

## PROMISING PRACTICE

# Peer-to-Peer Professional Development in Building a Culture of Collegiality in Corequisite Education

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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A student-centered, effective corequisite program requires significant collaboration and coordination between faculty, staff, and administration. For successful corequisite course design, institutions should provide opportunities and resources to engage in “meaningful and respectful conversations and professional development” that facilitate “the implementation, assessment, and scaling of corequisite courses” (Charles A. Dana Center, The University of Texas at Austin, 2022, p. 2). To accomplish these goals, institutions should encourage “collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including institutional researchers, administrators, and student support professionals” (p. 6). As part of this work, institutions should facilitate opportunities for faculty “to design, deliver, and continuously improve” their courses through various supports, including “communities of practice, summer institutes, team teaching, and mentoring opportunities” (p. 6).

Like many of its contemporaries across the state, North Central Texas College’s (NCTC) English and math faculty were committed to the promise of corequisite education and its students’ success as outlined by the Dana Center, but they also understood the obstacles to implementing, assessing, and scaling its corequisite courses. The pandemic also compounded these challenges: English and math faculty were struggling with Zoom fatigue, burnout, anxiety, and social isolation.

Still, NCTC’s English and math faculty sought opportunities and resources to come together and collaborate to meet its students’ needs and embraced professional development opportunities that promised specific, meaningful, and pedagogically sound deliverables. There were conversations about bringing outside facilitators to lead workshops and sending faculty members to conferences; however, in the semesters immediately following the pandemic, conference opportunities were limited, and NCTC’s faculty and administration were reticent to travel. Besides, the college’s English and math faculty believed they had the tools and knowledge to design and develop a student-centered corequisite program. What they needed were more opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration where they could engage with each other and create curriculum and instructor resources without distraction.

To achieve these goals, in the fall of 2021, NCTC applied for and received the College Readiness and Completion Model (CRCM) grant from the Texas

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Higher Education Coordinating Board<sup>1</sup>. The grant’s objectives were to “support Texas public institutions of higher education (IHEs) in implementing, enhancing, and scaling evidence-based programming and best practices that impact college readiness and gateway course completion outcome” (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, n.d., para. 1).

As part of this grant, the English and math faculty participated in a series of evening workshops where they would collaborate and develop course-specific resources for students enrolled in corequisite first-semester Freshman Composition (ENGL 1301) and Contemporary Mathematics (MATH 1332) courses. During the Spring 2022, Fall 2022, and Spring 2023 semesters, 16 full- and part-time English and math faculty members met three times each semester (once a month) for three hours in the evening to engage in peer-to-peer professional development. For their participation, faculty members would receive modest stipends (\$500) each semester, acknowledging the additional workload, incentivizing their participation in grant-related activities, and compensating them equitably and fairly for their time and professional expertise.

### Designing the Workshops and Findings

NCTC’s English and math faculty understood the importance of peer-to-peer professional development for promoting a sense of vitality and collegiality that, in turn, facilitated buy-in, and the faculty wanted to move beyond brainstorming to complete manageable—but meaningful—projects that they collectively identified as relevant and worthwhile to students and the department. Therefore, in designing the workshops, NCTC grant directors decided to focus on what Artze-Vega et al. described as “rich combination[s] of new information and ideas, hands-on experiences, collegial conversations, and opportunities to reflect” (2013, p. 168). They understood that effective professional development extends “beyond the workshop participants and lead[s] to the establishment of a culture that supports reflective, scholarly teaching” (Rutz et al., 2012, p. 47) and that peer-to-peer professional development communities are especially important contributors to instructional improvement (Little, 2022, p. 936).

The results showed that participating in the peer-to-peer professional development workshops was an overwhelmingly positive experience for English and math faculty.

Because the English and math faculty’s long-term objectives were to promote a culture of collaboration and innovation that resonated within the disciplines and across campus, their goals for the workshops were three-fold: According to Camblin and Steger (2000), faculty would focus on:

- instructional development emphasizing “the development of faculty skills involving instructional technology, micro-teaching, media, courses, and curricula” (p. 3);
- organizational development emphasizing “the needs, priorities, and organization of the institution” (p. 3); and
- vitality or a sense of purpose and collegiality (p. 4).

During the Spring 2023 workshops, English faculty focused their attention on two learning outcomes from Composition I, ENGL 1301: “Develop ideas with appropriate support and attribution” and “Use Edited American English in academic essays.” During the first session, English faculty discussed the goals and expectations for first-semester composition students and narrowed their focus to several key projects. They divided into groups to create new curriculum materials, develop student resources, and revise signature assignments. During the second session, faculty members worked in groups to align curriculum, resources, and assignments to students’ marketable skills and revised grading rubrics. One faculty member produced a short video directed at students explaining the

ethical use of AI writing, and another revised discussion boards to reinforce and assess teamwork. As content was created, the division chair consulted with faculty and added these resources to the department’s Canvas group. During the third session, English faculty came together to finalize rubrics, develop a syllabus statement regarding AI-generated writing, and discuss strategies for incorporating lessons on AI-generated writing into the curriculum that would engage students in the writing process.

The math faculty collaborated during these workshops with instructional designers from eLearning to revise course homepages, making them accessible to students, and adding videos via Flip Integration into the courses. Additionally, math faculty worked together to

<sup>1</sup> The English department at North Central Texas College acknowledges and thanks the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for approving its grant application, which funded these workshops.

develop civic engagement projects and feasibility studies that invited students to create visual representations of math concepts, demonstrating how math impacts local governments and communities. Math faculty collaborated to identify topics, create curricula and handouts, create Excel sheets, and design assignment rubrics. Math faculty also integrated resources from the college's career center into their courses, aligning with the grant's emphasis on marketable skills.

To assess the effectiveness of these peer-to-peer workshops, a post-workshop survey was developed (modified from a survey developed by Barlett & Rappaport, 2009, p. 81) that focused on organizational and instructional development and the importance of community and vitality (or a feeling of purpose) in the workplace (see Appendix). The survey was sent to 16 faculty participants, and 100% of the participants from the Spring 2023 workshops responded<sup>2</sup>.

The results showed that participating in the peer-to-peer professional development workshops was an overwhelmingly positive experience for English and math faculty: All survey respondents stated that a sense of community in the workplace was important to them (quite important: 12.5%, and very important: 87.5%). The top three reasons that faculty elected to participate in the workshops were to collaborate with colleagues (100%), for the professional development opportunity (81.25%), and because of the stipend (81.25%).

- All respondents (100%) stated that their organizational and instructional development had increased due to their participation in the grant workshops.
- An overwhelming majority (87%) of respondents indicated that their teaching had changed some (40%), quite a bit (40%), or very much (7%) through their participation in the grant workshops.
- All respondents (100%) noted that their sense of vitality (or feeling of purpose) had changed due to participating in the workshops (some: 37.5%, quite a bit: 50%, very much: 12.5%).
- All respondents (100%) stated that they collaborated more with their colleagues due to their participation in the workshops (some: 12.5%, quite a bit: 43.75%, and very much: 43.75%).
- All respondents (100%) noted that their participation in the grant workshops was overwhelmingly positive.

While the stipend and professional development were factors in respondents' willingness to participate in the workshops, attendees overwhelmingly noted the value of collaboration.

- "The best part about participating in the CRCM grant workshops was collaborating and taking time to talk with colleagues. Too often, we are too busy at work and don't have a chance at creative outlets like these."
- "The opportunity to collaborate with others in my department was absolutely the BEST [part of] participating. The workshops enabled so many meaningful conversations about what we do and how we do it—these conversations continued outside of the workshop meetings and were really valuable in helping me bring new ideas into the classroom."
- "Having time set aside and valued with compensation for our labor, has produce[d] more collaboration within our department. The projects completed and the sharing of ideas, have led to our students being more engaged in the classroom."
- "Having time to collaborate with members of my department and others has given me a broader view of the challenges we all face when striving to provide our students with the best curriculum possible. The stipend has shown that the college values our intellectual work and increases job satisfaction and personal emotional well-being. And most importantly, students' positive reaction to all the new ideas, projects, and rubrics developed in the workshops is evident in verbal statements, discussions, attendance, and writing engagement."
- "The ability to dialogue with the department without other goals or constraints is vital to our department's ability to ruminate on our potential goals."

While this sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 16 participants, the survey results overwhelmingly demonstrated the benefits of providing stipends, time, and resources to support peer-to-peer professional development. Compensating faculty for their participation helped promote buy-in, and the surveys have since provided an additional metric for evaluating the workshops' effectiveness that will be used in the future to assess and compare.

In conclusion, the professional development gained from these peer-to-peer workshops can impact students' success outside their corequisite courses. As Artze-Vega et al. (2013) explained,

<sup>2</sup> This study was IRB approved by North Central Texas College's Institutional Review Board on 9/27/2023.

## Appendix

## Faculty Survey

We have come to learn that what our students might be doing in their math, science, and sociology classes, for instance, shapes them in important ways that, in turn, affect their learning in our own classes; likewise, sustained or direct involvement in the pedagogies of colleagues and departments across all disciplines deepens and extends (sometimes even complicates) our understanding. (p. 173)

Corequisite courses require a high degree of collaboration and coordination among faculty members, but the effort is made worthwhile by enriched educational experiences that nurture a culture of collaboration and professional development, thereby creating a more effective and supportive environment for corequisite education.

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This survey evaluates if/how the CRCM 2021 workshops promoted vitality (or a feeling of purpose) and community in the workplace. For the following questions and statements, you can simply X the answer closest to your opinion, type in Y or N, or add comments such as “very much!” or “not really.”

1. A sense of community in the workplace is important to me.
  - Not at all
  - Of little importance
  - Of some importance
  - Quite important
  - Very important
  
2. The CRCM 2021 grant workshops were strengthened by a sense of community. I feel more connected with my colleagues. (Y/N)
  
3. When I began the CRCM 2021 grant workshops, my interest in organizational and instructional development was:
  - High
  - Medium
  - Low

Organizational development is defined as professional development that emphasizes “the needs, priorities, and organization of the institution” (Camblin & Steger, 2000, p. 3). Instructional development is defined as “the development of faculty skills involving instructional technology, micro teaching, media, courses, and curricula” (Camblin & Steger, 2000, p. 3).
  
4. Through my work with the CRCM 2021 grant workshops, I would say that my organizational and instructional development:
  - has increased substantially.
  - has increased a little.
  - stayed about the same.
  - has declined since the time I participated in the project.
  
5. I would say that my teaching has changed as a result of my participation in the CRCM grant workshops.
  - Not at all
  - Very little
  - Some
  - Quite a bit
  - Very much



6. I would say that my sense of vitality has changed as a result of my participation in the CRCM 2021 grant workshops.
- Not at all
  - Very little
  - Some
  - Quite a bit
  - Very much
7. I have collaborated more with my colleagues as a result of my participation in the CRCM 2021 grant workshops.
- Not at all
  - Very little
  - Some
  - Quite a bit
  - Very much

8. Overall, I would say that my participation in the CRCM 2021 grant workshops was:
- Overwhelmingly negative
  - Somewhat negative
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat positive
  - Overwhelmingly positive
9. What else would you like to say about participating in the CRCM 2021 grant workshops?

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