HOW TO REDESIGN A COLLEGE COURSE USING NCAT'S METHODOLOGY

II. Getting Ready to Redesign

Before they begin a course redesign, most institutions have found it extremely useful to think through their readiness to engage in the endeavor. An institution has two categories of issues to consider when assessing its readiness to undertake course redesign: institutional support for the redesign and available resources to support the redesign. Successful redesign requires that both institutional support and needed resources be in place before a redesign begins.

Assess Your Institution's Readiness to Redesign

Campus Support

Do you have sufficient support on campus to initiate a redesign? If not, you need to develop a plan to secure that support before beginning an actual redesign plan.

- *Faculty Support.* This guide assumes that those who wish to initiate a course redesign have identified the academic and/or resource problem(s) that course redesign can correct. You need to clearly specify the problem and gather data that supports the need for change—such as student pass rates for the past several years and the percentage of students who successfully complete the course. The question then becomes, Do all faculty members in the department understand the nature and extent of the problem? Even though many of the institutional teams that have worked with NCAT believed that the scope of their identified problem and the need to solve it were well-known among their peers, they subsequently learned that others did not share that understanding. That's why you need to be sure that all department members are aware of the problem and supportive of the need to correct it. Most faculty members are not familiar with course redesign and will need assistance in understanding it.

- *Administrative Support.* Do academic administrators (department chairs, deans, vice presidents, provosts, and presidents) understand the nature and extent of the problem? Have they seen the data? Even though many administrators do understand the scope of the problem the course faces (indeed, it may be the administration itself that initiates the redesign), others, surprisingly, do not have that understanding and will need to be informed. Most administrators are not familiar with course redesign and will need assistance in understanding it. Administrative issues will need to be addressed throughout the redesign process, and campus resources will be needed; consequently, having solid administrative support is extremely important to the success of the redesign. In addition, administrators may need to step in to support the redesign effort when colleagues or other departments or divisions question the redesign. Senior administrators must be prepared to provide that support.

- *Unionized Campuses.* Faculty unions strive to ensure that faculty members work in a secure and productive working environment with a reasonable workload. On some campuses, work rules may seem to be obstacles to redesign. Because one of the goals of course redesign is to reduce instructional costs, unions sometimes conclude that faculty will automatically lose jobs or be required to carry heavier workloads. NCAT has successfully worked with institutions in many states that have faculty unions, including Massachusetts, New Jersey,

and New York. The campus administration and those initiating the redesign need to take into account the specific union contract under which the redesign will occur.

NCAT's Scope of Effort Worksheet (see Appendix D) has been designed to help campuses document that the number of hours faculty devote to the redesigned course will be the same as or fewer than the number of hours devoted to the course's traditional format, even if class size grows or the number of sections that faculty carry increases. This is possible because course redesign off-loads to the technology certain tasks like monitoring student progress and grading. Explaining how this occurs and documenting the changes by using the Scope of Effort Worksheet enable redesign leaders to help union leadership understand the benefits of redesign for both students and faculty. Having union support is crucial to successful change on a unionized campus.

Financial Support

Do you have sufficient financial resources available to support a redesign? If not, you need to develop a plan to secure that support before beginning an actual redesign plan. Financial resources may be needed to support three things depending on the nature of the redesign.

- *Faculty Released Time.* To focus on planning the redesign, a subset of full-time faculty will need released time from some or all of their teaching responsibilities. Financial resources will be needed to pay qualified adjuncts to teach those sections so that faculty who are key to the redesign can have time to do the work. Not all faculty involved in the redesign need released time. Those granted released time should hold pivotal roles in the planning and development of the redesigned courses.

  NCAT does not recommend using extra service or overtime pay rather than released time. Because faculty members were presumably fully employed prior to the beginning of the redesign process, paying overtime means that faculty must work on the redesign after hours or on weekends. The use of overtime payments also means that faculty may incur difficulty in scheduling important meetings with team members or others on campus. The overtime payment method of remuneration forces faculty to place the redesign lower on their priority list because their current classes and students must come first.

  If the planning schedule permits, paying stipends during the summer may work. Some faculty cannot be released during the year for various reasons, which prohibits their participation in the redesign project. If you decide to pay summer stipends, it is important for all participants to be on campus with a regular meeting schedule and set tasks to complete as part of the redesign's development.

- *Technological Infrastructure.* Some institutions have robust infrastructures, but many need to expand their infrastructures to support larger labs or to equip small classrooms. Typically, course redesign means more students will be using on-campus computers and accessing the campus network. Thus, an institution's technological infrastructure will need to be examined and may need expansion as new demands are placed on it and the volume of student engagement increases. Again, senior administrators are typically those who make such important infrastructure decisions. As noted earlier, they must understand the reason for the redesign and the anticipated benefits for students and the institution.

- *Computer Labs/Classrooms.* Some institutions have existing computer labs/classrooms that are underutilized and can be rescheduled and repurposed. Other institutions will need to

expand the labs/classrooms they have because more students will be using them than were using them before the redesign. Still others will need to build new labs/classrooms. When repurposing or expanding existing labs/classrooms or creating new ones, senior administrators are typically those who make such important space decisions. As noted earlier, they must understand the reason for the redesign and the anticipated benefits for students and the institution.

Even though all successful redesigns will reduce instructional costs over time, some financial resources are needed up front. (Funds that will be needed as an ongoing feature of the redesign to buy software or technology-based services such as grading assistance or tutoring should be included in overall redesign planning.) Where do those financial resources come from? Some institutions have redirected internal funds to support redesign. Other institutions have received outside funding from Title III or Title V grants or from private foundations that seek to improve student retention and success. The ability to articulate clearly the problem the institution is trying to solve by implementing course redesign will go a long way to enabling funders (either internal or external) to understand and support the redesign effort.

Prepare to Develop a Plan

Once the institution has a clear understanding of its goal and believes it has the necessary support and resources to move forward in the development of a redesign plan, both faculty and administrators need to learn more about course redesign, what its strengths are, and how it actually works.

Establish a Course Redesign Team

The first step in developing a redesign plan is to form a course redesign team. Successful course redesign is the product of a team effort. It is neither a faculty project nor an administrative project nor a professional staff project. It takes *all* of those people—because it is a team effort. In evaluating prior redesign programs, we have found that taking a team approach always receives the highest possible rating from participants.

Institutions should establish institutional teams that include the following types of people.

- *Faculty Experts.* Course redesign requires that faculty experts explicitly identify a course's desired learning outcomes and agree on course content. Most courses appropriate for course redesign are typically taught by more than one faculty member. To ensure course consistency, faculty experts must work together on the redesign—resolving any differences in how the course will be offered—and must collaboratively plan the most effective way to accomplish the redesign goals.

- *Administrators.* Because redesigns affect multiple sections, large numbers of students, and academic policies and practices, it is important that the team involve academic administrators. The level of those administrators will depend on the organization of the institution and the institution's size. For some, it will be the provost/academic vice president or designee; for others, it will be a dean or department chair. Those team members play important roles when institutional issues arise such as changes in scheduling or the use of classroom space. If unexpected issues arise in the process of redesign implementation, administrators can help the team resolve them quickly and effectively across institutional offices.

- *Technology Professionals.* These team members provide expertise so that the redesign goals are accomplished in ways that make the technology as easy as possible for students to use. Technology professionals contribute ideas about how to increase interaction with content as well as with other students. They also suggest design approaches that ensure that the technology will not limit students' learning options.

- *Assessment Experts.* In Chapter VII, NCAT sets forth straightforward methods whereby student learning in the redesigned course can be compared with student learning in the traditional course. It is, however, useful to include on the team a member who is knowledgeable about assessment and research design—especially if the institution seeks to measure additional facets of the redesign such as performance in downstream courses or student satisfaction. Such expertise may be found in a department of education or a department of psychology or in offices of institutional research.

- *Instructional Designers.* If your campus is fortunate to have instructional designers on staff, you may wish to add one to the team. An instructional designer can help guide the re-sequencing of instruction and provide insight into learning theory and modularization. Subject matter experts are not always learning experts, and such guidance can be crucial.

Take Advantage of NCAT Resources

- *Background Reading.* Following is a short bibliography of NCAT articles about course redesign. Distributing the articles among the redesign team and other colleagues on campus and discussing them as a team and with others are good activities to pursue in preparing to develop a redesign plan.

  An Overview of Course Redesign
  This article provides a brief overview of NCAT's course redesign methodology and outcomes.

  Increasing Success for Underserved Students: Redesigning Introductory Courses
  This report examines the impact of the redesign techniques developed by the Program in Course Redesign on the success of adult students, students of color, and low-income students.

  Improving Learning and Reducing Costs: New Models for Online Learning
  This is an edited version of a September/October 2003 *EDUCAUSE Review* article that describes the six redesign models that have emerged from NCAT's Course Redesign programs.

  Lessons Learned
  Each of the following three monographs offers an in-depth analysis of Program in Course Redesign projects, with a focus on the most important quality improvement and cost reduction techniques used in the redesigns, the implementation issues they encountered, and the projected sustainability of the course redesigns.

  Round I Redesigns: Lessons Learned
  Round II Redesigns: Lessons Learned
  Round III Redesigns: Lessons Learned

- *Redesign Case Studies.* NCAT has provided the higher education community with almost 200 case studies of redesigns that both improved learning and reduced costs (see http://www.theNCAT.org/PCR/Proj_Success_all.html). The case studies are sorted by discipline, redesign model, and degree of success. The NCAT Web site has an array of free resources for those seeking to implement a successful redesign, including those at both two-year and four-year institutions.

  Campus Visits. The redesign team should consult with and visit institutions that have successfully implemented this model. Visiting multiple institutions is a good way for teams to observe exactly what occurs in a course redesign and to see actual interaction between students and instructors. The team can also discuss issues that may have arisen during the planning stage. Campus visits have been definitive in convincing faculty and administrators who may have hesitations about course redesign or who cannot envision either exactly how it would work in practice or its effectiveness.

  It is also important that senior administrators understand the benefits of course redesign. After some explanation from faculty and the department chair, senior administrators might find it useful to talk to or visit colleagues at institutions that have redesigned a course by using the NCAT model. Same as in the case of faculty, when senior administrators see course redesign in action, talk to students, and talk to their colleagues, they tend to understand that course redesign is a viable way to solve both academic and resource problems at their institutions.

- *Redesign Scholars.* In 2006, NCAT established the Redesign Scholars Program to link those new to course redesign with more-experienced colleagues whom they can turn to for advice and support. Trained in NCAT's course redesign methodology, Redesign Scholars have led successful redesigns that have been sustained over time. Only exemplars in course redesign are selected to be Redesign Scholars.

  Individual institutions that want to initiate course redesigns may wish to invite a Redesign Scholar to visit their campuses. Site visits focus on issues of curriculum and pedagogy, administrative matters, assessment and evaluation efforts, and implementation issues. Redesign Scholars are also available to campuses via telephone and e-mail for ongoing consultation. Redesign Scholars are engaged on a per-event basis and determine their consulting fees individually.

  Follow the links at http://www.theNCAT.org/RedesignAlliance/ScholarsList.htm to read about each Redesign Scholar's background and redesign project in order to choose someone who would make a good fit with your particular redesign idea. Contact information is also provided.

Readiness Checklist

- Have you clearly identified the problem the redesign will solve? Do you have data to support the extent of the problem? Do others on campus also acknowledge the problem?
- Do you have sufficient resources to support the redesign? Have you identified sources of external or internal funds to support the redesign?
- Do the senior administrators who make funding and space decisions understand the needs of the redesign? Do they have sufficient information to make appropriate decisions?

- If your campus is unionized, has the redesign plan been discussed with union leadership? Have you shared the Scope of Effort Worksheet to document that the redesign will not increase workload?
- Have you formed a redesign team that includes faculty, administrators, technology professionals, and assessment experts? Does the team understand the scope of the task?
- Have you established specific assignments for team members and others for the planning period?
- Have the team and others read about successful redesigns on the NCAT website and discussed them?
- Have you visited other campuses that have implemented successful redesigns, or have you had telephone discussions with their faculties and administrators? Were others who might have reservations about the redesign invited to join the visits or the phone calls?
- Have you considered asking one or more NCAT Redesign Scholars to visit your campus and provide advice about the redesign?