

Sustaining DATs

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Sustaining DATs

The Departmental Action Team Model is not only centered on creating change, but creating *sustainable* change. This leads facilitators to guide DATs in ways that emphasize a shared vision, generate a long term communication plan, and consider sustainability, continuous improvement, and project assessment at every stage of their work. Some DATs complete projects that result in sustained change during the period while they are being externally facilitated. Others are in the middle of projects when this period ends. Often, DATs want to continue their work to lay a sustainable foundation for their projects.

Departmental Action Teams have written and presented proposals related to their continuation to their department chairs, executive committees, or faculty bodies. Three example proposals have been reprinted below, without identifying information, and with the permission of DAT members. We also present a survey that we used in developing a network of support for internal facilitators that are continuing to serve DATs.

PROPOSAL TO FORM SELF-FACILITATED COMMITTEE

The DAT that produced this document had initially planned to disband, and bring DAT ideas into some of the many committees in their small department. They did not think that forming a new committee was feasible for their department. However, in their last two externally facilitated meetings, members pointed out that facilitation and a focus on the department's long term vision were aspects of the DAT that would be lost if they followed this plan. They brought these concerns to their chair, who asked them to write a proposal to form a new committee. They met over the summer to write the proposal letter, which is reproduced below, and was accepted. They continued their work with an internal facilitator, who was supported with some training from the DAT project.



Letter to the chair

Dear Chair,

As discussed at the end of the Spring semester, the Department Action Team (DAT) would like to submit a proposal for future activities for your review. Over the past year, we believe that we identified needs of our growing department and affected some developments. As you are aware, we focused on helping students with career building activities such as the Industry Night and a CV workshop, but also with a Facebook page and a Welcome Event. Luckily, this didn't happen in isolation – much of the credit goes to students and faculty members who initiated seminars intended to help our students with their careers.

What distinguished the DAT from regular committees was the format: we had regular bi-weekly meetings that were moderated by trained facilitators from outside the department. They guided the group in identifying and adjusting goals, finding the right strategies for achieving them, and taught us communication skills. As a result, we had balanced discussions where students and faculty could weigh in without concerns about power dynamics. It was especially helpful to have both undergraduate and graduate students actively participate and act to help the whole student population.

We propose to continue the two main activities of last year: (1) shape career building activities – potentially co-producing specific events with established departmental committees, and (2) identity-building and visioning for the growing department, which includes a range of topics such as inclusivity, social, research and learning climate, curriculum, industry connections, and/or career building. While the DAT would like to retain some ownership of events that we developed last year, the goal is to gradually move them into committees as to maintain flexibility to take on broader identity-building and visioning tasks.

One significant drawback next year will be the lack of group facilitation because the DAT support was limited to two years. However, if funding for the facilitators were continued at the college level, the DAT would still benefit from workshops and facilitation consulting that are offered in addition to DAT facilitation. As a group, we would develop a new structure to ensure balanced discussions (we have some ideas how to do this) – moving towards a self-facilitated DAT. Our proposal thus also includes revisiting the progress, format, and future goals for the DAT late next spring after a year of the new self-facilitated arrangement.

Please note that the college will decide on continuing funding for the facilitators very soon. Since they benefited our group so much, it would be wonderful if you as the chair could write a letter of support to the college to nudge them into the right direction.



Of course, any feedback on the self-facilitated DAT proposal is welcome and desired when you get to it.

Thank you,

[Name of department] Departmental Action Team:

Undergraduate students: [names];

Graduate students: [names];

Faculty: [names]

PROPOSAL TO FORM DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE

The DAT that produced this document modeled it after bylaws for other committees in their department. They wanted to continue as a self-facilitated group, but anticipated that the new chair of their department might not support creating a new permanent committee, and would likely want to change the balance of membership. Therefore, they defined their membership bylaws carefully. They also were careful to be very concise, craft a focused mission statement, and connect that mission statement clearly to a limited number of areas of work and specific projects. The chair accepted their proposal and established an ad hoc committee, which later became the permanent Climate Committee in their department.



DAT Bylaws Statement

The Departmental Action Team shall be a departmental committee which consists of faculty and staff members who will serve for at least a one year term and student members who serve for at least a one semester term. In addition to DAT members, an Associate Chair of the department shall be appointed by the Chair to serve as a voting member. The DAT shall continuously assess the climate and community of the department, taking into account input from the department chair, faculty, staff, and students. The DAT shall make recommendations for improving the climate and community and shall present its recommendations to the department for approval as appropriate. The DAT will carry out projects toward improving a sense of community and inclusion for students, staff, and faculty, in alignment with its assessments. The Department Chair, with the advice of the Executive Committee, will annually approve one of the members as the DAT Chair.

Areas of work

- The DAT will accomplish its mission of improving climate and community in the department by focusing work on these areas:
- Communication
- Respect, including reductions in harassment and discrimination
- Diversity
- Engagement between and within various groups in the department, including faculty, staff, undergraduate students, and graduate students.

The DAT's work will support the department's growth and improve climate and retention of students, faculty, and staff.

Potential and Ongoing Projects

Programmatic

- Initiatives to improve graduate student climate
- Faculty discussions about communication
- Call To Action undergraduate groups (ongoing)
- Undergraduate student awards (ongoing)
- Student Resource Center renovation (ongoing)

Data collection and analysis

- Focus groups of undergraduates, from different courses and years
- Women in department (faculty, staff, students) focus group
- Collect and analyze undergraduates' reflections on diversity and inclusion through a new advising Canvas online module
- Collect and analyze data on staff and faculty turnover
- Survey faculty, staff, and students on frustrations with communication processes



PROPOSAL FOR LONG-TERM ASSESSMENT PLAN

The DAT that crafted this proposal had seen past education reform efforts fail to engage many faculty. Some of the DAT members were concerned that their recommendations for a multi-year assessment program would not be sustained. This report proposed the multi-year plan and included how faculty and student time would be provided to implement it. The document had 5 sections and an appendix. Sections 4 and 5 are reproduced here. The other sections provided departmental context and data that supported the plan. It was presented in a late spring faculty meeting, at the end of the DAT's first year. The faculty did not object to the plan, and approved funding for graduate students to implement the first summer's work. After their second year of work, the DAT received approval to continue collecting pilot data with the assessment they developed. After external facilitation ended, the name of the group was changed to "Curriculum Assessment Team" and two faculty members formerly on the DAT coordinated the continued work with their colleagues and students, compensated by service credit.

Section 4. Assessment Plan Goals & Methods

The overarching goal of an assessment plan is to implement an integrated program designed to help this department evaluate how well we are meeting our goals in educating our undergraduate majors in the skills detailed in Section 3. This section details plans for ongoing and future assessment aimed at quantifying the development of those skills in our students as they progress through the major and providing ongoing feedback with the goal of improving teaching and learning in courses for the majors.

A suite of assessment tools will be used to determine both the current status of the effectiveness of skills instruction and the progression in improvement of those skills as the students' progress through the major. Possibilities include the following:

- In-course exercises designed to track skills through specific courses in the major.
- Evaluation of capstone courses and products.
- Exit surveys and/or interviews of students, offered every year.
- A specially designed assessment tool to be administered in a specific set of courses every year.

The goal is to produce a data set that provides evidence detailing how well the students in the major are learning the relevant skills both as they travel through the major and how that is changing with time, as the department modifies and focuses its curriculum.

During the development of this assessment plan, it was determined that no existing, off-the-shelf assessment tools exist that will meet the goal of assessing all the skills as students progress through the major, nor can we assess how we, as a faculty, are improving those learning outcomes as we modify courses and curriculum. As a result, a number of different tools will need to be developed to meet 4(a) through 4(d), above.



The exercises in (a) will be designed in future years and integrated into a set of courses chosen based on the general path through the major. Evaluation of capstone course products, including selected exams and essays, will be evaluated every year, as will exit surveys and/or interviews which, again, will be designed and implemented in future years.

Assessment development timeline

Summer 2018:

1. An assessment development team will meet over the summer, with Departmental Action Team (DAT) facilitation. The summer team will include two or three graduate students on hourly appointments through the department and one or more faculty members. The team will review the literature to learn what makes assessments effective; draft an assessment(s); and develop a proposal for how, when, and to whom the assessment(s) will be administered.
2. Identification of faculty assessment coordinator (see section 5, below).

Fall 2018 – Spring 2019: Implementation of first complete round of assessment.

End of summer 2019: Evaluation of first assessment

Section 5. Future Sustainability

To ensure that the procedures and goals outlined in this proposal are maintained and improved as part of an ongoing program, resources in the form of personnel and organizational support must be allocated to these efforts. It is recommended that one faculty member be assigned the oversight of this program as part of their teaching duties. In the early stages (Fall 2019-Spring 2019), an ad hoc committee should be formed to assist with the development of new assessment tools and their evaluation. Ideally, some or all members of the summer assessment development team will be willing to serve on this ad hoc committee. In the longer term, a designated faculty assessment coordinator will oversee the activities listed in Section 4 on a regular basis, with the assistance of designated office staff. S/he also will ensure that feedback on the assessment results is communicated in a clear manner to both individual instructors and the faculty overall. Recognizing that this will involve considerable effort in order to organize and manage this effort, it also is recommended that special consideration be awarded that individual, most likely in the form of reduced teaching load; i.e. the management of this assessment program would correspond to one half-course per year of teaching credit.

Note that this assessment provides a framework for continuing Science Education and Discipline-Based Education Research studies. For example, data from assessment tools and yearly assessments will be a valuable resource for future education-based research projects; for example, these assessment tools might be used to gather data before and after treatment associated with new modes of teaching. It is recommended that the department investigate partnering with other



organizations at the university to assist with the development and implementation of the tools listed in Section 4, above.

BUILDING A FACILITATOR NETWORK OF SUPPORT

A sustained DAT ideally would have one or two designated internal facilitators (individuals from the department). For the job of a facilitator to be sustainable, these individuals need time to do the preparatory and follow-up work, training to know what to do when problems arise, and a community to strategize with. DAT facilitators often talk to chairs in the last semester of a DAT's facilitation to explore ideas around supporting the upcoming facilitators once it is clear that the DAT plans to continue its work. They also work with the DAT to identify interested internal facilitators and offer consulting.

A new endeavor at the DAT project is building a facilitator network of support. We began this once there were a number of sustained DATs on campus. We began the development of the network by inquiring about interest in a variety of possible support services. The survey we used to begin these inquiries is below.



Facilitator Network interest survey

The Departmental Action Project is developing options for supporting departmental facilitators. Please indicate services that interest you or would serve your department. Over time, facilitators from other universities are expected to join. We may not offer all the services below immediately.

1. Email address
2. Last name
3. First name
4. What is/are your departmental affiliation(s)?
5. What is your role, in your department?
6. What university are you affiliated with?
7. What potential services are you interested in? *Check all that apply.*
 - Individual consulting (one hour sessions, by appointment)
 - DAT project coffee hour (drop in sessions, where you can discuss facilitation questions with us)
 - Facilitator Network discussions (every other week, one hour, discuss facilitation techniques and specific situations facilitators are working to address in their groups)
 - Facilitation Skills Workshop (1-3 hour session, a specific topic)
 - Facilitation Skills Intensive (4+ hours, potentially over several days, a group of topics)
 - Other (please describe):
8. Of the above options, which 2-3 services are of MOST interest to you?
9. We will definitely offer Facilitator Network discussions, starting this fall. Which features of this discussion group appeal to you? *Check all that apply.*
 - I would like to join this group starting in October
 - I would like to join this group starting in January
 - Meeting every other week
 - Meeting once a month
 - Meeting over the summer
 - Making a commitment to the group of a semester or more
 - Having the option to drop in to the group as I am available
 - Light reading "homework" from our new book, "Facilitating Change in Higher Education"
 - A free copy of "Facilitating Change in Higher Education"
 - Spending most of the time on learning about specific facilitation skills
 - Spending most of the time discussing "problems of practice" in facilitating groups led by participants
 - Splitting time between learning skills and discussing problems
 - Having an online space to "hang out" and discuss facilitation informally (slack channel, MS Teams channel, etc.)



- Having a monthly "coffee hour" to discuss facilitation informally and connect with DAT staff
10. Does any of the following describe you? *Check all that apply.*
- I am a participant in a group and interested in applying facilitation skills to help the group
 - I am facilitating a group in my department
 - I am facilitating another kind of group (a campus group, a group outside of work)
 - Is there anything else you would like us to know as we develop these services?

