

Effective Facilitation of Teams to Enact Departmental Change



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Context: Departmental Action Teams

Improving undergraduate STEM education is hard!

Department Action Teams (DATs)

- Teams of 6-10 faculty, staff, and students in a single department
- Focus on large-scale issue of departmental importance
 - Curricular alignment, inclusion of women/PoC
- Implement solutions that are structural and sustainable
 - Curriculum coordinators, monthly equity discussions
- Work over an extended time (1-2 years)
- **Supported by external facilitation**

Facilitation Goal

Primary goal: Create an environment in which DAT participants are likely to achieve success by focusing on **process**.

- Keeping the group organized
- Creating shared vision
- Setting concrete goals and outcomes
- Insisting on evidence (not anecdote)
- Focusing on sustainability
- Highlighting early wins
- Attending to power imbalances / interpersonal tensions

This work is unlikely to happen unless it is explicitly someone's job!

For our DATs, facilitators were 2 postdocs from the Center for STEM Learning.

Facilitation Techniques

Wide variety (this is not exhaustive)

- **Logistics:** scheduling meetings, taking & projecting notes, organizing files, bringing snacks, etc.
- **Activities:** The “Ideal Student” visioning exercise
- **“Metacognitive” conversational moves:**
 - “How do we know that most students take these classes out of order?”
 - “Is there anyone in the department who we need to bring into our process?”
 - “We seem to be in the weeds. What is our goal right now?”
- **Blending participant and facilitator roles:** Analyzing data, writing sections of reports

Questions?

Example DATs

	Potions	Runes	Alchemy
Participants	4 Faculty 5 Students (2U, 3G) 2 Staff	5 Faculty (4 NTT)	7 Faculty (2 NTT) 1 Staff 1 Postdoc
Time	Fall '14–Spring '16	Fall '14–Spring '16	Spring '16–present
Focus	Representation of women/PoC among majors	Alignment among major courses	Building community, belonging among majors (and faculty)
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-yr data analysis • DAT → Committee • Applicant outreach • Publicity campaign • Equity discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study of major trajectories • Creation of 3 curriculum coordinators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student survey • DAT → Committee • Faculty retreat

Guidance without an “Agenda”

“[The facilitators] didn't have an agenda. They were about helping us find our own path and I think that was really important. That's a big takeaway I took from it: in working with other faculty in our department we have to be very careful to not push our own views or our own agenda on them. And obviously there is a purpose for [the new curriculum coordinator] positions and we need to keep that in mind, but we also have to work with them to try to implement change.”

—Runes faculty member

Value of Explicit Visioning

“And I also think a lot of the work that happened at the beginning of sort of defining what the group does and what are the goals and what are the priorities really contributes to...a sense of shared purpose, of we have things we know we want to work on, which is different for example than many faculty meetings where people are just kind of standing up and spouting off their opinion and it never really goes anywhere.”

—Potions faculty member

Attending to the Big Picture

“[H]aving a bigger perspective of like let's discuss our goals, let's make our plan for what are our priorities, that sort of framing is very useful. I think [the facilitators] were doing that deliberately.”

—Potions faculty member

“I think [the facilitators] kept the big picture in mind whereas we'd start hashing out specifics about some particular issue. It was good to have someone who was in charge of remembering the big picture.”

—Runes faculty member

Facilitator as Participant

“They were just always willing. We needed that data of all the courses and who'd taken which courses. They just did it. [Facilitator 2] would crunch the data for us, and that, for me, would've been a big hurdle to find the time and the motivation to actually do it, and to have someone just go do it and then come back with the results was really helpful.”

—Runes faculty member

Diverse Membership

“[W]e have people from all different levels and parts of the department, I think that that is a real asset to the committee. And I feel like that validates what we are doing, right, like we're not ignoring people, some section of people who aren't speaking, and that makes all the actions more valuable.”

—Potions postdoc

“[C]ompared to a regular faculty committee, which we talked about this time last year as part of what the DATs are trying to do differently, having both the undergrad and grad student perspectives about both their experiences and what they really care about I think has been really important for shaping what we do, and that's incredibly valuable.”

—Potions faculty member

Diverse Membership, continued

“I definitely feel much more empowered being part of this to know that even as an undergrad that my voice is represented in the department. That's huge. It makes me feel like I want to get up, I want to get off the couch, I want to do these activities, plan, organize, execute. And really, you know, maybe undergrads have a lot more energy, they haven't beaten it out of us yet, but I think we are kind of an untapped potential resource.”

—Potions undergraduate

“This has probably been one of the few experiences where...I was totally able to jump in and do stuff...I think that's one of the things that makes this group so good, is it truly is like everybody's part of it, everybody's sharing stuff, everybody has their thoughts, and that's a valid thing for everybody”

—Potions staff member