

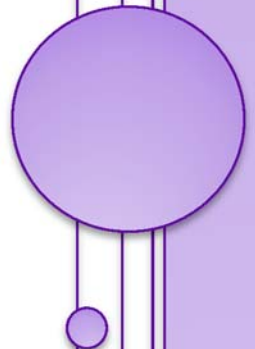
DOING CURRICULAR CHANGE IN A SHARED GOVERNANCE SETTING

A survival guide from San Francisco State University

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Doing curricular change in a shared governance setting

A survival guide from San Francisco State University

You are holding in your hands what we hope will be a useful tool for your program or department to embark on a process of curricular revision and, hopefully, to create a culture and structure for ongoing curricular work. This survival guide was developed by faculty from over a dozen departments and across four colleges at SF State, all of whom have been working through curricular revision ourselves, assisted by the Division of Undergraduate Education and Academic Planning.

This document is a guide to thinking about and doing *faculty-led curricular change for student success and achievement*. That particular formulation represents a shared commitment, and it has three important parts:

- **Faculty-led** – we share the idea that curricular change must be conducted in a shared governance environment and led by the teaching faculty of the department
- **Curricular revision** – the process we share is not the addition of a new emphasis, or a change in a few courses, but rather the revision of a curriculum that includes individual courses, their relationship to each other, and their sequencing in pursuit of a shared set of learning outcomes and goals for students.
- **Student success and achievement** – the principal objective of our curricular design is to improve student access, learning, retention, movement through the major, and graduation with high quality degrees.

1. Why change?

To begin: Building a rationale for change

Curriculum revision begins with the identification of a need to change, and any department or program considering revising their curriculum needs to begin with the question: do we need to change? While curriculum can always be improved, you might only need small, incremental changes or it might be a bad time to begin this kind of undertaking. Even if you're pretty sure it's time for a redesign, undertaking the exercise of asking whether change is needed can begin the process of intentional redesign.

The impetus for change may come from many places. For example, changes may be needed to align student learning with program goals. Faculty may want to consider how best to prepare students for steps after graduation. Curricular changes can address a greater focus on improving student learning. Curricular revision should be an ongoing process, but most of us are beginning or emphasizing an intentional curricular revision project because we have identified needs or opportunities for student success and achievement. But it's not enough for just a few people to desire change. Rather, it is important that the department have a shared sense of why change is important or necessitated. So we've designed a set of questions that may help you to think about

the motivations you may have for curriculum revision. We suggest that you might want to go through these questions with your department as a way of building a shared vision of the “why” – and then the “what” – of curricular change.

Table 1.1: Motivations for curricular revision

Student career and life success

- Does internal evidence of student success (degree progress, retention, and graduation) suggest the need for revision?
- Does external evidence of student achievement (post-graduation employment, employer feedback, success in graduate programs) suggest the need for revision? Are there shifting requirements by accrediting agencies?
- Has the market changed in such a way as to require students to acquire new skills or knowledge?
- Does feedback from alumni suggest the need to develop new/different knowledge and skills?

Changes to the field and discipline

- Has the field moved or changed since the curriculum was last visited?
- Does the curriculum need updating due to new ideas, approaches, or technologies in the field?

Factors related to the university and college

- Has the college or university mission changed?
- Have there been changes to the delivery and availability of resources -- including funding?
- Has the baccalaureate or general education structure of the college or university changed?

Changes within the department

- Is the department seeing a diminishing number of major students?
- Have changes in the faculty – including retirement and hiring -- created new opportunities or challenges for course offerings?
- Has the department mission changed?
- Do the courses offered fulfill the department’s program outcomes in such a way that student learn, attain, and retain them?

Factors related to the construction of the major

- Do the courses offered build upon each other in an intentional and logical manner to construct and reinforce student learning?
- Are there clearly designed pathways towards graduation?
- Do students find obstacles in their pathway towards graduation due to course offerings, timing, or sequencing?

What are the benefits of change?

- Is your goal to increase the quality of the education you offer and its contribution to the long-term success of your students?
- Are you aiming to increase student graduation rates?
- Will changing the curriculum make faculty happier in the long run?
- Will curricular revision potentially bring the department closer together?
- Will the data gained through curricular revision help you to understand your students and your department better?

Discussing these factors (and there may be others) within the department is one way of beginning to figure out not only whether the program or major should change, but also what revisions to prioritize and the timeline over which they should occur.

Change as a continual process

Of course the questions above approach curricular change as a process your program or department is just beginning. Most successful departments, however, revisit their curriculum frequently, often just making minor tweaks or changes when necessary. Such continual revision can be minimally disruptive if it becomes part of the department culture and the annual calendar. This should be a goal for most of us.

2. Facilitating and leading change

Who leads?

In faculty-led curricular design, it is the faculty who lead, but the actual organization and leadership of the process many depend upon the governance structure and realities of your department. Consider discussing the following questions in your department in order to determine how the revision process will occur.

Table 1.2: Leadership roles

- How do your department by-laws assign responsibility and authority for curricular change?
- Who identified the need to revise your curriculum? Are they in a position to lead change?
- What is the role of the chair in the department? Is the chair a change leader?
- How does the size of your department and its organization shape how change will occur?
- Is there a curriculum committee, long-term planning committee, or other established, elected committee charged with curricular revision?
- Will an ad hoc committee be constructed to lead curricular change? How will they be selected?
- Should different groups – disciplinary sub-fields, interest groups, or others – within the department be represented?

- Should the department do everything together, as a whole?
- Should staff be included in the revision process?
- How will students be consulted?
- What is the role of lecturers or adjunct faculty in the curricular revision process? What courses do they tend to teach? Do they have particular valuable perspectives? Should they be specifically represented, or included, in the revision process?
- Are there faculty from related departments, or departments whose classes are prerequisites or form part of the major, who should be represented in the group coordinating curricular change?

Answering these questions should lead you to identify the individual responsibilities, participatory structures, and structural obstacles and opportunities you face. These may help you to determine not only “who” is responsible for leading and participating in curricular change but also “how” change will occur.

Communicating with faculty and other stakeholders

Communication is central to curricular revision in a shared governance environment. There are three basic communication tenets for the group leading or facilitating curricular change:

- Faculty – and other stakeholders – need to be invested in the process of curricular revision if it is to be successful.
- Communication about curricular change should be inclusive of the diversity of ideas and evidence available, not about convincing your colleagues about a particular plan of action.
- Despite your best intentions, your process will hit snags and encounter contention. Embrace the challenges and depend on communication with your colleagues to overcome these issues.

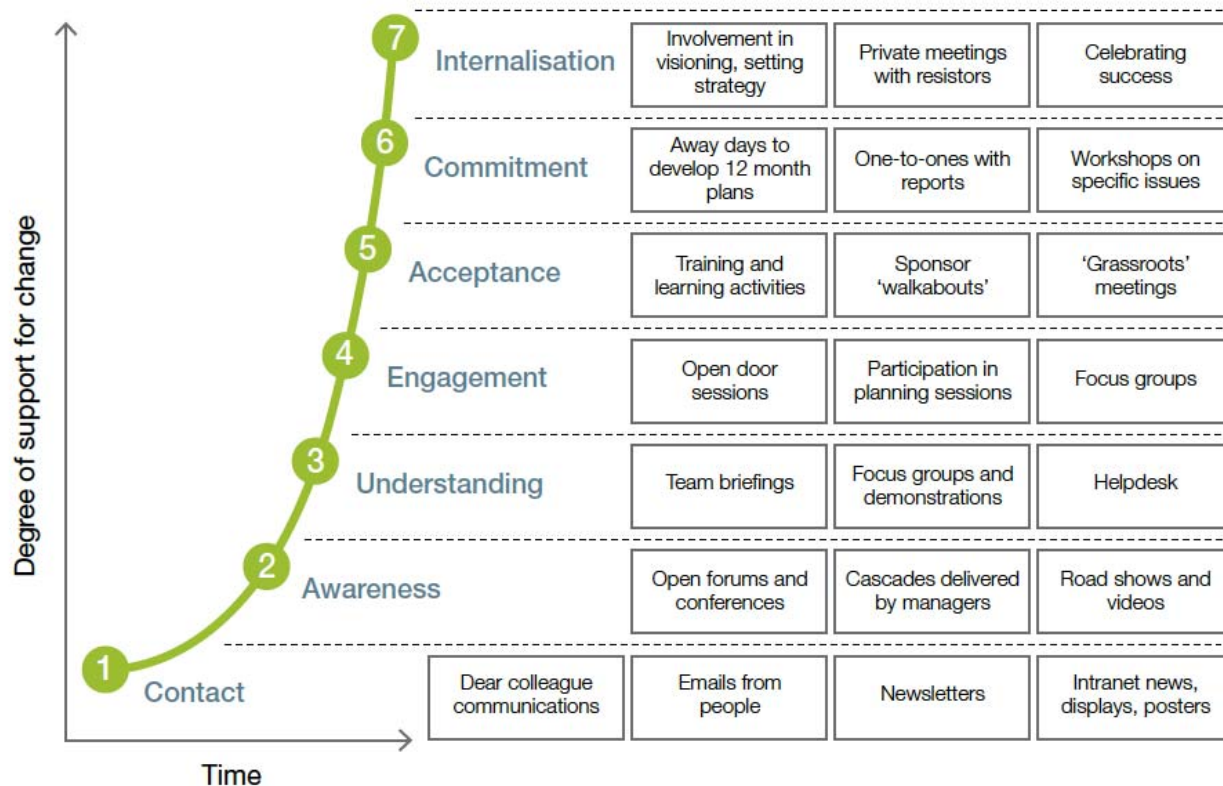
This doesn’t mean that everybody necessarily has the same commitment to the process. Nevertheless the earlier and deeper their endorsement and participation in the process, the better for the project. Achieving high levels of engagement should be your goal, which means that all stakeholders should participate in communication about curricular revision as early in the process as possible. Communication could include informal conversations, electronic forum interactions, or setting aside a department meeting or department retreat to engage communication about the possible ways that change could contribute to student success.

From the beginning of the process, programs should consider having dedicated conversations among as many stakeholders as possible to learn about perspectives and experiences. Having these discussions in a meeting or retreat can be difficult, but bringing in a facilitator who isn’t a stakeholder can help this process because they are not perceived to have an “agenda” that is aligned with a subset of stakeholders. Consider some of the following questions that could start a discussion broadly before moving into specific idea generation around curricular change:

1. What makes us proud about what our students achieve in our program?
2. What are our strengths as a faculty/staff in this program?
3. What are some of the challenges we see our students facing while they navigate our program?
4. What are some of the challenges that we as faculty/staff have in delivering the program to our students?

Commitment to curricular change usually takes time. The chart below shows seven levels of engagement that participants in changes like curricular revision often go through over time. At the beginning, they learn about the needs for change and become aware and even understand the project of curricular revision. Over time, they can come to engage the process and even become committed to it, eventually internalizing in such a way as to become proponents and shapers of the change.

Chart 1.3: Levels of engagement



1

¹ “Leading and managing change at the University of Bath: Guidance and tool kit”, accessed at https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/leadership-and-management/change-management/docs/Managing_change.pdf

This chart names several different strategies that the leadership team can use to draw faculty into the project as active participants and change agents themselves. It's a useful chart, but we at SF State found a number of approaches and tools particularly useful. Consider using some of these strategies:

1. Have informal or brown bag meetings to talk about curriculum with your colleagues to develop awareness of the need for and possibility of curricular change.
2. Put together accessible assessment reports that give meaningful insight into the way that the program is meeting and not meeting the needs of students to develop understanding about why curricular change is needed.
3. Engage stakeholders in discussions about the curriculum either in retreats or small interest-oriented groups.
4. Engage faculty in developing and responding to different ideas and drafts for curricular change through planning sessions.
5. Maintain inclusive discussions and incorporate feedback from diverse perspectives to promote acceptance of and trust in the curricular revision process.
6. Use a democratic process to incorporate faculty approval of the revision plan – either voting or working toward consensus, establishing a commitment to the revision plan.
7. Help guide internalization of the revision plan by engaging faculty in strategizing student roadmaps, planning their individual contributions, or engaging students in the review of a final draft of the plan.

While you're doing all of this, remember also the three communication tenets listed above. It is especially important that the leadership team be prepared to listen and learn when communicating with your colleagues. Remember, sometimes the best ideas come from people who seem to be resisting the process. They may in fact have good reason to be reluctant, and may foresee problems that can occur. Before you write off faculty as being opponents, consider some of the reasons they may be opposed to specific proposed revisions or the undertaking as a whole.

- Is your curricular revision a project of the faculty as a whole, or a small group?
- Do some faculty members feel alienated from the project because it seems to be taking the department or program in a direction that will marginalize their expertise or work?
- Is generational difference in play? Are there some faculty deeply invested in the existing program?
- Can you identify groups that might have their own ideas about curricular revision, but be reluctant to participate?

Creating a culture of inclusivity

No matter exactly why some faculty feel outside of the curricular revision process, or how obdurate their opposition, the best way to engage them is to create a culture of inclusivity and shared governance in curricular issues. You can use the questions below to help gauge whether your departmental situation and culture is ready for shared curricular change. Consider using Table 1.4 as a shared exercise in your department. Ask faculty whether they agree or disagree with the statements as a way of both finding out your level of preparedness and inclusivity and identifying areas for improvement

Table 1.4: Do you have a culture of inclusivity?²

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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- Planning is self-initiated by the department
- Curriculum revision is considered everyone’s job
- There is a culture of inclusion in the department
- Ideas are welcome, no matter where they come from
- Those faculty & staff who will be affected are proponents of change
- Faculty share responsibility for identifying where change is needed
- The search for solutions to problems includes faculty
- The search for solutions includes students, alumni, staff, and other stakeholders
- Proposed solutions are based on evidence to which all faculty have access
- There is a serious attempt to make sure faculty understand proposed solutions before they are tried
- Leaders at the College level support change
- Curricular revision could continue even if leadership changes

If you can identify certain obstacles to shared responsibility in the questions above, consider ways to open up the process to more faculty participation.

Tools for creating inclusivity and shared responsibility for curricular revision

We all want the members of our department to work together to produce meaningful changes to the departmental curriculum. But how can we make this happen? Some answers might lie in departmental culture, and others in communication (both discussed above), but there may also be solutions in documents, structured groups, and other tools.

Table 1.5: Tools for developing shared responsibility

- **By-laws:** departmental by-laws exist to help define both structures and processes by which decisions are made. If you have by-laws, these should already inform your work. If they aren’t appropriate for the task ahead of you, or if you don’t have any, you should consider developing up-to-date and appropriate by-laws.
- **Outside consultant or specialist:** sometimes it is useful to bring in an expert both for their knowledge and to relieve the chair and project team from having to be the focus of feelings and ideas about curricular revision.
- **Faculty learning community:** FLCs are usually built around groups of faculty (within a department, or interdepartmental) who work together to acquire knowledge and share ideas about curricular revision. Often they include both formal readings and informal discussion and sharing.

² Adapted partly from C.L. Briggs, J.S. Stark, and J. Rowland-Poplowski, “How Do We Know a “Continuous Planning” Academic Program When We See One?”, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 74, (2003), 361-385.; and Lattuca and Stark, *Shaping the College Curriculum*.

- **Statement of shared purpose:** Perhaps the most critical element of successful collaboration is a clear understanding of the shared (or intersecting) goals that justify intra-organizational collaboration. A well thought out statement of shared purpose (or problem statement) is your most useful tool to help define the program vision. The program vision provides a vivid image of the desired future that will result from the adoption and implementation of the project. It succinctly answers the question, “Why should we do this?” and offers a clear destination.
- **Project plan:** The project plan clearly outlines the scope of the project, general roles and responsibilities, the timeline, and any budget.
- **Memorandum of Understanding:** MOUs describe a mutually beneficial framework of expectations and obligations that two or more people and entities can work within to achieve shared goals. MOUs normally delineate responsibility and specify the services each person or group will provide. They also establish frameworks for oversight of specific elements including workflow, infrastructure, and support.

You may be able to develop these tools based just on the expertise within your department. However, should you need help, consider asking your College administration or other departments for copies or examples that may already be in use.

3. The Process of Change

Change is, of course, a process. It happens gradually. In fact, many departments involved in curricular revision at SF State have been very surprised at just how long it takes to make meaningful change. But so long as the goal of student achievement is kept firmly in mind, it’s a process that is worthwhile.

A step-by-step blueprint for curricular revision

There are several models for defining how change happens and the stages through which a group must pass when making changes like curricular revision. Excellent examples are captured in articles and chapters that you may wish to read, including John P. Kotter’s “Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail” and Lisa Lattuca and Joan Stark’s *Shaping the College Curriculum*.³ The model below, however, is the one that we’ve found to be most effective for faculty-led curricular change.

Departments that are working on curricular revision at SF State have identified a number of different tasks and stages that might be part of your process. We can explain these as a 6-stage model for curricular revision, with some ideas about how to transition from one phase to another:

³ John P. Kotter, “Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail”, in *On Change Management*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011, 1-16; Lisa R. Lattuca and Joan S. Stark, *Shaping the College Curriculum: Academic Plans in Context*, Second Edition, (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2009)

1. Gathering and interpreting **evidence**: If you began with the exercise in Table 1.1, you have already carried out the first task in this phase – identifying the motivations and reasons that will guide curricular change. In order to actually make changes, however, you will need both quantitative data and qualitative evidence. This may include surveys of alumni, information from experts in industry, student success and graduation rate data, ideas and information from departments in your field at other universities, and more. These data need to be collected and also turned into a form that the department can use – maybe in the form of a report.
 - o Possible transitional deliverable: evidence analysis report
2. Establishing a shared **department mission** and **program learning outcomes (PLOs)**: In this phase, your department or program will work together to identify a common (brief) mission statement and shared program learning outcomes. These learning outcomes should be both meaningful and pithy so that they can guide the work you do later to make sure your program is actually delivering on these outcomes. The PLOs also should represent skills and competencies students need to master as well as knowledge they should possess.
 - o Possible transitional deliverables: mission statement and PLOs

***Note:** Identifying and constructing meaningful program learning outcomes is the foundation of your curricular revision. At every step after this one, you will be referring to and aligning with these goals. Your process must be transparent and collaborative. Your PLOs should be shared by the faculty. They should tell students why they can be excited to be in this program and proud of the achievement of having completed it. Don't be afraid to expend a great deal of time and effort on this step.*

3. **Aligning** courses with program learning outcomes: Once you have Program Learning Outcomes, your department will want to make sure that students are actually achieving them by the time they leave the program. In most cases, you will find it useful to identify not only exactly which courses serve each PLO but also multiple levels through which students may pass on their way to achieving these PLOs. For example, they may be *introduced* to content or a competency in one course, have it *reinforced* later in the program, and *master* it in a capstone course. Through this process, you may find that some new courses are needed, other courses are no longer necessary, and still other courses need to be internally revised.
 - o Possible transitional deliverable: Current alignment chart
4. **Redesigning the curriculum**: Once you have a sense of where your current curriculum fits with your mission and PLOs, or doesn't, your department or program will have identified areas that need work including new, revised, or retired courses. At this point, you will probably also want to identify places where High-Impact Practices like research, learning communities, and writing-intensive classes belong in your curriculum. You may also identify signature assignments that can help assess both individual student progress and – in the future – your overall program. This is your opportunity to sequence your core courses and electives and to collectively design the new pathways students will follow toward graduation.
 - o Possible transitional deliverables: New curriculum proposal and pathways

5. **Implementation and approval:** At a certain point in the redesign process, your department will be ready to adopt the new curriculum and to seek outside approval, where necessary. This will require the development of an official curriculum design (using forms provided by the university) and a decision by the department to adopt this curriculum. Another associated task is representing and explaining the curriculum to the college administration and to shared governance bodies that will need to approve it. This may require consultation with other departments as well.
 - o Possible transitional deliverable: Adopted and approved new curriculum

6. **Assessment and ongoing revision:** Congratulations! You have a new and presumably better curriculum that will serve students' needs and that was designed through a faculty-led process. Two major tasks await, however. The first is ongoing assessment of the program to determine what is working well and what is not. The second task is to return to create the opportunity for ongoing work on the curriculum so that it remains up to date and appropriate to departmental goals and student needs.

Identifying the tasks involved in each stage help you to develop a project plan. It can also help you to identify which tasks might provoke the most anxiety, and to plan for faculty participation in these tasks. Consider the list below. Which of these tasks will be part of your process? In what order will you approach each task? Must one task be completed before the next can begin? Will some tasks require multiple iterations? *Where is your department in your curricular revision process?*

Table 1.6: Tasks associated with stages of curricular revision

1. Evidence collection and analysis
 - o Consulting with alumni or field experts
 - o Consulting with students
 - o Collecting student success/achievement data
 - o Analyzing evidence of student progress, retention, graduation, inflow and outflow
2. Departmental mission and Program Learning Outcomes
 - a. Designing the mission and vision of the department
 - b. Designing program outcomes
3. Alignment
 - a. Explaining to each other what our courses do/Course SLOs
 - b. Aligning courses to program outcomes
 - c. Evaluating where course outcomes are met, and at what levels
4. Curriculum redesign
 - a. Designing new core courses
 - b. Designing new pathways/sequences
 - c. Eliminating or banking courses
 - d. Integrating additional High-Impact Practices
 - e. Designing assessment tools including signature assignments
 - f. Reviewing and changing advising practices
5. Implementation and approval
 - a. Departmental agreement/approval for changes
 - b. New course submissions (for CRC approval)
 - c. Revised curriculum submission (for CRAC and senate approval)
 - d. Begin teaching new courses, implementing new assignments, etc.

6. Assessment and ongoing revision
 - a. Collect assessment material
 - b. Analyze assessment material
 - c. Identify areas for further revision

Of course, change is rarely this neat, and your process will be unique, but we hope this list will help you to frame the work you are going to do together.

Troubleshooting

Each phase also comes with its own challenges. In particular, phases 3-6 carry unique difficulties that are worth sharing. Below, we list some of the challenges you might encounter, along with strategies for dealing with each.

Departmental mission and Program Learning Outcomes

- a. It is often challenging to develop a mission that reflects what is unique to the department or program
 - i. Be prepared to take some time on this process, and perhaps to invite an outside facilitator to help you think through what is important to your program together.
- b. At this stage, some faculty may have not yet become engaged in the program but are beginning to be wary of changes
 - i. It is important to note and validate any concerns that those faculty may have about impending change – this can both be valuable information in developing the needed changes and also helps the concerned faculty feel more engaged in the process]
- c. In developing PLOs, it may become difficult to reconcile accreditation and national standards with departmental emphases
 - i. Consider looking at how other programs that have similar accreditation or standards have reconciled their own PLOs – gathering a sample of these programs' work can help to inform your own process

Alignment

- a. While faculty may have been able to find shared PLOs, once the discussion reaches a deep and real level differences may emerge
 - i. Consider what kinds and amounts of differences are tenable for the curriculum and whether they can co-exist. Try to explore the differences and identify the elements that are most relevant to the PLOs and vision
- b. The question of the speed of change often becomes particularly important at this stage, when it begins to become clear that the curriculum is really likely to change
 - i. Consider developing a timeline with your faculty that helps them understand clearly what will need to happen at different stages of change so that they are prepared for it
- c. The question of the role of adjunct faculty may be particularly important in this phase, especially if changes are being proposed to courses they tend to teach.
 - i. Continue your inclusive discussions by including adjunct faculty who are willing to discuss how they think they might work toward meeting the

- different changes in the courses they teach, find out what support they could use to make their own course curriculum revision workable
- d. Faculty may have difficulty determining which PLOs apply to their courses, and at what levels. Some faculty may judge their courses to meet all PLOs, even superficially, while others may be concerned if they teach courses that don't seem to match the PLOs. These issues may impede the department's ability to consider the program as a whole.
 - i. Consider putting together faculty learning communities that focus on the discussion of courses and PLOs – if a few faculty teach in a particular area, perhaps they could work together determining how the PLOs apply to the courses they are teaching and whether they believe they would need to change anything to engage the PLOs

Curriculum redesign

- a. As the curriculum actually begins to change, uneven adoption and workload may reveal itself as an issue
 - a. Keep the conversation open – because inevitably there will be problems that were unforeseen, allow those challenges to surface and include in your assessment their identification and your response to them. Engage faculty in these observations and troubleshoot as inclusively as possible
- b. By this point, momentum loss may become a problem, since the department or program will probably have worked on the revision for several semesters.
 - a. Remember to keep the conversation going – regular updates at department meetings or in email will keep the issue at the front of people's minds, start working on strategies for advising during the transition
- c. You will probably need to consider how to change the curriculum in mid-stream, while students are actually moving through the major.
 - a. Make sure to have clear messaging and documented pathways for students depending upon their particular place in the program, be prepared to be flexible as you make the change so that students can get the best experience possible while still moving toward graduation in a timely way
- d. Another issue that often comes to the fore in this period is the balance between the academic freedom of the individual instructor with the needs of courses to deliver on PLOs and curricular imperatives.
 - a. Engage instructors in discussions about the ways in which they could teach the courses such that they meet the appropriate PLOs – offer support or faculty learning communities to help instructors engage in a way that is consistent with their pedagogy and expertise

We hope you have survived your curricular revision! Before concluding this Survival Guide, however, we want to quickly address two inflection points in this process.

Moments of Decision

How does your department reach a decision on what changes to make? How do you decide to adopt a new program, or even make incremental changes? Do you need a 'division' or majority vote? Do you decide collaboratively through consensus? What are the advantages or disadvantages of each approach?

Here are several approaches departments and programs have taken:

- Appointing committees or ad hoc working groups responsible for bringing each part of the curriculum to the department for a vote
- Form interest groups around each concentration or emphasis in the department, and make sure they have consensus among these groups for each step
- Holding a formal vote in the department
- Waiting until they gain full consensus of every member of the department

What is the advantage of each? Might each be employed at a different stage? How does your department work?

Ongoing change

Oh darn! I thought we were done with this thing.... But in fact, there are reasons you'll want to continue the process, if perhaps through a committee or periodic assessments, as it's impossible to keep up a full effort forever.

Here are some reasons to keep curricular revision as a permanent item for your department to consider:

- to assess the effectiveness of the changes you've made and to adjust where necessary
- to involve new faculty in the process and gain their contributions
- to keep up with ongoing changes and opportunities in the field