Designing the Course Transformation Academy at Kennesaw State University

Kristina DuRocher

Scott Reese

Based on experiences in Gateways to Completion (G2C) and institutional priorities, Kennesaw State University (KSU) created the Course Transformation Academy (CTA). This case study explores KSU's process in developing the CTA. Our model focuses on milestones to measure progress, as well as developing an adaptable model of three stages that is open to courses of any level. In addition, our model integrates mandatory administrative support, the participation of all department faculty, and the involvement of students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At Kennesaw State University (KSU), the creation of the Course Transformation Academy (CTA) was an opportunity to institutionalize a model shaped by the Gateways to Completion (G2C) process during a time of increased institutional interest in student retention and progression. Our below-peer-institutions-graduation- rates spawned a presidential task force which found that high-failure-rate classes were one component that affected student progression and degree completion.

Between 2015 and 2021, nine courses were involved in the G2C process (ACCT 2100, ACCT 2200, CHEM 1211, HIST 2112, POLS 1101, MATH 1111, MATH 1190, POLS 1101, and SCI 1101), allowing us to explore the multiple iterations used in implementing the G2C model and see which interpretations could be successful given our institutional context. Given our many examinations, KSU found similar strategies positively impacted students and reduced DFWI rates, particularly with our Accounting and Chemistry cohorts, while also identifying strategies that failed to achieve significant outcomes. This unevenness allowed us to focus our developing model in important ways.

METHODS

Our approach to developing the CTA began by treating each instance of the G2C model as a separate pilot. The CTA development group, (consisting of the authors plus the Executive Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and representatives from the Office for Academic Affairs), determined whether a given pilot course was considered a success (reduced DFWI rates meaningfully) or not and then deconstructed their processes to identify commonalities. This deconstructive engineering model allowed us to engage in an honest and comprehensive understanding necessary to build on our successes, while also investigating past failures. This allowed us to identify and structure our CTA model with new, preventive aspects in order to set the stage for success.

OUTCOMES

The Course Transformation Academy exists to provide the institution a way to intensely focus on courses. In an effort to be responsive to the students in their classrooms, it allows faculty the time, resources, and expertise necessary to effect meaningful course redesign with support from a committed administrative structure. Many aspects of our model will not look novel to anyone who has worked in a G2C environment with the "Self- Study" as the first stage of development followed by a second phase focused on "Preparing for Change," and a third phase on "Making Improvements." One key innovation in our CTA model is that each stage of the process is goal based, and timelines are set in collaboration with participating departments rather than imposed by external factors. While this change could result in lengthy times for some aspects, we found it necessary for authentic engagement, as well as creating an opportunity for all participants to develop the necessary mindset. Indeed, programs are allowed to step in and out of the process as they need and we work with departments to determine their best entry stage,

recognizing that it is important for programs to complete every part of the process. These stages reflect the specific outcomes we hoped to achieve for each part of the process.

The "Self-Study" stage is not dissimilar from that found in the G2C model. Our analysis found this process was vital for developing the mindsets necessary for participants to support the work of the redesign. The only differences in the outcome for the "Self-Study" from the G2C model was a slight shift in the desire for guidance in the data analysis to help faculty see where to explore the data in ways that mattered to them.

In the "Preparing for Change" stage, we explicitly filled in many of the gaps we saw from our less successful pilot programs in order to achieve our outcome of creating a deeper connection between curriculum and student achievement. In this stage, the faculty develop common learning outcomes for every instance of the course, build a common assessment tool that measures the learning the faculty care about, engage in curriculum mapping to ensure alignment across sequences, and go through professional development on evidence-based pedagogies, active learning, and inclusion.

In the "Making Improvements" stage, our outcome focuses on application. In this phase, faculty engage in course mapping to ensure alignment among assessments and pedagogies, pilot implementation of specific pedagogies, analyze and adjust based on those pilots, and ultimately build a plan for sustainability.

In addition to outcomes for each part of the process, we also sought to shift away from a cohort model. Our most successful G2C redesign programs were Accounting, which showed a 21% decrease in DFWI rates, and Chemistry, which showed a 14% decrease in DFWI rates. Our analysis found two key characteristics in both of these successful G2C programs: mandatory administrative involvement and the required participation of the entire department's faculty.

It was clear from our deconstruction analysis that mindset transformations needed to happen in administrators as much as in faculty. Requiring participation among leadership secures a commitment of time and attention, and such engagement is vital for achieving faculty buy-in and establishing sustainability. Necessitating an entire department's participation safeguards that the important work, often completed by a small committee of instructors, is inclusive of and supported by all faculty. In addition, this requirement assists with all stages as it ensures that all stakeholders are having the same conversation.

The newest addition to our model, the requirement for student voices, was an outgrowth of our institutional commitment to inclusion. As the overall goal of the CTA is to improve student learning through collective action, the most important voice in that process was that of the students.

PLANS FOR CONTINUATION AND EXPANSION

The CTA is just one part of our many university conversations about student success, but it is one of the only spaces where faculty, administrators, and students collaborate to have conversations centered around student success, pedagogy, and curriculum. It is currently the only model presented that has had demonstrated impact. While we continue to implement the current model with our inaugural courses, we are also expanding and improving the model as new departments are recruited. The campus discussion around student success has seen increased interest among disparate parts of campus.

LESSONS LEARNED AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

As the CTA is in its early stages, we do not have any data yet from our early participants, but we anticipate a similar success to those course cohorts that experience achievement in G2C. Our Course Transformation Academy wraps important change elements, learning science, institutional support, and inclusion around the G2C process to positively impact our students and ensure thy achieve academic success.

Key takeaways that shaped how our G2C program became the Course Transformation Academy:

1. We recognized the need for more of an organizational change to our process to have meaningful and lasting impact.

2. Data of success is important, but not sufficient and we need an institutional focus for sustained improvement.

3. Faculty are content experts, but not usually learning or curriculum experts and need considerable support to transform what they know into meaningful learning environments that support students from all backgrounds.

4. The student voice is routinely overlooked in the curriculum process. We strongly believe that including students in this process adds a missing dynamic and is a central tenet of our ongoing work. The faculty work of teaching and curriculum is not something that we do to students, but with students.

It is clear that our CTA follows the G2C process at its heart. Our analysis of the last six years of work demonstrates that the G2C approach can be successful, but for KSU to expand upon that success requires the process be placed inside of a change model and supported at all levels.