Reframing “buy-in” during a phased adoption of course coordination

OLSUME – Nov 17th 2026

Context

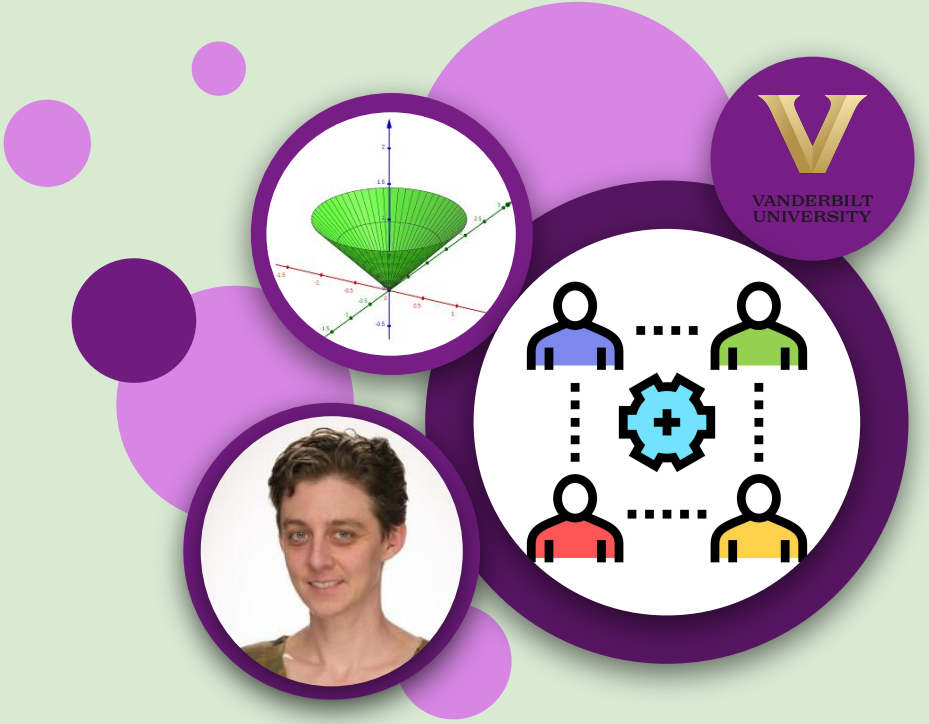
Vanderbilt University

- Private university in Nashville with ~7000 undergraduates.
- Math department is in the College of Arts & Science, but it also serves students in the School of Engineering and Peabody College of Education.

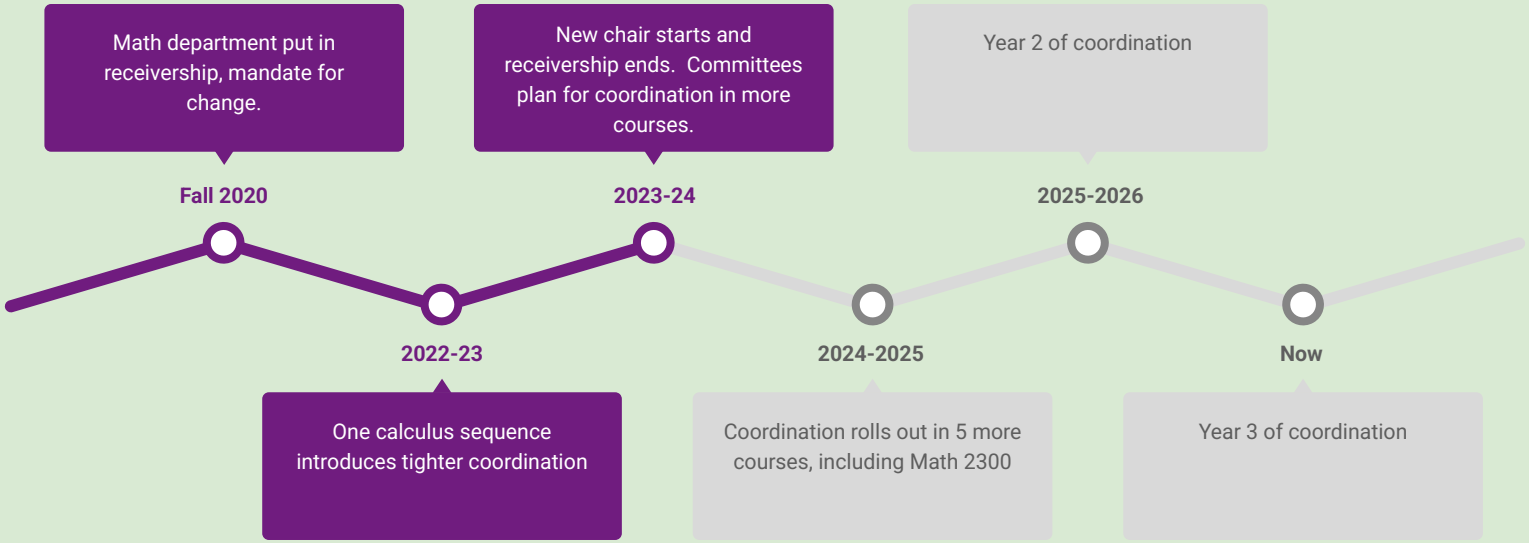
Math department

- 19-25 T/TT research faculty, 8-10 CT teaching-focused faculty
- 1300-1800 students taking lower-level courses each semester, in sections of 25-36

Math 2300: Multivariable Calculus



Timeline for change



Math 2300: Multivariable Calculus

Fast Facts

- Fairly standard Calc III curriculum
- 15 sections in the fall, 5 sections in the spring, 25-30 students per section
- Both MWF and TR sections
- Students are mostly Math, Phys, & Engr majors
- Mix of 2nd year students & 1st year students w/AP credit
- Taught faculty of all tracks & ranks, some of whom have taught it for a long time, some first-time teachers

Pre Coordination

- Common textbook
- One pre-semester meeting
- GPA ranges
- New instructors expected to design their ‘version’ of the course

Coordination

- Common textbook, schedule, course policies, and non-exam assessments
- No common exams, but same number and length of exams in MWF and TR sections
- Weekly meetings
- Permanent faculty may ‘opt-out’ of the above, but must follow pre-coordination norms.

Why coordinate? Why is buy-in important?

Efficiency, equity, fairness, continuity

Student success in large service courses

Vehicle for departmental change and pedagogical innovation

Support for new instructors

"McDonald's is consistent, but it's not a 5-star restaurant."

"We don't tell people how to teach."

"I don't want to be forced to _____."

Guiding principle

Instructors in a coordinated course should feel ownership over the form it takes. Buy-in comes from common purpose and shared vision.

Dilemmas

- These are all real, anonymized dilemmas from the early stages of course coordination.
- I am not trying to be gossipy about my colleagues.
- Rather, I hope to have discussions about how to stay in productive working relationships through disagreement.
- Many of you have many more years' experience with coordination than I do.
- You may think that some of these scenarios are not actually dilemmas because their solutions are easy or obvious to you. That's fine, as long as you're willing to explore beyond that instinct.

Dilemmas have been removed from this version.

The proper context for the dilemmas is the discussion that happened during the seminar in which they were presented. Without that context, it is easier to read them ungenerously. You are invited to find them in the video of that session, and experience them that way in context.

What are your buy-in dilemmas?

Thanks!

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