

# TRESTLE Scholars Facilitator Guidelines

Stephanie Chasteen (TRESTLE PI)  
October, 2017

Thank you for facilitating a *Transforming Education Stimulating Teaching and Learning (TRESTLE) Scholars* group! This document has a few guidelines for TRESTLE Scholars facilitators, including helpful resources and guidance from previous facilitators.

# Purpose of the TRESTLE Scholars

The purpose of the Scholars program is to **leverage existing expertise** on campus around evidence-based teaching in STEM, both **spreading knowledge and generating community** around teaching excellence. You, as the facilitator, are the chosen expert whose experience is being leveraged.

## Guiding principles of TRESTLE Scholars

While you have significant leeway in how to organize your Scholars group, we expect you will adhere strongly to the following principles. These principles focus on the TRESTLE Scholars as a *Community of Transformation*, focused on institutional transformation through community engagement.

1. **TRESTLE Scholars use scholarly teaching practices.** There should be a focus on scholarly teaching, which includes both (a) using existing literature and/or (2) gathering evidence of student learning to guide teaching decisions. *In practice, this often takes the form of having an accessible reading assignment for each meeting, and continually asking participants how they might measure the desired changes. One element of this scholarly approach is the requirement that Scholars produce some product as a result of their work, and present that publicly.*
2. **TRESTLE Scholars are grounded in the reality and expertise of real teachers.** While the Scholars group should be founded on research, it is NOT a group designed to help participants learn the research literature or become researchers. All Scholars groups should focus primarily on using this scholarly basis, along with wisdom of practice, to make *real teaching decisions and get feedback on those decisions.* *In practice, this often means that a significant part of the Scholars groups are devoted to either (1) discussing how to apply the recommended practices to their classrooms, and (2) getting feedback from each other on materials that they have developed and/or tried in their classroom.*
3. **TRESTLE Scholars respect the expertise in the room.** As a facilitator, you should not be the center of attention during the majority of the meeting. Because Scholars are interdisciplinary, participants benefit greatly from the perspectives of instructors in other departments. *In practice, this means that you will give participants opportunities to discuss, ask questions, share ideas, and interact with one another. Scholars are also asked to weigh in on the process and outcomes of the group.*
4. **TRESTLE Scholars focus on building community.** One of the strengths of the Scholars communities is the ability to work in a community of one's peers, across disciplines. *In practice, this means thinking carefully about how to create a collaborative atmosphere from the first meeting, and making sure to have many opportunities for discussion and sharing.*

# Requirements of facilitators

1. **Prepare for the semester.** Review the information on participants to consider their interests and needs. Plan for the trajectory of the semester, with a suggested outline, though with the recognition that this may change due to interests of the Scholars. See [Preliminary Planning Inventory](#) for helpful prompts.
2. **Prepare for all meetings.** Send out a pre-reading or other resource for each meeting, have a plan for the agenda of all meetings. Send meeting reminders before each meeting. See [Agenda Planning template](#) for a possible structure.
3. **Facilitate meetings.** While you shouldn't be the center of attention during the majority of meetings, you play a critical role in keeping the discussion focused on the topic of the day. It is easy to get off-track, but participants will appreciate having a clear sense of accomplishment from the meetings. Also, don't let individuals dominate the meeting.
4. **Take notes.** Take attendance at meetings, and keep some notes during the discussions. You can see examples from previous groups in the Google folders. Scholars are only allowed to miss one session and still get recognition.
5. **Organize materials.** Maintain a Google Folder with all resources provided to the group, materials created by participants and submitted for feedback, meeting notes, and the final product.
6. **Facilitate discussion around the group goals, product, and dissemination.** Early in the group, decide what product or deliverable they will create. This has been a challenge in the past, and often falls to the end as a compendium of activities. Ideally, this product should drive the collaboration in the community and focus the work. Submitting a proposal for funding or resources could be motivating.
7. **Submit assessment measures.** You will be asked to submit a short reflection of your Scholars group and complete a teaching practices survey.

*Not required but possibly helpful:*

1. **Split each meeting between literature and practice.** Past communities have found it helpful to start each meeting with a discussion of the reading or literature or general principles, with the second half used on troubleshooting individual challenges or, especially later in the semester, sharing materials developed for feedback. Jenny Knight indicates this required watching the clock, since it was easy for the first part of the meeting to run long. Ciancanelli indicated that there was less interest in the research by midway through the semester, and conversations needed less structure.
2. **Assign homework.** In Ciancanelli's Metacognition group, four assignments were given during the semester to try specific things in their class, which was useful for focusing discussions. She found this helpful for giving participants a clear goal and something to share early in the semester. In Knight's Group Work group, each participant developed a classroom activity to get feedback on.
3. **Consider running the community for an additional semester.** Many participants want to continue after the first semester. TRESTLE is happy to try to support this if you are interested. At the least, consider convening the group one or two more times in the next semester to check in. Late in the semester, ask participants their interest.

# Commitment from TRESTLE

1. Assist in setting meeting times and locations.
2. Arrange for remuneration of TRESTLE facilitators. (Let me know how you would like to receive this; e.g., salary allocation, additional pay, or use the funds to pay for educational activities)
3. Provide feedback, assistance, connections to broader campus/intercampus efforts, etc.

## Tips and Suggestions

**How will you create an inclusive, supportive community where participants can be vulnerable and take risks?** Some suggestions:

1. Share a problem you're working on. Don't walk someone through a tough decision you've already made. Rather, ask for help on a decision you haven't made yet. (If there are two facilitators, the second facilitator can take notes on ideas that come up). Discuss the ideas, and have a meta-discussion about what happened, why it was useful, and how it's connected to what you really want to happen in the community moving forward.
2. Consider asking participants to rotate in bringing refreshments.
3. Have participants sign up to lead part of the meeting (e.g., sharing materials for feedback)
4. Ask participants to share their own stories (from class, their own learning, etc.)
5. Affirm participants' ideas and challenges
6. Use "field trips" where participants visit each others' classes, perhaps using a "triad" model where at least one member in the triad is currently teaching a CURE.
7. Reflect and discuss this topic with co-facilitators and Stephanie to ensure you are paying appropriate attention.

**How will you facilitate the first meeting?** The first meeting is very important in setting group norms and practices. See [reflections from previous facilitators](#) for suggestions from them. For example, Jenny Knight did not come in with a suggested syllabus, but had participants create their own syllabus for the semester, to promote ownership. She used table tents for participants to introduce one another, and had them discuss their goals for the group.

**How will you manage a large group?** A group larger than 8 is likely to be challenging to facilitate. Participants benefit from hearing multiple perspectives, but it is hard to get around to all. Ciancanelli reported it was hard to manage a group of 11, and some people did not share in this large group; it was difficult to bring people back together the one time that they split into smaller discussion groups -- though that developing a routine might have been useful in this regard. Consider ways to make sure to hear all voices without verbally sharing out, such as writing ideas on post-its and doing affinity grouping of post-its, brainwriting (everyone write down an idea, and pass to the next person to read and add and reflect). Again, table tents can be useful for making sure everybody knows everybody else, but also for turn-taking in a large group: Turn the table tent on its' side to indicate you would like a turn.

**How will you lead the community through various stages?** Previous work has suggested that learning communities can go through a few stages: *Forming stage* (optimism, excitement, objectives, planning, discussion re community, implementation, learning; wait and see attitude; nervousness about inclusion), *Storming stage* (possible low energy, going in circles, waning interest and commitment, floundering, challenges, disagreements, vying for leadership or power), a *Performing stage* (action, learning, sharing with others, deliverables, achievement), and *Adjourning stage* (meaningful closure, recognition, celebration). Ciancanelli indicated that the group had developed a personality by midway through the semester, and it was useful to check in to see how they wanted to proceed in the rest of the time.

## Resources for you

- [Google Drive folder](#), (accessible by anybody with CU Boulder login, but Stephanie can share with you directly), including folders from previous groups, a folder for your group (accessible by anybody with the link), and resources for facilitators.
- [Reflections and surveys from previous Scholars groups](#). Very helpful resource!
- **TRESTLE resources**. We have an email list, newsletter, and a cross-campus network. All this can be drawn on for speakers, readings, resources, and inspiration. We also have a mini-grant program (\$1000) which may be able to support Scholars' work, and a set of Expert Consultants who can work with Scholars one-on-one.
- [FLC Do's and Don'ts](#). A helpful PDF from another institution.
- [Preliminary Planning Inventory](#). A very helpful scaffold for planning the activities of the group, though not all sections will be relevant. This may guide your pre-planning.
- [Planning your FLC](#). A Word calendar that may be useful in planning purposes.
- [Agenda Planning template](#) a possible structure for planning each session.

Thank you, and don't hesitate to ask me for support or conversation!