

The Early Days of UW Flex: How the University of Wisconsin Colleges Engaged Faculty



Greg Lampe, formerly UW Colleges provost and now retired, shared initial steps that promoted faculty engagement as this institution explored and then developed an Associate of Arts and Science (AAS) degree for the UW Flexible Option program. The AAS was among the first five Flex academic programs, for which approaches to faculty engagement varied.

“Naming a senior faculty member and recognized faculty leader as the UW Colleges Flexible Option coordinator was critical to faculty members’ sense of ownership of the academic side of the UW Colleges UW Flexible Option,” Provost Lampe said.

HE SUMMARIZES STEPS FOR THIS EXAMPLE OF FACULTY ENGAGEMENT:

1. The provost met with department chair representatives—within two days of the initial announcement of the UW Flexible Option—to listen to their concerns and discuss their role in the competency-based development process.
2. That meeting led to formation of an all-faculty member advisory committee including various academic departments and program chairs, with the provost as chair and the charge to focus on curriculum development and assessment.
3. At the first committee meeting, the provost introduced an inquiry-based model/process and asked only that members commit to exploring CBE. This request alleviated deadline pressure and allowed members to move slowly and carefully.
4. The committee ensured transparency of its work by sharing a detailed summary of each meeting with the entire institution.
5. At the second committee meeting, members reached consensus on advancing the inquiry process from exploration to curriculum development. The provost assured the committee that faculty and instructional academic staff would be compensated for their work.
6. The provost, with committee consent, put out a call to academic departments and program chairs to voluntarily commit to exploring how their departments might fit into a Flexible Option degree model.
7. By the third committee meeting, 16 of 18 academic departments and programs had committed to developing competencies and assessments.
8. The provost and UW Flexible Option program director decided that faculty and staff would develop competencies and assessments using existing department-based course curricula, which seemed less daunting than starting from scratch given the tight timeline and limited resources for launching a CBE program at that point. (As UW Flex matured, this approach to developing competencies and assessments changed, as described in the takeaway in this content section regarding direct assessment CBE program design.)
9. Leading up to the January 2014 launch, professional development supported faculty and staff, competency development continued, and the provost and registrar mapped proposed competencies with the UW Colleges Associate of Arts and Science degree.
10. The provost named a senior faculty member as the UW Colleges Flexible Option coordinator and to also serve as committee chair.