

The Curriculum Design Studio

A Curriculum Committee Alternative for the 21st Century

How effective is the standard curriculum committee in helping to quickly develop effective curriculum and move it from idea to implementation in a timeframe that meets the needs of business versus the needs of the community college? The curriculum committee is perhaps the best example of what Barr and Tagg (1995) describe as the community colleges' ability to mirror the wrong parts of our university predecessors. Workforce needs are changing rapidly and community colleges must remain adaptive (Walker & Zeiss, 2001). The challenge facing community colleges is to find an alternative to effectively develop relevant curriculum to meet local workforce development needs in a more timely manner.

Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, Nebraska, struggled with these very issues. The college eliminated the curriculum committee many years ago, so the need became balancing responsiveness to industry with standards and quality control. After a yearlong study, the Curriculum Design Studio (CDS) was established to strengthen and support curriculum design and development.

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Implementing a system with more advisory committee input to increase relevance and limit approvals to increase responsiveness, the CDS is an alternative to the standard curriculum committee. The studio is directed by the design studio coordinator who works closely with academic administrators as well as faculty from all programs and academic disciplines. The mission of the studio is to serve as an ongoing, evolving resource for faculty who are engaged in the process of curriculum revision or creating new curriculum.

Concept to Action

The CDS was established in November 2001 with a faculty member serving as studio coordinator. The initial priorities included advertising and promoting the services of the studio and the studio coordinator to the faculty and academic deans, which was accomplished through the distribution of an electronic newsletter. Further promotion and edification concerning the potential utilization of the studio came through more informal and individual strategies.

Although extensive awareness of the studio's potential was slow to develop dur-

ing the initial six months of operation, early success was forthcoming. College faculty discovered that their work, especially concerning pedagogy and content research, could be enhanced with no threat to their professional standards or subject expertise. The studio coordinator functions as an on-campus consultant to aid faculty in developing ancillary materials, the appropriate use of classroom technology, educational software, and interactive Web resources. The coordinator also offers help in the creation of lesson plans, course outlines, objective identification, and course and program curriculum.

Results

In addition to project consulting, research assistance and as-needed training for individual faculty, several training and planning retreats have been conducted, resulting in new and innovative curriculum enhancements in several program areas including culinary arts, industrial maintenance, paralegal studies, and social sciences. The studio coordinator also works with program advisory boards to identify needed curriculum reform in response to the needs of a particular industry or the community. Further,

the CDS maintains a comprehensive Web site resource that provides a structured model for curriculum development for use by faculty when they revise, create, or deliver a course or program.

The current studio coordinator also

developed a 14-module, online course as an additional resource to help faculty develop learning materials, and new courses, as well as maintain existing courses. By establishing flexible opportunities for design and instructional skills development, the vigor of curricula is more likely to remain constant and faculty are more likely to pursue creative curriculum development within a common framework of good curriculum design, thus strengthening course effectiveness, quality, and ultimately student satisfaction and retention.

Future Challenges and Potential

Key to the future success of the Curriculum Design Studio will be the ability of the coordinator to continue serving as an expert support resource and consultant rather than a staff curriculum developer or instructional designer for faculty. Likewise, the role of administrators remains critical in supporting the studio and not abusing the formal curriculum approval authority provided them in the absence of

a curriculum committee. Additionally, faculty and administration must adhere to the checks and balances inherent in this system of development and approval. As use of the Curriculum Design Studio expands, curriculum can be implemented more efficiently and delivered more effectively to meet workforce development needs by following a common framework of solid curriculum design.

References

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- Walker, K.P. & Zeiss, P. A. (2001). Designs for change: degrees and skills. *Community College Journal*, 71 (3), 8–11.

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