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Facilitating Curriculum Change One Step At a Time

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This session will describe challenges of facilitating curriculum re-design in a large department, followed by a discussion of strategies to address these challenges, including a 'roadmap' outlining steps to accomplish a successful initiative. The presentation will start with a brief introduction of the topic and the presenter's personal experience with leading change. The challenges of leading a curriculum change will be outlined. The audience will then be asked to participate in an interactive 'think, pair, share' with their neighbors to consider challenges and potential barriers they might face in their own departments. Volunteers will report out to the room and any additional issues will be incorporated into the presentation. The session will then continue with practical recommendations, illustrated with specific examples. These will include key steps and considerations in preparation, planning and implementation. Factors to consider include how to appropriately set the stage such that faculty understand and support the rationale for the change, faculty development through workshops etc., identification and empowering of faculty leaders, ways to demonstrate respect for faculty ownership of the curriculum while facilitating the process, methods to engage and develop buy-in of the faculty, incorporation of transparency in the process, and importance of recognition and incentives such as stipends or release time for those involved in the development of new courses etc. After presentation of the recommendations the audience will be solicited for additional ideas from their personal experiences to add to the best practices attendees can take away from the session.

Although the personal experience will be of a biology department head, the focus is on best practices for the process and generating faculty engagement and thus will be relevant to any discipline or type of institution. The presentation will be of value to a wide audience as many chairs will experience leading some kind of curriculum revision during their tenure. Due to recent national reforms in life science curricula, several biology regional and national meetings/workshops have been held on how to implement the new approaches, demonstrating how critical the planning process is and the need for thoughtful leadership to successfully achieve department change. Interactive activities are described above.