

Faculty Engagement

TOOL: Faculty engagement in design and launch of new initiative

GOAL: Successful integration of a competency-based program at two Texas postsecondary institutions

BREAK THROUGH

MODEL: Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program

Why was this strategy developed?

Texas Affordable Baccalaureate (TAB) was conceived as a competency-based postsecondary degree program that would integrate into the traditional academic infrastructure at both South Texas College and Texas A&M-Commerce. The challenges were great—since South Texas is a community college and Texas A&M is a regional four-year university, the two institutions differ in their missions, history, values, culture, size, and governance structure.

“There were a lot of moments of give and take, there was exposure to new approaches to the design of an online course, there was sharing of best practices, but most meaningful were the relationships developed that will transcend time beyond working together on the development of this curriculum.”

Rosemond Moore, TAB program director, South Texas College

The ongoing success of TAB depended on cross-institutional collaboration, yet educators from these institutions had never worked together before. Some faculty and administrators were openly skeptical of competency-based education and TAB required approval by each institution's faculty senate.

In light of these challenges, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) proposed that the best chance for TAB's success was to engage the cultural knowledge and professional expertise of existing faculty from both institutions right from the start. **In a series of monthly convenings, faculty from both institutions gathered with THECB to share their perspectives and insights, and worked collaboratively to build TAB's curriculum. This helped to cultivate mutual respect across professional boundaries and a shared commitment from both institutions to the competency-based model.**

Many initiatives to improve student success fail to take hold because they engage faculty too late or not at all. THECB designed these convenings to create the conditions, supports, and incentives that would enable shared ownership of TAB among faculty and would enable faculty to become champions of the initiative at their respective colleges. TAB was successfully approved by both faculty senates.

How is it different?

Engagement of faculty was accomplished through a carefully choreographed series of seven monthly meetings. The objective was to intentionally and genuinely engage faculty in building the innovation, to enable collaborative decision making on potentially divisive issues, and to improve the overall sustainability of the program by having faculty champions on each campus.



First, administrators at each campus nominated faculty members who had the knowledge and expertise to improve TAB, including those who were openly skeptical of competency-based education. These faculty members were invited to meet in Austin for a kick-off meeting, which was led by a faculty member (who could help validate and discuss any concerns from a faculty perspective) and by a facilitator trained in negotiation. Participants were 1) provided a literature review and other supporting resources about competency-based education; 2) given resources on the Lumina Foundation's [Tuning Process](#), which was ultimately used to develop the curriculum for TAB; and 3) encouraged to share their fears, concerns, hopes, etc., with no ramifications. The first meeting was an open forum, where faculty participants shared their reactions to

the initiative and to competency-based learning in general. Several educators decided after that first meeting – with no consequence – that the program was not for them.

The subsequent six meetings took place over the course of several months. Participants stayed in the same hotel and meetings included intentional non-working lunches in efforts to promote a sense of community. Participants' support for TAB grew as they worked to build the competency-based curriculum, says Van Davis, director of innovations in higher education at THECB, who facilitated the faculty convenings.

Collaboratively, faculty from both institutions worked to design the TAB curriculum, which is competency-based for general education and cohort-based for upper division. General education faculty gathered in subject groups to map competencies from existing courses. Upper division faculty engaged industry and sought K-12 input. At the end of each session, all participants shared their curricula so that they were informed by everyone's expertise, no matter the subject.

"All of us fully believed in this project, were totally dedicated to it, and were fully engaged in producing high-quality work that we knew would be a wonderful benefit to people in Texas," says Chip Fox, TAB faculty representative at Texas A&M-Commerce.

What is the advantage for students?

Students benefit from a stronger, more coherent, more creative curriculum resulting from the faculty work sessions. Through the collaboration of university and community college faculty, the curriculum leverages the different strengths, values, and cultures of each institution, such as workforce

insight from the community college and a research emphasis at the university.

The curriculum also reflects the interests and expertise of a diverse faculty. "All of us have had many years of experience teaching students in our areas, as well as years devoted to understanding what students need to be successful in these areas," says Fox.

Furthermore, because faculty built the competency-based curriculum from A to Z, it provides a logical progression of concepts in a linear learning pathway for students.

How does it improve learning?

The student-centric approach to learning in TAB is also influencing traditional classrooms at the two host institutions where TAB faculty teach, says Davis. Having mapped the competencies of TAB from traditional courses, faculty have a fresh perspective on what students are expected to master in all of their courses.

The collaborative process also allowed cross-disciplinary development of the curriculum, and student learning improves when faculty understand how their curricula affects student success in other disciplines. "Faculty understand and know best what aspects of a curriculum the students like and find challenging and engaging versus those elements that can detract from a course," says Rosemond Moore, TAB program director at South Texas College.

What is the advantage for instructors and administrators?

Engagement of faculty from existing traditional programs at both institutions helped smooth the way for academic senate approval of TAB



and contributed to its sustainability. The collaborative process allowed support for TAB to build organically—from within the faculty ranks—which ultimately paved the way to integrate the program into the existing academic infrastructure. As a result of this buy-in, TAB and the two host institutions can meet educational needs on a long-term basis in two of the poorest counties in the nation. (To learn more about the model's educational strategy, see [TAB's profile](#).)

The experience was also personally valuable for involved faculty. Moore says that the process of faculty engagement in TAB curriculum “leaves me as a faculty member with a wealth of resources that I can call upon, research with, and develop new approaches to higher education in the future.”

What are the challenges?

Bringing together faculty who had never worked together before—from two different institutions, from within two different postsecondary

“Every single area of the TAB program is right on target for what students need to have a true and properly focused education that is, at a minimum, the equal of any full college degree program anywhere.”

Dr. Haydn “Chip” Fox, faculty representative to TAB, Texas A&M University-Commerce

systems, together with a higher education coordinating board—to air their fears and concerns can be challenging. Davis, as facilitator, attempted to create an environment of mutual respect and trust among the group. “Faculty input was valued, acknowledged, and integral to the process,” he says.

Another challenge was that faculty struggled to think about curriculum outside the confines of a traditional course. However, in time, with discussions about the competency-based vision, faculty became supportive of this new form of curriculum development. Because the collaborative curriculum development for TAB took them away from their other academic responsibilities, THECB recommends buying out

faculty time for this process, or issuing an honorarium.

What's Next?

As TAB moves from design to launch, THECB is creating professional development modules on motivation theory, learning theory, and coaching styles to develop the soft skills for TAB's academic coaches and content instructors. The modules will be online so that they can be used at both institutions as staffing for TAB scales up. In addition, THECB is looking into a partnership with Civitas Learning, an organization that can help educators and administrators understand how to use data and analytics to increase retention and guide students to success.





NEXT GEN TOOLS

Strategies and Innovations for Implementing Breakthrough Models

ARTIFACT:

Agenda for First Meeting and Competency Map Worksheet
(Click on the images to download the documents.)



Meeting Agenda

Texas Affordable Baccalaureate General Education Competency Workgroup

Date: September 28, 2012
Time: 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Place: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Board Room, 1200 East Anderson Lane, Austin, Texas

8:30 a.m. *Registration and Continental Breakfast*

9:00 a.m. *Welcome, Introductions, and Overview of the Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Project*

10:30 a.m. *Break*

10:45 a.m. *Overview of Tuning and the Competency Development Process*

Van L. Davis, Special Projects Director, THECB
Bret Mangus, Dean, College of Education and Human Services, TAMUC
Ali Esmaeli, Dean for Bachelors Programs and University Relations, STC

Van L. Davis, Special Projects Director, THECB
Joel Heikes, Grant Writer, STC

USE IT:

- TAB's faculty-driven process for curriculum development was guided by the [Lumina Tuning Process](#)
- TAB used [Microsoft SharePoint](#) for online project management, but recommend [Basecamp](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact: Van L. Davis
Van.Davis@the.cb.state.tx.us

Competency Cluster:
Prerequisite Note:

Competency	Sub-Competency	Learning Outcome	Enabling Objective	Cognitive Domain/Process	Assessment Types