

Dana Center to Offer No-Cost Online Training to Select College and University Mathematics Faculty

Project supports math instructors in the urgent shift to virtual delivery of “entry-level” college math courses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin will offer a series of free professional learning opportunities to mathematics faculty this summer and fall. The “National Virtual Professional Learning” series will provide training in the design and delivery of effective, engaging virtual teaching and learning for students in gateway college-level mathematics courses, including those using student supports in the co-requisite model.

Teaching faculty representing nearly 50 two-year and four-year institutions from Minnesota, South Texas, the Miami area of Florida, along with several Tribal Colleges and Universities, will participate in the virtual learning series. These sessions are supported by grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Ascendium Education Group.

“Teaching effectively in a virtual modality can pose a distinct challenge for faculty, especially with the recent, very rapid shift to online course delivery that institutions have faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Martha Ellis, Ph.D., interim managing director at the Dana Center. “Most traditional online mathematics courses do not provide the support and engagement needed for students to be successful. Mathematics instructors themselves have expressed a desire for intense guidance in virtual teaching if they are to be comfortable, proficient in available tools, and able to apply research-based best practices in virtual collaborative teaching.”

Through [FOCI: Focused Online Collaborative Interactions](#), the Dana Center has provided online professional learning to thousands of higher education instructors. A FOCI series involves six, two-hour sessions delivered synchronously over several weeks. Each cohort of 25 teaching faculty learn over time using scaffolded content and apply what they learn to their own teaching in between sessions. The “National Virtual Professional Learning” series will include instruction on the design of lessons, student supports, and technical issues as well as access issues for students from low-income backgrounds and students with disabilities.

The series will focus on entry-level college mathematics courses, including classes taught with co-requisite supports. Although introductory math courses are a critical milestone in degree or certificate completion, national data show that [less than 10 percent](#) of students complete a college mathematics course within the first two years of college. Co-requisite courses are showing [increasingly better success for students](#) than the familiar “remedial” approach to developmental education. In most traditional remediation models, students are asked to take one or more non-credit bearing math courses before enrolling in the college-level course they need. In contrast, co-requisite models enable students to enter directly into college-level math while also accessing additional academic and related supports through a “co-requisite,” such as a concurrent course, lab, or tutoring program.

“Ascendium is committed to projects like these that help educators, their institutions, and their systems begin to dismantle structural barriers to learner success,” said Amy Kerwin, Ascendium’s vice president of philanthropy. “Providing support for online teaching from our Covid-19 Rapid Response Fund is essential to maintaining progress on this important goal.”

The Dana Center conducted a series of free “triage” webinars and office hours during March 2020 to provide math faculty with effective tools and online teaching strategies to help them in moving their courses to virtual delivery. The overwhelming response—over 500 instructors from 26 states—to this

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The University of Texas at Austin
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webinar series stressed the need and desire among faculty for more in-depth professional learning in online teaching.

The \$275,000 in grants provided by Ascendium and the Gates Foundation will support the development and ongoing improvement of the Dana Center's FOCI series as well as the participation of 125 faculty members in the summer cohorts.

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