

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

### III. Making Key Decisions before the Program's Launch

This chapter builds on the critical components of program design discussed in Chapter I and discusses the decisions that program leaders must make in order to customize NCAT's approach to local circumstances. Customizing requires that the program leaders engage in a series of program design and development tasks prior to the program's launch. This stage comprises three parts:

- Develop a Call to Participate and Application Guidelines
- Make decisions about necessary elements of the program
- Make decisions about optional elements of the program

#### Develop a Call to Participate and Application Guidelines

The first step in launching a course redesign program is to develop a Call to Participate directed toward the entire campus community and a set of Application Guidelines directed toward those interested in applying to participate in the program. The contents of those documents incorporate the first three key components of a campuswide program: an organized public initiative with clear and specific goals, a funnel approach, and a competitive process.

For those program documents, NCAT has developed templates that can be freely adapted and revised as needed by any campus to reduce the labor intensity of the tasks. The templates are included in the appendices. The documents may seem lengthy, but they have worked well for us in all of the course redesign programs we have conducted since 1999. You may of course edit them as needed.

#### Make Decisions about Necessary Elements of the Program

Before developing those documents, you must make a number of decisions involving the following topics.

*Clear Goals.* What are the program's goals? Goals must be clear to the campus community. Examples of program goals are (1) adopt new ways to improve student learning outcomes, (2) demonstrate those improvements through rigorous assessment, (3) reduce institutional costs, (4) free up instructional resources for other purposes, (5) support enrollment growth on the same resource base, (6) increase graduation rates, and (7) develop the internal capacity of faculty and staff to continue the redesign process. A clear statement of program goals should introduce both the Call to Participate and the Application Guidelines.

*Role of the Provost or Vice President for Academic Affairs.* 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. Someone important has to be in charge of the redesign program. NCAT recommends that the campus provost or vice president for academic affairs lead the program—consulting others on campus as necessary—and make final decisions about the program structure in terms of the wording of the Call to

Participate and the Application Guidelines. This leadership role cannot be delegated to a faculty committee or a teaching and learning center director or an administrative intern or faculty fellow. Day-to-day management of the program can be delegated to someone in the office of the provost or vice president for academic affairs, but the message that the provost or vice president for academic affairs is in charge should be clear to the campus community.

*Program Leadership Team.* We strongly recommend that the provost or vice president of academic affairs be in charge of the program, but day-to-day program management should be delegated to a team, led preferably by someone in the office of the provost or vice president for academic affairs who reports directly to the latter. The team should consist of a small but targeted number of people who will have involvement in the redesign efforts—such as representatives from the academic technology organization, student affairs and advising, facilities and classroom management, instructional design, and the teaching and learning center. The team should be prepared to meet with potential participants prior to the award of grants and then with project leaders as a group on an ongoing basis throughout the implementation period; we suggest monthly meetings at minimum. The composition of the team enables important campus constituents to both be aware of redesigns as a whole and serve as a resource to help redesign projects resolve any problems that arise. The team is referred to as *the program leaders* throughout this guide.

*Large-Enrollment Courses.* To achieve maximum impact on improving student learning and on reducing instructional costs, courses targeted for redesign should have large numbers of students and instructional personnel. Although increased learning may result from the redesign of small courses, to achieve the strategic institutional benefits of both increased learning and decreased cost, the focus should be on large-enrollment courses. Large-enrollment courses may be courses with very large sections (e.g., traditional lecture courses) or courses that offer large numbers of smaller sections. In all cases, more than one person should be involved in teaching the course. Deciding to focus on large-enrollment courses—and providing a rationale for that decision—should be part of program planning.

*Data Collection.* Program leaders should encourage the submission of redesign proposals that will affect large numbers of students based on an institutional review of data. To identify which courses offer the most promise for redesign, the program leaders should collect and distribute data about potential courses for redesign (e.g., top 25 in enrollment) for the most recent fall term for which data are available. Data should include the total enrollment in each course and the successful completion rates (with grades of C or better) in each course. Using that approach will focus institutional attention on identified areas needing improvement and options for cost reduction and quality improvement.

*Number of Participating Projects.* Program leaders must decide on the number of projects they want to participate in during the first round of the course redesign initiative; NCAT recommends selecting three to five projects in the first round. It is extremely important to do everything possible to ensure the success of the initial projects so that they can serve as models for future rounds of course redesign. The campus community must be convinced by example that course redesign can indeed lead to improved student learning at reduced instructional cost.

*Grant-Making Strategy.* To incent faculty and staff to participate in the program and to support campus redesign projects, the institution should at the outset of the program offer grants and clearly state their dollar amounts. The program leaders decide what the amounts will be. Some projects may require additional institutional support such as, for example, to rehab campus space or to establish a computer lab. Other questions that need answering about how grants

will be administered are, Will you require matching funds from the departments? Will you restrict the expenditure of funds in any way? Will you offer a bonus for successful completion or for achieving a particular goal (e.g., increasing enrollment, reducing the DFW rate by XX%)? Will you award half of the grant funds initially and the other half upon successful completion of a pilot term? Are you willing to ask the department or program to return the funds if the project fails to carry out its redesign plan? All decisions regarding such issues should be included in the Application Guidelines.

*Cost Savings Statement.* Because the topic of reducing costs in higher education is controversial, the program leaders must be thoughtful about the way they introduce it and must assure potential program participants that they will benefit from participation. What does *cost savings* mean in practice? It is important that the campus community understand the context for reducing costs. In the past, cost reduction in higher education has meant loss of jobs, but that's not the NCAT approach. In the vast majority of NCAT course redesign projects, the cost savings achieved through redesigned courses remained in the department that generated the savings, and the savings were used for instructional purposes such as:

- Offering additional or new courses that previously could not be offered
- Satisfying unmet student demand by serving more students through the same resource base
- Breaking up academic bottlenecks—courses that delay students' forward progress in a subject area or program because the courses are oversubscribed
- Increasing faculty released time for research, renewal, or additional course development
- A combination of purposes

NCAT thinks of cost savings as a reallocation of resources that ultimately enables faculty and their institutions to achieve items on their wish lists: what they would like to do if they had additional resources. In some cases, cost savings involve faculty time, thus enabling faculty members to teach additional students or do other institutional tasks. In other cases, cost savings translate into actual dollars (e.g., using fewer adjuncts), and the dollars can be dedicated to other institutional purposes. The program leaders should state in advance the expected allocation of the cost savings generated by redesign projects. We recommend including in both documents a statement such as, "Any savings generated through the redesign projects will remain in the departments or programs that generated them."

### **Make Decisions about Optional Elements of the Program**

The NCAT methodology can be adapted to fulfill the priorities of each particular institution in addressing the problems it seeks to solve. As they make decisions about the necessary elements of program design listed earlier, program leaders may also wish to customize the redesign program and its description according to their own goals and objectives. For example, even though the overall program goals are to improve the quality of student learning while reducing instructional costs, program leaders may want to put special emphasis on how those goals get expressed. For example, rather than saying "reducing costs," the wording could be "support enrollment growth without additional resources."

In addition, program leaders may want to limit the courses that are eligible for redesign. Following are examples of choices:

- Only the top 25 in enrollment numbers
- Only introductory courses
- Only courses with high failure rates
- Only those courses with gender, economic or racial achievement gaps
- Any large-enrollment course
- Courses at any level, including graduate courses
- Specific academic subsets (e.g., math and science, developmental courses)

### **Key Decisions Checklist**

- What are the program's goals? Have you clearly stated them in language that all campus constituents can understand? Have you included them in the Call to Participate and the Application Guidelines?
- Has the campus provost or vice president for academic affairs committed to lead the program?
- Have you decided who will serve on the program leadership team and set forth a schedule for team meetings with individual project leaders?
- Have you decided to focus on, say, large-enrollment courses and provided a rationale for that decision?
- Have you collected and distributed enrollment and completion data about courses with the potential for a redesign (e.g., top 25 in enrollment)?
- Have you identified the number of participating projects for the first round of the initiative? Have you made it clear that there will be subsequent rounds so that more departments can be involved in the redesign?
- Have you decided to award grants to participating redesign projects? Have you decided on the dollar amounts of the grants? Have you decided how the grants will be administered and the conditions under which they will be awarded?
- Have you decided what will happen to any cost savings produced as a result of the course redesign initiative? Have you made a public statement about that decision so that all campus constituencies are aware of the decision?
- Have you identified any special emphases that will determine which courses are candidates for redesign?
- Have you established a program timeline and communicated it to all members of the campus community?