

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

IV. Developing a Plan of Work

It would be hard to overstate the importance of writing things down. Writing things down ensures that everyone involved in the redesign program knows what has been agreed to.

A written Plan of Work should be developed prior to public announcement of the program. The Plan of Work can be referenced and revised when necessary throughout the process, serving as a road map to keep everyone on track.

A sample Plan of Work is included in the appendices.

Establish a Program Timeline

The plan of work should be structured around the program's timeline. Here is an example timeline recommended by NCAT:

August - September 2015	Program planning and development
October 1, 2015	Program announced; Call to Participate distributed
November 15, 2015	Workshop #1: An Orientation to Course Redesign
January 15, 2016	Responses to Course Readiness Instrument due
February 28, 2016	Workshop #2: Developing the Redesign Proposal
March - June 2016	Redesign projects develop final proposals
July 1, 2016	Redesign projects submit final proposals
July 15, 2016	Projects selected; grants awarded
July - December 2016	Redesign projects planning and development
Spring 2017	Redesign pilots
June 2017	Workshop #3: Interim Progress Reports
Summer 2017	Revisions to redesign plans
Fall 2017	Full implementation of redesign projects
January - March 2018	Redesign projects conduct project evaluations
March 15, 2018	Final project reports due
April 2018	Workshop #4: Assessing the Results
Summer 2018	Dissemination of results Program evaluation

Throughout this guide and its appendices, we use these example dates consistently to make the linkages clear, but they are, of course, only examples.

The chapters that follow describe each of the program elements in greater detail.

Develop a Publicity Plan

Program leaders need to develop a plan to generate awareness of and bring visibility to the program at all campus levels. Program leaders should create a name for the initiative such as the "University of X Course Redesign Initiative"—something that will be meaningful to all campus

constituents. Information about the program should be communicated not only to faculty, administrators, and professional staff on campus but also to board members, local and national press, policy makers, peer campuses within the state, and so on. The program leaders should create a database of those who will receive information and updates about the program throughout its duration. Active communication to multiple constituents establishes the initiative as a campus priority and signifies its importance.

Communication mechanisms such as broadcast emails or a newsletter dedicated to the redesign initiative can be used to publicize program activities throughout each stage of the program. During the selection stage, the program leaders should announce the names of those who submitted responses to the readiness criteria, those who got selected to move on to the next stage, and those who got selected to participate in the program. During the implementation stage, the program leaders should circulate summaries of project progress reports, summaries of project outcomes from the pilot stage and final outcomes, and summaries of lessons learned from the redesign's full implementation period. The message should convey something that says: "It is a privilege to be selected to participate in the program, and we applaud your success." Active communication is crucial to ensuring that lessons learned get shared and course redesign experiences get scaled to produce further quality improvements and additional cost savings."

A sample Publicity Plan is included in the appendices.

Create a Program Website

Program leaders should create a comprehensive website to both support and publicize the program. A website provides an ongoing way for the campus community and other stakeholders to learn the status of the initiative and to be aware of deadlines, workshop plans, and the like. The website can be linked to NCAT's website so that those on campus can understand that the campus initiative is part of a *national* effort to improve learning while reducing costs. As the redesign program progresses, abstracts of the redesign plans, interim progress reports, and final outcomes reports can be added.

Throughout the program's duration, the website's first paragraph on the home page should permanently contain a brief description of the program—for example, "Building on lessons learned from national programs at the National Center for Academic Transformation, the [INSTITUTION] Course Redesign Initiative will demonstrate how [INSTITUTION] can redesign its instructional approaches by using technology to achieve both cost savings and quality enhancements. Redesign projects focus on large-enrollment introductory courses that have the potential to affect significant numbers of student and generate substantial savings. Each project fully implemented its redesign during the spring 20XX term."

During the application period, the website should include links to and brief descriptions of the Call to Participate; the Application Guidelines; an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page appropriate to your campus workshop information (day, time, location, how to register, homework information); and links to the Final Proposal Format document that gives instructions for preparing final course redesign plans.

After the grant awards have been made, you should move the application information to a section called "Archives." You may wonder why you should keep the application information on your website. The reason is that availability of the original documents is useful throughout the

process as new members of the campus community become aware of the program or when questions arise about how the program works.

You should then add a section called “Project Descriptions,” with links to edited versions of each project abstract, including the names of the primary project leaders and their contact information. As the program progresses, you can add summaries of progress reports to this section, pilot outcomes reports, and final project reports. Finally, the overall program evaluation can be added. Information about future rounds of the program can be added whenever it becomes available.

For examples of how NCAT has constructed these sections of our website, see <http://www.theNCAT.org/States/MO.html> and <http://www.theNCAT.org/R2R.htm>.

Q: Why does the timeline include a pilot term? What is it?

A: NCAT recommends that every large-scale redesign conduct a pilot before moving to full implementation. What do we mean by a *pilot*? A pilot involves testing the redesign idea—including most if not all of the important quality improvement and cost saving characteristics of the planned redesign—with a subset of students enrolled in the course. Enrollment in the pilot section(s) needs to be large enough so the redesign team can learn what problems students are likely to face and how to resolve them prior to scaling up to full implementation in all sections of the course.

The pilot period provides an opportunity for the redesign team to uncover technology issues or other problems involving the newly designed assignments or activities. For some institutions, the pilot term also provides a time to collect consistent data on student learning from both traditional and redesign sections that can be compared when consistent historical data are not available. For many institutions, the pilot has provided a time to make sure that important audiences both on and off campus have been informed of changes in the course and that all potential bumps in the road have been smoothed. Overall, a pilot provides the redesign team with a dress rehearsal of the redesigned course and an opportunity to resolve any issues. Redesign project participants have learned that it is much easier to solve problems involving 150 to 200 students rather than 1,000 students.

Q: Why should a program include four workshops?

A: The four workshops we recommend are of two kinds. The first two (An Orientation to Course Redesign and Developing the Redesign Proposal) are designed to teach participants how to plan and implement a course redesign. They are part of the fourth main component of a successful course redesign program: provision of resources and support for participants.

Most faculty members do not have prior experience in course redesign that both improves quality and reduces cost and that involves multiple faculty members working together. And it is difficult for most faculty to imagine how to approach the issues simply by referring to NCAT’s website. Faculty therefore require training and development in the new methodology. Participation in the first two workshops will be a significant faculty development experience for all because the workshops help participants understand NCAT’s strategies for quality enhancement and cost reduction. After attending the workshops, participants are much more prepared to formulate strategies for both quality enhancement and cost reduction.

All faculty members involved in prior NCAT programs have expressed appreciation that workshops were available to them and voiced the belief that their colleagues would benefit from similar experiences. The workshops were key in providing examples, organizing principles, a national perspective, and opportunities for discussion. Such greater preparedness on the part of participants produces strong, detailed course redesign proposals.

The second two workshops (Interim Progress Reports and Assessing the Results) form part of the fifth main component of a successful course redesign program: accountability. The timing of these two workshops is such that projects must submit pilot implementation reports and final implementation reports—both of them supported by data—to program leaders prior to the workshops and must communicate the information to their peers in a public forum. Holding the workshops in conjunction with reporting due dates helps ensure the timeliness of report submissions. Finally, the workshops offer continued support to the redesign projects and are designed to enable the projects to learn from both program leaders and other projects as they implement and evaluate their redesigns.

Q: The timeline seems long—almost three years from conception to conclusion. Why do you recommend such a lengthy period for the program? Can we shorten it?

A: The timeline is driven by two primary factors: the academic calendar and the need for a substantial learning and planning period.

As discussed earlier, we highly recommend implementation of a pilot before a move to full implementation. The logical term for a pilot is the spring term so that the project team has time during the summer to revise the redesign based on what was learned and to prepare to fully implement the redesign in the fall term. Some redesign projects have piloted in the fall and been fully implemented in the spring, but that schedule is not optimal because of the brevity of the winter break between fall and spring.

NCAT recommends a six-month planning period so program participants can become familiar with course redesign and can develop highly detailed plans for their redesigns. Unlike many grant proposals, which are essentially “plans to plan,” NCAT redesign proposals are extremely detailed so that the projects can begin to make preparations for their redesigns as soon as they are accepted to participate in the program. Five months are allocated for the concrete preparation activities needed to launch the pilot. Chapter XII of [How to Redesign a College Course Using NCAT’s Methodology](#) discusses those activities in detail.

Prior to the program’s launch, program administration activities take up about two months, an extremely important period in which program leaders make decisions about the program’s structure and get key campus constituencies on board. At the end of the program, program evaluation and dissemination account for about four months, a period that could certainly be shortened but could also be used to prepare for the second round of a campus-wide redesign program.

Q: The timeline seems short—only three years from conception to conclusion. Why do you recommend such a truncated period for the program? Can we lengthen it?

A: NCAT has used this timeline in successfully working with more than 200 course redesign projects. We believe that, although it may move along relatively expeditiously (compared with academia’s typical glacial pace!), it allows sufficient time for planning and preparation. A major element in the timeline’s structure is to insist that projects develop detailed plans for their

redesigns before grants are awarded. That forces projects to determine choices and make decisions rather than carry on endless discussions about possibilities without arriving at conclusions—a phenomenon with which we in the academic community are all too familiar. An exception to the recommended timeline might present if a pilot implementation goes disastrously wrong. In that case, it would be prudent to repeat the pilot before moving to full implementation.