Transfer Spotlight: Interview with Common Course Numbering Subcommittee Co-chairs

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On January 13, 2023, 9 of 11 Chair/Co-chairs from the Common Course Numbering (CCN) Subcommittees for 2022 met to discuss their experience aligning courses last year. CCN Subcommittees were created to support the alignment work being done by Transfer Council. This includes creating the CCN system and major transfer map (MTM) work. For the first round of CCN, Transfer Council created five subcommittees: one to establish a framework for CCN and four faculty subcommittees. Julia Pomerenk (U of O) and Chris Sweet (Clackamas CC) Co-chaired the Systems and Operations Subcommittee; Laura Pelletier (Lane CC), Kerrie Hughes (Clackamas CC), and Vicki Crooks (OIT) Co-chaired the Communications Subcommittee; Nikki Gavin (Lane CC) and Celeste Petersen (Clatsop CC) Co-chaired the Math Subcommittee; Joseph Reid (OIT) Chaired the Statistics Subcommittee; and Tristan Striker (Linn Benton CC), Leigh Graziano (WOU), and Tim Jensen (OSU) Co-chaired the Writing Subcommittee. The following article is based on a transcript of the discussion, which focused on the work subcommittees completed by aligning 10 of the most transferred courses between community colleges and public universities in Oregon (COMM 100Z, 111Z, 218Z; MATH 105Z, 111Z, 112Z; STAT 243Z, and WR 121Z, 122Z, 227Z).

Q1: What parts of the 2022 Common Course Numbering (CCN) work were successful?

Julia: Well, we successfully aligned 10 of the most transferred courses in Oregon. I know when Chris and I first met we said, "Oh, my goodness! How are we going to meet with this group of people (who don't really know each other) and create a framework for CCN? People are never going to agree on the elements of the framework!" There were times when it looked like this couldn't possibly work, but by the end we sat back and said, "That worked. We did it!" I think the *real* success is that we all worked together and got this accomplished. It worked and is working. It's remarkable.

Tristan: I'll piggyback on that and add that one thing that was successful: we figured out a process for alignment on the fly, learning as we worked through the process and encountered things naturally. Generally, we worked well together in the Writing Subcommittee. We met challenges and found consensus, which was remarkable. I'm proud of that. As Julia said, we did a lot of work establishing the alignment process, which has paved the way for future subcommittees and will hopefully make their work easier.

Kerrie: In the Communications Subcommittee, we had a safe place to agree to disagree, which was very helpful. Ultimately, we had to find a solution to aligning three courses, but we had one leader in particular (Laura), who moved us toward consensus. She was a rock star. We allowed everybody to speak and allowed everyone's voice to be heard, even when we disagreed. During discussions, if we saw someone was withdrawing or didn't want to continue, we pulled them back into the conversation and let them know it was ok to disagree. We invited them to talk it through and for me, that was amazing. You don't often have a safe place to disagree in meetings, but we fostered that environment, which was a strength.

Laura: We had really good communication in our subcommittee. When we got to our last meeting, people were like, "That's it? We're going to miss being a part of this work!" That kind of surprised everybody. We felt like we need to keep talking, because it was so productive for us to work together.

Kerrie: I learned so much from my colleagues at other institutions. At times, they would interpret a student learning outcome differently from what I would; then someone else would explain the way they perceived it, and

this challenged me to examine my perception. Ultimately, this made our work more productive. I didn't feel lost in my genre or discipline. Instead, I felt I had colleagues that were helping me to better understand my subject area.

Chris: I'd like to add that having co-chairs was successful. Julia and I weren't matched based on skills or our résumé, but we played off each other's strengths. I don't recall any real weaknesses or missed opportunities in the leadership of our group and that was due to the different skills and strengths we brought to the table. It worked out well. The decision to have co-chairs was super successful.

Julia: One more thing I want to say is that whatever else happens, the fact that faculty across the State are meeting and talking about curriculum is super good. Thank you everyone for doing that!

Nikki: The collaboration that has been prompted by this legislation is fantastic because it's bringing all of us together to try to get a common vision about what these courses are at all our institutions. Information from this collaboration is going back to institutions and continuing. Granted, there are a lot of issues to be worked out at individual institutions. We're all wrestling with these challenges.

Vicki: It is hard to think in terms of success because this process was difficult. More importantly, I am concerned about the lasting impacts these changes will have for my institution. I do think that making transfer classes within the state a simple process is a worthwhile goal.

Q2: What parts of CCN were most challenging?

Kerrie: I would agree with Chris that having co-chairs is great, but I think tri-chairs is too much. Laura and I got along great because we think alike, but our third chair was not always on the same page. I think three leaders made decision making too challenging, for us.

Vicki: Several things were challenging for me. First, I had the impression that many people on my committee simply wanted to be quick in decision making. Voting meant progress and I felt that important details were missing. The revisions done by group-editing were stressful and probably didn't result in the best work, as many simply settled to avoid lengthening the process.

Nikki: I think one of the challenging parts was answering questions about inclusivity, because as co-chairs, we didn't really have good answers for things like what are we going to do about the colleges that aren't represented on our subcommittee? How do we reach out to them? As a co-chair, you really want to have an answer to that, but there wasn't really a clear way to include all institutions. As Co-chairs, we tried to reach out via our statewide contacts as best as we could but a more proactive inclusivity plan from the state-level would have been beneficial to improving inclusivity. There was a desire to be completely inclusive and include all stakeholder voices, but there wasn't a clear way forward concerning how to do that. We wanted to make sure that people were at the table when conversations were happening so that folks weren't excluded, and their perspectives left out. I think the other thing that was challenging was a lack of definitions and a lack of common understanding of definitions. For example, what's an outcome vs. a topic vs. an objective. Having a new assessment subcommittee to serve as consultants or advisors is going to be helpful. Having a common understanding of definitions would have been really helpful from the get-go.

Kerrie: We had problems understanding the Faculty Charge from Transfer Council, at times. I think it will be better for the next round of subcommittees because we've worked through all that last year. I do remember that Laura and I kept going back to the Faculty Charge to clarify our responsibilities as a subcommittee. Our VP David Plotkin is on Transfer Council and even he had to ask for clarification. For example, I didn't know you could add language to a course description. I thought you could add one learning outcome because of Systems & Operations saying that we could add up to 25% more to outcomes. We're having meetings at our institution concerning this. One subcommittee member from Writing told us we could also add information to a course description. We found out from reading the Recommendation Report from Systems and Operations that we could add up to 25% more information to both a course description *and* learning outcomes. This was no one's fault, but it was part of being the first group to go through this process *while* the framework was being created. It will be much easier the second time, but it took a long time to illustrate, articulate, and explain what the Faculty Charge was saying. We've

worked to lay out the process so that everybody can comprehend it and make sure that everyone is on the same page. Several times after reading the Faculty Charge we said, "That's not our job. Our job is to do this."

Tim: The timeline for accomplishing the work was the biggest problem. For the Writing Subcommittee, understanding the Faculty Charge came late and subsequently, implementation of the work was rushed which compounded problems in other areas. Scheduling was another problem, as was the ability to get feedback from stakeholders. As a result, the ability to take time to revise outcomes in a way that really benefits students and our colleagues was limited. Doing work that is fundamentally unfunded from the State in a way that did not put undue pressure on other areas of work that has equally high priority was very challenging. I think moving forward, the timeline for alignment work is going to be different because subcommittees are starting in January or February, not April, like we did. However, at my institution we're encountering a backup right now with implementation, so we're trying to get work completed to meet the fall 2023 deadline. We're also discovering a whole lot of unforeseen implications that are a result of rushing the process through. And one last note: I know for a fact the State routinely pushes back legislation on other mandates, so why did they insist on rushing this one? That hard line is confusing to me.

Celeste: One of the things that I found difficult was the inequity of compensation for people representing different colleges. Some got paid by their institution for their work in a CCN Subcommittee and some got nothing. Work on CCN is a big commitment and takes a lot of time and work. I want to go on the record and make sure institutions are aware of this issue. It's hard to have equitable work when subcommittee members are compensated differently (or not at all) for the work they are doing. This also affects the ability to schedule time for subcommittee work. Remember: we are teachers first.

Kerrie: We also need the ability to share more information about the results of our decisions, in committee. I think that was lacking, even though we had the option to write Minority Reports. [Note: Subcommittees have the option to write a Minority Report for Transfer Council when two or more members disagree with a vote in a Subcommittee.] For example, at some institutions changing credits is having a huge ripple effect and not being able to voice that information outside of a written document fails to adequately explain why this is detrimental. I think we need a way (outside of a Minority Report) to discuss some of these larger issues.

Laura: It impacts things like Oregon Promise, which is up to 90 credits, and now you're adding more credits when you increase course credits with alignment work. How is CCN going to impact things like that? We need to be able to address these concerns. The last time I attended Transfer Council, it was evident that the light bulb was going on, and they were beginning to see the consequences of some of these decisions.

Nikki: And how does CCN affect things like College Now, Dual Credit, and pre-reqs? What will be the fallout of CCN decisions? It would be great to see some facilitated collaboration and problem solving between institutions dealing with similar challenges, so we don't have to recreate the wheel at every institution. We don't want to be pushed back into our silos again. I think one of the additional challenges is that as a co-chair, you become the de facto representative for CCN at your institution, and you're expected to know all the nuances of the project, answering questions at every meeting you're in. The incredible number of questions people have speaks to the lack of information that's available for this project. I think a lot of the lack of information is going to be remediated by the Resources for Common Course Numbering webpage, which I really love. But the expectation that we know the answers to CCN questions is an unrecognized part of the workload. It's like as a subcommittee member or co-chair, the expectation is that you become the liaison or point of contact for all levels of questions at your home institution. Your colleagues want to know what's going on. Your Dean wants to know what's going on. The VP of Academic Affairs wants to know what's going on, and it feels like you are expected to know everything about CCN. I'm not the one in charge of implementing CCN at my college. Colleges need to recognize this is a big project which needs to be led by someone with authority at the institutional level.

Q3: How did your subcommittee address the need to represent all 17 community colleges, when only 8 community colleges were represented on each subcommittee? (**Note:** each CCN subcommittee consists of 8 members from community colleges and 8 members from public universities, as per Transfer Council.)

Nikki: In math we have the Oregon Math Chairs and the Oregon Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges (ORMATYC), which is a statewide collaboration of community college math folks. We communicated via outreach with both entities to make sure we were contacting individuals who weren't on the subcommittee. However, even with that outreach, there wasn't always a response, which was frustrating to the subcommittee because there was this desire to have that engagement with all institutions to make sure that we weren't doing something that would be impossible for an institution. Without engagement from all institutions, we were left to try to synthesize information from websites as we tried to make the best possible recommendations that included all voices.

Tristan: For Writing, we have the Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee (OWEAC), which is a statewide advisory committee serving college and high school English faculty. They helped us reach out to folks, but despite that, we still had folks who weren't included, and we ran into that a little with PCC, which is the biggest school in the State. They didn't have representation on our subcommittee. A lot of institutions in Oregon have very different ways of approaching writing curriculum, which is enlightening, but we need a way to improve that communication so that folks can stay on top of what's going on. I felt like we were trying to communicate to folks, but there still were some who felt left out and were surprised by the decisions made in subcommittees. Having said that, I do think we have wide representation on subcommittees. Another challenge was not knowing what we could and could not discuss outside of subcommittee, due to public meeting laws. We could only do work on alignment in subcommittees. I think that made reaching out to institutions more challenging.

Tim: Getting information out about the nomination process through the [Resources for Common Course Numbering](#) webpage and to Chief Academic Officers and empowered administrators was important.

Nikki: One of the biggest challenges we've experienced is a lack of understanding and awareness from our administrators about this work, even though there have been concerted efforts like letters to CEOs and President's Council and other high-level groups. It seems like the faculty understood the importance and potential consequences of this work. We knew CCN was a big deal, but it felt like lobbying for the change was happening from the bottom up, instead of being led by administration. We needed more buy in from administrators, who should be providing faculty with the time and resources to do the work needed, which is reflected in the lack of equity with compensation for workload and scheduling. In the future, it would help to have administrative buy in, collaboration, and participation across institutions. They also need to understand the magnitude of this work. That would be helpful.

Vicki: Some members of my committee seemed to know each other. I later learned that many had worked together as part of a statewide community college group. I felt that community college representatives were more active on the committee. There were representatives from 4-year colleges and universities who were regular contributors but on occasion, the discussions and votes seemed skewed toward a community college perspective.

Laura: I've had several emails from other institutions saying, "I heard this. What is this thing?" That's been difficult.

Q4: What advice do you have for future CCN Subcommittee Chairs/Co-chairs?

Tristan: I had this conversation with one of my colleagues before the break, because they wanted to jump on the upcoming CCN English subcommittee, and I told them the exact same thing. Make sure you have lots of time set aside for this work. Also, be aware that you are going to have to communicate with a lot of different parties. For me, that was a challenge. I know that for many of us, chairing a subcommittee was in addition to lots of other work we are expected to do. Chairs must keep track of all the email associated with CCN work.

Vicki: Spend some time before your committee work starts getting to know other Chairs, even if they are outside of your discipline. A regular update from other committees would be very helpful.

Julia: They are going to have it so much easier than the folks in the first year, because we didn't have a framework when we started, and we didn't know some of the things we know now. I think the structure that is in place is going to make alignment work so much easier, going forward.

Q5: What advice do you have for future CCN Subcommittee members?

Kerrie: Communicate and participate. If you are going to commit to serving on a subcommittee, then *really* commit to it because none of this work can happen without you. Sometimes we didn't have enough people present to vote because SB 233 says we have to have three-fifths of members for an official vote. This meant we would have to try and get more people to attend and that hindered the process. We were functioning under a time constraint, which already made it difficult to complete the work. Failing to have enough members present to do the work only made things more difficult. We were fortunate at my institution because our Deans gave us release time to do the work, which made it easier to commit to meetings. Our VP is also on Transfer Council, so they knew the work and were aware of the time needed to do this work. Unfortunately, many colleagues on subcommittees do not have that kind of support from their institution, so they are working without any compensation (e.g., load release, $) in addition to full teaching loads and expectations for service to their institution and community.

Vicki: Again, before you start the official work, spend a little time talking about yourselves, your schools, and the task before you. Ask questions early.

Tim: I'd like to echo what Kerrie said earlier about understanding the Faculty Charge and basic expectations about knowledge of learning outcomes, guidelines, and working with different interpretations. Having that base knowledge is a great way to get everybody on board from the beginning. It also helps to identify key stakeholders at your institution in advance of the work. Additionally, allow time to receive feedback and identify any issues that might arise, in advance of the work. For example, we have an English Major that is going to be impacted by changes in CCN coursework (e.g., WR 121Z, 122Z, and 227Z). We're used to reaching out to our English colleagues, but perhaps not as accustomed to reaching out to other folks on campus whose programs will be affected by these changes. The same is true for administrators who will be impacted by changes, downstream. One final comment: I'd like to compliment my co-chairs who set up a process that allowed us to separate voting from the drafting of outcomes. We always took a break between these two parts of the process, which was incredibly useful for easing possible tension and providing time for reflection. In a couple of instances, we did find issues that we needed to address. After a break, this led to a smoother voting process.

Julia: That's a good reminder, Tim. Sometimes people want different things—sometimes consensus is not always possible.

Q6: What research did your subcommittee do to gather the information needed to align courses?

Tristan: We polled our institutions and asked them to put course information in a spreadsheet (e.g., course descriptions, outcomes). We tried to create an amalgam of that information and used that to start the conversation. Gathering all that information from all 24 institutions was really, really helpful. Our group did have a bit of an advantage because we had done a lot of alignment work beforehand, with OWEAC and other organizations, like the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). We've done a lot of research based on national standards and organizations. Many of our outcomes and course descriptions were created from that information. Our research was based on looking carefully at that information.

Laura: We looked to the National Communication Association (NCA), which has done a lot of work creating learning outcomes for our discipline. Then we took the spreadsheets that HECC staff created for us and polled people to record course information like learning outcomes to compare what this looked like at different institutions. Then we blended what worked for our institutions by matching it with NCA information. Our goal was to create course information that helped students and was useful to institutions. We wanted to make the outcomes broad enough that they could be open to interpretation in different ways.

Nikki: The Math Subcommittee also consulted with some documents produced by the American Mathematical Association. Specifically, there's been a lot of work coming out about math education and science and what that will look like in the next decade. We looked at things like quantitative reasoning vs. precalculus and/or STEM work. We really tried to use this as an opportunity to clarify the fact that institutions have different pathways. That was inspired by the work coming out of national organizations. We wanted to be relevant and follow visions in

place for what mathematical learning is starting to look like in higher education. We also looked to industry needs concerning patterns of economic growth.

Vicki: Initially, we attempted to consolidate the many course descriptions that had been gathered from across the state. This process seemed a bit cumbersome. Research beyond this seemed mostly a matter of individual initiative rather than a strategic decision. The research included a survey of textbooks from courses, looking to the National Communication Assoc for guidance, and I compared the methods other states used to ensure smooth transfers. I also spoke with a variety of faculty members about the likely impact of additional credits for communication gen-ed classes.

Q7: What parts of alignment work were the most difficult? Why?

Kerrie: Aligning credits. Writing outcomes was (fairly) easy for us, but we had to hash through terminology, first. Aligning credits was extremely difficult, especially if you came from an institution where increasing credits is going to create chaos.

Tristan: It was a bit different for our subcommittee. Changing a course number (e.g., 122) was really challenging because it had a lot of implications for some schools in the subcommittee. Every subcommittee faced unique challenges, but for us, the other parts of alignment went smoothly.

Vicki: There are fundamental differences in the mission and goals of the schools represented. There are also differences in the student populations we serve. To suggest that what is best in one situation, is best in all is an oversimplification. An example of one difference was Interpersonal Communication. One colleague at a community college wanted to be sure that the intercultural requirement was fulfilled by the course. While culture is mentioned in all communication courses, our students get their core training in the Intercultural Communication course. To meet the needs of the community colleges, we voted to make culture an element in one learning outcome. In this case, the learning outcome is fine, but the conversation around it was illustrative.

The question of credits was by far the most problematic. I believe the increase of credits has the potential to actually reduce the amount of communication courses our students will take. When WRI and Speech went from 3 credits to four, the required number of classes was also reduced. It is challenging to convince faculty in other majors that communication training is essential for their students. Coupled with the pressure to reduce the number of credits needed to graduate, and it is inevitable that some will opt out of communication classes. The community colleges are not facing this pressure.

Q8: How did your subcommittee address differences of opinion?

Julia: One of the things that Chris and I did in our group was to suggest the development of some guiding principles to guide our work, which really helped. We knew what our charge was and came to understand it even better as we developed the framework, but the guiding principles really helped because we could point back to those when there was a disagreement. Now people may choose to interpret the guiding principles differently, but overall, they really did help us.

Vicki: People were friendly and polite. But there was limited patience to continue beyond what was necessary.

Nikki: I want to piggyback off what was said earlier, concerning members who sometimes disengaged with the process. When we saw that folks were starting to pull away a little bit, we were purposeful and proactive about bringing people back in by recognizing that there was disagreement. We didn't want to let things fester. Instead, we tried to talk through it, even when we were under a time crunch. It was important to make sure that members of the subcommittee felt like they had the opportunity to really, thoroughly voice their opinion so that when it came time for a vote, there was understanding and appreciation that everyone's cards were on the table. Then we could take a vote. We also gave lag time for votes, so that after we made a recommendation, we would wait a week to vote so we had time to process things and gather comments.

Tim: I think the co-chairs and colleagues in the Writing subcommittee did a great job. I do think that if someone had a critique, it needed to be paired with a recommendation for improvement. I do not believe that simply saying "I don't like this" is sufficient. Members were challenged to provide a recommendation to improve things. As a general rule in life, I've found this is a good way to work with people.

Q9: What was your interaction with other groups involved in this work like (e.g., CCN Systems & Operations, Transfer Council, other CCN Subcommittees, faculty at your home institution)?

Nikki: The CCN Math Subcommittee had inconsistent contact with the other CCN subcommittees. Granted, this was the first round of CCN work so that may change in the future. I would have liked to have had more opportunities to collaborate with the other co-chairs because we faced such similar challenges. It would have been helpful to brainstorm strategies for how to lead conversations in subcommittees and to share our vision for our groups. I also think that communicating with folks at individual institutions was spotty, at least from my perspective. Sometimes I received emails from institutions not represented on our subcommittee and they were panicking, wanting to know what we were discussing and how they could engage with the work. They also wanted to know what they were supposed to do once Transfer Council accepted our recommendations. Having more guidance for them would be helpful.

Laura: I don't think there has been a lot of discussion about CCN within institutions. I think people are wondering, "What's happening?" I also think many people have thought, "Who cares? It doesn't involve us." I have a feeling there's going to be a lot more communication after CCN courses are approved and sent to institutions for implementation. I think that those of us on CCN subcommittees are going to start getting a lot of questions. Unfortunately, CCN information does not seem to be coming from the top down at most institutions. I think communication is going to be coming, but so far it has been from faculty involved in the process instead of administrators.

Vicki: Because I am in close proximity to writing faculty, we had an on-going conversation about their committee progress. I was jealous of the writing group who came together almost as an extension of their years-long association in OWEAC. It seemed a huge advantage to have that foundation as they started committee work.

Jane: Any last thoughts?

Nikki: I'd like to put a plug in for legislators that are considering making these kinds of legislative decisions in the future: please include folks who are experts in their field as part of the collaborative process used to write legislation. I think a lot of the timeline and sequencing issues—including issues related to workload—could be potentially avoided if there had been educators in the room when conversations were happening about mandates [like CCN] related to the Senate Bill [233]. I would like to ask legislators to be more collaborative when writing legislation about education.

Julia: I think there is a growing awareness of the need for this type of representation. I know that HECC is a connection between higher education and legislators, but it felt like there was a project management breakdown with this project. There was a need for greater organization instead of just developing the steps as we went through the process. The general management structure felt like it had not been thought through. Things could have gone smoother if we had a full project management structure, at least from our end.

It would have been great to have a pre-year, like the first year the Systems and Operations Subcommittee could have created the framework and been consulted on how to roll this out. A year for planning and creating a structure for CCN would have been helpful.

Nikki: Yes. I think that is exactly right. That would have allowed time for greater understanding about curriculum cycles and faculty workload. We also could have figured out shared definitions and expectations for subcommittees. This also would have helped all 17 community colleges to have greater confidence in the work of subcommittees.

Thank you to the CCN Chair/Co-chairs for their time and reflections on the work of the past year. Your comments and suggestions are valued and will be used to improve the CCN process going forward.