

[Opinion] Interview with Common Course Numbering Subcommittee Co-chairs

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On January 13, 2023, 10 of 11 Chair/Co-chairs from the Common Course Numbering (CCN) Subcommittees for 2022 met for a discussion. 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-Swan (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 public institutions in Oregon (COMM 100Z, 111Z, 218Z; MATH 105Z, 111Z, 112Z; STAT 243Z, and WR 121Z, 122Z, 227Z).

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

Co-chairs shared that the task, while daunting, was collaborative and successful. They are proud of the work done by their subcommittees, which demonstrates what can be achieved with collaboration.

Julia: We successfully aligned 10 of the most transferred courses in Oregon. I think the *real* success is that we all worked together and got this accomplished. It worked and is working. It's remarkable.

Tristan: We figured out a process for alignment on the fly, learning as we worked through the process and encountered things naturally. We met challenges and found consensus, which was remarkable. I'm proud of that.

Kerrie: We had a safe place to agree to disagree. We allowed everybody to speak and allowed everyone's voice to be heard, even when we disagreed. I learned so much from my colleagues at other institutions.

Laura: 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. It was so productive for us to work together.

Chris: 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.

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.

Vicki: 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?

Scheduling, equity, aligning course information while creating the process, and the compressed timeframe presented challenges for subcommittees.

Kerrie: I think having three leaders made decision making too challenging, for us.

Vicki: 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: Answering questions about 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. Having a common understanding of definitions would have been helpful from the get-go.

Kerrie: 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. We're having meetings at our institution concerning this. 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.

Tim: The timeline for accomplishing the work was the biggest problem. Scheduling was another problem, as was the ability to get feedback from stakeholders. 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.

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. 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. 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.

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.

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. 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.

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

Subcommittees relied on affinity groups and grass roots outreach to be inclusive.

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 to make sure we were contacting individuals who weren't on the subcommittee.

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. I felt like we were trying to communicate, but there still were some who felt left out and were surprised by the decisions made in subcommittees.

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 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.

Vicki: Some members of my committee seemed to know each other. 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?

Co-chairs suggested budgeting for the time needed to complete the work and investing in getting to know each other. Also, it is important to rely on the process established in 2022 to guide the work.

Tristan: 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. 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?

Co-chairs encourage active participation and open communication. Invest time in reading the Faculty Charge and schedule time for feedback throughout the process.

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 Failing to have enough members present to do the work only made things more difficult. Many colleagues on subcommittees do not have 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: Having a base understanding of the Faculty Charge and expectations 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. One final comment: separate voting from the drafting of outcomes, which is incredibly useful for easing possible tension and providing time for reflection.

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?

Subcommittees looked to regional and national organizations for guidance. They also gathered information from all institutions.

Tristan: We polled our institutions and asked them to put course information in a spreadsheet (e.g., course descriptions, outcomes). We've done a lot of research based on national standards and organizations.

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.

Nikki: The Math Subcommittee also consulted with some documents produced by the American Mathematical Association. We looked at things like quantitative reasoning vs. precalculus and/or STEM work. 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: Research included a survey of textbooks from courses, looking to the National Communication Assoc for guidance, and comparing 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?

Challenges varied by subcommittee, but aligning credits was difficult for many.

Kerrie: Aligning credits was extremely difficult, especially if you came from an institution where increasing credits is going to create chaos.

Tristan: Changing a course number (e.g., 122) was really challenging because it had a lot of implications for some schools in the subcommittee.

Vicki: To suggest that what is best in one situation, is best in all is an oversimplification. The question of credits was by far the most problematic. The increase of credits has the potential to actually reduce the amount of communication courses our students will take.

Q8: How did your subcommittee address differences of opinion?

Subcommittees discussed the importance of working together, deliberation, and reaching consensus.

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 could point back to those when there was a disagreement.

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

Nikki: 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. 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: 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.

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)?

Subcommittees would benefit from improved communication. Co-chairs want the opportunity to provide input on decisions that affect higher education.

Nikki: I would have liked to have had more opportunities to collaborate with the other co-chairs because we faced such similar challenges. 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.

Laura: I don’t think there has been a lot of discussion about CCN within institutions. I have a feeling there’s going to be a lot more communication after CCN courses are approved and sent to institutions for implementation.

Vicki: 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 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. There was a need for greater organization instead of just developing the steps as we went through the process. Things could have gone smoother if we had a full project management structure, at least from our end. A year for planning and creating a structure for CCN would have been helpful.

Nikki: 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 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 honest 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.