

“How Can You Justify That?”

Using Data and Evidence to Guide Tough
Curricular Decisions

Sound Familiar?

- “What do you mean I can’t offer English 1A for 10 units? What about my teaching load??”
- “But, college XYZ does / doesn’t do it that way!”
- “That’s not what X at the Chancellor’s Office said!”
- “What do you mean I can’t establish a new CTE program Vertical Zen Engineering?”
- “All the university programs do it this way.”
- “But, our professional organization requires us to...”

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- OR



Sound Familiar?

Have you ever experienced curriculum decisions being defended with vague references to regulation, appeals to authority, and tangentially related anecdotes?

It's not uncommon, unfortunately. Developing sound, objective rationale for curriculum decisions and handling conflict requires that committees learn how to move away from anecdote, persuasion, and personalities and towards data and evidence-based decision making.

Conflict is Normal!

Common points of conflict in Curriculum:

- Unit Inflation or Deflation
- Inter-departmental Turf Wars over Courses and Degrees
- General Education Category Assignment
- Course Relevance
- Impact on Other Programs / Degrees
- Discipline Authority Over Course Content
- Governing Regulations or Authority for Curriculum.
- Controversial Subject Matter, Texts, or Topics.

Conflict Scenarios

Scenario #1

The Allied Health faculty bring in a revision to Pharmacology 101. They are proposing to assign the course to the following disciplines: Emergency Medical Technologies, Health, LVN, Nursing, Nursing Science, Pharmacy Technology, and Psychiatric Technician. The proposal states that unless they assign the course to all of these disciplines, that they will not be able to find qualified faculty to teach the course. The committee rejects the proposal on first reading.

- What resources could the Allied Health faculty use to justify their proposal?
- What steps could the committee chair take to resolve this issue?
- What data and evidence could be used to find a reasonable solution?

Scenario #2

Faculty in the Aeronautics program submit a series of course and degree proposal that substantially alters the total units of each course and adds two new AS degrees. They are pushing for the proposals to be approved on an expedited schedule to meet new FAA regulations and are insisting the committee accept the revisions and new degree without question.

- How should the committee handle this request?
- What evidence could be used by the faculty, the committee, the administration, or the chair to verify the necessity of the proposal and timeline?
- What data could be used to review the request for a new degree?
- Who should be consulted in this process?

Scenario #3

An English course has been specifically created for students that hope to become elementary school teachers. The English department has established a prerequisite for this course based upon the skills the students need upon entry. The department chair of the future teacher program wants the English department to remove the prerequisite because it forces those students to take unnecessary units.

- What type of data or evidence would be used by the faculty and committee in this instance to reach a solution?
- How would this data be used?
- If a compromise was not possible, how would you prepare for the curriculum meeting knowing that there may be conflict?

Scenario #4

The GE subcommittee is tasked with reviewing all courses currently in the local GE pattern for alignment with recently changed category definitions. The subcommittee is tasked with developing a list that indicates which courses are to be removed, kept, or set aside for further review. Among the courses to be cut are several Music courses that rely on GE status to make enrollment minimums. The politically powerful Music faculty demand that the committee keep these courses in the local GE pattern, or else.

- What data or evidence could be used in this situation to support a decision one way or the other?

Scenario #5

Mathematics faculty submit a revision to MATH 200: Introduction to Statistics. This course is transfer-level math for non-majors and required for most degrees in the catalog. Math faculty propose increasing it from 3 to 4 units to match increased content and the addition of hybrid learning. The Counseling and Articulation representatives on the committee point out that this will have a big impact on existing degrees and the development of new degrees and vow to block approval in the committee, resulting in a chain of aggressive, angry emails between faculty on either side of the issue.

- What issues should be considered by the faculty and committee in working towards a solution?
- What evidence or data could be used in determining the best course of action?
- What resources or guidelines could provide external justification for a decision for or against?

Scenario #6

The Art faculty submit a list of their Active Participatory Courses that are “Related in Content” as per the revised regulations in Title 5 along with 35 new course proposals that add levels or variations to existing courses. Some members of the committee and the CIO are adamant that they have missed the intent of the regulation. The Art faculty insist that they created these on the advice of a document supplied by Erik Shearer at the Curriculum Regionals. The committee members respond that they are going on what David Morse told them at Plenary. The CIO insists that everyone else is wrong and that what Barry Russell told her at the CIO conference is the correct interpretation.

- What role could data or other objective evidence play in resolving this dispute?

Summary

Conflict Resolution and Good Curriculum Decisions

- Focus on underlying principles, not personalities;
- Emphasize interests rather than positions.
- Anticipate and defuse conflict before committee meetings.
- No email wars or discussions. Brown Act implications.
- Explanatory gymnastics usually indicate weak rationale.
- Rely on data and objective evidence to guide decisions, rather than anecdotes, argument, and appeals to authority.
- Provide specific references to code, regulation, CO guidelines, or best practice documents.
- Create local policies or processes that outline how contested proposals or topics will be handled.
- Strive for consistency and fairness in applying local policy and adhere to established process.

Resources

- Data Mart (<http://datamart.cccco.edu/datamart.aspx>)
- EDD Labor Statistics (<http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov>)
- ASSIST (www.assist.org and info.assist.org)
- ARCC (<http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/TechResearchInfoSys/Research/ARCC.aspx>)

Questions?

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