

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

XI. Building Capacity and Scaling Initial Success

After conducting an initial course redesign initiative, the program leaders need to think about how to scale the redesign effort and how to develop long-term policies and practices that institutionalize redesigned course delivery that maximizes quality and minimizes costs.

Publicize the Results of the Course Redesign Initiative

There are many ways to do this. Here are two suggestions.

- As part of the redesign program, the program leaders conducted a one-day workshop after the first term of full implementation. The workshop provided a forum for teams to describe their experiences, to learn from one another, to communicate learning outcomes and cost reduction data, and to describe their plans for sustaining the redesign.

That workshop should be replicated with an open invitation to members of the campus community to attend. The campus provost should take the lead in the workshop, emphasizing that course redesign offers a significant way to improve student learning while reducing instructional costs. Such a workshop is very easy to organize because the project leaders have already developed their presentations.

- The course redesign initiative website should include summary descriptions of each project plan and final reports submitted by the project leaders. Both documents should be edited to a similar format to facilitate easy comparison among projects. Final reports should include learning outcomes data, course completion data, cost reduction data, a discussion of the most important pedagogical techniques that led to increased learning, a discussion of the most important cost reduction techniques that led to reduced costs, a discussion of implementation issues encountered during the redesign process, and a discussion of future sustainability of the redesign. See, for example, <http://www.theNCAT.org/States/MS.htm> and <http://www.theNCAT.org/States/ABOR.htm> for examples of how to organize such a website.

The campus provost should send the website's URL with an appropriate cover e-mail to all campus constituencies to raise awareness of the success of the course redesign initiative.

Conduct a Second Round of the Course Redesign Initiative

Whether the initial program was highly successful or moderately successful, it is but a good start. More examples of successful course redesign are needed in order to embed the idea that it is possible to improve student learning while reducing instructional costs at the institution and to effect significant policy change.

The second round may want to favor academic areas that were not represented in the first round.

Create a Redesign Scholars Program Comprising Those Who Have Both Improved Student Learning and Reduced Instructional Costs

NCAT has created a Redesign Scholars Program to link those new to course redesign with more-experienced colleagues to whom they can turn for advice and support. Scholars serve as a resource for new course redesign institutional teams to help such teams apply the principles of course redesign based on the successful experiences of the Scholars. Creating a similar program on campus would recognize and reward those who have completed successful redesigns and would provide a local resource for new teams. Such a program would also provide links among the various redesigns so that teams can learn from one another as they build a culture that values improving student learning while reducing instructional costs. *Only those who have achieved both goals of the initiative should be selected to be Scholars.*

Be More Purposeful and Actively Involved in Generating Course Redesign Project Possibilities

Here are three suggestions.

- One way that campus leaders can contribute to generating interest in course redesign is to pinpoint academic or resource problems that could be resolved through redesign. By shining a spotlight on courses with high failure rates, for example, campus leadership can help position a new course redesign initiative as an academic problem solver rather than a “technology” grant program. We recommend that, based on a review of data, the provost identify those courses most likely to be significantly affected by course redesign. Through such an approach, the campus can focus institutional attention on identified areas needing improvement.
- The provost’s office should work with campus faculty in advance of a next round of the course redesign initiative in order to identify courses with academic or resource problems whose solution would benefit the greatest number of students. All campuses need lead time to organize campus initiatives. Thus, when course redesign grants are announced in future years, the campus will be better prepared to respond as a result of prior planning and discussion.
- The program leaders should conduct a workshop for deans and department heads as part of the second round of a course redesign program. Such a workshop should provide the participants with a detailed look at the first round of projects, and it should point out what worked well, what worked less well, what the challenges were, how problems were solved, and so on. The goal would be to help participants gain expertise in how to think about engaging their constituencies in course redesign and how to take specific actions to move project teams forward.

Build on What Was Learned in the Initiative to Revise Campus Policies and Procedures

During the first round of a course redesign initiative, many campuses discover various policies and/or procedures that inhibit implementation of the program. Those policies and procedures may need careful examination and revision to accommodate the successes achieved through course redesign. In some instances, faculty curriculum committees grant “exceptions” to college policies (or faculty unions grant “exceptions” to the contract) to allow the course redesign “experiments” to take place. If course redesign is to grow and prosper on campus, those exceptions may need to become standard operating procedure. Examples are policies on class

size, seat time, work rules, the role of undergraduates in instruction, and the ability of students to continue course work in a subsequent semester. In other cases, the issues may be procedural such as failing to differentiate between enrollment “caps” and actual class enrollment, which results in a failure to meet redesign cost-saving goals. Those procedures need to be changed so that classes reach the desired size and so that cost savings can be achieved. Finally, many campuses have implemented long-standing practices that they believe are required by such external agencies as accrediting associations or federal and state financial aid agencies. Gaining clarity about actual requirements or negotiating new ways of achieving agreed-upon ends may be necessary.

Conduct Further Studies on Issues That Emerged from the Initiative

Because a course redesign initiative involves paying close attention to what is going on in a course or a group of courses, a number of issues tend to emerge that require further study. There is no doubt, for example, that students who “do the work” succeed in redesigned courses. In many cases, however, a large number of students may still not be completing the course(s) successfully. A remaining issue is how to improve success rates even further by engaging those students who are not engaged. Some campuses have followed up—on the students in a redesigned course who never participate—only to discover that the students have not attended any of their courses. Is that the case for your “no-show” students? Other examples of questions that may require further study include how many students accelerate—that is, finish early? How many students move at a slower pace—that is, finish late? What accounts for the difference? How well do students perform in downstream courses? The initial course redesign period may uncover larger campus issues that need to be investigated and resolved.

Require Course Redesign as Part of the Campus Resource Allocation Strategy

As we said at the beginning of this guide, NCAT views course redesign as a means to an end: the transformation of the campus community’s understanding of the relationship between quality and cost. After several rounds of running a grantlike course redesign program, an institution needs to integrate course redesign into its campus resource allocation strategy.

After conducting, for example, three rounds of the program and producing, say, 9 to 15 excellent models that both improve learning and reduce costs, supported by valid and reliable data, institutions should move beyond a demonstration-program mode. They should begin to require all departments to engage in course redesign as part of a campuswide strategy to accomplish the joint goals of improving quality and reducing costs.

That strategy includes rewarding those departments and schools that engage in redesign and penalizing those that do not—by using a combination of carrots and sticks. There are many ways to do this such as creating an incentive fund, cutting those who redesign by a smaller percentage than those who do not during times of budgetary reductions, and funding by a larger percentage those who redesign versus those who do not.

Because institutional circumstances differ, each college or university will need to develop a strategy that fits its particular circumstances.

Here are three descriptions of institutional circumstances and some sample strategies for dealing with them.

- Course redesign results in actual dollars’ being freed up for other uses.

- Course redesign enables you to cope with declining resources (e.g., budget cuts, declining revenues, rising costs).
- Course redesign supports growth to meet demand on the same institutional resource base.

Course redesign results in actual dollars being freed up for other uses.

In this instance, cost reduction means reducing the number of non-tenure-track faculty—including instructors, adjuncts, and temporary appointments—and relying more heavily on tenure-track faculty without increasing the latter’s workload. Given the high percentage of those types of appointments on most campuses today, those instructors represent a significant portion of the instructional budget. Increasing the percentage of full-time faculty involved in teaching will generally improve quality, especially when it’s done in the context of a large-scale course redesign program. At Cleveland State Community College, redesign of the mathematics department resulted in the elimination of adjunct faculty members (a 20% savings in real dollars that could be used for other purposes), the full involvement of the full-time faculty with no increase in workload, smaller classes, and big gains in student achievement.

Sample Strategy. An institution sets a goal of reducing its reliance on temporary instructors and adjunct faculty from 60% to 35% as a way to improve quality and reduce costs. The goal is made clear to the campus community, and course redesign is selected as the way to accomplish it. Nine departments are involved in three rounds of a course redesign program with the specific goals of changing the ratio of tenure track to non-tenure track faculty and producing excellent models that show that this can be done. Both faculty and students are satisfied with the new mode of instruction. Campus leaders then turn to the departments that did not participate in the program and say, essentially, “We are cutting your temporary-instructor allocation by 25%. We want you to follow the examples that have occurred on campus. We will support you throughout the process, but you must do it.” Campus leaders will need to make a number of decisions about the funds that will be saved. For example, should you let the funds stay entirely in the departments? Should you split the funds with the departments in some way? Should you give raises as an incentive to participate? Again, different institutional circumstances will lead to different decisions.

Course redesign enables you to cope with declining resources.

For many colleges and universities, the financial environment in which they must operate is one of declining resources. Public institutions face the need to do more with less. All but the most privileged private institutions face rising costs and declining revenues. How to maintain quality in the face of less-than-desirable financial circumstances is the challenge for most of higher education. Course redesign offers a proven way to do so. The University of Southern Mississippi, for example, was able to deal with severe budget cuts during its course redesign initiative. Despite losing positions across the institution, the departments that redesigned their courses were able to manage the cuts with no diminution in quality.

Sample Strategy. After receiving a state-mandated budget cut of 5%, an institution sets a goal of maintaining the same number of program and course offerings at the same level of quality despite its decreased resource base. The goal is made clear to the campus community, and course redesign is selected as the way to accomplish it. Nine departments had been involved in three rounds of a course redesign program with the specific goals of reducing costs by 30% and producing excellent models that show this could be done. Both faculty and students are satisfied with the new mode of instruction. Campus leaders then turn to the departments that did not

participate in the program and say, essentially, “We want you to follow the examples that have occurred in the course redesign program. We will support you throughout the process, but you must do it.” Departments that redesign their courses would have their budgets cut less (0 to 2%) than those that do not; the latter would be cut by, say, 10%. Rewarding those who redesign and punishing those who do not will eventually bring all but the most recalcitrant around to the new way of offering courses.

Course redesign supports growth to meet demand by way of the same resource base.

A significant number of institutions face greater demand for particular courses or programs than they are able to meet on their current resource bases. Still others want to expand their offerings to serve new student populations (graduate students, online students, and so on) and/or generate additional revenue but are unable to do so because of limited resources. Course redesign enables an institution to grow—without requiring an increase in resources. For instance, the University of Mississippi redesigned its mathematics department. Prior to the initial redesign in academic year 2000/2001, the department offered only 13 courses annually, had 45 math majors, and a doctoral program on probation. After the department redesign was complete in 2006/2007, the math department was able to offer 28 courses annually, had 81 math majors and 20 doctoral students, and a program no longer on probation. In another example, cost savings produced by a redesign of Women in Society at Arizona State University enabled the department to accommodate new student growth during a time of retrenchment and to create and expand a new graduate program. Whether it involves initiating new programs, clearing academic bottlenecks, or enrolling more students in current offerings, course redesign enables institutions to grow—even in times of relative scarcity.

Sample Strategy. An institution sets as its goal the ability of all students to graduate within two or four years, depending on the type of institution, unless the delay is caused by a student’s personal circumstances. The goal is made clear to the campus community, and course redesign is selected as the way to accomplish it. Nine departments are involved in three rounds of a course redesign program with the specific goal of breaking up academic bottlenecks that are slowing down students’ ability to graduate on time. Prior to the program’s launch, data are collected to identify which departments and/or courses are creating the bottlenecks, whether the reason is academic (high failure rates), or financial (insufficient resources to offer enough sections and/or courses). Campus leaders then turn to the departments that did not participate in the program and say, essentially, “We want you to follow the examples that have occurred on campus. We will support you throughout the process, but you must do it. If you do not make the necessary changes, your department will lose its ability to receive new equipment, travel to conferences, take sabbaticals, and so on. Again, different institutional circumstances will lead to different incentives and penalties that can be applied. If a department is already well managed and is acting responsibly both academically and financially, it would be exempt from the initiative.

Initial course redesign programs rely on a single course redesign to demonstrate that it is possible to improve quality while reducing costs and to create successful models for others. When moving to requiring course redesign as part of the campus resource allocation strategy, you need a strategy for a whole department. Sometimes the redesign of a large introductory course will free sufficient resources to accomplish the campus goal. Sometimes a large number of courses may need redesign. Departments must make choices about which courses should be redesigned to meet the campuswide goal in the context of the institution’s individual circumstances.

To paraphrase former Citibank chairman Walter Wriston, the job of campus leadership is to create wealth, not to allocate shortages. Course redesign enables you to create that wealth, especially when you integrate redesign into the overall campus resource allocation strategy.