

Department Action Teams: A New Model for Empowering Faculty to Make Sustainable Change



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Why Implement DATs?

Improving undergraduate STEM education is hard!

- Typical change strategies (curriculum development & dissemination, top-down mandates) don't create sustained, systemic change

Department Action Teams (DATs) are a better model

- Teams of faculty (and others) in a **single department**
- Work over an **extended time** (at least 1 year)
- Focus on **large-scale issue** of departmental and **personal** importance
- Implement solutions that are **structural, adaptable, and sustainable**

The DAT Model

Related to, but distinct from, Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs)

| | FLC | DAT |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Participants | Faculty members from multiple departments | Faculty member, staff, or students from the same department |
| Object of Change | Teaching of individual courses | Department-wide educational issue |
| Tools | Education research, course data, external facilitators | Education and institutional change research, institutional data, external facilitators |
| Workflow | Similar efforts in parallel | Collective work on one goal |
| Culture/Norms | Agency, community | Agency, community, collaboration |
| Outcome | Individual change, transformed course | Collective change, transformed department |

Example DAT: Structure

Area of Focus (chosen by participants): The underrepresentation of women and students of color

5 participants

- 2 tenured, 2 untenured, 1 postdoc
- 2 women, 3 men

15 1-hour meetings over 7 months

2 facilitators (including me)

Example DAT: Activities & Outcomes

Major activities & outcomes:

- Analysis of 10-year **dataset** on student trajectories through the major
- Creation of a **report** presenting and interpreting this analysis, discussing national trends and best practices
- Creation of a **Committee on Representation, Retention, and Recruitment**
 - Structural change
 - Continuation of the DAT

Example DAT: Participant Quotes

DAT participants felt like they were making change and engaging with people who care.

“It's valuable in that I feel like we are moving towards really effecting change.”

“Why are so many of these things the DAT did . . . not part of the department plan? . . . It's frustrating to me that the [department] community here doesn't seem to care . . . So working with people who care . . . that was just really nice.”

Example DAT: Participant Quotes

Facilitation was essential to the success of the DAT.

“They kept us on track. They made sure that there was communication all the time. They did what . . . a typical faculty member won't do, which is to send emails and to hold people to a meeting schedule and to assign jobs.”

“Having [the facilitators] moderate the DAT seems to reduce any preexisting hierarchy among members of the DAT that exists from department structures. This is appreciated by us junior members!”

Questions?

Come find me at my PERC poster: **P2-2**
(9:15-10:00, Thursday morning)

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