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# Curriculum developers: An emerging subset of educational developers

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**Abstract**

This mixed methods study explores the work and perspectives of curriculum developers, a subset of educational developers who support the development, revision, and/or renewal of academic degree programs and similar sequences, beyond an individual course. Thirty-five developers in the United States and Canada completed a survey addressing curriculum support roles and how they describe and perceive this work. Although structural differences were identified across contexts, descriptions and perceptions of the work were remarkably similar and highlighted the distinctiveness of the work with regard to complexity and scale, facilitation, and navigating departmental cultures and dynamics. This study is an important first step in recognizing and understanding curriculum development and building community within this subset of educational development work.

**Keywords:** curriculum, educational development, support, perceptions

Program-level curriculum development—developing, revising, and/or renewing academic programs—is complex work that faculty typically undertake infrequently and without training. This work inherently requires collaboration across multiple stakeholders and often requires navigating accreditation and other approval processes, which can be challenging without experience. Furthermore, governance structures,

promotion criteria, and faculty cultures can impede efficient and effective curriculum development (Zemsky et al., 2018). Thus, it is valuable for faculty to have the support of experienced educational developers in this work (Bens et al., 2021).

Educational developers are well-suited to supporting program-level curriculum development because they regularly support pedagogical development, curriculum development at the individual course level, and organizational development related to teaching and learning (Beach et al., 2016; Schroeder, 2011; Wright, 2023). However, this work appears to be relatively rare in the portfolios of centers for teaching and learning (Beach et al., 2016; Wright, 2023).

Working with an entire department on collaborative, complex change involves features and challenges distinct from educational development focused on individuals. In many contexts, faculty have high levels of autonomy over their own course design and pedagogical decisions (Schroeder, 2011; Zemsky et al., 2018). This circumstance works in favor of educational development focused on individual instructors, such as teaching consultations and course design or instructional skills workshops. But it creates challenges for educational development that supports faculty in collaboratively developing, agreeing to, and implementing program-level changes—changes that likely impact faculty autonomy in their own courses. As a result, it is important to explore the perceptions and experiences of those engaged in curriculum development so that we can create meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities to better support this work.

Discussions of curriculum immediately run into a definitional challenge as *curriculum* is an imprecise term. Reviews of the literature on curriculum in higher education agree that there is no shared understanding of what *curriculum* means (Annala et al., 2015; Tight, 2024). Annala et al. (2015) noted that among the articles they surveyed, "most . . . took the concept of curriculum as self-evident, yet a wide variety of interpretations appeared" (p. 175). Fraser and Bosanquet (2006) similarly found a range of understandings of *curriculum* among faculty they

interviewed. Barnett and Coate (2005) embraced the "fuzziness" (p. 5) of curriculum as a term because it points to the inherent complexity of curriculum as an idea.

One element of the definitional complexity is around scale: *curriculum* might be used to refer to a student's entire learning experience across their time in higher education or to a number of smaller units, such as the curriculum for a major or minor, the curriculum for a single course, or even the curriculum for sections within courses. The literature on curriculum development does not always differentiate between different scales of curriculum, and even when the scale of reference is clear within a book or article, it is not always evident whether the conclusions also apply to other scales.

On the one hand, curriculum is anything from the lesson in a 50-minute class session to an entire degree. On the other, differences in scale matter. Specifically, from the perspective of an educational developer, there are significant operational differences between the approach one might take supporting an individual faculty member designing a single course that is fully under that instructor's control and the approach one might take supporting a department collaboratively designing an entire degree for which they are collectively responsible. The complexities involved in curriculum at the program scale also increase exponentially, warranting a consideration of program-level curriculum development as a distinct enterprise (DiPietro et al., 2022). Timmermans (2014) identified "facilitating a change process" as the central threshold concept in educational development and distinguished between facilitating change in individuals and groups and facilitating systemic change (p. 305). Curriculum developers arguably work at the intersection of these categories, navigating individuals, groups, and systems in their work in a way that other educational developers might not.

We elected to use Bens et al.'s (2021) definition of *curriculum* as a "set of well-integrated teaching and learning experiences forming a connected whole" that "extends beyond the individual course" to academic programs and similar sequences (p. 482). When filtered through this definition, the literature on curriculum development is relatively

limited. Much of it has focused on case studies of particular projects (e.g., Anakin et al., 2018; Healey et al., 2013; Wijngaards-de Meij & Merx, 2018; Wilson & Slade, 2020) and on processes and practices that support effective curriculum development (e.g., Fowler et al., 2015; Kalu & Dyjur, 2018; Metzler et al., 2017; Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004). Literature focusing on the role educational developers play in program-level curriculum development is even more limited (Bens et al., 2021; DiPietro et al., 2022; O'Neill, 2010; O'Neill et al., 2014) and does not yet offer a comprehensive view of curriculum support within educational development, nor does it elucidate its nuances as a complex and demanding educational developer role.

This research originated from our own experiences as educational developers who support academic units in developing and revising curricula. Each of us came to this work in different ways and with different backgrounds, yet we all found ourselves surprised by the common elements of curriculum development work: stories of educational developers struggling to scale up course-focused backward design techniques or of working sessions derailed by department politics or an inability to reach consensus. We also found that our fellow educational developers who had not worked in curriculum development sometimes struggled to understand what we were experiencing. We began to wonder about the distinctiveness of curriculum development as an educational development role and sought to better understand our own and others' experiences with this work.

In this study, we take a first step toward documenting the characteristics of this support role by surveying curriculum developers—a subset of educational developers who support the development, revision, and/or renewal of academic programs and sequences, beyond the individual course, through their expertise in curriculum design—in the United States and Canada. Henceforth we use the term *curriculum developers* to describe this subset of educational developers and *curriculum development* to describe the support work they do. We sought to understand curriculum developers' practices and perspectives by examining two research questions:

1. How is curriculum development work structured within educational development?
2. How do curriculum developers describe and perceive the work they do?

We were also interested in possible differences between the United States and Canada in how curriculum development is structured and experienced by developers. This exploratory study is among the first to investigate curriculum support as a distinct type of educational development and to do so from the perspective of people doing this work.

## Method

This study is descriptive, painting a picture of participants' experiences of curriculum development. Because we were interested both in the administrative structures in which our participants work and in their perceptions of their work, we employed a mixed methods approach to collecting data. This allows results related to administrative structures to be summarized quantitatively while also allowing us to gather rich information about participants' "lived experiences" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 7) through several open-ended questions. We chose to use an online survey to reach more people than would be feasible with interviews. The study was approved by the research ethics boards at both institutions, and all participants provided informed consent.

### *Participants*

We recruited participants via two listservs for educational developers in North America: the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network Google Group and the Canadian Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) listserv. We sought participants who self-identified as working in formal educational development roles and whose work involves collaborating with, facilitating,

and/or leading groups of academic faculty and/or staff in the design or revision of academic programs/curricula (as opposed to course-focused work). Anyone meeting this requirement was invited to participate regardless of job title or where within the institution their position was located (e.g., a central office or embedded in a department or school). The survey was open from November 2021 to January 2022.

We received 59 responses; 24 were excluded due to answering only inclusion criteria ($n = 16$), answering too few questions ($n = 5$), or failing to meet inclusion criteria by not having a formal educational development role ($n = 3$). The final sample consisted of 35 individuals located in the United States ($n = 12$) and Canada ($n = 22$); one did not indicate location. Participants could refrain from answering any question, so responses do not always total 35. Demographic information is provided in Table 1.

***Table 1. Participant Demographics***

| | | **Percentage of Participants** |
|---|---|---|
| Country ($n = 34$) | United States | 35% |
| | Canada | 65% |
| Gender† ($n = 30$) | Male | 3% |
| | Female | 97% |
| Race/ethnicity* ($n = 28$) | White/Caucasian | 86% |
| | Latinx | 3.5% |
| | Asian | 7% |
| | Multiple | 3.5% |
| Degree level* ($n = 30$) | Master's | 53% |
| | Doctorate | 47% |
| Degree field* ($n = 27$) | Science | 26% |
| | Education | 37% |
| | Humanities | 30% |
| | Art | 4% |
| | Business | 4% |
| Professional Affiliation ($n = 32$) | Tenured faculty | 25% |
| | Non-tenured faculty | 9% |
| | Staff | 66% |

* Open-ended questions.

† Non-binary and self-description were also options.

### *Survey Design and Analysis*

As we were unable to find an existing instrument that addressed our research questions, we leveraged our team's research design expertise and developed a 35-item Qualtrics survey informed by past surveys administered to instructional designers (Magruder et al., 2019; Sharif & Cho, 2015) and educational developers (Green & Little, 2016; O'Neill, 2010). The survey collected demographic data, information about the participants' work as curriculum developers, and participants' perceptions of the distinctiveness and value of their work. In total, there were 20 open-ended questions and 15 closed-ended questions, the majority of which asked participants to select from a list. Individual survey questions are described in the context of the results. A draft of the survey was reviewed by several curriculum developers from outside our research team who provided feedback on the survey and helped to ensure its clarity, consistency, and accuracy.

Closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics or counts, both overall and by country. Where country comparisons are listed, the individual who did not indicate their location is included only in the overall count. Apart from demographic questions, only closed-ended questions with at least 31 (88%) of the participants responding were analyzed and included in this article. Open-ended questions were coded using inductive qualitative coding techniques (Miles et al., 2020); after reading through the full open-ended data set multiple times, each researcher individually identified preliminary codes derived from the data. The researchers then shared their preliminary coding and as a team agreed upon a single set of codes to be applied across questions. All data were then recoded by at least two researchers who compared their work at multiple points and revised for consistency. We found that the final themes, in addition to capturing participants' perspectives, resonated with us in our own experiences as curriculum developers.

### *Researchers as Instrument*

Our positionalities and experiences as curriculum developers at our institutions (both large, public research universities, one in the United States, one in Canada) impact our approach to this research and data analysis. While our experiences as curriculum developers afford us insight into work of this nature, they can also introduce the possibility of bias in our interpretations. To combat potential bias, before collating findings, we rotated coding pairs to ensure our analyses incorporated multiple perspectives based on our geographical location, professional experience, and positionality.

## Results

We first report how curriculum development support is structured, including developers' positions and the ways they engage with the academic units they support. We then share how these developers describe and perceive their work: the perceived importance and distinctiveness of their work as compared with other educational development roles, the roles they believe they play, and the challenges and opportunities the work presents.

### *Structure of Curriculum Development Support*

#### *Position Information*

To identify how positions were structured, participants were asked their job title, unit location, percentage of time allocated to curriculum work, and the number of people in their unit providing curriculum development support. Responses varied considerably.

When examining the 35 participants' job titles, which often indicate the focus and level of positions, the only titles that were shared across institutions were Curriculum Consultant ($n$ = 2) and Educational

Developer (*n* = 2). Sixteen (46%) participants reported a title that combined either *curriculum* or *educational* with *specialist*, *developer*, or *consultant*. Nine (26%) reported titles including *director* or *manager* (some also included *senior*), and 7 (20%) reported titles indicating senior academic positions (e.g., dean). Seventy-five percent (*n* = 8) of U.S. participants held a management or upper-level position, compared to 32% (*n* = 7) of Canadian participants.

The majority (*n* = 22, 63%) held positions located within a central or university-wide center for teaching and learning. A smaller number were located within a different central support unit, such as the Office of the Provost or Academic Affairs (*n* = 6, 17%), or an academic school or faculty (*n* = 7, 20%). U.S. participants were more likely than Canadian participants to be in a central support unit other than a teaching and learning center (*n* = 4, 33% vs. *n* = 2, 9%), and Canadian participants were more likely to be located within an academic school (*n* = 5, 23% vs. *n* = 2, 17%). The length of time participants' units had provided curriculum development support varied (see Table 2); this support appeared relatively new in the United States compared with Canada.

The number of people providing support for curriculum development in participants' units varied (*Mdn* = 2, range 1–8), with little variation across contexts. Participants and their units provided support to a wide range of projects: a median of 4.25 individually (range 1–25) and 6.5 as a unit (range 1–70). Overall, a median of 40% of individual participants' time (range 9%–100%) was dedicated to curriculum development. Just eight individuals (23%) indicated that 80% or more

***Table 2. Length of Time Providing Curriculum Development Support***

| | **Overall (*n* = 35)** | **United States (*n* = 12)** | **Canada (*n* = 22)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| <2 years | 6% | 17% | 0% |
| 2–5 years | 23% | 33% | 18% |
| 6–10 years | 26% | 33% | 23% |
| 11+ years | 43% | 17% | 55% |
| Unknown | 2% | 0% | 4% |

of their time was dedicated to curriculum development; all but one were in Canada. U.S. participants reported a median of 30% (range 9%–80%) of their time spent on curriculum development, compared with Canadian participants at 50% (range 10%–100%).

*Engaging with Academic Units*

When asked to indicate the ways academic units request support, nearly all (*n* = 33, 94%) reported that units contacted them directly. About a third of participants (*n* = 12, 34%) invited units to work with them, with Canadian participants more likely to select this option than their U.S. counterparts (*n* = 10, 45% vs. *n* = 2, 17%). About a quarter (*n* = 8, 23%) indicated units were either invited or required by academic leadership or review processes to work with them, and 20% (*n* = 7) indicated units go through an application process. Participants shared that units' motivations for requesting curriculum development support varied: units desired continuous improvement of teaching and learning, were required to by quality assurance or accreditation requirements, or sought to ensure student success in an ever-changing market and society.

### *Developers' Descriptions and Perceptions of Their Work*

*Perceptions of the Importance of Curriculum Development*

*Importance of the Work.* When asked about the importance of curriculum development, participants referred to the impact of curricula on student learning, student success, or student retention. Some responses were high level, such as a claim that "everything we do is in service of student learning experiences at our institution." Other participants made more specific reference to the relationship between curriculum development and the student experience, observing, for example, that "students don't experience their school as just a collection of courses, ideally. They experience entire programs." One

participant summed up many of the recurring themes in their sweeping assessment of the importance of investing in curriculum development:

> This is the foundation of everything else that happens in the program regarding teaching. It can address issues of equity and inclusion, help with retention, improve student success. It can make faculty less frustrated by what students do/don't know when they enter their classrooms. It's the way to sell your program to students, administrators, alumni [etc.;] it makes you articulate what you care about and why/how students will be different because they completed your program. It helps you argue for more support and resources in a rationale [*sic*], evidence-based way.

Participants also mentioned the importance of continually improving a program, both because of quality assurance/accreditation requirements and independent of them. They pointed to the importance of improvement, alignment, and intentionality in curriculum design, with one arguing that it is "essential to stay current and adapt to our changing world" and another observing, "If you don't aim at something, then you will miss the target. Aligned curriculum is intentional and purposeful."

*Importance of Developers.* Participants emphasized their belief that curriculum developers play an important role in helping faculty develop a well-designed curriculum. Several noted that curriculum developers have expertise that faculty might not. While "faculty have very specific expertise in their discipline," they were often not "taught how to organize courses into productive and impactful pathways for students. . . . Curriculum developers can help faculty (and others) do the thinking about program design effectively." Another noted that academic units can have longstanding or default ways of creating curricula that are not effective, arguing that it is "not common" to focus on "concepts of scaffolding learning, or of intentionally building a curriculum." Participants believed curriculum developers can work to change these norms.

Some participants felt that they brought particular value to the work through their ability to see the bigger picture and to focus on "learning at the degree level." They connect unit faculty to a wider context; one noted, "I have the advantage of a 10,000 f[oo]t view across the Faculty and understand where different resources exist within the University," and another stated, "I liaise between many different interests. Students, faculty, industry, senior leaders. I am the middle person."

### *Perceptions of the Distinctiveness of Curriculum Development*

*Scope.* The idea of a 10,000-foot view emerged again when participants were asked how, if at all, curriculum development differs from other types of educational development. One observed that curriculum developers need this "macro-level" view that takes into account "how programs and the systems that surround them operate." The work also requires more direct navigation of institutional and unit leadership priorities, as well as accreditation and Senate/government requirements.

Many emphasized that curriculum development was distinctive in its focus on working with groups who must collaborate and even reach consensus, as opposed to with instructors focused on individual courses and personal pedagogical practices. Participants reported that curriculum development "engages whole units and multiple faculty." As a result, developers must "[work] within a culture" and "[navigate] both institutional norms and policies as well as department norms and policies." One pointed out "the necessity for collaborative processes and outcomes," and another similarly emphasized the importance of "collaboration and teamwork—or in some cases, compromises when faculty are not willing to set aside differences."

*Time Invested.* Curriculum development is also distinctive in the time it takes, with several participants using the word *sustained* to describe this work. When asked how long they typically engage with an academic unit, the 35 participants who responded to this question

reported an extensive range of time, with responses peaking between 6 and 18 months.

*Lack of Distinction.* Although most participants identified differences between curriculum development and other forms of educational development, three did not. One commented, "For me, it is not different," and another observed, "It's not [different]. The projects are just bigger." The third was uncertain as they had "not done much other educational development work than this."

### *Roles Played by Curriculum Developers*

Participants were presented with 10 common support roles and asked to indicate both the most important role they played when providing curriculum development support and which were roles they did not play. Participants were not provided with definitions for each role but were asked to explain their choices as a way to elicit their perceptions of the roles.

The role most frequently indicated as most important was that of facilitator ($n$ = 20, 61%). Participants described facilitation with some nuance. One defined facilitating as "an enabling of things—processes, discussions, change, etc." This idea that curriculum development centers on enabling or making easier the work of others factored into many responses, including in participants' descriptions of their own work, where eight participants used *support* or *help* as their primary verb. One participant noted that their facilitation role was particularly important because having difficult conversations about curriculum is a skill that academic units sometimes lack. Others similarly felt that having a developer facilitate the process enabled greater success than might have been realized otherwise.

Several participants emphasized that they frame their role as a facilitator to underscore faculty ownership of their curricula and programs. One participant noted, "I don't have 'authority' over this type of work and I want the groups I work with to 'own' their work, their process, their product." Another observed that faculty are "very invested" and

"possessive" of their field and curriculum, which can sometimes lead them to question an educational developer whose expertise is outside the field; therefore, the "emphasis on the role of facilitator can help ease this concern."

Although facilitator was selected as their most important role by the majority of participants, other participants identified project manager, analyst, and leader as the most important roles they play in curriculum development work (see Table 3). However, there were interesting divisions regarding the role of project manager. Six participants (18%) identified it as their most important role. One justified the importance of this role with "the projects will stall if you do not have someone to keep the process going." Nevertheless, 10 (29%) identified it as a role they do *not* play; several noted that a common misunderstanding is that units expect them to be project managers, but they are not. One participant explained, "We help guide departments through [program review] requirements in a non-punitive way. This is in contrast to those who act as project managers who focus on completion of tasks." Thus, participants seem divided on whether managing a unit's progress through this complex process is their responsibility. It may also be that participants are using different terms to describe similar practices; what some participants describe as project management, others may think of as facilitation or guidance.

***Table 3. Curriculum Developers' Most Important Roles (n = 33)***

| | **Percentage of Participants** |
|---|---|
| Facilitator | 61% |
| Project manager | 18% |
| Analyst | 12% |
| Leader | 12% |
| Evaluator | 9% |
| Coordinator | 6% |
| Moderator | 3% |
| Translator/adaptor | 3% |
| Mediator | 0% |
| Participant | 0% |

### *Perceived Challenges and Opportunities of Curriculum Development*

*Challenges.* When asked to identify the biggest challenges of curriculum development, participants emphasized the various forms of resistance they encounter. Participants mentioned faculty and/or academic leadership lacking capacity for engagement or various factors contributing to resistance to change, such as "political and interpersonal dynamics among faculty, academic leadership turnover, too many institutional priorities to make progress on any of them, preoccupation with teaching load and content coverage."

Another participant added that faculty may resist because they may not be familiar with the curriculum process or not be able to come to agreement:

> There is a lot of resistance when working with faculty. I think this comes from fear of not knowing the design behind the whole curriculum. Faculty tend to know their courses really well, but not their curriculums. Getting buy-in when there are a variety of perspectives can be a challenge.

Participants also focused particularly on time and prioritization, observing a mismatch between the amount of work required by curriculum development and the amount of time faculty have to devote to it.

Some instances of resistance were related to quality assurance or accreditation. For example, one participant noted, "[I am] feeling the frustration and futility of forcing a department to follow a specific process, regardless if it suits their needs, because of quality assurance." Participants who discussed quality assurance felt that when it is mandated by the institution or a governing body, faculty do not tend to agree that the work is necessary or prioritize it.

*Opportunities.* The opportunities afforded by curriculum development fell into two primary categories: the personal enjoyment participants derived from their work and a sense of the work's broad impact on student learning. Many participants shared the satisfaction they gained from working with faculty from a range of disciplines and particularly

that spending long periods of time working deeply on program curricula allowed them to "learn a lot about different disciplines, careers, and industries." Participants also focused on enjoyment derived from collaboration with faculty and more generally from helping people.

Another prominent theme was curriculum development's significant and positive impact on student learning. Several participants described this idea in general terms: "seeing the positive impact on students and their learning," "making change to make programs better for students," or simply "making a difference!" Some compared this to course-focused educational development work, with one noting that "[s]mall, course-based changes are typically not deep or sustained enough to transform the experiences of departmental majors."

Interestingly, a few participants observed that the scale of curriculum development work made the impact on students more difficult to perceive directly. One participant felt this work "is a step removed from individual courses, instructors, and in a way, students." Another observed that because of the scale of the work, curriculum development "can have much more serious consequences than course-level work" but that it also "has less direct/obvious impact on students." The potential consequences of work at this scale on student learning were specifically detailed by a participant who identified this as one of the primary opportunities of curriculum development work:

> If I teach a class, I affect 20 people. If I help one faculty member, I impact their class or all their classes, so maybe a few hundred people. When I work with curricula/program development, I am impacting maybe thousands.

## Discussion

This study revealed that despite variability in some structural features of curriculum development support positions in Canada and the United States—namely that this work appears newer and more

likely done by people in management or upper-level positions in the United States and more established and distributed across a range of positions in Canada—individuals who do this work generally feel their work is distinct from other forms of educational development and have notably similar perceptions about the importance and nature of this type of work.

The observation of one participant that they see themselves as "the middle person" serves as a heuristic for the various ways in which curriculum developers view their role as distinctive. Curriculum developers work at a meso level, between micro-level educational development work with individual instructors and macro-level organizational development work with institutions (Ellis, 2018). In this role they require both strong interpersonal skills and systems-level awareness. They often also find themselves in a mediating role within the group dynamics of a department, working as the middle person to hear all sides and to bring about compromise and consensus.

Participants emphasized the significance of this role in supporting faculty in curriculum development, a process that is complex and often unfamiliar to faculty. Zemsky et al. (2018) recommended expert facilitators external to the academic unit to help faculty avoid the myriad challenges of collaborative curriculum work. Our findings concur, suggesting that curriculum developers perceive their work as valuable in terms of support and facilitation. They report that their expertise in curriculum development and associated processes can reduce faculty workload, thus allowing faculty to focus on the disciplinary aspects of curriculum renewal. Curriculum developers shared that they also play the role of neutral outsider, helping faculty navigate challenges such as department politics and keeping them focused on their common concern for their students (Bens et al., 2021; Zemsky et al., 2018).

The scope and scale of the work came up recurrently as distinguishing features of curriculum development support, as participants reported working with groups of faculty, often full academic units, on projects that take months or even years to complete. Both the challenges and rewards of this work appear to be related to the scale,

signaling a key area for targeted support for curriculum developers. For example, the curriculum developers in this study felt their most important role was as a facilitator, an identification that is unsurprising given the centrality of facilitating change processes to educational development itself (Timmermans, 2014).

Explorations of facilitation in educational development are often approached from the assumption that the change being facilitated is with individuals (e.g., Torosyan & Cook-Sather, 2018) or that facilitation with individuals and with groups involve essentially the same skills (e.g., Timmermans, 2014). However, our participants' emphasis on the scope and scale of curriculum development, as well as on the interpersonal skills required to navigate department culture and dynamics, suggest that there are distinctive facilitation skills necessary to lead a department or program through the complex change process that is curriculum development. Academic departments constitute microcultures that impact faculty members' relationship to teaching and curriculum (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2015). These microcultures play an active role in curriculum development, and successful curriculum development requires understanding and engaging with them, as well as the dexterity to modify approaches to best suit a range of department microcultures. Educational developers are frequently trained to facilitate learning in individuals, whether in one-on-one or in group contexts. They are not as frequently trained as facilitators of group processes, when the goal is group collaboration or consensus-building. The latter skills, our participants suggest, are explicitly needed in curriculum development work.

Curriculum developers reported focusing on "the big picture," including the long-term impact on student learning over time, which reflects a systems-level approach to curriculum. This view is simultaneously broad, encompassing the whole university, and deep, with lengthy, behind-the-scenes collaborations within departments and programs. This ability to connect people and ideas across the university was viewed as a complement to faculty's subject matter expertise.

The value for the development of curricula, and ultimately for student learning and success, is in the combination of the faculty and the curriculum developers' perspectives.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

As we believe this is among the first work exploring the roles of curriculum developers in North America and the number of curriculum developers is unknown, we are unable to determine what participant sample would be representative of individuals providing this support generally. However, we propose this study could be the first step in determining core details around this population. While a precise calculation around sample size could not be made, we believe our data were sufficient to draw the conclusions we have made. We may have missed potential participants not on the selected listservs or who do this work in contexts not traditionally associated with the listservs we used, such as in accreditation or assessment offices, yet our recruitment methods were consistent with our goal to identify participants in "formal educational development roles." Furthermore, while a large majority of our participants identified as white women, this group has been identified as a population overrepresented in educational development (Green & Little, 2016; POD Network, 2016).

We intentionally confined our study to the United States and Canada because of the relative similarity between the higher education systems, the structure of academic programs, and the ways curricula are developed in these two countries. We note that, despite Canada having a smaller overall population and substantially fewer higher education institutions than the United States, we received more responses from Canadian participants. Our results suggest that Canadian institutions have generally offered this support for a longer period, perhaps indicating that curriculum development is more well established in Canadian educational development; this distinction may explain this apparent discrepancy. To mitigate this imbalance, we explored

country-based differences and noted when they emerged. Further work elucidating these differences will allow educational developers around the world to better apply the literature to their own contexts.

There is ample scope for future studies continuing to understand curriculum development. If, as our findings suggest, this work is a distinct subset of educational development, it likely requires specialized skills and competencies. Future work could unpack what those skills and competencies are and how curriculum developers might best achieve them. The distinguishing features of the facilitator role in curriculum development are a particularly salient area for future study. There may also be interesting differences between curriculum developers who have roles almost fully dedicated to curriculum support and those who provide a wide range of support, or between those in management positions and those in non-management positions.

The present study provides evidence, from the perspective of those doing the work, that curriculum development is a distinct emerging subset of educational development in the United States and Canada. However, this proposition was not tested directly as the authors of this article identified these themes upon analyzing the open-ended responses of survey participants. Future work should therefore include comparisons between curriculum development support and other forms of educational development. It would also be interesting to hear from faculty receiving curriculum development support in order to understand the work from their point of view.

## Conclusion

This study began with our desire to better understand our own roles as curriculum developers and to discover whether others engaged in this work shared our experiences. The findings of the study indicate we are not alone. Many of our participants' observations—about the complexity and scale of curriculum development, about the specialized facilitation requirements when working with a group of people with

strong habits of individual autonomy who must collaborate and come to consensus, about the necessity of navigating departmental cultures and politics—echo our own experiences. This study is an important first step in understanding curriculum development as a subset of educational development. We hope it is also a first step in addressing this gap in the literature and creating recognition and community among those of us doing this work.

There are various forms of support that would benefit curriculum developers. Institutions, including centers for teaching and learning and other educational development support units, might consider the opportunities for curriculum development support in their hiring, work distribution, and staff training. To do so effectively, they need to better understand the skill set necessary to succeed in this work. Educational developers—both new curriculum developers and colleagues who wish to support them—working from a toolkit of skills and practices honed through work with individual instructors and courses would benefit from understanding the limitations of simply scaling up such approaches when facilitating and supporting large, complex, long-term projects. Training and support related to process facilitation as well as to change management in higher education may be useful. And curriculum developers themselves, who may not yet see themselves as a coherent community, can benefit from intentional collaboration, resource sharing, and community-building around curriculum development.

## Biographies

**Elizabeth Dickens** is an Associate Director and Associate Professor at the University of Virginia's Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), where she directs the CTE's curriculum (re)design program and other department-focused work. Her current research projects include work on curriculum development, equity-focused educational development, and the scholarship of educational development. She is the past editor of the POD Network's *POD Speaks* series of occasional papers.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest.

## Data Availability

The survey questions and the data reported in this manuscript are available on request by contacting the corresponding author.

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