EP3

Supporting Departmental Change Efforts in Physics with Departmental Action Leadership Institutes (DALIs)

Joel C. Corbo (University of Colorado Boulder), David Craig (Oregon State University), Robert Dalka, Sara Frederick, Chandra Turpen (University of Maryland College Park)

SUMMARY

Departmental Action Leadership Institutes (DALIs) support faculty members and their departments in implementing significant changes to their undergraduate programs. DALI participants learn about and implement critical aspects of engaging in a change effort (e.g., defining a vision, setting goals, gathering and analyzing data, assessing results), of supporting a high-functioning team (e.g., recruiting diverse team members, managing conflict and power differentials), and of interfacing with stakeholders outside the team (e.g., cultivating allies, managing resistance). Thus far, the participants in the pilot DALI are reporting a positive learning experience.

What is a DALI?

A DALI provides intensive support for major departmental change efforts by training leaders in how to be effective agents of change in their departments. DALIs are intended for departments facing major challenge or wanting to make a significant change.

Participants: Two people from each of five institutions, working in a pair as change leaders.

Facilitation: Provided by two experts in departmental change (currently, Corbo and Craig)

Time commitment: Intensive kickoff workshop, followed by a year of bi-weekly meetings.

DALI Structure
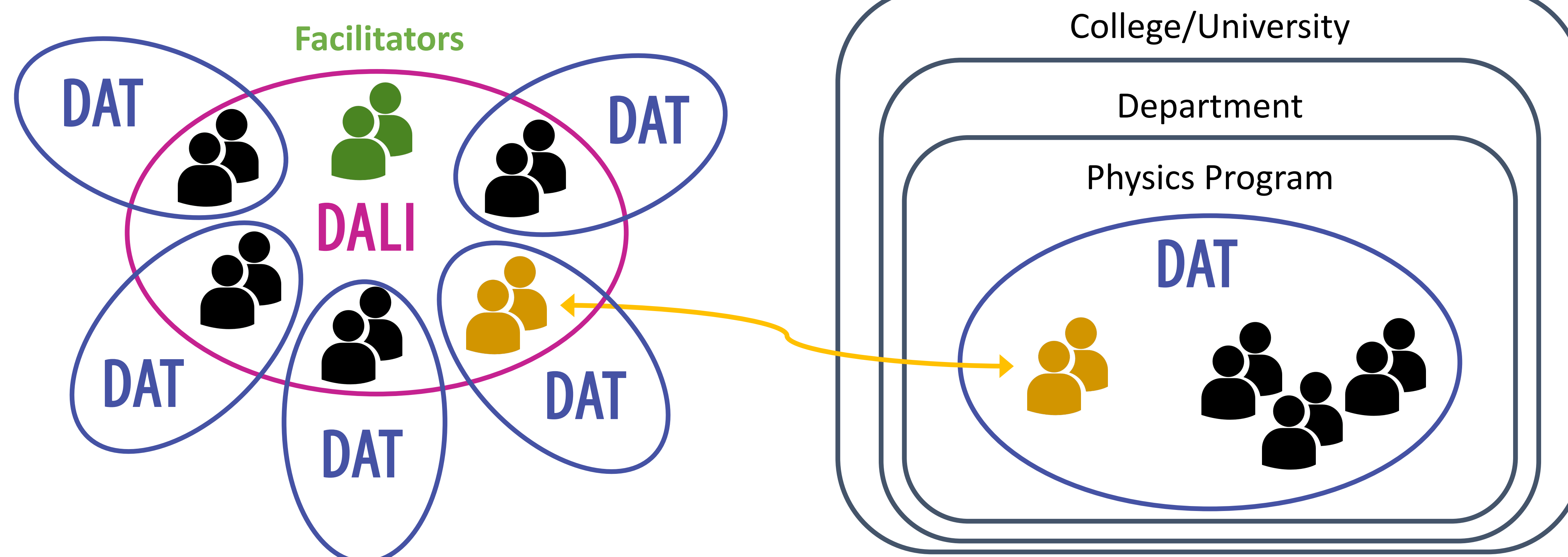
Each pair of DALI participants acts as a leader of a Departmental Action Team (DAT) in their department. The DALI equips the participant pairs with knowledge and tools to help them lead their DATs in making effective, sustainable, data-informed change. The DATs "do the work" of implementing the change, with support from the DALI facilitators and other participants. The DATs also include other department members (faculty, students, staff, alums, etc.) and is embedded in a particular institutional context.

DALI Curriculum

The DALI supports participants in developing key change-related skills:

Carrying out the change effort (e.g., defining a vision, setting goals, gathering/analyzing data, engaging in activities, assessing results)

Developing a high functioning team (e.g., recruiting a diverse team, setting up norms, defining team structures, managing conflict/power differentials, motivating team members)

Building positive relationships (e.g., gathering input, cultivating allies, developing buy-in, interfacing with other units)

Growing as change agents (e.g., learning about models of change, recognizing opportunities to advance change, feeling more capable of/motivated to create change)

Quotes from DALI participants

Shift in expectations: From being given an answer to self-diagnosing

"I thought, you know, somebody is going to just give me an answer—do this or do that, and have those bright ideas that we just run back and implement them… But [the facilitators] kind of made the point, very successfully, that it will be up to us to find the reason why we're not functioning as well as we would like."

Inclusion of students as "equal players"

"I also really appreciate that they told us—and it's not always that you think about it—that it's very important to have students on those teams and make them equal players"

On decision-making and consensus

"[W]e will go with the majority. But if we have somebody who deviates then we will be delaying the decision until next meeting and let…the other person who does not want to vote for this decision…put out his or her points, why they don't want to make this decision. And we will delay the vote or revote next time after we listen all the arguments of the person who disagrees with the majority. [W]e want a full consensus."

Assembling a diverse team

"[T]he idea of like assembling a diverse team, I thought was really useful. Like… having students, we also have faculty now from the Ed school… we have an alum on our team as well… I'm not sure I would have thought of including all those people."

On working as a change leader team

"[I]t's always easier to do something with someone, especially when you're trying to do something new… you have someone to bounce ideas off of… If something goes wrong, you don't feel like it's entirely your fault…. after our first DAT meeting we're both like, yeah that did not go the way we had anticipated it was gonna go, and then we could talk about like, okay well, what do we have to do to kind of course correct."