Engaging Communities of Practice to Create Pedagogical Change
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What are the “Top25”?  

Our highest enrollment courses
Vulnerable to being Barr & Tagg’s (1995) “instructional paradigm”
The “student as scholar” model

- A developmentally-informed vision of discovery learning (Hodge, Baxter Magolda & Haynes, 2009).
- Requires that faculty shift to sharing authority with students (Mitchell, 2006)

Goals of Top 25 project

1) emphasis on inquiry and active learning,
2) engagement with peer learners,
3) improved critical thinking,
4) innovative use of technology to move student learning of low-level memory information to outside class hours, and
5) increased student satisfaction.
Project status

• Each year (starting in 2006) 5-8 teams have come on board.
• 18 teams are at least one year into their redesign.
• Affects about 30,000 student seats per year

Examples of redesign

• Inverted classroom
• Reorienting to engage students in practice
• Use of undergraduate teaching associates
• Buffet approach of options
• Large lecture with students working in pairs and small groups in class
• Innovative use of technology
Communities and their functions

Administrative support community: consults on inquiry learning and course design, organizes supports from other offices, and provides ongoing assessment

– Classroom observations
– Student focus groups and surveys
– Written examples of critical thinking
– Trust issues between departmental and administrative/assessment communities

Communities and their functions

• Departmental communities: planning, implementing
• Assessment Fellows community: critical thinking in student work
• Disclaimer—not real FLCs
Challenges for administrative community

- faculty knowledge base
- faculty, staff, and student attitudes
- assessment on a large-scale
- balancing consistent project outcomes with unique course designs
- supporting the physical, technological, and scheduling needs of student learning
- administering a large project.

Lessons learned

- Composition of departmental communities
- Need assessment and feedback from administrative community for 2-3 years
- Need institutional support to get through initial student resistance
- Need for support for students
- Concerns about autonomy
How does this apply to YOU?

- What size institution are you from?
- What are the challenges associated with improving teaching and learning at your institution? Do you believe these are unique to your institution?
- Does your institution use communities of practice to improve teaching and learning? Would these be useful to you?
- If you use communities of practice, what support do those groups receive? How might that support be improved? What support resources/strategies might be unique to your institution and which might be generalizable?

In case you want to know how it is going....
Inquiry

• Students in the redesigned courses reported engaging in more inquiry-driven activities (e.g., “working on assignments that require you to build understanding on your own”);

Engagement

• Students in redesigned courses were more likely to contribute to class discussions and to work with other students during class
Moving low-level tasks out of class

• Students in redesigned courses reported less course emphasis on “memorizing facts, ideas, or methods” and spent significantly more time preparing for the courses

![Bar graph showing hours spent preparing for class]

Additional results

• Redesign students reported significantly more emphasis on multiple aspects of critical thinking (e.g., making judgments about the value of information)
• No differences in student satisfaction
• Anecdotal reports of shift in student and faculty culture
Transformative power of collegial partnerships

“validating them as fellow scholars and professionals, encouraging them to apply the principles in ways that are aligned with their particular departmental contexts, and co-constructing new ways of educating together” (Hodge et. al.(2009, p. 23).

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References


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