Changing the Conversation About Productivity:

Strategies for Engaging Faculty and Institutional Leaders

A Report by Public Agenda for the Lumina Foundation's Higher Education Productivity Initiative

PUBLIC AGENDA

Introduction

This report builds on and extends Public Agenda's ongoing research on the attitudes of various stakeholder groups toward higher education reform.[1] Here we explore the purpose and promise of more effective engagement of those stakeholders who—at first blush, at least—appear to express the deepest resistance to the productivity agenda: faculty. The report's driving questions are, what does it take to bridge the most pervasive divides in perception between productivity advocates and faculty, and what can be accomplished through deeper, more strategic engagement?[2]

In the course of exploring strategies to engage faculty as important partners in the pursuit of greater productivity, we have found it necessary to expand the scope of our inquiry somewhat to include institutional leaders more broadly. Because effective leadership is critical for driving and sustaining change efforts, it is important that faculty engagement be viewed as a critical component of a larger institutional engagement effort that also includes college presidents, senior administrators, trustees, chancellors and the like.

Faculty, and sometimes college leadership as well, have often been viewed by reformers as tangential to the development and enactment of productivity policies. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that these "frontline" stakeholders in higher education are, in fact, critical to the success of any productivity agenda. There is growing awareness among many productivity advocates that engaging such key stakeholders in strategic ways at each step in the policy process—from development to implementation to sustainability—is key to generating the sense of shared purpose necessary for long-term success. Still, many questions remain about how best to engage those stakeholders who are typically most resistant to productivity agendas.

The insights and strategies summarized in this report are drawn from three focus groups with faculty at both two-year and four-year institutions and roughly 25 in-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted with college presidents, higher education researchers, representatives of collective bargaining associations, disciplinary associations, accrediting bodies, professional development organizations serving faculty, and representatives from a wide range of higher education consortia.[3]

Regardless of the type of stakeholder interviewed, the questions we asked revolved around the same themes: Can faculty be more effectively engaged around the productivity agenda? Should they be? If so, what would more effective engagement of faculty look like, and what is to be gained? When conducting focus groups with faculty at both two-year and four-year institutions, we explored alternative approaches to framing the productivity agenda, different strategies for opening up constructive dialogue with faculty about productivity and different avenues for faculty participation in the agenda in order to identify the conditions under which faculty were able to move past their more predictable negative reactions and begin to view themselves as co-owners of this difficult work.

As a result of these conversations, we believe that faculty can and must be engaged more effectively in the productivity agenda for lasting gains to be made. Most important, our findings suggest that more effective engagement is indeed possible and that the current economic and educational climate is conducive to the development of several particularly promising strategies. This is not to say that the job of bridging the gaps between faculty and more natural allies of the productivity agenda will be simple or easy, but evidence suggests that establishing a shared sense of purpose and a constructive working relationship with faculty is both necessary and possible.

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[1] See, for example, the following Public Agenda reports: *Squeeze Play* (2009, 2010); *Campus Commons* (2009); *The Iron Triangle* (2008).

[2] The Lumina Foundation for Education's Productivity Initiative centers on their "big goal" to increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025. To achieve Goal 2025, Lumina and their partners/stakeholders are focusing on three policy priorities: (1) increase and reward completion; (2) generate and reinvest savings; and (3) educate and train in affordable ways.

[3] While three new faculty focus groups were conducted in 2010 for this memo (in Minneapolis, MN, Austin, TX, and Phoenix, AZ), we also drew on the set of faculty focus groups conducted in 2009 for our *Campus Commons* report. Also, to encourage candor, we guaranteed individual interviewees that we would not directly attribute quotes to individuals in the report. Instead, we provide generalized attributions by stakeholder type and provide a complete list of interviewees at the end of the report.

The Findings in Brief

I. A Ground Map of Effective Engagement

Clearing a Path: Overcoming persistent caricatures, avoiding the "P" word

Among the key obstacles to constructively engaging faculty in the hard work of increasing higher education productivity are 1) entrenched caricatures on the parts of reformers and faculty alike; and 2) the word *productivity* itself. These obstacles tend to obscure the common ground that does exist across divides and therefore need to be faced head-on in order to create the conditions in which such common ground can be used as a foundation for progress.

Common Ground: Change is inevitable, engagement is essential, leadership is key

Despite a widespread view of faculty as "living in the past," our research suggests that faculty do, in large measure, recognize the need for reform. It is true that many faculty members are deeply concerned about what these changes portend, but most agree that nothing is to be gained by denying the necessity of fundamental change in the way higher education works in this country.

In addition, the most vocal proponents and critics of productivity policies share the view that new, more robust forms of faculty and institutional engagement are essential for making progress, and both sides accept that current patterns and norms of communication and engagement with faculty about reform are insufficient. Finally, when asked what effective engagement looked like and entailed, we were told repeatedly by faculty, institutional leaders and productivity advocates alike that committed and skillful leadership is critical to building the trust necessary for progress.

Making a Start: Framing the conversation for faculty

A core principle of any effective engagement effort is: Begin where people are, not where you want them to be. In the case of faculty, this means engaging faculty first around those issues that they care most deeply about and building from there. The issues of student success and educational quality are among those that faculty care most deeply about, and these can, if handled carefully, serve as effective starting points for engagement around issues of productivity.

II. Engaging Faculty Around Lumina's Productivity Policy Priorities

Successful implementation of performance funding policies is more likely when faculty are engaged early

Given the serious challenges around implementing and sustaining performance funding policies, and given the role that faculty can play in derailing these efforts in the implementation phase, taking the time to engage faculty from the outset may well be worth the effort in the long run.

Tuning and related work as a natural vehicle for faculty engagement

Because such projects as tuning and articulation connect fundamentally with those issues that are of greatest concern to faculty (teaching and learning, student success, the quality of a degree), they offer a natural process through which to engage faculty in activities related to increasing productivity.

"Back-office" efficiencies increase productivity and facilitate faculty engagement

Faculty resistance to productivity efforts targeting the classroom (curriculum and delivery) will be easier to overcome if serious efforts are first made to reduce costs and improve efficiencies on the administrative/systems operations side of the cost equation. Taking the time to communicate to faculty the efforts made to improve back-office efficiencies can serve as a positive point of departure for constructive engagement around the more threatening issues that affect faculty.

III. Promising Strategies for Engaging Faculty

In the course of our conversations, we heard a wide range of interesting ideas and examples of ways to better engage faculty and institutions in the difficult work of productivity. The following is a compilation of several that, in our estimation, show strong potential:

Target younger faculty as early adaptors

Younger faculty appear more willing to experiment with alternative ways of structuring their work lives and are more receptive to concepts of productivity (properly framed). They tend to be more open to the idea that the responsibility for student success should be shouldered as much by the institutions and faculty as by the students themselves. In addition, they seem to have deeper awareness of the pressures and challenges that derail their students. They also consistently express more openness to new uses of technology (beyond distance learning).

Engage faculty outside of their departments
The tendency, especially at four-year institutions, toward faculty isolation and compartmentalization reinforces an inward-looking culture that makes it more difficult to engage faculty around reform. Avenues for engaging faculty outside of their departments, such as faculty consultative councils within institutions or systems, accreditation bodies and disciplinary associations, are promising for generating awareness of, and buy-in for, productivity measures.

In the most difficult settings, focus engagement efforts "on the margins" in the early going
Some college presidents at four-year institutions suggest focusing efforts on the margins (those areas of the college serving greater numbers of nontraditional students) in order to pave the way for and inspire greater openness to changes in the traditional core.

Pay special attention to the opportunities presented by two-year institutions
While engaging faculty at all types of institutions is going to be critical for sustaining productivity policies, leadership at two-year institutions appear to be more open-minded about productivity efforts because of their stronger natural focus on learning outcomes and their more likely connections to the labor market. Moreover, faculty at two-year institutions, particularly those in developmental education, are more open to creative, experimental strategies for helping more students succeed than is typical of their peers at four-year institutions.

IV. Effective Engagement in Action: The University System of Maryland

The University System of Maryland's Effectiveness and Efficiency initiative models an approach to productivity that respects faculty and relies on their consistent engagement to drive and sustain change. A short list of key lessons drawn from Maryland includes the following:

- Start by giving faculty and institutions credit for what they are already doing and build from there.
- Build trust by focusing first on systems operations instead of academics and take the time to make the case to faculty in terms they can relate to.
- Inspire participation by appealing to faculty interests and acknowledging faculty concerns.
- Provide real support and incentives to faculty to allow for their meaningful participation in implementing productivity policies.

A quick scan of the chart on the following page provides a snapshot of the standard stumbling blocks that have become familiar to anyone invested in the difficult work of increasing higher education productivity in the United States today. Persistent gaps in perception around the language and agenda of "productivity" continue to be serious obstacles to enacting, implementing and sustaining the policies aimed at significantly increasing the number of individuals with meaningful postsecondary credentials in a climate of ever-shrinking resource pools.

The long-term success of ambitious change efforts like Lumina's Productivity Initiative depends, at least to some extent, on the development of a shared sense of purpose among stakeholders who may and do often start in different places and experience the challenges differently. But this sense of shared purpose will not emerge spontaneously on the heels of policy change, nor will it materialize as the result of even the most rigorous messaging campaigns alone. Instead, lasting change requires a firmer foundation of buy-in and participation that results most often from a combination of sound policy development and implementation, multichannel communications efforts and authentic dialogue and problem solving among key stakeholders.

The Findings in Detail

The Current State of the Debate on Productivity

The chart below summarizes characteristic perspectives among different higher education stakeholders around the issue of productivity and suggests why more focus on dialogue, engagement and consensus building is crucial for sustainable progress. This summary draws on interviews conducted for various research reports produced by Public Agenda in recent years.

Stakeholder Group	Understanding of the Problem	Possible Solutions
State higher education officials	See higher education institutions as not producing enough graduates.	*Productivity*: Asking hard questions about things such as class size, curriculum delivery, back-office efficiencies. *Focus on retention*: Easier to keep students than to get them. *Incentives*: Incentivize schools for students completing programs, not for enrolling in programs. *Technology*: Expand the use of technology in delivering curriculum.
College and university presidents*	See institutions as caught between declining state revenues and rising expenses. *Result:* Either higher prices, decreased availability, or lower quality.	*Productivity*: Colleges have already done most of what can be done; only marginal efficiency gains possible. *Redefine education as public good:* Deserves massive increase in funding (for example, portion of stimulus package).
Higher education CFOs†	See institutions as caught between declining state revenues and rising expenses.	*Productivity can be increased.* *Willingness to explore alternatives such as larger classes, distance education; new ideas should all be on the table.*
Faculty	Seldom focus initially on declining revenues and increasing costs, or sometimes blame increasing costs on higher administrative costs. Major problem: quality. › Declining quality of incoming students. › Too many unprepared students going to college, drags down quality for good students. › Administrative pressure to retain/pass students leads to lowering standards.	Skeptical of many solutions proposed above, fearing they will decrease quality. Concerns include: › Rewarding completion: More graduates does not necessarily mean more educated individuals. › Business models are inappropriate for higher education. › Productivity means asking faculty to do more with less. › Distance education requires more work from faculty, works well only for the most motivated students. *Raise standards; produce better-educated individuals—more important to produce fewer better-educated graduates, even if it means fewer people will have degrees.*
Public‡	Students and individuals are caught between growing sense that a college education is absolutely necessary for success and growing fear that increasing college tuitions/fees make college out of reach.	Protect access to higher education. High support for measures that protect access. Growing sense that colleges are inefficient and can educate more students without necessarily needing more money.

* Observations about presidents' views are based on *The Iron Triangle* (2008).

† Observations about financial officers' and faculty's views are based on *Campus Commons* (2009).

‡ Public opinion findings are based on surveys conducted for *Squeeze Play* (2009).

I. A Ground Map of Effective Engagement

What does it take to change the conversation around productivity and find ways to engage faculty as partners in problem solving? Having identified the gaps in different stakeholders' starting-point attitudes, we believe the most natural place to begin is by 1) identifying what it takes to clear a path for constructive dialogue; 2) unearthing existing common ground; and 3) determining where and how to begin to build toward shared purpose and ownership.

Clearing a Path

In our conversations with faculty and institutional leaders, we focused initially on identifying the most serious obstacles to constructive dialogue about productivity and on strategies for mitigating those obstacles. Two key obstacles dominate: entrenched caricatures and the word *productivity* itself. These obstacles tend to obscure the tentative common ground that does exist across divides and therefore need to be faced head-on in order to create the conditions where such common ground can be used as a foundation for progress.

Persistent Caricatures (on All Sides) Obscure Openings for Progress

Consider the following quotes by productivity advocates:

> When faculty complain about productivity, all they're really saying is, "We're mad that we don't get to do things the way we've always done them."

> Most faculty don't think at all about student success or about what they're equipping their students to do. They really only care about their own narrow subject.

> Higher education just doesn't think about how to be more productive. They're stuck in the past.

While there is certainly truth in these views, as there is in most caricatures, these standard and scriptable accusations leveled by productivity (and other reform) advocates tend to obscure areas around which shared understanding and common purpose may be generated. Some advocates are beginning to see the problem with this approach, saying things like, "Calcified conversations about recalcitrant faculty are really problematic and wrongheaded, and it's very important to genuinely engage faculty."

These types of faculty caricatures may be useful at times to prod awareness about the necessity for change, but in a context where there is already widespread and growing awareness of the inevitability of change, this approach is less useful. In our conversations with faculty and representatives of faculty consortia and collective bargaining associations, we asked several questions aimed specifically at getting a sense of the depth of faculty and institutional recalcitrance. As we listened carefully to faculty and their representatives, we learned that there is a greater openness to change and a greater desire to be included in the processes driving that change than the caricatured positions suggest.

> The assumption—and I've heard it said verbatim—that faculty don't think about how we teach or about whether or not our students are succeeding... is a complete falsity. That's just not true. This is what we do every day. I mean, it keeps us up at night trying to figure out how we can teach more effectively and help our students succeed.
>
> ~ *Community college faculty member*

> When you hear faculty talk about the challenges, about being flooded with unprepared students or about other challenges, don't just assume that they're resisting change. Their lives have changed substantially... and they are willing to change more, but you are not going to get the change you want by bashing, starving and ignoring them. You need to listen and really engage them on the ground.
>
> ~ *University faculty member*

There also seems to be growing awareness among some faculty of the need to communicate strategically:

> It's true [that being inundated with unprepared students is a root problem], but you cannot talk to the administration in those words because they check out and say, "This is the faculty problem again. You want to blame the student." You cannot bring this argument to the table because they use it as an excuse to not listen to us. And we should be heard. So we have to come at it differently... you cannot use that narrative.
>
> ~ *Community college faculty member*

At the same time, faculty-held caricatures of the productivity agenda and its advocates are also quite damaging to constructive dialogue. The following quotes are representative of the kinds of predictable negative reactions we heard from faculty members when we asked about the value of productivity efforts:

> Producing degrees is not the same thing as producing Toyotas. Educated people aren't widgets, but that's how [productivity advocates] think.
>
> ~ *Community college faculty member*

> Sure, we can churn out degrees like widgets if that's all they want, but I can't see how that's going to accomplish the goal of a more educated population.... Seems like it's just about "cram 'em in, shove 'em out."
>
> ~ *University faculty member*

Now consider how advocates of productivity themselves describe their efforts:

> We live in a world where it is no longer possible to get a good job with a high school diploma, and we are simply failing too many of our nation's young people when we say that we can't do more to ensure that students have not only the means to access higher education, but also the tools and support they need to accomplish their degrees without going into crippling debt.... This is a moral imperative.
>
> ~ *State chancellor of higher education*

> For too long, higher education has put it on the backs of students to fail or succeed, and it's high time that colleges and universities realize that they bear some responsibility for ensuring that their students do more than just enter college; they have to make sure they're able to succeed.... This is what productivity means to me.
>
> ~ *College president*

As we engaged faculty and institutional leaders in dialogue around these ideas, we found that it was possible to help people move past their caricatured positions, a point we'll take up in some detail later. Most important, once they were able to get beyond those scriptable reactions, their conversations became far more constructive and creative.

The Word Productivity *Is Far More Problematic for Faculty Than the Goals*

While advocates of productivity are understandably invested in the idea that *productivity* is not a dirty word, they may be well advised to focus less on seeking acceptance of the word than on creating space for a shared sense of purpose around the goals of productivity.

We found in our conversations that the word *productivity* itself created unnecessary static that prevented faculty from moving past their most simplistic knee-jerk reactions. When we pressed respondents to engage the ideas themselves rather than the word, we were given some instructive feedback by a community college president who strongly believes in the productivity cause:

> The minute I hear the word *productivity*, I get nervous and I'm one of *them*, one of the people who are totally on board with the goals and policies associated with producing more degrees at a lower cost. If I get wary when I hear the word *productivity*, just imagine how a typical faculty member responds. It's like the worst possible word you can use if you want to get faculty buy-in for the ideas.
>
> ~ *Community college president*

Our conversations with "average" faculty supported this assessment:

> When I hear the word *productivity*, I think about producing widgets and I just tune out.... But if you want to talk about helping more students get their degrees more efficiently, and about the things that may need to change in the classroom to make that happen.... I'm open to that conversation.... I want my students to succeed... and I'm really bothered by the debt they're carrying.
>
> ~ *University faculty member*

However, while the word *productivity* conjures images of assembly lines and can easily be reduced to the idea of working much harder for less pay, the ideas associated with helping many more students accomplish their goals in a timely fashion are not inherently objectionable to faculty. Taking our cues from comments like the one above, we experimented with different ways of stimulating constructive conversations with faculty about important productivity measures without actually using the term *productivity* and found that faculty were quite open to discussing a wide range of important and relevant ideas. For example:

- Faculty are bothered by the high level of student *debt*, and this concern is an excellent opening for engaging them around issues of *cost and completion*, including strategies for accelerating completion.
- Following on the last point, a good number of faculty said they were open to the idea of three-year degrees that involve *year-round teaching*.
- Many faculty were also open to conversations about creative uses of technology for transforming the way curriculum is delivered. [4]

Our point is that it can be more important to stimulate the right kind of thinking and conversations than it is to ensure that people use any particular word or phrase and that there do appear to us to be ways of accomplishing the former.

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> *~ Community college president*

Common Ground

When it comes to bridging the gaps between faculty and advocates of productivity, there are three particularly important areas of common ground that can serve as anchors for generating this shared sense of purpose. Both the champions of productivity and its most trenchant critics appear to agree on three points:

Fundamental Changes in Higher Education Are Inevitable, and the Status Quo Is Untenable

Despite a widespread view of faculty as "living in the past," our research suggests that there are actually very few heads in the sand about the changes that are happening and those that are still to come. It is true that many faculty members are deeply concerned about what these changes portend, while others are heartened by what they see happening, but everyone agrees that nothing is to be gained by denying the necessity of fundamental change in the way higher education works in this country.

> I see that the entire structure of higher education is changing. There's no sense in denying that… there's no way that costs can continue to rise as they have. When I was in college, I could work during the summer and essentially pay for my tuition and books. We live in a different world now, and it's disastrous for young people in this country.… It cannot go on this way. Things must change.
>
> *~ Liberal arts faculty member at a flagship university*

> I think people are now finally waking up to reality; diminishing state appropriations, fiscal crises in municipalities, and the way higher ed does things is clearly not efficient. If you're going to run institutions effectively, you can't have committee meetings on top of committee meetings, and you can't view the year as beginning in September and ending in May.
>
> *~ Community college president*

> We are not like the newspaper industry and the auto industry, unable or unwilling to adapt to new realities. Our industry has changed dramatically, and it looks totally different today than it looked 30 years ago. We know more change is coming and that it has to happen.
>
> *~ American Association of University Professors (AAUP) official*

[4] More specifically, we found widespread skepticism about technology when it is reduced to "distance learning," which many felt does not save time or money, but there was a great deal of openness (particularly among younger faculty) to experimenting with technology to transform what happens in the classroom.

Productivity advocates are concerned with producing more degrees, faculty and institutions see that their world is changing (consumer demands, untenable costs for students—books as much as tuition—fundamental changes in the type of student coming in the door, particularly at two-year institutions), and this shared appreciation of the inevitability of change is a useful point of departure for generating the kinds of conversations that can lead to acceptance and even buy-in of new ways of doing things.

Engagement Isn't a Luxury, It's a Necessity

The most vocal proponents and critics of productivity policies share the view that new, more robust forms of engagement are essential for making progress, and both sides accept that current patterns and norms of communication about and participation in change efforts are insufficient.

Faculty and other skeptical institutional leaders, even when they express hostility and frustration, still say they want a place at the table, because they understand the changes will be happening with or without them. Purely out of self-interest, they would prefer to be on board, where they have a chance to participate in crafting and implementing solutions rather than simply being steamrolled.

> We know dramatic change is happening and inevitable.... Some of us, like me, are gravely concerned about what these changes will mean for knowledge in this country, but it doesn't do us any good to sit on the sidelines.... We have important contributions to make and should be at the table.
>
> *~ Liberal arts faculty member at a flagship university*

> I'm absolutely on board with the productivity agenda, but I think that its main advocates need to get grounded in the cultural impediments. Not to seriously address these questions is sort of crazy, and faculty or institutional engagement is about addressing the cultural questions and issues, so it's essential.
>
> *~ University president*

Even those who say that faculty resistance will ultimately be crushed by the economic realities of our time also say that sustainable progress requires finding a way to make faculty part of the solution. We asked all of our interviewees and focus group respondents whether or not they thought lasting progress could be made in the absence of serious efforts to engage faculty. The following quotes from advocates of productivity are typical of the responses we got:

> Gains in productivity will be made only at the margins if you don't engage faculty.... The faculty are at the heart of teaching and learning, and I think we need faculty involvement to produce any significant kind of reform.
>
> *~ Financial officer at a university*

> Better decisions will be made if faculty are engaged from the get-go. If hard decisions are made, at least everyone will be making them. When that happens, I think people can then live with it even if they aren't delighted with the outcome.
>
> *~ Community college president*

> Faculty can be annoying in how they can slow things down, but you get better decisions in the long run if you do involve faculty in deep ways. It doesn't ensure you'll make the right decision, but by involving faculty at the beginning of these processes, there is a better chance of achieving the goal.
>
> *~ Productivity advocate at a national higher education consortium*

The positions expressed in the quotes above, though originating from different motives, are surprisingly close in spirit to those views expressed by faculty. While faculty we spoke with were wary, even hostile, in their initial reactions to productivity agendas (especially when framed using the traditional *productivity* language), they still consistently expressed a desire to be included in the conversation. Overall, while the common ground represented by widespread agreement that change is inevitable and that engagement is essential should not be overstated and taken to mean that faculty are on the verge of becoming passionate partners in this work, it nevertheless represents an important opening that leaders can use to begin a more productive dialogue.

Effective Leadership Is Critical for Building Trust and Driving Change

Trust can be a major stumbling block in moving past caricatured positions and identifying paths forward, and we were told by both faculty and productivity advocates that it is impossible to overestimate the value of effective leadership. From faculty, institutional leaders and system leaders alike, we were told that effective leadership balances strong vision, deep respect, skillful communication and collaborative practices.

> An indispensable element of the success here has been the leadership of the chancellor, who understands faculty concerns and was himself a researcher. He's able to communicate this message in a way that gets people to the table and encourages the kinds of participation from administrators that builds trust with faculty. His leadership has helped sustain the enthusiasm, even when things are challenging.
>
> *~ Chair of a state system faculty council, anthropology professor*

> I want to stress the importance of the leadership of governing boards in [the productivity work]. They are critical players.... Boards have to see to it that accountability measures are being pursued and they have a core role to play in cultivating a broad vision. But they shouldn't go off on their own or just proceed in a top-down manner. They need to be collaborative and skilled in the art of participatory governance, and this is where faculty engagement is vital.
>
> *~ Chancellor, State System of Higher Education*

> Leadership is not everything, but I can't stress how important it is. The chancellor genuinely respects faculty... and his decision to put people like me in front of this work who have been faculty themselves... and who understand and respect faculty concerns is just really smart.
>
> *~ Associate vice-chancellor*

Making a Start: Framing the Conversation for Faculty

After a good-faith effort to clear the path and unearth common ground, how do we make a start on engaging faculty as partners in the productivity agenda? A core principle of any effective engagement effort applies here: Begin where people are, not where you want them to be. In the case of faculty, this means engaging faculty first around those issues they care most deeply about and build from there. A number of issues that faculty care deeply about can serve as toeholds for engagement around issues of productivity, and they coalesce around two first-tier issues: student success and educational quality.

Student Success

Based on our conversations with faculty and institutional leaders, the most effective path for opening up constructive dialogue with faculty about productivity will likely begin with a focus on student success. One university president captured the point precisely:

> For faculty, "student success" is the cognitive framework that makes the most sense to them, and it's something that most do care deeply about despite their griping. If you jettison the word *productivity* when you're dealing with faculty and instead use the language of student success to frame issues of retention, acceleration and completion of degrees, you'll be much more likely to reduce resistance and get faculty buy-in around the core productivity agenda.
>
> *~ University president*

"Student success" is a framework that resonates with faculty's concerns around teaching and learning and is a natural vehicle for beginning conversations about the role faculty can and should play in helping more students complete degrees in a timely fashion. As we noted earlier, faculty we spoke with also expressed deep concerns about the debt students carry and how this debt may affect students' success in school and life. While they are separate issues, and therefore represent separate avenues of engagement, the intersection where the issue of debt connects with student success may represent an especially promising point of entry for important conversations with faculty about productivity policies and practices.

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>
> ~ *University president*

It is important to note here that while the "student success" framework overlaps the productivity agenda, it is not identical with it, and there can be a tendency for poorly framed and managed conversations to stray afield of the core issues. However, a student success framework does create space for engagement around key productivity themes of retention and completion, and because most faculty recognize that revenues (whether from state or student) are limited, it is possible to talk about retention and completion in the context of limited resources and cost-effectiveness. In short, our research suggests that while the risk of losing focus with the student success framework is real, it can be negotiated, while the alternative (forcing the productivity framework from the outset) is most often a nonstarter with faculty.[5]

Educational Quality

We found in our *Campus Commons* research that faculty most often object to productivity initiatives on the grounds that it will diminish educational quality. We probed this issue to find out more about what quality means to faculty and whether or not they can be effectively engaged as "guardians" of quality in some constructive way.

In doing so, we found that while faculty inevitably express concern about the negative impacts on the quality of teaching and learning that the goal of increasing degree attainment and optimizing productivity could have, they have very few opportunities to think deeply about what quality actually means. Our impression was that there is a deep-seated and authentic concern here, but not much of a developed perspective, a situation that is ripe for engagement.

Creating the space for faculty to engage issues of educational quality may prove a powerful strategy for bridging the gaps between them and productivity proponents. We found, for instance, that faculty did not simply equate quality with smaller classes, subject content mastery and traditional teaching methods. Rather, they were willing, and even eager, to talk about quality in ways that connect directly with the productivity agenda.

In one conversation, a community college president described how his institution was able to overcome a difficult situation with faculty by engaging them as guardians of quality. In this setting, the college initiated a program (akin to the Western Governors model) of granting credentials in a technical program based on demonstrated proficiency rather than accrual of credits, and the faculty initially viewed this as a betrayal of their profession. As the president described it:

> [The faculty members in this department] were furious about this until we enlisted them to review the guidelines for proficiency and gave them the job of reviewing student portfolios.... It's important that we paid them to play this role, but it's also important that we gave them a role of authority in a situation that initially felt out of their control.

By empowering faculty members as the guardians of quality, this college was able to make substantial gains in productivity while bringing the faculty on board. This theme will be explored further in Section II, below, on how "tuning" and articulation work can be a natural path through which faculty become engaged in productivity work.

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[5] Our findings here echo the recent CommWorks focus group report on Texas, in which they found that student success (as it connects to the Texas-specific Closing the Gaps initiative) is an effective strategic framework to use in marshaling support for performance funding.

II. Engaging Faculty Around Lumina's Productivity Policy Priorities

In this section, we explore the prospects for engaging faculty in the major planks of Lumina's productivity platform, beginning with incentivizing completion via higher education funding reform.

Performance Funding: The Argument for Stakeholder Engagement in Policy Work

In our report *Campus Commons*, we found that most faculty recoil at the idea that colleges and universities should be evaluated and incentivized by the number of students who complete courses or degrees, and our conversations with faculty for this memo confirmed those earlier findings.

> When you fund for completion, what are the incentives you're setting up? That a place reduces its requirements and shuttles students through so that their graduation rates go up. Are people better educated? Does simply producing more degrees at a lower cost without regard for whether or not students are actually being educated make us more competitive with parts of the world that we've really got to compete with down the road? I don't think the answer is yes.
>
> *~ Liberal arts faculty member at a flagship university*

> [Performance funding] can have really perverse consequences for institutions like ours.... Those institutions that can be selective will have no reason to take a gamble on students who aren't a sure thing, while colleges with open enrollment will continue to lose out.... That's a recipe for disaster. How will we ever meet the challenge of educating that massive population of first-generation and lower-income students with this kind of approach?
>
> *~ Community college faculty member*

But does faculty buy-in really matter to a state policy question such as this? Arguably, as one researcher we spoke with explained, it does—especially when one's horizon extends beyond what it takes to pass a policy to encompass what is required to implement and sustain it:

> Performance funding is so subject to the ups and downs of the revenue cycle, and nobody has been able to insulate it. But there is reason to believe that real engagement—meaning early and regular—of key stakeholders might be an important contributor to the insulation.
>
> There are three levels to the institutional actors that need to be engaged—there's the state board, then there's top administrators within institutions, then there are faculty and staff. The first two are critical for getting the policy passed. Faculty begin to become important as a source of complaint during the phase when policy is getting passed, but they are crucial when it comes to implementation.

It is important to build the structure of consultation into the very design, implementation and ongoing evaluation of any performance funding policy:

> The states that have done a better job with this are the states where performance funding has weathered political and fiscal volatility better.
>
> *~ Performance funding researcher*

Tuning and Related Work as a Natural Vehicle for Faculty Engagement

"Tuning" is a process for determining, across institutions, what a degree in a given field actually represents—that is, the knowledge and competencies that students should master. Because tuning, along with related articulation processes, addresses those things that faculty are most concerned with (teaching and learning), it is a natural "setting" and process through which to engage faculty in activities relevant to increasing productivity. Moreover, the lessons the Initiative learns about how to engage faculty effectively in tuning will inevitably be relevant to engaging faculty in other aspects of the agenda.

We spoke with leaders of tuning work in Minnesota, where tuning is taking place around the disciplines of biology and graphic design. We learned important lessons that apply to both states engaged in tuning and states that remain focused on the substantially less ambitious but still daunting work of crafting clear articulation agreements between two-year and four-year institutions.

> We had to start not with lectures and presentations by experts, but instead with having faculty talk to each other about how they determine learning outcomes.
>
> *~ Minnesota tuning coordinator*

In Minnesota, efforts were initially stymied by lack of adequate front-end engagement of faculty. Tuning experts, like other experts, sometimes tend to think that simply imparting information about what tuning is and why it matters will be enough to generate faculty buy-in. Unfortunately, this was not the case:

> When we initially pulled our teams together [department chairs in the two fields from two-year and four-year institutions around the state] for a tuning conference, there was a lot of hostility. People felt like, "Who the hell are you coming in and telling me what I need to do! Do you even know what it is that I'm doing now?" So we had to step back and create space for faculty to engage each other in dialogue about things that matter to them... and of course, those things are precisely the things that tuning is about. But we had to start not with lectures and presentations by experts but instead with having faculty talk to each other about how they determine learning outcomes... and these are individuals who have never had a chance to talk to others in their discipline from other institutions.
>
> *~ Minnesota tuning coordinator*

By starting with listening and dialogue instead of lecturing (a fundamental principle of sound stakeholder engagement), the team in Minnesota created the space for faculty to develop a sense of ownership over the process and to drive the work themselves. As a result, they said they've seen some amazing progress being made, both in terms of cross-institution learning between two-year and four-year institutions and in terms of the substantive impacts of the collaboration.

> It's been pretty amazing to watch faculty learn from one another and to see the stereotypes about two-year institutions dissolve.... What's been most interesting is how the faculty have come up with ingenious and simple solutions to articulation and transfer issues that the legislature has been struggling with unsuccessfully for years.
>
> *~ Minnesota tuning coordinator*

In states where tuning is not yet on the agenda, concerted efforts are still under way to craft articulation agreements to smooth the transfer of credits between institutions. In these settings, we were told that "the states that are making the most progress are the ones that have found ways to engage faculty creatively and consistently." We've heard a number of comments echoing this statement:

> There's a stigma for four-year faculty who think that two-years are inferior, but what I have found is once faculty from a four-year college sit down with faculty from a two-year college and start talking about what each does, they realize that they're considerably closer—and of course it's usually the four-year faculty doing most of the learning and saying, "Oh, you guys actually teach that, too?"
>
> *~ State-level faculty senate representative, career and technical colleges*

What the quotes above suggest is that faculty engagement can take on many different forms and can include faculty within disciplines engaging one another across institution type in order to make progress on core issues of productivity. When approached skillfully, tuning and articulation can be mechanisms for increasing productivity itself and also the means of engaging faculty in the broader productivity agenda.

> You can't present productivity efforts as the flavor of the month from the administration. In our efforts where there are these kinds of challenges, we work to root the initiative in the work that faculty are already doing by engaging them early, and then we push to take things to the next level.
> *~ Community college president*

Back-Office Efficiencies: A Classic "First Things First" Issue for Faculty and Their Representatives

While faculty do not have a direct role to play in determining how to best streamline administrative functions, the need for greater efficiencies in administrative operations is an area that is of great concern to some faculty and to those organizations which represent faculty interests, such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).

The AAUP and similar entities that represent faculty interests, regardless of whether they have collective bargaining power or not, can offer organized opposition to productivity efforts that they view as undermining the teaching function and/or academic freedom in higher education. One of the chief arguments that we heard again and again in our conversations with representatives from these organizations concerned what they viewed as the explosion of administrative operations in higher education. Productivity measures that impact faculty were misplaced, they implied, when administrative costs are spiraling out of control.

> Only about a third of faculty today are in tenure-track positions, the rest are part-time or contingent. At the same time, administration and nonfaculty administration have grown about 280 percent. So what you have is a total change in the workforce. If you want to talk to me about productivity, you'd better talk about that imbalance.
>
> *~ AAUP representative*

> To make progress on productivity, you have to limit the growth of administrative units, because that's the part of higher education that's growing and is sucking up more of the funding of higher education. I think you could increase productivity within the same budget if you were to start to seriously address this issue, but I don't really see that happening.
>
> *~ AAUP representative*

Some institutional leaders agreed that:

> It's true that teaching and learning need to be rethought, but it's also the case that higher ed has gone very wrong in disproportionately spending resources on administration. We could run institutions much more efficiently, and we have a responsibility to do so. So we need to be having both conversations, one about how we structure learning and one that is focused on getting real about the explosion of the administrative side of things.
>
> *~ University president*

While it may seem that faculty representatives and faculty themselves would naturally want to shift focus away from themselves and toward administration, we think it would be a mistake to simply dismiss this as finger-pointing. Based on our conversations, as well as our general experience in engagement, it seems likely to us that for those who represent faculty interests, this may well be a kind of "first things first" issue. By this we mean that they'll be much more willing to consider productivity that impinges on the classroom if they know, first of all, that administrative costs are also being examined.

In the case of the University of Maryland, the fact that the productivity efforts began with a major focus on systems operations rather than academics cleared the way for effective engagement of faculty down the line. As a result, Maryland has been much more successful in cultivating a sense of ownership among faculty for the productivity work. (See the report's conclusion, which examines the University of Maryland's productivity work, for more details.)

III. Promising Strategies for Engaging Faculty

In the course of our conversations, we heard a wide range of interesting ideas and examples of ways to better engage faculty and institutions in the difficult work of productivity. What follows is a compilation of some strategies that, in our estimation, show strong potential. It is important to note that challenges exist, even in the most promising strategies, so along with our recommendations we also flag those challenges that should be anticipated.

Target Younger Faculty as Early Adaptors

We began our research with a hypothesis that faculty in the more technical or practical disciplines would be easier to engage around issues of productivity and that those types of faculty might be targeted as early adaptors and champions of productivity. This hypothesis did not get a lot of traction in our interviews, and what we learned instead is that age is a more significant indicator of potential receptivity than is discipline. In general, younger faculty appear more willing to experiment with alternative ways of structuring their work lives and are more receptive to concepts of productivity (properly framed).

In general, our research suggests that younger faculty:

- Tend to be more open to the idea that the responsibility for student success should be shouldered as much by the institutions and faculty as by the students themselves.
- Seem to have deeper awareness of the pressures and challenges that derail their students and consistently express concern about the debt that their students carry (in part because they themselves are shouldering a great deal of education debt).
- Consistently express more openness to new uses of technology (beyond distance learning) to deliver curriculum differently.

Challenges: The downside of this strategy is that younger faculty at four-year institutions are constrained by the structure of their profession, which requires them to focus on research at the expense of teaching. Moreover, younger faculty at both two-year and four-year institutions are not, by virtue of their junior status, especially influential within or outside of their departments. That said, one needs to start somewhere and also to build for the future, and working with younger faculty may be a fruitful way to do both.

Engage Faculty Outside of Their Departments

Faculty, especially in four-year institutions, tend to be quite isolated in their departments. As one faculty member put it, "Most faculty know everyone in their department within a week, but never come to know anyone outside of it. They really live in a bubble." This compartmentalization reinforces an inward-looking culture that makes it more difficult to engage faculty at four-year institutions around issues of productivity. However, avenues exist for engaging faculty outside of their departments, and we were told by many respondents that these avenues of engagement may be particularly promising for generating awareness of, and buy-in for, productivity agendas.

Examples of extradepartmental vehicles for engaging faculty include the following:

- Faculty councils at universities can be effective vehicles for exposing faculty to the practical concerns facing other disciplines and experimental approaches to curriculum delivery, while providing greater connection to and appreciation for the administrative side of higher education in useful ways.
- Disciplinary associations are particularly useful for engaging those faculty members who are influential in their departments (and are therefore well positioned to become change agents and may be great points of entry for generating buy-in for productivity efforts, however these are named and framed on campus).
- Accreditation bodies can be useful for giving faculty broader exposure to the world of higher education outside their department, which in turn makes these individuals better candidates for engagement around productivity issues.

> [The] most respected faculty members do get involved in disciplinary organizations, and these people have persuasive power. If the people who are involved in the disciplinary organizations are moving in one direction, other faculty will follow. I don't think faculty will follow the people moving in the direction that is coming from the state. It's when the disciplinary organizations come out and say, "Look, c'mon, let's get it together—we can improve productivity and drive change, because we know what we're doing," that your chances of getting buy-in will be quadrupled.
>
> *~ Accreditation expert*

Challenges: The channels of communication and engagement implied by this strategy do not automatically exist and may need to be forged over the long haul. One-off or quick-hit efforts to engage faculty through these sorts of networks are unlikely to provide great results, but leaders often go this route if they are not comfortable hearing and working through contending points of view or simply because they are so busy. It takes true discipline and a set of real skills to effectively engage a challenging yet critical stakeholder group such as faculty via professional networks outside of their institutional home base.

In the Most Difficult Settings, Consider Focusing Early Engagement Efforts on the "Margins"

Engaging faculty in productivity at some institutions, such as flagships, major four-year research institutions or long-standing liberal arts colleges, can be especially difficult. These sorts of colleges and universities often have particularly deep cultural traditions that have managed to remain in a state of relative disconnect from the realities of the labor market and business world, where the concept of productivity is of critical importance. Some of them have considerable political clout as well.

In addition, mission creep can be a problem with four-year institutions, many of which have ambitions to become research universities and thus operate at cross-purposes with the productivity agenda. Further, tenure-track faculty, particularly at flagships (but also at other four-year institutions), labor under the "publish or perish" mantle and have few natural incentives to seek greater productivity in the classroom or department, while contingent faculty have relatively little connection to or influence over the institutions (and are thus a difficult target for engagement).

Given these challenges, we were particularly interested in hearing from college presidents who are trying to make headway on productivity issues in four-year institutions. We quote at length here a president at a four-year institution, who described one particularly interesting strategy, "changing from the margins in, rather than from the core out."

> At the institutional level, we're trying to carve out the traditional core of the institution and making a big deal of protecting it as is—we're demarcating it both to protect it but also to draw a line around it and let people know that everything else, everything outside of that traditional box, is subject to change.... Outside of that small protected area of the traditional faculty serving the traditional residential students, we'll hire differently, reward differently, deliver content differently, innovate for productivity and the like. And we're up front in saying to those more traditional, mainly older faculty, "We know you'll hate that, but you don't need to worry about it because it's not going to affect you inside your traditional box."

> And then we'll look hard at teaching and learning both inside and outside that marked-off zone, and I believe we will begin to see faculty inside the traditional area "peering over the fence" at the nontraditional realm, interested in learning and incorporating the things that seem interesting, and we think that change to the traditional core will come over time as a result.... So what we're doing is changing from the margins in, rather than from the core out.

> When it comes to engaging faculty, we should focus on those who are looking across the fence from inside the traditional box, curious about the nontraditional realm. These will be the faculty to engage in change efforts, because they'll already be the most interesting, committed, probably younger, hungry teachers. Change in higher ed comes so slowly. Traditional players will probably not be able to drive change—it'll probably come from the margins since that's historically where all change comes from.

Building on this last point about change being least likely to originate from the traditional core, we find ample evidence to suggest that great gains may be made in productivity by giving strategic priority to two-year institutions, which according to many are more forward-looking. While they are certainly not "marginal" in higher education, two-year institutions may have less obstructive baggage than traditional four-year institutions when it comes to innovating around productivity.

Pay Special Attention to the Opportunities Presented by Two-Year Institutions

While engaging faculty at all types of institutions is going to be critical for sustaining productivity policies, there are some clear advantages to inroads that may be made by engaging faculty at two-year institutions:

- Leaders at two-year institutions appear to be more open-minded about productivity efforts because of their stronger natural focus on learning outcomes (what students are actually being prepared to do, including preparation for the next level of education or preparation for the workforce).
- Full-time faculty at community colleges have greater freedom, and therefore ability, to focus on student success (as it connects with the productivity agenda) than their peers at four-year and flagship institutions, who labor under greater pressures to "publish or perish."
- Community and technical colleges often have advisory boards that connect the curriculum to the workforce, making community colleges more naturally aligned with the culture of businesses, in which concerns about productivity are familiar and central.
- Faculty in developmental education at two-year institutions tend to be both more pragmatic and more creative in their approaches to student success, and they are therefore more open to innovations in the design and delivery of curriculum.
- Achieving the Dream colleges are particularly well positioned for engagement around productivity because leaders at these institutions are more focused on data-informed change efforts for student retention and completion.

Challenges: As open enrollment institutions, community colleges are strained by the massive influx of students, many of whom require significant remediation, so they already have the greatest challenges with respect to capacity. In addition, the heavy reliance on adjunct faculty, who are naturally less connected with the college, makes engagement challenging in its own way.

Navigating the Union Context

For those working on productivity agendas in states where faculty unions are particularly strong, there are special considerations to keep in mind. The bottom line here is that unions create both obstacles and opportunities that must be understood. While it appears that higher education has not been as successful as K–12 in at least experimenting with labor-management partnerships to improve outcomes for students, it is clear from our conversations that any work around productivity being carried out in a unionized state should operate diligently to engage the union effectively from the outset.

From some, we heard that unions provide unique benefits if they are engaged properly:

> There's no reason that a union would be opposed to a productivity initiative, but most of the problem is how unions are approached and communicated with. Instead of coming in with some arrogant assertions about state level policy, etc., begin by engaging top union leadership on the core questions and work to see where there are overlapping interests and concerns. There's a lot more openness on the part of unions to various change initiatives than one might think, but they need to be engaged properly.
>
> ~ *Community college faculty union representative*

> We have big collective bargaining [in my state], and our two faculty unions have been really wonderful in understanding that difficult decisions need to be made.... Things are always tough around negotiation time, but we have a good relationship, and union leaders have been telling faculty better than I can that we're in tough times and that they're not going to get everything they want.
>
> ~ *Chancellor of a state system*

According to others, financial officers in particular, unions create a host of new obstacles to navigate:

> The leadership of the faculty senate and individual faculty that are not officers in the faculty union are, for the most part, much more willing to engage in a real dialogue about reform, about efficiencies. I really sense, though, that when the faculty put on their AAUP hat, they become much more predictable in their reactions to issues—much less willing to be open to change. So I really do think that collective bargaining—while it may have accomplished some good things in making clear and more explicit expectations of faculty and some other things—has had a generally negative effect on ability for us to work with faculty on the [productivity agenda].
>
> ~ *Financial officer*

> The productivity conversations that are easiest to have in unionized contexts deal with administrative issues—and much less with how departments are organized or the way our faculty do their work.
>
> ~ *Financial officer*

Unfortunately, we did not encounter anyone who could tell us of interesting, out-of-the-box labor-management partnerships around productivity that we might point to as promising examples. Many said things like, "There's got to be someone doing something interesting out there, but I can't think of any examples."

Based on what we were told, one must dig deeper to find promising strategies here, but given the fact that K–12 has some interesting examples, not to mention many other industries from which lessons can be drawn, it is worth exploring and experimenting with creative labor-management partnerships on productivity, especially if we want to ramp up progress in unionized states.

IV. Conclusion: A Case Study in Faculty Engagement Done Right—"Getting More Juice for the Squeeze" at the University System of Maryland

We close by highlighting a specific case in which innovative and effective faculty engagement has played a critical role in driving change around productivity. The University System of Maryland (USM) is a standout case both with respect to gains made around productivity and with the role played by deep, authentic engagement of faculty in driving and sustaining those change efforts.

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effective engagement of faculty, and each state and context carries unique opportunities and challenges, the Maryland case embodies lessons that are instructive in any setting.

Background and Accomplishments to Date

USM's Effectiveness and Efficiency (E&E) initiative began in 2003 when deep budget cuts compelled system leaders to begin a serious effort to reduce costs while improving academic quality. The E&E initiative, led by a Regents' Work Group, began with a focus on increasing efficiencies in systems operations (that is, on the "low-hanging fruit") and then evolved to focus on increasing effectiveness in the classroom. The first five years of the initiative resulted in over $130 million in cost savings and cost avoidance for the system.[6] Now in its seventh year, the E&E work continues to evolve and deepen, with positive results accumulating for the system, its constituent institutions, taxpayers and students alike.

> This [initial, systems-level] work put us on the map as a system that could do something... and got us a lot of great media attention. The downside was that we took all the low-hanging fruit off the vine, and there wasn't much more we could do without looking to the academic side of things.
>
> ~ *Associate vice-chancellor 1*[7]

As it happened, this "downside" became an asset in approaching the "academic side of things." The positive media attention USM was given for its effort to become more efficient in its systems operations created natural momentum that allowed leadership to "ride the wave" (as one respondent put it) into conversations with institutions and faculty about effectiveness in the classroom. Once they had addressed all the low-hanging fruit around administrative inefficiencies, they could legitimately turn to changes that needed to happen in the classroom to help reduce time to degree and increase the system's capacity to help more students attain degrees with existing resources.

A few examples of E&E policies and practices that have emerged on the academic side of the work include the following:

- Allowing students to earn at least 12 credits applicable to their four-year degree from Maryland community colleges.
- Capping most undergraduate degree programs at 120 credits in order to decrease time to degree.
- Requiring all students to earn 12 alternative degree credits through, for instance, advanced placement, international baccalaureate, study abroad, service learning and the like.
- An ambitious Course Redesign Initiative that has led to more student success and increased faculty workloads.[8]

According to the leaders of the E&E work, these significant gains could not have been generated in the absence of strategic, consistent and authentic engagement of faculty and institutional leaders from the outset. In the next section, we examine how that level and quality of engagement were achieved.

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[6] USM Fact Sheet 1001: USM: Providing Access to Excellence and Advancing Maryland (www.usmd.edu).

[7] We interviewed two separate associate vice-chancellors for academic affairs in the Maryland system and refer to them as "1" and "2" throughout. This does not reflect their rank in the system; it simply is intended to differentiate between two different speakers, and the designations "1" and "2" reflect only the order in which they were interviewed.

[8] Ten USM institutions have course redesign projects under way as part of USM's Maryland Course Redesign Initiative, and the first set of redesigned courses was offered in the spring of 2008 as Phase 1. Disciplines represented included chemistry, mathematics, psychology, biology, English and nursing, and specific courses targeted are the lower-division high-enrollment/low-success-rate courses. In Phase 1, significant cost savings have been achieved across courses, including a 71 percent decrease in per course cost in a general psychology course and a 17 percent decrease in costs in a developmental math course. Phase 2 of the Course Redesign Initiative is currently under way and will include a minimum of 35 courses across the 10 USM institutions, chosen through a competitive RFP process. Because there is no cookie-cutter formula for successful course redesign and engagement of faculty must be intensive, the process (from conceptualization to full implementation) can take up to two years. As a result, the faculty who participated in Phase 1 are being developed as consultants for Phase 2 and are being given additional opportunities to redesign summer courses. For more details on the Course Redesign Initiative, see *http://www.usmd.edu/usm/academicaffairs/courseredesign/* and *http://www.usmd.edu/usm/workgroups/EEWorkGroup/eeproject/eereports08.html*.

Faculty Engagement: Lessons Learned from the USM Experience

Build trust by focusing first on systems operations instead of academics, then take the time to make the case to faculty in terms faculty can relate to

As we noted earlier, administrative/systems operations is an area of great concern to those organizations that represent faculty interests (such as the AAUP). Our hypothesis—that this is a kind of "first things first" issue for faculty and that resistance to productivity efforts targeting academic operations will be easier to overcome if serious efforts are first made to control costs on the administrative/systems side—was confirmed by the Maryland E&E team.

> First we went to the operations side and demonstrated that we had done everything we could to improve efficiencies, and only then we went to faculty and said, "And now we need to do more to improve effectiveness in the classroom, and we need your help...." Because they had seen the effort we made and because we came to them asking for their input and creativity, we were able to get their buy-in for some very difficult decisions... including increasing faculty workload.
>
> *~ Associate vice-chancellor 2*

> Even though we know that the easiest thing to do to save money is to go to faculty and hire more adjuncts, this is about quality, and we can't go there and we couldn't go to faculty on anything first. We started with every other kind of cost savings we could find, and then we went to faculty and delivery.
>
> *~ Associate vice-chancellor 1*

This strategic focus on low-hanging fruit paid off for Maryland. Not only were they able to achieve significant results in cost savings and cost avoidance in which everyone could take pride, they were also able to demonstrate to faculty that they had done everything they could to create efficiencies without impacting the classroom and faculty work life. This good-faith effort made it much easier to initiate difficult conversations about the need to increase faculty workloads and the need to rethink how classes were being designed and delivered.

Note also the comment in the second quote that "this is about quality." Not only did the leaders of the USM initiative sequence their effort wisely by tackling administrative inefficiencies first, they framed and focused their conversations with faculty in meaningful terms that resonated with faculty concerns and values.

Start by giving faculty and institutions credit for what they are already doing, and build from there

Representatives of the chancellor's office pushed out the message that they would be turning from systems operations to academic E&E, but they initiated this communication as an appeal; they asked presidents, provosts and faculty what they were already doing to improve efficiencies and effectiveness on their campuses and began by recognizing the work already being done.

> Everyone got credit for what they were already doing, and we put together a report for the board of regents that was a very positive presentation about what creative individuals at institutions were already doing. And the board's response was positive and encouraging. It was, "Great, let's see what more we can do...." It was very different from, "If you don't do x, y and z, we're going to shove it down your throats."
>
> *~ Associate vice-chancellor 2*

> I think this is a quality of great leadership: recognizing where successes are happening, where people are doing good work, and starting there instead of starting with heavy-handed mandates from above. [The chancellor] is an extraordinary leader in this regard.
>
> *~ Associate vice-chancellor 1*

After first asking for input about what efforts were already being made to do more with less and improve student outcomes in creative ways, faculty were then asked to account for their existing workload. This included not only time spent in the classroom, but time spent advancing research, time spent in advising, on committees, in community service and the like.

> Before we started having the difficult conversations about the need to increase faculty workload, we knew it was important to get an accurate picture of what actually constitutes their existing workload. The assumption that faculty teach a few hours a week and then spend the rest of the time mowing their lawns or whatever doesn't reflect reality, and before you initiate those hard conversations about workload increases.... you have to understand what faculty are already doing.
>
> *~ Associate vice-chancellor 2*

To drive and sustain change you need both a top-down and a bottom-up effort. Leaders have to clearly articulate the vision for change, but the change itself has to be driven by institutions and faculty.... Any serious change effort must have the broad participation and support of faculty in order to be successful. It's absolutely crucial. Faculty have to feel that they are real participants in shaping the initiatives that will achieve the vision, or that vision will never be realized.

~ Chancellor, University System of Maryland

After creating a report for the board of regents that accurately portrayed faculty work life, the E&E team received help from Dr. Carol A. Twigg of the National Center for Academic Transformation, whose work focuses on redesigning those high-enrollment/low-success-rate courses that plague every university. Her model employs teams of faculty who teach these challenging classes. They are charged with looking at how faculty time might be reallocated to protect critical activities while employing off-the-shelf technology to support better student learning.

Inspire participation by appealing to faculty interests and acknowledging faculty concerns

The board was excited by Twigg's course redesign work, but faculty were initially skeptical and raised questions about what this work would mean for educational quality. There were concerns about "dumbing things down," losing the personal connection to students, abdicating the responsibility to inspire and mentor the next generation of scholars, and employing the faddish use of technology.

Rather than mandating course redesign work, the chancellor presented it to institutions as an opportunity to become involved in an experiment to improve student learning and invited, rather than required, institutions to submit one course for redesign.

> This wasn't, "You'd better do this or else." It was, "If you step up, you can get involved in an interesting experiment about how to use your time and knowledge better to help more students succeed." It wasn't and isn't a mandate but an aspirational goal presented to faculty in ways that resonate with them.... As a result, the faculty who've been involved so far are the greatest champions of the work because they own it.
>
> *~ Associate vice-chancellor 2*

Initial skepticism notwithstanding, faculty were attracted to the idea that the course redesign work might free them up to focus on upper-division courses, to the prospect that these stale classes might be delivered in a more exciting and effective way, to the opportunity to learn about new techniques to creatively deliver content, and to the possibility of improving student outcomes in these early gateway classes in order to draw more students to their major.

By being involved in the process, faculty concerns have largely been laid to rest because we have been given a central role that acknowledges and respects our insights and professional commitments.

~ Chair, Council of University System of Maryland Faculty

Provide real support and incentives to faculty to allow for their meaningful participation in implementing productivity policies

One of the keys to making this work *work* has been providing the right structure of incentives for faculty. Everyone we spoke with noted the importance of giving not only technical assistance and support but also funds and time off (course relief) to faculty involved in the redesign work so that they could be fully engaged in the experiment.

> We demonstrate our commitment to this and to faculty by actually providing them with the support they need to be successful in this work.... The return on our investment has been remarkable.
>
> ~ *Associate vice-chancellor 2*

> The faculty where we were involved [in the first round of course redesign] are not only champions inspiring others to get involved... they are also themselves reapplying to redesign more courses, including some upper-division courses. There really has been a kind of snowball effect.
>
> ~ *Faculty council chair*

One manifestation of this support is a cross-campus learning community. As a result, those participating in the course redesign work were not isolated on their campuses but had regular opportunities to engage in collaborative problem-solving workshops with colleagues from across the system and with Twigg on hand to offer technical support and assistance. This extra step helped deepen faculty commitment to the work and improved the initiative's outcomes.

> Without [faculty] engagement you lose... some of the best problem solvers at your disposal. These are some of the smartest people in the world! Why would you not want to create the conditions to harness all of their knowledge and expertise? We've seen in this work that they have a lot of answers and great ideas... and frankly, you're not going to be successful without them on board.
>
> ~ *Associate vice-chancellor 1*

To further raise the profile of the E&E work, a new category has been added to the Regents' Awards (for excellence in teaching, service and so on) called the "E&E Innovation Award," which formally recognizes and honors the creativity and participation of the faculty.

> [Faculty engagement] helped us educate the governor and legislature.... When they saw faculty were willing to be engaged, willing to increase their workload, and saw that faculty were coming up with their own ideas about productivity... that really changed the tone of the people holding the purse strings, and it changed the culture of the university system.
>
> ~ *Associate vice-chancellor for academic affairs, University System of Maryland*

Interview Subjects[9]

DR. STEPHEN ABY, Professor, University of Akron, and Ohio Representative to the National Collective Bargaining Congress of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

DR. JOHN BUTTELWERTH, Professor, Civil Engineering, Cincinnati Technical & Community College, and Chair, Ohio Faculty Senate of Career & Technical Colleges

DR. MILTON COX, Director, Center for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching, & University Assessment, Miami University of Ohio

DR. JOHN CUPPOLETTI, Professor, Biophysics and Physiology, University of Cincinnati, and Chair, Committee of Governance Issues, Ohio Conference of AAUP

DR. PETER FELTEN, Associate Professor, Director, Center for the Advancement of Teaching & Learning, Elon University, and President, The Professional & Organizational Development Network

DR. RUDY FENWICK, Professor, Sociology, University of Akron, and Chair, Ohio Faculty Council

DR. MATTHEW FILIPIC, Senior Vice-President for Business and Fiscal Affairs, Wright State University

MS. TERI HOLLANDER, Associate Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Academic & Enrollment Services and Articulation, University System of Maryland (USM)

DR. JOHN IMMERWAHR, Professor, Philosophy, Villanova University

DR. JIM JACOBS, President, Macomb Community College

MR. DENNIS JONES, President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

DR. WILLIAM KIRWAN, Chancellor, University System of Maryland (USM)

DR. PAUL LEBLANC, President, Southern New Hampshire University

DR. SHERRY LINKON, Professor of English & American Studies and Co-Director of the Center for Working-Class Studies, Youngstown State University

DR. SYLVIA MANNING, Executive Director, Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association

DR. MICHAEL MCCOMIS, Executive Director, Accreditation Commission of Career Schools & Colleges

DR. JAMES MCCORMICK, Chancellor, Minnesota State Colleges & Universities System

DR. M. PETER MCPHERSON, President, Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities

DR. DAVID L. PONITZ, President Emeritus, Sinclair Community College

MR. MICHAEL POWELL, Instructor, Politics, Estrella Mountain Community College, and Director, Adjunct Faculty Association

DR. GARY RHOADES, General Secretary, AAUP

DR. NANCY S. SHAPIRO, Associate Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, USM

DR. DONALD SPICER, Associate Vice-Chancellor and Chief Information Officer, USM

DR. WILLIAM STUART, Professor, Anthropology, University of Maryland–College Park, and Chair, Council of University System Faculty

MR. STEVE TEIXEIRA, Secretary, Academic Professionals of California

DR. BELLE WHEELAN, President, Southern Association of Colleges & Schools, Commission on Colleges

DR. DAVID WITT, Professor, School of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Akron, and Vice-Chair of the National Collective Bargaining Congress of AAUP

DR. WILLIAM ZUMETA, Professor, Public Affairs, University of Washington, and President, Association for the Study of Higher Education

[9] This list does not include focus group respondents. Focus groups were conducted with faculty members at both two-year and four-year institutions.

About Public Agenda

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