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Making Sure "Pre" Isn't "Mis": Exploring Student Disciplinary Conceptions

Description of the Session

The focus of this panel session will be how teacher-scholars intentionally plan for student preconceptions about different academic disciplines. Student preconceptions are important because they influence how students approach, understand, or misunderstand new knowledge and ideas. Learning will occur when student preconceptions are dealt with, by first systematically identifying and understanding the common preconceptions, and then developing techniques to help students recognize and get past them, particularly if the preconceptions are misconceptions. This challenge to teaching and learning exists across all disciplines and courses as students are not empty vessels, but come to courses and learning with preconceptions about how the world works. Nancy Chick (English) will report on her SoTL work that articulates and helps students confront the misconceptions and novice practices in literary studies. Tracy White (Biology) will report on a SoTL project which probes student preconceptions regarding the ways in which biologists evaluate evidence and addresses the problem of oversimplification of the goals and processes of science. Cary Komoto (Geography) will report on a SoTL project about understanding common student misconceptions about scientific processes in physical geography.

Objectives of the Session

The major objective is to report on three SoTL projects that specifically focus on questions about student preconceptions. Another major objective is to assist audience members to consider student preconceptions in their disciplines and begin to think about them as SoTL projects.

Audience Involvement

Planned involvement will include discussion among the panelists and the audience. The audience will first be invited to think about preconceptions in their disciplines and consider how these may influence their students' learning. The audience will also be invited to engage in discussion about common preconceptions in their disciplines to see if there are common preconceptions across disciplines. The audience will also be encouraged to share their experiences in investigating preconceptions and techniques for utilizing the preconceptions to assist student learning. In addition, the audience will be encouraged to ask questions during the presentation of the projects.

Audience Experience and Learning

The audience can expect that they will first learn about three SoTL projects investigating preconceptions in three different disciplines. In particular the reports will focus on systematic investigation of student preconceptions. These examples may help audience members plan and structure their own investigations into preconceptions in their disciplines.

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