year, as much as possible. Moving the conference locations facilitates the creation of space to expand members' understanding of SoTL methods and ways of knowing, as well as higher education structures and contexts. The proposed location, however, must be weighed against other factors related to whether the conference is likely to be feasible and successful. Individuals who work at institutions without support for them to attend previous ISSOTL conferences are going to be inherently less familiar with the expectations for an ISSOTL conference, making their bid more challenging. Many of these individuals are located in regions in which ISSOTL is not yet well established. At the same time, the goal of wanting to bring the ISSOTL conference to new regions also runs into a tension at times with potential fiscal risk. The conference (and related membership renewals) is the predominant income stream for the Society each year. Without those funds, ISSOTL simply cannot continue to exist. How can the Society best walk the line of extending a welcome to these scholars and regions while also being a financial caretaker for the long-term health of the Society? These are ongoing and complex conversations within ISSOTL.

Explicitly Welcoming Newcomers to the ISSOTL Conference

In 2013, the two authors of this article, Sarah and Susannah, in partnership with Sherry Linkon, then-vice president (U.S. Region) for the ISSOTL Board, developed a “New to ISSOTL” session to be offered in the hour directly before the start of the ISSOTL conference. The goals for this session were to connect newcomers with each other and with experienced SoTL scholars, to answer any just-in-time questions that they had about the conference and/or their upcoming conference sessions, and to get them excited about being at ISSOTL. We also wanted to provide newcomers with a little bit of context about the Society, how it is structured and its history. The session began with a brief, 10-minute discussion of the history and structure of ISSOTL, and then invited newcomers to join small discussion groups, each one facilitated by an experienced SoTL scholar. The session was well-received, with a number of people mentioning the “New to ISSOTL” session as an important moment of welcome for them. A tradition was born; the “New to ISSOTL” session has been offered each year at the start of the ISSOTL conference since this time. That being said, the session’s focus has shifted in emphasis over time. One such change has been to decenter the role of the experienced SoTL scholar: While there is still a facilitator in each group who is familiar with ISSOTL conferences, they are encouraged to promote discussion between group members as much as possible, in order to model curiosity and co-learning rather than serving as the primary source of knowledge transfer. In this way, the session has moved closer to fostering the relational and mutual inquiry-focused components of an ISSOTL welcome.

Another shift that has happened in the session structure is to more intentionally partner with ISSOTL’s student interest group, to encourage students (whether they are new to ISSOTL or have been attending for many years) to join the discussions as well. Having a student and non-student facilitator has helped to foster a sense of welcome, especially for other students who are new to the Society. Finally, the Convenings Committee has also overseen the creation of the ISSOTL Buddy System, designed to build relational welcome and establish the beginning of a network of scholars. Conference attendees are asked to indicate their interest in serving as a Buddy mentor to 2-3 people who are new to ISSOTL, or if they themselves are new to the conference, if they would like a Buddy at the conference. The expectation for Buddies is that they will connect at several points across the conference, attend each other’s sessions when possible, and/or have a meal together. And, the Buddy pairings are encouraged to meet up at the “New to ISSOTL” event and join a small group discussion together. In this way, the Buddy mentor serves as an additional facilitator and resource for the group, and the Buddy mentee has an opportunity to connect with their mentor, and the other mentees in their Buddy group, before the conference has even begun.

Welcoming Individuals into Scholarly Community: Teaching and Learning Inquiry

Other conference activities include the intentional presence of the editorial team of *Teaching and Learning Inquiry (TLI)* the official, peer-reviewed journal of ISSOTL that aims to support and facilitate the act of “going public” with scholarship on teaching and learning (Shulman, 1999). Inherent in the journal’s mission is providing a robust and developmental peer reviewing process, with a specific emphasis on mentoring authors through the review process, providing extensive feedback, and an unwavering commitment to disseminating scholarship from multiple voices to many contexts and regions. The journal promotes an ISSOTL welcome through inviting submissions on SoTL where the act of reviewing is developmental, supported, and constructive. The editorial team views this level of engagement with authors as critical to acknowledging the

SoTL work happening evoking the founding editors' wish to "showcase the breadth of the interdisciplinary field of SoTL in its explicit methodological pluralism, its call for traditional and new genres, and its international authorship from across career stages" (Chick & Poole, 2013, p. 1). Writing ten years later, Friberg and Chick (2023) discuss this aspect of welcome through a reflection of stages of going public, "from ensuring the work provides different kinds of access ... and building sustained relationships with the public" (p. 4). Through the intentional structure of *TLI*'s reviewing processes with authors as building relationships, these acts of going public are also seen as opportunities to build relationships with readers, to see themselves as central to the ongoing dialogue in the journal.

With an editorial team of seven SoTL scholars representing four countries (Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the perspective is global and wide-reaching—albeit primarily Western—when it comes to supporting a range of SoTL scholarship, from novice scholars to experienced practitioners. The editorial team sees peer reviewing as a form of mentorship for each author, even for articles that might not make it to publication. As such, the editorial team takes great care in making the editorial process developmental and emergent, a prominent component of the ISSOTL welcome. Each article is assigned to an editor; the editor takes responsibility for shepherding the review process, which includes the careful identification of reviewers, drawn from an extensive repository of peer reviewers across countries, disciplines, SoTL expertise, and research interests. With three reviewers for every article plus the care of each editor, the editorial process is designed to create a sustained relationship, built on principles of collegiality, respect, and mentorship. In recognition of the sustained relational welcome that we ask of reviewers, the Society invites nominations each year for the Gary Poole Distinguished Reviewer Award, named after the journal's founding co-editor.

In the last four years, the editorial team purposely focused on intentional outreach efforts to new scholars, new SoTL questions, and new SoTL methodologies: The editorial team hosted an "Introduction to *TLI*" session at the annual ISSOTL conference in 2022, occupying a table at the ISSOTL conference for informal, bespoke conversations about publishing in the journal, and created visual and digital resources to introduce audiences to SoTL and its processes (see <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/TLI/about> for video created by Sophia Abbot). In particular, we saw that the "Introduction to *TLI*" workshop enabled editors to invest more time and space to welcome participants to the idea of publication. These sessions introduced participants to the journal while facilitating discussions on the writing process, the review process, and providing time to answer any questions—particularly questions about types of inquiry plus questions representing initial ideas about projects in progress, pointing to the potential for new scholarship in the years ahead. The session also encouraged participants to become *TLI* reviewers, as the act of reviewing is as beneficial to building relationships within SoTL as is being an author. In total, *TLI*'s recent efforts purposely focus on its responsibility as an invitation to make SoTL scholarship visible through a mentored review process.

Building Transdisciplinary Scholarly Communities: The International Collaborative Writing Groups

Convening for several intensive days before the ISSOTL annual conference, and continuing to collaborate beyond the conference, are the International Collaborative Writing Groups (ICWGs). Started in 2011, the ICWGs are a signature ISSOTL initiative, once in which ISSOTL members

collaboratively identify relevant SOTL topics, conduct these projects, and develop public products to share the results of their inquiries with the field. The multi-tiered ICWG program structure includes co-leaders, who oversee an ICWG program cycle, co-facilitators, who facilitate each of the project groups, and participants, who work with a set of co-facilitators on a specific topical area of inquiry. Across all of these tiers, individuals are intentionally selected across regions, disciplines, and institutional roles, to encourage broad participation across ISSOTL members and to address meaningful, internationally relevant and transdisciplinary questions of teaching and learning scholarship. In scholarship about the ICWG cohorts, one finding points to the “diversity of group membership and facilitator leadership as essential to their [participants’] perceptions of the initiative” (Healey & Matthews, 2017, p. 2). ICWGs are inherently transdisciplinary, not only in their process and constituents, as described above, but also in their products. The first three ICWG cohorts made the results of their work public through traditional academic writing. More recently, this model has been expanded to more fully represent knowledge forms and audiences, with some ICWG cohorts focused on public rather than traditional scholarship. And in 2024, the first iteration of an emergent ICWG is being offered; this cohort is encouraged to think expansively about product, form, audience, and scope.

The ICWG model models a ceremony of welcome in several ways. At its core, it is an initiative that invites scholars into mutual inquiry through a structure that attends to principles of relentless welcome: Participants are intentionally selected across difference, to disrupt hierarchies and homogenous thinking, and during the face-to-face convenings of the ICWG working groups, there is a strong emphasis on community building and joy. Additionally, the iterative and collaborative project work is strongly developmental, through its peer review and feedback processes, and the ICWG itself also frequently serves as a developmental space, as participants who enter an ICWG cohort as relative newcomers to SOTL then later become co-facilitators or even co-leads over times.

The ISSOTL Board and ISSOTL Standing Committees

Teaching and Learning Inquiry is one space where the ISSOTL welcome is sustained throughout the year. The ISSOTL Board of Directors is another. The ISSOTL Board consists of elected volunteers serving in the following positions: the President-Elect, President, and Past-President (a three-year term across these three positions), Secretary, Treasurer, two Student Vice Presidents, and two Regional Vice Presidents for each ISSOTL region for which there are at least 50 members. The vice presidential roles, both the student VPs and the regional VPs, are structured to have off-set terms, so that a newly elected regional or student VP serves at least their first year in the VP position with a more experienced VP at their side. Both the three-year presidential terms and the off-set vice-presidential terms allow for intentional mentoring and the extension of welcome to new Board members. The four ISSOTL Standing committees (Publications Committee, Recognition Committee, Advocacy Committee, and Convenings Committee) are also designed as a place where mentorship in the Society occurs; it is often the case that committee members experience epistemological and linguistic welcome during their service on an ISSOTL committee, which then positions them well for serving on the ISSOTL Board.

These experiences of welcome into Society leadership roles are also complicated, and not everyone experiences the Board or the Society committees as a space of welcome. While all members are invited and encouraged to stand for election to the Board, name recognition and scholarly

prominence undoubtedly plays a role in predicting who will be elected. Because of this, individuals with more SoTL connections and those whose academic positions and personal lives support their ability to be productive scholars are more likely to be elected to serve. Further, individuals in more precarious employment positions or without institutional support are less able to take on the volunteer work that a Board position requires, or fund their travel to the annual conference to attend the in-person Board meeting that occurs before each annual conference.

Opportunities for Expanding the ISSOTL Welcome

ISSOTL is an academic community that has sought to intentionally structure welcome into its processes and initiatives, and Sarah and Susannah have been beneficiaries and contributors to that welcome. There are countless folks who think of ISSOTL as a space that is counter-cultural to their disciplinary spaces, that provides them with a space to be with “their people.” That being said, we see opportunities for this welcome to be improved, from efforts to create more inclusive governance pathways, to broadening developmental supports for emerging scholars and scholarship, to rethinking how the annual conference is designed and how conference locations are selected. These opportunities do not exist solely within the academic ivory tower; these ISSOTL activities represent intentional choices needed in our current world. All of these potential avenues for an expanded ISSOTL welcome are in line with the Society’s vision for its work (i.e., ISSOTL’s 2019 Strategic Plan; <https://issotl.com/strategic-plan/>). We wonder: How can this vision for a more inclusive welcome be realized?

A critical hinge point between vision and realization for ISSOTL’s welcome resides in the Society’s financial plan. Conversations about balancing vision and practicality have often come back to this challenge. Bringing the conference to new regions of the world would be less of a fiscal risk *if* the conference (and related membership revenue) were not the predominant income stream for the Society. Extending the reach of developmental editorial mentorship to more scholars around the world would be possible *if* there were more financial support for the work of *TLI*. The intentional and inclusive building of capacity for Societal leadership would be more possible *if* these efforts did not solely leverage the goodwill of volunteer members of the Society.

This may be the moment, however, as the Society turns 20 years old in 2024, to take some risks and trust that the ISSOTL model of welcome has legs. Without sending the Society into a state of fiscal precarity, what shape might these risks take? Some possibilities:

- Select a conference site from a region of the world that is new to the Society and make it the core mission of the Board to work developmentally and relationally to support those scholars in hosting an exceptional ISSOTL conference.
- At the conference, consistently extend invitations to new scholars to join in mutual inquiry, and highlight the results of these collaborations at specified sessions in the next year’s conference.
- Think beyond the conference as the principal space for scholarly exchange, to include ongoing virtual avenues to consistently go public with their SoTL and refine their work in community with other SoTL scholars.

- Create special issues in *TLI* that publish only scholarly work that is someone's first SoTL paper, and invite experienced SoTL scholars to serve as joint editors and mentors for this work.
- Restructure the positions of the Board so that a subset of elected positions are allocated specifically to scholars new to the Society and to emerging ISSOTL membership regions.

We see these manifestations of welcome as potentially critical to sustaining the work of SoTL and giving intention to how to foster mutual inquiry and engagement for longevity.

Conclusion

In this article, we have outlined the forms of welcome that we see operating throughout ISSOTL: A welcome that seeks to disrupt traditional academic hierarchies, an invitation to mutual inquiry, a developmental framework, and a relational welcome that attends to the whole person and fosters sustained networks of relationships. We have identified where, in our own journeys into SoTL, we experienced these forms of welcome, and we have attempted to identify where, within ISSOTL, these forms of welcome are institutionalized and frequently realized.

What have we learned about welcome as a transferable suite of practices conducive to other academic spaces? First, the ISSOTL forms of welcome start with the recognition of a shared mission. For us, there is a convergence around inquiry and investigation around learning - at the heart of SoTL is our students. Through investigating what supports our students in learning, we empower our students and ourselves. Welcoming others into this inquiry process, with a sincere desire to learn with and from each other, contributes to an iterative cycle of improvement which benefits our teaching and students' learning. In other academic spaces, centering the shared goals of all constituents, with an authentic desire to support all members in realizing that goal, may play a powerful role in fostering an initial sense of welcome.

Additionally, when an ISSOTL welcome is most successful, it emphasizes relationships and the ongoing support for people, in all of their complexity, exploring and thriving in their ever-evolving professional identities in SoTL. What implications might this have for other academic communities? As Bernstein (2013) argues, SoTL-engaged individuals play a "cosmopolitan social role" (p. 35) in our institutions, in large part by connecting with scholars and learnings from outside of their own departments, campuses, and disciplines. We encourage the exploration of welcoming structures that would more readily enable individuals to form and maintain networks in and across departments, institutions, and professional organizations. And we note that, vital to the thriving of these networks as relational spaces, is a shared commitment to a developmental mindset and to "be[ing] gentle with each other" (Chick, 2014, p. 10).

We recognize that outlining the aspects of ISSOTL that we conceive of as welcoming might suggest a utopian academic space. Indeed, the Society is invested in inclusive teaching and learning and creating spaces of relentless welcome for scholarly teachers around the world. There has been substantial work done within the operations of ISSOTL to increase the likelihood that a ceremony of welcome is realized. That being said, there are many forms of complexity within these efforts to ensure an inclusive welcome in ISSOTL. It is clear that there is a shared vision for the Society to be one that extends a full welcome to all scholars; enacting that welcoming vision

in practice becomes complicated. The ISSOTL welcome is a living practice; it is our hope that by making the current aspects of welcome across the society more explicit, we can better navigate these complexities and more fully extend the ISSOTL welcome to all.

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