**HOW TO ORGANIZE A CAMPUS-WIDE COURSE REDESIGN PROGRAM
USING NCAT'S METHODOLOGY**

X. Maintaining Consensus and Ensuring Sustainability

From working with more than 200 course redesigns, NCAT has found that the most-serious implementation issues encountered have had to do with building and maintaining consensus around the redesigns among all of the stakeholders: students, parents, faculty, professional staff, and senior administrators. The need for shared, campus-wide understanding of the redesign program plan begins when that understanding is developed; it continues through the pilot period as the plan becomes real; it becomes even more necessary during full implementation as more and more students, more and more faculty, and more and more staff get involved; and, equally important, it must continue on an ongoing basis.

Redesigning a course is not simply a *faculty* project but, rather, a solution to a recognized, *institutional* problem. The sustainability of that solution is based on continuing institutional agreement at all levels. Ongoing communication with all stakeholders about the redesign's effectiveness keeps the goals of the redesign program and its outcomes clearly visible. The program leaders need to keep everyone updated on student success rates, student satisfaction, and cost reduction and to remind everyone of the situation prior to the redesign. Even though the program leaders may be familiar with those facts, others in the institution may be new or may not know the history of the reasons the change was made or may be unaware of those reasons.

Some institutions have not encountered such implementation issues because they foresaw them and dealt with them in advance. Others did not anticipate them and had to deal with them in mid-redesign. Some worked on resolving the issues constructively and ended up with successful redesigns; others backslid and abandoned key aspects of their redesign plans as consensus among various stakeholders waned.

Maintain Ongoing Consensus

Program leaders need to pay special attention to how they will achieve ongoing consensus among:

- Senior administrators
- Faculty
- Campus offices

Senior Administrators

Institutional commitment to a course redesign program includes building and sustaining that commitment throughout the life of the program. In the course of implementing a redesign, things happen: lead faculty members leave or retire; departments get reorganized; presidents and provosts get new jobs. Faculty members—on their own—can show and have shown spectacular success in creating highly effective new learning environments, but for those successes to be sustained or for them to have real impact on the institution as a whole, both departmental leaders and institutional administrative leaders need to play active and continuing roles.

You will inevitably encounter problems in implementing your redesign program as you transition to a new form of instruction. Without a full commitment to preserving the key elements of the redesign while addressing problems that may arise, the institution might simply abandon the redesign program, thus forgoing the learning gains or the cost-saving benefits or both.

About half of all institutions that have worked with NCAT cite the need to build institutional commitment to redesign outside their home departments, especially among senior administrators, as one of their most serious implementation issues. Participants frequently cite leadership support and administrative support as factors in sustaining and expanding interest in a redesign. In some cases, redesign was encouraged by system-level leadership; another team noted support by trustees as a factor. Like the building of acceptance within the department, however, the broadening of institutional commitment requires continuing attention and ongoing support even under favorable circumstances.

Examples

"Our greatest challenge involved institutional support. Some administrators viewed this redesign as a grand experiment or a test case. The redesign has exposed a number of issues that need to be addressed regardless of its success. The university needs to develop—and communicate to parents and students—a coherent and compelling description of our e-learning initiatives that addresses common misconceptions and concerns (e.g., that the university is becoming a distance-learning campus). Far from being an insulated and isolated initiative, this redesign was simply the first of many such efforts. The more the university can do now to learn from and address the larger support and public relations issues raised by this effort, the easier it will be for future redesign teams."

"In the middle of the redesign, the department of mathematics and computer science became split into independent departments in different colleges. The importance of having strong support from departmental (and university) leadership became increasingly clear after the department was split. Team members ended up in both departments, which created conflicting priorities that affected the pace of redesign. Unlike the joint department head, the new computer science department head was not a member of the redesign team, which resulted in a change in scope because of a decision about how the target courses would be used. The fragility of creating and sustaining major pedagogic change under changes in leadership, which could bring changed priorities, was evident. Existing redesign features at the time of the split have been sustained and more fully developed, but aspects of the redesign that were not yet in place have been problematic to initiate due to changing interests and changing personnel. The team is still working to achieve all of the redesign goals; however, the pace of implementation has been slowed."

"All three of our campuses successfully implemented the full redesign with all 3,600 students, demonstrating increased student learning gains and decreased costs. Nevertheless, some faculty preferred the old model. In response to that faculty preference, a number of changes occurred on the three campuses. In the term immediately following the successful redesign, the college began offering a choice of either the redesigned or the traditional lecture format at two of the campuses. Altogether, 11 redesigned sections and 10 traditional sections were offered. The third campus developed a model that uses the redesign model but also incorporates pencil-and-paper homework requirements. Topics and term schedules are still coordinated between two of the campuses because some students use labs on both campuses; however, tests are developed independently. Although the

workshops on study skills and time management were successful, they are no longer part of the redesigned course. These techniques have been combined into a credit course not applicable to a degree; the course is offered occasionally."

Faculty

The biggest implementation issue most redesign projects face is achievement of consensus on a variety of issues among all faculty teaching the courses in question. Because course development in the traditional format is usually done by a single faculty member working independently on a single section of a course, the redesign of an entire course (all sections) by multiple faculty can present a number of challenges such as reaching agreement on core course outcomes, instructional formats, topic sequences, and a common website. And because instructors are usually not used to talking about such issues, they need time to work through them. As several institutions have commented, however, that can be a *good* problem to have. Collective decision making and departmental buy-in are key factors that lead to successful redesigns.

About two-thirds of institutions have reported challenges around redesign when it comes to achieving faculty consensus within a department. Some of the challenges were attributed to leadership issues—for example, interim department chairs who were reluctant to press resisting faculty. All institutions stress the need for strong leadership and administrative support to overcome those challenges. Some team leaders thought they had solved the problem of faculty buy-in at the outset but were surprised to find they had not communicated as effectively as they thought they had. Team leaders thought they had their colleagues' support, but when the redesign got under way, they discovered that the opposition was stronger than anticipated. Those issues underline the importance of constant communication to check signals and maintain momentum.

Examples

"Even though the departmental faculty agreed to the redesign initially, once it was accomplished there was some opposition from several faculty members. In retrospect, the team needed to do a better job of communication and inclusion and actively involve the other 16 full-time faculty in improving redesign components and course evolution. This has been largely overcome and is not an issue with adjunct faculty."

"Due to some instability in leadership in the department during the transition period, there was a large disparity among full-time faculty in the amount each was involved in the process. This led to some not being aware enough of processes and procedures when the semester started. It was expected and understandable that faculty used to lecturing had reservations about adopting the redesign model, but many quickly saw the value to students and embraced their new roles. Some were unable or unwilling to adapt to their new roles."

"The department has consistently supported redesign. Although there were initial skepticism and inertia to overcome, the result has been a very collegial process and one that has strengthened the department. The adjunct faculty are now fully involved with the implementation, having received extensive training and mentoring."

<u>Campus Offices</u>

Institutions frequently encounter challenges associated with preparing others on campus for the format of redesigned courses. Most such challenges involve advising, wherein advisers do not provide correct information for students or simply misunderstand what the course is about. Program leaders need to constantly and consciously market the redesign to key campus constituencies that know little about the new format and how it differs from more-traditional offerings. Taking a proactive approach by offering sessions about the redesign model for various campus offices, explaining the benefits of the redesign to student government officers and organizations, using the summer to visit advisers and coaches and describe the benefits of the new approach, and addressing colleagues' concerns immediately can help during the transition period.

As full implementation continues, program leaders cannot assume that those who were informed about the development of the plan at the outset of the pilot still support the redesign. Some campus offices may have thought the redesign was merely an experiment rather than a permanent change. In addition to keeping departmental colleagues informed, program leaders need to be sure that advisers and others who work with students know that their ongoing support is needed.

<u>Examples</u>

"Although the department worked closely with administrators while planning the redesign, more effort needed to be given to preparing the entire college community for the changes. Even though a thorough explanation of the redesign rationale, benefits, and structure was presented to academic advisers and student service personnel, some were not as supportive as needed to encourage students to accept the change."

"Regular meetings were held with the professional advising staff to share information about the redesign curriculum and course policies. Frequent communication between the department chair and the assistant registrar was also necessary."

"The team made a campus-wide presentation at an in-service training and conducted sessions for adviser training in order to educate the college faculty and staff. Some instructors and advisers still do not understand the redesign model well enough to register students."

Ensure Sustainability

Once a successful pilot has been conducted, once the bumps in the road have been smoothed out, and once full implementation is in place, most institutions expect that sustainability will be a given. After all, the redesign has both improved student success and reduced instructional costs. Why wouldn't the redesign be sustained? Making the assumption that redesign will automatically be sustained without continuing attention will turn out to be a big mistake. Because course redesign is so different from the traditional way of teaching in higher education, it must be continually sold and resold to all campus constituents. As the players change, continued focus on building and maintaining consensus cannot be underestimated.

Executive Leadership. The important role of senior administrators does not end when full implementation occurs. Senior administrators need to be prepared to support the redesign and to guard against the desire of some to backslide to the traditional format. The provost or

president will need to remind those wanting to go back to the old way of the reasons the redesign occurred in the first place and of the evidence that proves the redesign's ongoing success.

Faculty Leadership. Strong and continuing faculty leadership of individual course redesigns is crucial to sustainability. Even though those providing the leadership may change, the importance of the role does not. The designated leader must continue to ensure (1) the consistency of the course among sections and (2) adherence to the policies and procedures established initially. The leader also serves as liaison with other departments and divisions whose support is needed to maintain the redesign.

Ongoing Data Collection. Some institutions believe that demonstrating the initial success of the redesign through data comparisons is sufficient to generate campus-wide consensus. They assume that similar results will continue, but they neglect to continue collecting and analyzing the data that support that continuation. Many institutions have initially seen a small increase in student success after the first term of implementation, but as they continued to tweak the redesign and become more familiar with how to implement it, the number of students successfully completing the course continued to grow. Through ongoing measurement, institutions can see continuing improvement that will help sustain consensus.

Ongoing Communication. It is important to continue communicating with campus offices and with other departments on an ongoing basis to keep them updated on student success rates, student satisfaction levels, and cost-effectiveness and to remind them of the situation prior to the redesign. The program leaders may be familiar with those facts, but others in the institution may be new or may not know the history of the reasons the change was made. Letting them know about the successes other campus projects have achieved using course redesign will make them feel they are not outliers but, rather, part of an important new trend.

Some institutions have developed a handout that explains the new way that redesigned courses are offered. Advisers can use such a handout to assist them as they explain the redesigned courses to students. Students can take the handout with them to review later. Some institutions have worked with the college newspaper to publish an article that explains the redesigns and includes data to demonstrate the successes students are experiencing. Other institutions include a discussion of the redesigned courses in freshman orientation sessions. That gives new students and their family members a clear understanding of how the redesigned courses will work, why the changes were made, and the successes other students have achieved.

Orientation of New Personnel. Changes in personnel are common at most institutions, particularly among part-time instructors. New full-time instructors are also hired from time to time. Turnover at the department chair, dean, and executive levels occurs nowadays more frequently on most campuses than in the past. New faculty and new administrators need a good understanding of why the redesign model is being used, how it works, and the benefits it offers. New faculty, staff, and administrators should learn about the redesign from more than just an email or a data report. They should be invited to visit classrooms or labs and talk with students, tutors, and faculty. They need to see firsthand how the redesign works and how all constituencies are benefiting.

Financial Plan. To ensure long-term sustainability, a financial plan that keeps the necessary technological infrastructure current and functional will be needed. Such things as upgrading or replacing computers, hiring lab tutors, and buying new versions of the commercial software require ongoing investment. Some administrators mistakenly believe that the creation of labs or

computer classrooms is a onetime investment. Others may not remember that the original course redesign actually saved resources for the institution while improving student success. Unless administrators are reminded annually how cost-effective the redesign is and what its important components are, they will forget. Some institutions annually calculate how many instructors would have been needed to teach the same number of students in the traditional format, and they compare those costs with the costs of the redesign. Such data provide evidence to remind administrators why providing needed resources is important.

Sustainability Checklist

NCAT recommends that all institutions develop an *annual plan* to sustain the course redesign program. Do you have an ongoing plan to:

- Verify that course redesigns are still achieving their primary goals?
- Collect data on learning outcomes, completion, and cost?
- Disseminate recent learning-outcome, completion, and instructional cost data to all stakeholders in order to document the redesign program's continued success?
- Ensure that cost savings are reallocated according to the original plan?
- Provide support and rewards for sustainable redesigns?
- Refurbish labs and computer classrooms as needed?
- Assist teams if major revisions to the redesigns are needed such as when textbooks or publishers change?
- Orient new students and their parents to the new model?
- Orient and train new department faculty to work in the redesign model?
- Recruit and train tutors and other support personnel?
- Orient new administrators to the redesigns and invite them to visit classrooms and labs?
- Visit campus offices such as those of the registrar, advisers, and information technology staff to ensure their continued support of the redesigned courses?
- Invite representatives of campus offices to visit and observe the redesigns in action?
- Review course policies and procedures and make changes if needed?
- Ensure that the program website is consistently updated?