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Accelerating Curriculum Design: "A Love It, Don't Leave It" Approach to Creative Process and Idealized Design

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The experience of curriculum change or development is challenging, and many nurse faculty report frustration and dissatisfaction with the process and outcome. While causes of dissatisfaction vary from school to school, there are factors common in many curriculum projects. These factors include lack of knowledge regarding curriculum development, lack of consensus regarding how to organize the curriculum development work (too much focus on details and vested interests rather than a changing external environment and stakeholder needs); the amount of time curriculum development requires; and related to the prior items, concerns about approaching curriculum projects with existing faculty processes with the usual power struggles and frequently report ineffectiveness.

An evidence-based approach to curriculum design was introduced by the consulting visiting professor to mitigate the aforementioned commonly reported dissatisfactions. The recommended conceptual framework for curriculum development includes three major approaches that promote a future orientation (idealized design); enhanced participation, decision making, and consensus building using a data driven, evidence-based approach (quality improvement principles); and, project management principles to ensure efficient and timely accomplishment of the overall work.

Idealized design may be defined as the process of interactive planning (Ackoff, Mabution, & Addisson, 2008). There are three major steps to idealized design, namely: (1) describing the current state in relation to existing needs based on a current scan of the external environment and stakeholders; (2) envisioning the desired future state that would achieve priority goals; and (3) adjust the ideal design to be acceptable by modifying system limitations or other realities that likely cannot be influenced. The overall goal of idealized design is to achieve the best, creative thinking for the future rather than first being constrained by current realities.

Quality improvement (QI) principles and techniques are widely used throughout the healthcare system. There are many models for QI in healthcare and other industries; yet, at their core, the majority of the QI principles are very similar. Important QI principles focus on customer needs, assessing and refining processes to achieve those needs using data and efficient methods, a commitment to participative strategies so that those closest to the work processes have strong voices in design and decision making, and plans for documenting improvements with a goal of continuously improving. While all of the latter are important in curriculum design projects, a change in typical faculty meeting communication and decision making activities can improve quality, efficiency, and participant satisfaction. Specifically, clarifying roles (leaders, members, facilitators, others), creating ground rules for meeting behaviors and responsibilities, articulating decision making processes, and active facilitation of previous meeting times must be enacted consistently.

Last, project management principles assure that there is a plan for sequencing and responsibilities assigned related to each phase of project activity necessary to achieve the project goals. Project management principles enhance meeting effectiveness with a shared understanding and ownership of the actions needed to move the project forward through the project lifecycle. Details related to the importance and value of project management will be provided in a subsequent section.

### Table 1. Project Deliverables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design/Description of Intervention</th>
<th>Project Scope</th>
<th>Project Management Procedures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum framework</td>
<td>In April, 2014, the Jefferson College of Nursing embarked on creating a new curriculum framework, depicted in Figure 1, and corresponding new curriculum for baccalaureate nursing education based on the best evidence and responsive to national reports, standards, and competencies.</td>
<td>Project management procedures ensured that the team produced a high-quality product on time with key stakeholder engagement throughout the process. At the outset of the project, the team developed a work plan that incorporated all milestones, project deliverables, meetings and tasks. Table 1 lists the deliverables that were produced throughout the project. The first project deliverable was a list of meetings for the core team which identified dates and times for meetings through the 13-month curriculum design phase. Meetings were typically three hours in length with some lasting six to eight hours depending on the agenda. The team established regular monthly meetings for the Co-chairs and the Dean to keep her abreast of progress, resources needed, and challenges encountered. The Dean was an important source of information on regulatory and accreditation considerations related to the new curriculum. The Co-chairs met regularly with the Distinguished Visiting Professor to review progress and develop meeting agendas. Because faculty engagement was a top priority, the work plan identified scheduled general faculty meetings, graduate faculty meetings, and undergraduate faculty meetings for the team to provide progress updates and obtain feedback. Communication and coordination strategies were implemented to facilitate effective collaboration with the community advisors. While the community advisors were invited to attend all scheduled meetings, it became apparent early on that the team needed to identify specific meetings in which attendance was required as competing priorities prevented their participation in every meeting. During these meetings, two to three team members reviewed work products with the advisors to obtain focused feedback. The faculty present at the meetings brought the advisors' feedback to the team, discussed this feedback, and revisions were made as needed. Because the timeline was aggressive and parallel tasks were required, the use of subcommittees to accomplish work outside of regular meetings was necessary to meet target deadlines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular themes</td>
<td>Key assumptions driving the project included a blank slate for changing baccalaureate nursing education, a philosophy of team teaching, student, partner, and faculty engagement, articulation with the current MSN and DNP plans of study, and a faculty responsible approach.</td>
<td>Its Unanimous…Success!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular outcomes for end-of-program</td>
<td>The team-faculty-led initiative included the following resources:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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