

PROJECT ACES

Redesigning Whole Courses for Active Engagement of Students¹

Guidelines for Proposals - Pilot
Fall 2012

Introduction

The mission of Salem State University is to provide a high-quality, student-centered education that prepares a diverse community of learners to contribute responsibly and creatively to a global society. We can point to numerous examples where we excel at providing this type of educational experience for our students. However, surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicate that Salem State lags behind peer institutions significantly in the use of 'active & collaborative learning' and 'enriching educational experiences'² Data from CIRP and WABASH confirm that students do not uniformly experience the type of high-quality, student-centered education we envision for them.

As one of several campus initiatives focused on building a supportive, engaging campus environment for students, Project ACES will pilot a program to transform all sections of a high enrollment undergraduate course through techniques that build greater student-student, student-teacher, and student-community interaction. Project ACES is looking for innovative models to institutionalize high-impact, student-centered education. High enrollment courses are defined as having a minimum average number of seats per semester of 250. By transforming large enrollment courses the project eventually aims to give all students an engaging learning experience.

Teams of faculty from departments that teach high enrollment courses are invited to submit pre-proposals, and if selected, full proposals, to be the pilot department for fall 2012- spring 2013. The department will be rewarded 25,000 over a three year period and staff support from departments such as the CTI, ITS, the library, and SASS.

Project ACES (Active Engagement of Students) has been designed to:

- 1) Increase graduation rates by decreasing DFW rates
- 2) Incorporate teaching techniques that have been proven to support and engage first generation and underrepresented college students as well as being beneficial for almost all students

¹ Parts of this proposal were borrowed from the TOP 25 Project, University of Miami Ohio (units.muohio.edu/celt/engaged_learning/top25/). The National Center for Academic Transformation provides excellent examples of redesign projects (thencat.org/howtodoit.htm).

² On NSSE, Salem State scored lowest amongst peers on Active and Collaborative Learning and Enriching Education Experiences. Active and Collaborative Learning includes class presentations, working with other students in and out of class, tutoring, and class contributions; Enriching Educational Experiences is defined as participation in co-curricular activities, practicum, internship, field experience, clinical assignment, study abroad, independent study, culminating student experience, and participation in learning communities.

- 3) Emphasize high-impact practices by focusing class time on critical thinking and high level cognitive skills and utilizing technology and new instructional models to assist students outside of class
- 4) Give students support, mentoring, guidance and opportunity to develop learning and organizational skills for success in college
- 5) Reduce costs and increase student success by decreasing DFW rates

ACtive Engagement of Students (ACES) Model

The ideal course to be redesigned will consist of a minimum average of 250 undergraduate seats each semester, contain a high number of first year students, and a substantial dropout/fail/withdraw rate. The exclusion of any one of these factors does not preclude acceptance.

The proposal should seek to:

1. Decrease dropout/fail/withdraw rates by increasing student support and engagement
2. Incorporate active and collaborative learning techniques³
3. Incorporate enriching educational experiences (defined by NSSE as diversity experiences, internships, civic engagement, learning communities, and applying course content and skills to authentic situations)
4. Focus on improved critical thinking and problem solving skills
5. Tie course objectives to assessment that continuously monitors student learning and modifies the course as necessary
6. Incorporate innovative approaches to introduce students to new material, so class time can be used increasingly for critical thinking and high level cognitive tasks
7. Provide superior learning outcomes at a cost per student equal to or less than current levels by deploying resources and technology in efficient and cost effective ways

Departments must demonstrate that the redesign proposed in the target course has broad support from the department. It is generally expected that all sections of targeted courses will eventually utilize the new models developed, but initial stages of project implementation might only involve a select number of pilot sections. It is also recognized that in certain cases, it may not be appropriate for all sections to utilize new models. In this case, proposals should explain why only a subset of sections would be involved.

³ **Active learning techniques** refers to instructional tactics and strategies that focus the responsibility of learning on learners. Any technique that requires learners to demonstrate engagement with course content and/or other students can be categorized as active learning. Examples include minute papers, punctuated lectures, small group discussions, simulations, case-based teaching, problem-based learning, etc.

Support

Departmental teams will be expected to work throughout the calendar year (**resources will be available for summer stipends**) and schedule monthly working sessions with academic support staff from the library, CTI, ITS, and SASS as appropriate. Academic support staff will be continuously available to work with the teams on issues related to course redesign, student learning, and other topics deemed relevant by the project teams for a full three year period.

Departments selected for funding will be expected to participate in data collection to evaluate standardized measures across courses (note that we expect several courses to be redesigned in subsequent years). Specific details for data gathering will be developed with the departments selected for funding. Assessment support will be provided by the CTI and Institutional Effectiveness and Planning throughout implementation. While not requested in the pre-proposals, a departmental assessment plan is required in full proposals. Those submitting full proposals should consult with CTI staff on the development of tools and methods for assessing active learning techniques and revised student learning outcomes.

Compensation

Departments may request up to \$25,000 to be allocated over the three year project any way you see fit. Pre-proposals do not require a budget. Expenses may be used for costs directly related to project success such as: faculty time, development of technology-based resources, equipment, consultants, student wages. Faculty time may be compensated through course releases or summer stipends. Expenses may not be used for permanent lines, travel (except in case of consultants) or conference attendance.

Questions and discussion about potential projects should be directed to Marc Boots-Ebenfield, Center for Teaching Innovation. Departments interested in submitting pre-proposals are invited to consult with him prior to submission.

**Project ACES
Redesigning Whole Courses for Active Engagement of Students**

Call for Proposals for Fall 2012

Send all proposals including cover and budget pages electronically to provost@salemstate.edu.

Proposal Title: _____

Department: _____

Course:

Faculty Team (name, email, rank, minimum four members):

Abstract (no more than 100 words):

Chair signature

Date:

Timeline:

February 25, 2012	Preliminary proposals due
March 9, 2012	Finalists notified
April 20, 2012	Full proposals due
Summer 2012	Redesign work
Fall 2012	Redesign work
Spring 2013	Pilot team tests redesign
Summer 2013	Assess, Redesign and Disseminate
Fall 2013	Expanded implementation and Assessment (50%)
Spring 2014	Expanded implementation and Assessment (50%)
Summer 2014	Final redesign
Fall 2014	Full implementation in all sections

Guidelines for Project ACES Preliminary-Proposals

Suggested length: 3-5 pages, not including cover. Address each of the following, numbered accordingly, in your proposal:

1. Overview of Project

a. Describe the current course

b. Describe the project and the ways in which it will address each of the items listed in the ACES Model (above). Describe how the redesigned course will be a departure from the current system.

2. Rationale

Describe what evidence you currently have that the project will accomplish the learning outcomes specified by the department for the course while lowering the DFW rate and increasing student engagement and satisfaction.

3. Project Activities

Describe the activities the members of the team will need to conduct in order to accomplish the overall project mission.

4. Team Members

Describe the particular expertise each team member brings to the project and briefly discuss what their responsibilities will be for the project.

Note: Neither an assessment plan nor a budget is requested here, but each will be required in the full proposal.

Additional Items for full proposals

Several finalists will be selected from among the preliminary proposals. Finalists may be asked to clarify elements within the preliminary proposal. In addition, department teams should be ready to respond to the following items.

A. Expanded Description of Redesigned Course (3-5 pages)

1. Give specific examples, citing when possible research, literature or local examples of best practices that your planned implementation of criteria 2 and 3 below, will help meet criterion 1.
2. List 3-4 central course objectives focused on higher level cognitive skills and explain how you plan to meet criterion 5 on continuous assessment and course modification.
3. Give an example of a unit of instruction that demonstrates the plan to meet criterion 6 below. Describe in-class and out-of-class activities clearly describing assignments, uses of technology, types of feedback and interaction.
4. Explain how you plan to assess student engagement and satisfaction.

ACES Characteristics

1. Decrease dropout/fail/withdraw rates by increasing student support and engagement
2. Incorporate active and collaborative learning techniques
3. Incorporate enriching educational experiences (defined by NSSE as diversity experiences, internships, civic engagement, learning communities, and applying course content and skills to authentic situations)
4. Focus on improved student critical thinking and problem solving skills;
5. Tie course objectives to assessment that continuously monitors student learning and modifies the course as necessary
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B. Increase in time students spend preparing for class (200-300 words)

We will be using a generally accepted assessment benchmark that the total number of hours per week that a student spends on a class is at least *three times the number of credit hours of the course*. Thus, for a 3-credit hour course, students should spend 9 hours per week on the course: 3 hours in class and 6 hours outside of class preparing.

Justify that students in the redesigned course will, on average, spend at least this much time on the course. In doing so, be specific about students' learning experiences that will meet the "3 times the credit hours" standard. In other words, build a case that the requirements you have built into the redesign will significantly increase students' involvement in their learning. This is particularly important if you are reducing the amount of time spent in class.

C. Academic Support (200-300 words)

Describe the type of support that would like to receive from academic support centers such as the CTI, ITS, library, and SASS.

D. Cost (300-500 words)

Discuss how you expect the redesigned course, once fully implemented, to have a cost per student equal to or less than current levels.

E. Time-Line

Projects are expected to begin in fall 2012, but may begin earlier. List the major tasks that you will need to accomplish for your project, when they will occur, and the faculty member(s) who will carry them out.

F. Describe plans for institutionalizing changes as faculty teaching the course change. (300-500 words)

G. Budget

Attach and justify a three year budget. Calculate faculty release time at \$4,500 per course.