

ASSETT Faculty Fellows Report 2018-2019 Cohort

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The project: FLC and DAT directed at implementing “learning by doing” curriculum

I set out to institute a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) in political science to assist the department in transitioning to a “learning by doing” curriculum. The original goal of the faculty learning committee was to get a group of faculty together to work on implementing active learning pedagogies into a course, with the goal that each participant would have a completed syllabus ready to go by the Fall 2019 semester.

Over the course of the year, the project transformed several times. First, it became clear after our first FLC meeting that faculty did not feel that the shared timeline of having a course ready for Fall 2019 was the best use of their time. So, I transitioned to providing individual consultations with faculty on implementing active learning pedagogies. Then, the project was folded into our Departmental Action Team (DAT), which is focused on helping the department implement the new “learning by doing” curriculum. I was one of the three applicants for political science participation in the DAT program, and worked with our facilitators to assemble the members of the DAT and worked with the DAT over the course of the year. The DAT has met seven times so far and brought together undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff to work on implementing the learning by doing curriculum. We completed a draft report of our progress, and will continue our work into next year.

Challenges in implementing the project

There were several challenges involved in implementing the project. First, there are a number of different initiatives going on in our department this year, which made it difficult for people to find the time and energy to devote to the initial FLC. Second, faculty are not all on the same page or timeline with regard to implementing a “learning by doing” curriculum, which is a plan that was adopted by the department last year in a departmental vote. Implementing the DAT turned out to be a great solution to trying to deal with these challenges. By getting students, faculty and staff together, and working to figure out both the goals and the logistics of implementing new pedagogical methods into the curriculum, we are in a much better place to move forward next year.

Accomplishments of the project

I was able to consult with four faculty members on implementing active learning pedagogies as part of my initial efforts at establishing a FLC. Ultimately, the FLC was folded into the DAT. We

have five faculty members, two graduate students, two undergraduate students, and one staff member actively participating in the DAT, along with our facilitators. The DAT worked to develop ground rules for our work, identify learning goals of implementing “learning by doing” pedagogies, identify challenges to curricular change, and generate a report on what is already being done and how to facilitate additional curricular change. The work of the DAT is planned to continue into next year.

Reflections on the project

Participating in implementing curricular change is difficult. I feel that the ASSETT faculty fellows program, including the pedagogical readings and brainstorming activities, gave me tools to help the department move forward in implementing the changes we have agreed to implement. Further, participation in the DAT has provided all of us who are a part of it with additional tools to move change forward, especially with an inclusive approach to decision-making. I have also learned a lot about resources available to the department to assist us in making our curricular reforms, and how to reach out to utilize those resources. Most of all, I have learned that curricular change requires working together in pursuit of common goals and a common vision for achieving the desired outcome.

Future actions

The work of the DAT to implement the “learning by doing” curriculum will continue into next year. We are currently working to identify additional data that we need to gather about who is currently engaged in active learning pedagogies, whether the work of transitioning is being fairly distributed among those who teach our courses (tenure-track faculty, instructors, lecturers, GPTIs and visitors), how we can best meet the needs of undergraduates, and what roles staff are and should play in the process. Next year, we will move forward with this information to make recommendations to the department on implementing change. Of particular interest so far among students and grad students are the ideas of tying the curriculum more clearly to activities and work in the broader world outside the academy, and implementing “open spaces” where faculty, graduate and undergraduate students work together to research and study important political problems of the day.