

Departmental Action Teams

FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN EDUCATION

MANY EDUCATIONAL REFORM EFFORTS ARE INEFFECTIVE

While there exists a breadth of knowledge about best practices for education, there has not been widespread adoption of these practices. Often, it helps to focus efforts on departmental structures and practices that can support (or inhibit) innovation.

This project takes a holistic approach to educational change by focusing on shifting departmental structures and culture to sustain improvements to education.

RESEARCH-BASED CHANGE STRATEGIES IMPROVE EFFICACY

Our approach involves adapting organizational change literature that was primarily developed in business settings to higher education. We conduct ongoing research on the DAT model to iteratively design and test its effectiveness. Our work be used to guide educational reform in any department or institution.

IMPACTS OF THE DAT MODEL

We have implemented DATs across several disciplines (e.g., physics, geology, political science) to support a range of outcomes:

- Improved climate for women and underrepresented minorities
- Restructured course sequence to better support majors' transition to upper division
- Provided instructors with dedicated time for cross-course coordination

The DAT cultivates a departmental culture that is open to continuously improving undergraduate education. This benefits all members (e.g., students, faculty, administration), by allowing them to contribute to and have ownership of positive change.

DATS

A DAT is a working group of students, staff, and faculty who work on a cross-cutting issue related to undergraduate education in their department.

Each DAT is supported by external facilitators who have expertise in best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; facilitation and group dynamics; organizational culture; and education research.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Our work is guided by six principles that support effective departmental change:

1. Students are partners in the educational process.
2. Work focuses on achieving collective positive outcomes.
3. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation inform decision-making.
4. Collaboration between group members is enjoyable, productive, and rewarding.
5. Continuous improvement is an upheld practice.
6. Work is grounded in a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

