

Update on

CSU Transforming Course Design: Reducing Instructional Costs

CSU The California State University
WORKING FOR CALIFORNIA

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Faculty members and other educators from 18 CSU campuses participated in *Transforming Course Design* workshops in the summer of 2007. Amongst the issues they explored were the diverse ways to address the twin challenges of improving student learning and reducing the costs of instruction. The September *Update* featured a review of our workshop discussions about learning outcomes; in this October *Update* we provide an overview of the groups' ideas and conclusions on instructional costs.

Targets for reducing instructional costs often focus on reducing the number of course sections offered, by improved teaching and learning to decrease the number of students who repeat a course or to allow increased section sizes. Other potential savings that appear in institutional budgets include classroom space, instructional support and teaching assistants, and assigned time to create course resources (where savings might be achieved by re-using and adapting resources from other institutions).

Workshop participants noted other costs that are "off the books". For example, faculty members' passion for teaching their subject areas can overflow into time

Example savings targets in CSU 2007 projects:

CSU East Bay: reduce faculty class time required in *Human Development* courses through hybrid offerings;
CSU Northridge, Sacramento State: reduce number of sections required for students repeating the course;
San Francisco State: lower per student costs from \$317 to \$250 in *Introductory Calculus* courses;
CSU San Bernardino, CSU Stanislaus: improve retention & extend learning communities for new students, by increasing section size in hybrid offerings;
CSU Channel Islands: extend cost savings from student self-placement in "standard vs. stretch" courses.
http://www.calstate.edu/ats/transforming_course_design

invested in a course beyond the nominal workload assignment. The "cost" of that time to faculty can be reduced by optimizing the value and energy that it generates, in terms of faculty satisfaction and student success and engagement in the discipline. The time students invest in learning is another key factor which can be optimized in *Transforming Course Design*, both within a course and in the elapsed time to complete a degree. Other cost factors for students include textbook and technology purchases and flexible scheduling to fit other time commitments.

An Example of Cost Savings in Practice

"In all 30 of our Course Redesign projects, cost savings achieved through the redesigned courses remained in the department [or institution] generating them, and the savings achieved were used for instructional purposes. By reducing the cost of offering the redesigned course, institutions have been able to reallocate and do what they would like to do if they had additional resources ...Participants in successful Course Redesign projects have used their cost savings in the following ways:

- offering additional or new courses;
- serving more students on the same resource base;
- removing "academic bottlenecks"—courses that delay forward progress of students within a subject area or program because they are oversubscribed
- increasing faculty release time for research, renewal, additional course development, etc."

These approaches advocated by our CSU faculty align with the thinking of other higher education leaders: our goal is to "follow the high road to change rather than the low road. The low road to increasing productivity places heavy reliance on cost cutting without acknowledging detrimental consequences ...the high road asks how our valuable outcomes can be preserved and improved, while holding constant or cutting resource requirements. Framing the challenge in this way provides a far more fertile way of thinking about the problem. It shifts from being just a counting exercise to one that gets to the heart of the purpose and methods of higher education".

References: ¹ www.thencat.org/States/ABOR.htm (the *Call to Participate in the Arizona state-wide program*)
² Henry Levin, Foreword, *On Becoming a Productive University*, J. Groccia and J. Miller (eds.), 2005, p. xv