



The Design Process

Designing a Faculty Learning Community for Course Coordinators at Kennesaw State University

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- ✓ Design team reflected partnership between CTL staff and an academic administrator.
- ✓ Design team established clear objectives and participant expectations for their program.
- ✓ Design team also served as facilitators of the FLC, allowing for real-time adjustments
- ✓ FLC reflected a ‘train-the-trainer’ model

This case study outlines the process of designing and implementing a professional development program that is inclusive of VITAL¹ faculty within the College of Science and Mathematics at Kennesaw State University. We begin by providing background about the institution and developments that precipitated the creation of the 2022 Faculty Learning Community for course coordinators. We then offer an overview of the design team’s goals and process for designing the program, followed by a discussion of factors that the design team identified as impacting the implementation and success of the program. The case study concludes with a summary of successes and lessons learned related to the design and implementation of the program, which can be informative for other campuses engaging in similar efforts.

Background

Kennesaw State University (KSU) is a public, four-year university in Georgia. KSU enrolls around 40,000 students. KSU recently became an R2 institution, as designated by The Carnegie Classification, reflecting the institution’s growing focus on research. KSU employs more than 1,800 faculty, of whom about 1,000 are VITAL faculty, including around 750 who are part-time. The College of Science and Mathematics (CSM) offers an annual faculty learning community (FLC) through a partnership with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in order to promote a culture of teaching innovation and collaboration across disciplines. Each year, the purpose and focus of the CSM FLC is responsive to needs that arise in the college, such as creating better curricular alignment across departments or redesigning gateway courses; for the past several years,

¹ We use the term VITAL faculty — an asset-based term— to refer to contingent or non-tenure track faculty (including visiting faculty, instructors, adjuncts, lecturers, research faculty, and clinical faculty) as a way to affirm their vital role within institutions.

the structure of the FLC has generally reflected an action team model, where cohorts meet together to engage in workshops and then faculty meet in smaller teams to work on specific redesign projects.

In 2018, KSU joined the SEMINAL Project. The SEMINAL Project, a National Science Foundation-funded initiative led by the Association of Public Land-grant Universities (APLU), engaged three cohorts of institutions with a focus on identifying levers that can drive institutional change and facilitate wider adoption of active learning methods in undergraduate mathematics. One such lever SEMINAL identified is the coordination of multi-section mathematics courses, through, for instance, a common syllabus, textbook, and assignments. As part of the 2020 CSM FLC, two teams of mathematics faculty worked to increase coordination of specific courses, including through creating a course coordinator (CC) role.

Generally, course coordinators are responsible for developing and overseeing course curriculum for multi-section courses, as well as for providing support to course instructors. They work to create course materials, set learning objectives, and ensure that the course meets academic standards and requirements. Further, they provide guidance for using learning materials and tools, encourage collaboration and communication among course instructors, and provide professional development related to effective pedagogies such as active learning.

Given the potential for course coordinators to facilitate instructors' use of active learning in STEM, other CSM departments have adopted the CC model. Since 2020, CSM departments have created a number of new course coordinator positions to create consistency across course sections and to foster communication among instructors. Course coordinators generally work with at least ten course instructors.

However, as the positions were created individually within departments, college leadership became aware that the structure and responsibilities of these roles varied across departments. To help create better alignment among these positions, administrators worked with department chairs to develop a document outlining responsibilities for the position. College leaders also conducted a survey of CC that asked them about their ability to carry out their responsibilities and their perceptions of having the support they needed to do their jobs well. Additionally, the Assistant Dean for Faculty and Student Success identified course coordination as the focus for the 2022 FLC cohort.

Design Team Process

The team that designed the 2022 CSM FLC included the assistant dean, an educational specialist in the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), and the director for scholarly teaching in CETL. All three design team members had previously worked with course coordinators in professional development programs at KSU. They began planning the initiative in fall, 2021. To inform the design process, they used the results of the CC survey and conversations with CC, building on the existing structure of the CSM FLC. They established three specific objectives for the CC FLC and explicitly connected them to the college's strategic plan. The first goal was to increase course coordinators' focus on inclusive learning relative to course content. The second was to

position CC as change agents to support the wider use of inclusive pedagogies that support student learning and success, and the third was to build community among course coordinators to support their ability to facilitate discussions and provide constructive feedback about teaching to their colleagues.

The team designed a year-long professional development program based on a “train the trainer” model, with a focus on professional development of CC in both semesters, along with support for CC to meet with source instructors during the second semester of the program. In application, this meant that the professional development for course coordinators was intended to help them conduct professional development with course instructors, and, in turn, to help instructors create more inclusive learning environments for students.

Early in the design process, the design team discussed how to engage CC who had to miss meetings, given the many responsibilities of faculty in these roles. Because the FLC included expectations that participants would do reading and develop materials between meetings, they identified the importance of creating structures that would allow CC to keep up with this work. The team therefore created a Microsoft Teams site with readings and other materials that CC course coordinators could use even if they had scheduling conflicts.

Two members of the design team served as facilitators for the program, facilitating a responsive process that allowed for adjustments during implementation. The design team continued to meet about once a month during spring to discuss the program in light of the needs of the cohort. They also did some debriefing after each FLC meeting.

FLC Design and Structure

All course coordinators in the College of Mathematics and Sciences were invited to participate. Coordinators who oversaw entry-level courses and courses with high DFW rates (high rates of unsuccessful student outcomes) were particularly encouraged to participate. In total, eight course coordinators participated consistently, with an additional six coordinators who expressed interest but faced scheduling conflicts.

Monthly face-to-face FLC workshops were planned for spring 2022 that were 1.5 hours in length. Workshop topics included the following: developing leadership skills, using backward design to develop meaningful course assessments, using formative assessment to adjust instructional approaches, and designing common assignments and standardizing grading practices. During spring, participants were expected to develop an LMS shell for course instructors, to outline plans for conducting professional development with course instructors in the fall, and to develop course materials; these deliverables were due at the end of May to give faculty time to complete this work outside of the academic semester.

The design team planned a summer institute where course coordinators would invite 2-3 course instructors to participate in shared professional development related to developing aligned assignments, using formative assessments, and developing materials for peer observations of teaching.

Additional workshops for coordinators were planned for Fall 2022 on these topics: creating common syllabus components across courses, developing tools for administrative aspects of course coordination, conducting peer observations of teaching, collecting student data to assess course experiences, and developing materials related to their coordinator role for their teaching portfolio. Coordinators were also expected to meet with their course instructors at least monthly to share newly developed materials, discuss student data, and support instructional change. In December, designers planned a final FLC meeting where course coordinators shared their accomplishments and reflections on the program.

Factors that Caused Changes in Implementation

The design team intentionally used a flexible, responsive approach to design and made a number of changes to their original plans based on the differing needs and goals of the course coordinators. Three issues in particular contributed to adjustments during FLC implementation: departmental differences in the roles and responsibilities of CC, varied perceptions of CC related to their agency to lead other faculty, and different levels of readiness to enact instructional change for inclusiveness. Issues such as these are common when implementing new professional development programs for faculty.

Differences Across Disciplines

Even though department chairs and college administrators had created a document outlining the CC role, there were still differences in interpretation of this document, creating variation in the responsibilities and workload of course coordinators. As a result, CC were focused on varying types of activities and levels of coordination. For instance, in one department, course coordinators were expected to design all of the course activities to be used by all instructors of a course, while in another department, coordinators were expected to design only one common assignment to be used across course sections. Because of these differences, the workshops held during spring and fall varied in relevance and impact for participants.

The design team also realized that, as a result of these differences, they would need to rethink their plan for a summer institute. Coordinators were working on highly individualized projects, making it difficult to develop common experiences and expectations that would be widely applicable to all coordinators and the course instructors they were working with.

As a result, the design team decided to have each coordinator develop and lead their own summer initiative to best meet individual goals, with the expectation that all coordinators would implement about 30 hours of contact time with 3-5 course instructors. Thus, some coordinators planned a face-to-face experience, while others used a hybrid or fully online format. Coordinators were also given the freedom to select the 3-5 instructors they worked with over the summer.

College and departmental leaders also recognized the need to continue working toward better alignment of the role by revising the job expectations document during spring 2022. However, because this document was internal to the college, design team members from CETL were not made aware of revised expectations and responsibilities, limiting their ability to be responsive during this professional development program.

Perceptions of Agency for Leadership

A related issue was that CC had varying confidence about their ability to serve as advocates or change agents with their departments. This variation stemmed in part from the fact that the hiring process for course coordinators was different across departments. Some departments hired coordinators for the position, while others were appointed from within the existing faculty. Consequently, coordinators held a number of titles, including lecturers, tenure-track faculty, and clinical assistant faculty. The implicit power assigned to faculty based on the hiring process used and their faculty titles influenced the perspectives that coordinators brought to their work—and (most importantly) their sense of agency to coordinate and lead other course instructors. In particular, coordinators in VITAL roles felt like they had very little agency to affect change among their tenure-line peers; they framed their work as primarily involving the coordination of course data collection.

Additionally, some course coordinators struggled to see themselves as leaders because the roles lack structural authority. Because course instructors do not report to coordinators, course coordinators could only change faculty behavior to the extent faculty could be persuaded.

However, once program facilitators became aware that some course coordinators felt they could not effectuate the change they were tasked with, the facilitators tried to mitigate this perception by meeting individually with course coordinators and sharing with them various pieces of literature on leadership, including on different types of authority. Administrators emphasized that course coordinators could lead by being a guide and a resource to faculty. They worked to help coordinators understand how they be effective as change agents by encouraging their course instructors to embrace change in pedagogy and inclusive learning.

Readiness to Foster Inclusive Teaching Approaches

Finally, design team members noted that a few course coordinators were somewhat skeptical that shifting course focus away from content in favor of more time-intensive, inclusive learning strategies would ultimately impact students' learning and success. As a result of their positionality, they were not ready to advocate for these goals. Program facilitators therefore consulted individually with these coordinators, giving them space to reflect on the reasons for their perspectives, including that sometimes the assessments being used might not accurately measure improvements that occur when inclusive strategies are implemented. These individual consultations were beneficial in helping reluctant coordinators feel confident in advocating for the use of these strategies with their colleagues.

The CSM FLC had broad, multi-axis objectives, including leadership development, course redesign, role alignment, and community building. The ambitious nature of this program contributed to the changes facilitators needed to make when needs arose that were not initially anticipated. Their commitment to ongoing, responsive design, including giving coordinators more autonomy and meeting with coordinators individually and in small groups, contributed to the success of the program.

Good Practices for Designing Professional Development for VITAL Faculty

The design and implementation process at Kennesaw State University reveals several good practices that can be adopted by other campuses, regardless of the topic or format of the program.

- ✓ Linking professional development to the colleges' goals helps stakeholders understand why the program is important. Having a clear linkage helps can help promote faculty buy-in and can provide rationale for sustained funding.
- ✓ Continuous communication with college leadership helps make sure the program is congruent with the work of the College.
- ✓ Often, departments at universities can be insular in nature. Cross-functional teams can help break through the siloing of departments by leveraging the expertise of people from a variety of backgrounds.
- ✓ The design team was also the team that implemented the program. When difficulties arose, this allowed the planned program to be adapted more easily to meet the needs of the participants.
- ✓ Members of the design team had previous experience planning professional development. This allowed the program to start with a higher base level of understanding of its participants, culture, and needs.
- ✓ The design team created clear objectives for the program and expectations for participants. These pre-established objectives and expectations can be used as measurements to assess how well the program functions.
- ✓ Departmental changes that could affect the program and other relevant information can be gathered through continuous communication between program leadership and departmental chairs. This can aid designers and facilitators in being proactive with planning and implementation rather than reactive.

- ✓ High levels of responsiveness from program facilitators can be extremely useful. For example, after implementation began, facilitators sometimes met with smaller groups of course coordinators based on differing needs and readiness. These groups were designed to address participants' needs at a more individualized level. This process was developed as the program went on, in order to meet needs as they arose.
- ✓ Facilitators' responsiveness was in part demonstrated by their flexibility and commitment to using formative feedback about the program. Informal conversations and debriefings with the design team allowed for ongoing assessment of participant needs during implementation.

Program Successes

- ✓ The overlap of the design team and program facilitators allowed for responsiveness in how the team addressed issues as they arose during the implementation of the FLC.
- ✓ Facilitators adapted the planned design for the summer institute, allowing course coordinators to design and run their own mini-institutes that best addressed coordination of each specific course.
- ✓ The design team combined the expertise of a college administrator with educational development specialists, allowing for a design that attended both to college needs and good practices for professional development.
- ✓ Additionally, the design team has worked together on previous iterations of the CSM FLC. When possible, such continuity allows for the development of relationships among design team members and ongoing learning related to how to design effectively.
- ✓ The willingness of facilitators to meet individually with course coordinators fostered their buy-in and helped participants shift their perspectives. Individual consultations allowed both for tailored interventions and offered a safer environment than the larger FLC to do this work.
- ✓ The inter-departmental nature of the FLC cohort helped to foster a sense of agency among course coordinators. Facilitators noted that exposure to other coordinators helped participants gain strength as a unified team, as well as learning strategies from one another.

Lessons Learned

Design

- ✓ If this program were to be done again, design team members noted that having a team member with expertise in leadership development would be beneficial.
- ✓ Designers also mentioned that including a few department chairs on the design team may have been helpful because of their unique role in developing and implementing policy related to course coordinators.
- ✓ The design team adopted a “train the trainer” model thinking it could maximize the efficiency and impact of resources. However, providing tailored professional development for coordinators turned out to be resource-intensive because coordinators were in different places regarding their needs and readiness to change when they start the program.

Implementation

- ✓ One hour of leadership training was insufficient to overcome the natural resistance of course coordinators to become change agents. Course coordinators felt that they lacked the leadership authority to train their peers. Generally speaking, the training sessions focused more on what course coordinators needed to know rather than training course coordinators on how to implement what they have learned.
- ✓ Meeting in person was not the only way to build community and encourage engagement, there were ways to promote these things that also fostered the goals of the program. Program administrators noted that, during COVID, Zoom was a superior way to gather everyone into a comfortable setting and examine documents.

Professional Development Program Summary

- ✓ **Purpose and Objectives:** The purpose of the program is to provide professional development for course coordinators in the College of Science and Mathematics so that they could develop course curricula and provide effective training and support to course instructors.
- ✓ **Participants:** 22 course coordinators participated in at least some activities; 8 participated consistently across two semesters.
- ✓ **Delivery Mode:** In-person.
- ✓ **Structure and Length:** Monthly meetings that were 1.5 hours long in spring and fall semesters. Coordinators designed summer professional development experiences working with a few course instructors.
- ✓ **Content:** Workshop topics focused on developing the following: leadership skills, common syllabus components across courses, evidence-based assessment and grading approaches, course assessment practices through peer observations and student data, tools for administrative aspects of course coordination, and teaching portfolio materials related to the coordinator role.
- ✓ **Facilitation:** Members of the design team facilitated the workshops.
- ✓ **Deliverables:** Creation of an LMS course shell, course materials, and an outline of professional development plans for course instructors.
- ✓ **Assessment:** The design team debriefed after each workshop allowing for ongoing assessment and adjustments during the FLC.
- ✓ **Compensation and Recognition:** Participants who completed deliverables received \$1,000 for their work in each semester. For summer professional development work, compensation was \$1,500 for coordinators and \$1,000 for participating instructors.

Visit the [Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success](#) website for more case studies of professional development that is accessible and welcoming of VITAL faculty and a wide range of resources and toolkits to better support them.

