Utilizing a Principles-Focused Approach for Change Efforts

AAAS/IUSE Webinar
June 17, 2021
Departmental Action Team Project: Presenters

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Objectives

By the end of this webinar, participants will gain:

■ Knowledge of the basic components of the DAT model.
■ Understanding how the DAT model is implemented, and ways it can be adapted.
■ Ability to evaluate if the DAT model is appropriate for catalyzing the kinds of change of interest.
■ Awareness of available DAT resources and how they can be used to support change in departmental contexts.
Outline of Webinar

- Overview of DAT Model
- Culture Overview and Activity
- Principles Overview and Activity w/ Breakouts
- Implementing DAT Model
- DAT Impacts focused on Culture + Principles
- Q&A
How to Participate

- Use the Zoom chat to ask questions during the presentation as they come up for you
- View the chat to read answers to others’ questions
- Links to slides and activities will be posted in the chat
DAT Model Overview

Ngai et al., 2020. Facilitating Change in Higher Education: The Departmental Action Team Model.
What is a DAT?

A Departmental Action Team (DAT) is a departmentally-based working group of 6 to 8 faculty, staff, and/or students with two goals:

1. to **create change** around a broad-scale undergraduate education issue by shifting departmental structures and culture
2. to help DAT participants **become change agents** through developing facilitation and leadership skills

DATs were developed at CU Boulder in 2014; our current NSF project has been funded since 2016 and extended our work to Colorado State University.
Characteristics of a DAT

Membership: 6-8 members from a single department, diversity in roles (TT & NTT faculty, UG and G students, staff), demographics, perspectives

Timing: Meet once every other week for 60-90 minutes, for 2-4 semesters

Facilitation: External to the department, co-facilitation model, explicit focus on process and team development

Area of focus: Broad-scale issue related to undergraduate education, chosen/refined by participants through visioning process

Relationship to department: Supportive chair, regular communication to cultivate allies, support, positive feelings
DAT Life Cycle

1. Assemble a diverse team
2. Develop a shared vision
3. Come to consensus on goals to pursue
4. Analyze the current state of the department
5. Define a project
6. Carry out the project
7. Assess and reflect on project results
8. Chart the DAT’s future
Theory of Change

Maps out the logic for how a DAT’s structure and activities lead to desired outcomes.

1. Before a DAT.
   - A DAT forms in the department

2. Running a DAT.
   - The department values the work of the DAT
   - The DAT has affected change related to undergraduate education
   - DAT members are change agents
   - DAT members enact DAT culture without help

3. After a DAT
   - The department is supported by its members in making sustainable, positive, iterative changes that are aligned with the Core Principles

Focus on Culture
Departmental culture impacts the student experience.

Culture includes:

- **Visible artifacts**
  - meeting structure, physical space, departmental celebrations, policies and rules, ...

- **Invisible values, beliefs, and assumptions**
  - research is our priority, only tenure-track faculty make decisions, students know who and when to ask for help, ...

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Culture in Practice

What are some attributes of departmental culture that could impact the student experience?

- (3 minutes) Reflect on your answers to this question, based on your own experiences, observations from working with academic groups, knowledge from the literature, etc.

- (10 minutes) Share your responses with the group in Padlet: https://tinyurl.com/CultureAAAS. Click on the pink plus, or double click anywhere, to add a thought.
Focus on Principles
Core Principles

1. Students are partners in the educational process.
2. Work focuses on achieving collective positive outcomes.
3. Data collection, analysis, and interpretation inform decision making.
4. Collaboration among group members is enjoyable, productive, and rewarding.
5. Continuous improvement is an upheld practice.
6. Work is grounded in a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

These are both design principles and desired cultural characteristics of the DAT (and department).

Quan et al. 2019. Externalizing the Core Principles of the Departmental Action Team Model.
Principles in practice

Imagine a department that is becoming more aligned with the principle you have been assigned. As a group, consider:

- What would this look or sound like in a department?
- How will this impact students?

Access the activity here: https://tinyurl.com/DATprinciplesIUSEworkshop
Implementing the DAT model

Ngai et al., 2020. Facilitating Change in Higher Education: The Departmental Action Team Model.
Places to access resources

Facilitating Change in Higher Education: The Departmental Action Team Model.

DAT Digital Toolkit:
https://dat-project.org/digital-toolkit/

ASCN 4-part blog series:
https://dat-project.org/resources/web-resources/

*icons produced by Good Ware and Freepik
Is the DAT model right for your context?

These resources define the essential components of the DAT model, and what can be adapted to your context:

- How-To Guide 1: Using Innovation Configuration Maps
- Table 1.1: Basic characteristics (and anti-characteristics) of a DAT
- Handout 1: DAT Core Principles
- DAT Model Theory of Change (TOC)

Ngai et al., 2020. Facilitating Change in Higher Education: The Departmental Action Team Model.
How does one initiate a DAT?

**STARTING POINT**

A department needs change but lacks internal capacity to enact change

**OUTCOME 1**

Facilitators, department members, and department leadership communicate about having a DAT in the department

**OUTCOME 2**

There is external support for the DATs to form
Communication resources

- How-To Guide 4: Building Awareness of DATs
- Digital Toolkit Slides 2.0-2.10: DAT Model Overview
- Handout 3: Collaborative Communities
Indicators of Success

Evidence that a DAT is likely to be successful in your department:

- Meaningful conversations about improving undergraduate education have occurred
- There is expressed interest from the department chair and some department members in the DAT model

Evidence that your department may not be ready for a DAT:

- Improving undergraduate education is not a priority in the department
- The department is already in the middle of change (e.g., hiring a new dept chair)

Ngai et al., 2020. Facilitating Change in Higher Education: The Departmental Action Team Model.
How can facilitators prepare to run a DAT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators are ready to run a DAT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators understand departmental needs and context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitators have the capacity to support a DAT in the department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitators have legitimacy in the eyes of potential DAT members and department leadership</td>
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</table>
Facilitator preparation resources

- Chapter 2: Preparing to Facilitate DATs
- Facilitation Skills Inventory
- How-To Guide 2: Conducting a Listening Tour
- How-To Guide 5: Documenting and Reflecting on Meetings
- DATs in Real Life

Ngai et al., 2020. Facilitating Change in Higher Education: The Departmental Action Team Model.
Indicators of Success

Evidence of facilitator readiness:

- Involvement in a facilitator community
- Completed self-assessment of facilitation skills inventory
- Sufficient understanding of departmental needs and context
DAT Impacts
# DATs at CU and CSU, 2014-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments at CU or CSU</th>
<th>Curricular Changes</th>
<th>Cultural Changes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astrophysics *</td>
<td>• Established a new major</td>
<td>• Improving experiences for underrepresented undergrads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atmospheric &amp; Oceanic Sciences *</td>
<td>• Developing a skills assessment and implementation plan</td>
<td>• Improving departmental climate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>• Improved transition to the major</td>
<td>• Engaging undergraduates in departmental community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science *</td>
<td>• Ensuring a coordinated curriculum across the major</td>
<td>• Improving student spaces and instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical, Computer, &amp; Energy Engineering *</td>
<td>• Developing learning outcomes and program assessment plan</td>
<td>• Improving departmental communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forestry &amp; Rangeland Services *</td>
<td>• Promoting evidence-based instructional practices</td>
<td>• Increasing diversity in the major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geological Sciences *</td>
<td>• Improving undergraduate employability</td>
<td>• Improving diversity and inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Development &amp; Family Studies *</td>
<td>• Restructuring the major to be more cohesive</td>
<td>• Developing and implementing a peer mentoring program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information Sciences</td>
<td>• Advancing student engagement</td>
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<td>Integrative Physiology *</td>
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<td>Linguistics</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physics *</td>
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<td>Political Science *</td>
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<td>Religious Studies *</td>
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Table 1. Departments and changes are not aligned. *Group continued catalyzing change after external facilitation ended.
DAT Profile: “Potions”

- Focus: Improving experiences for underrepresented undergraduates
- Membership: Four faculty, one postdoc, two staff, three graduate students, two undergrads
- Outcomes: Two reports on diversity and inclusion in department; monthly seminar on equity and inclusion; increased access to honors intro course; gender neutral bathrooms; welcome event for admitted students from underrepresented groups; became a permanent committee, 2019 President’s Diversity Award.

“[C]ompared to a regular faculty committee...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
DAT Profile: “Divination”

- Focus: Developing learning outcomes
- Membership: 2 undergraduate students, 1 graduate student, 3 faculty members, 2 student advisors, 1 staff member
- Outcomes: Development of department-level student learning outcomes; aligning these with learning outcomes for major’s courses; development of a department-approved plan for collecting learning outcome data.

“[P]roviding those models for change, we probably would’ve never seen that had we not been part of a DAT. And talking through that was also really good because it allowed us to see really how we function as a group, and then department, to make that change happen...It's also been good to have that space to ask someone who has that in their wheelhouse, just talking points or language, how to come up and draft that.”
- Divination Faculty Member
**DAT Profile: “Runes”**

- **Focus:** Ensuring a coordinated curriculum across the major
- **Membership:** One tenure-track faculty member, four lecturers
- **Outcomes:** Departmental approval to provide course releases for three instructors and to support curricular reform across the department; integrated case studies about topics of interest across courses; instructor support for ongoing faculty teaching development.

“[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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Driving department-wide curricular change</th>
<th>Catalyzing cultural and community change</th>
<th>Developing the change agency of DAT members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>improved student experience</td>
<td>increased representation</td>
<td>sustained change in departments</td>
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<td>improved retention</td>
<td>improved sense of belonging</td>
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<tr>
<td>accreditation support</td>
<td>better connections to employers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>increased departmental engagement</td>
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</tbody>
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Corbo et al. 2021. [Departmental Change: Sustaining Impacts](#).
Q&A

Use the Q&A Feature on Zoom to ask questions to the hosts
We’d like to hear from you!

Want to get updates, ask questions, or implement a DAT?

- Reach us through our contact form: https://tinyurl.com/DATContactForm

- Information and resources at our website: https://dat-project.org/
References


Wise, S.B. (2020, Jan. 9). *President’s Diversity Award goes to Physics’ R-Cubed Committee*. U. of Colorado at Boulder Physics Department Website.