

# PROMOTING POSITIVE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER AND FACULTY RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY FROM A STATE UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

*This case study examined the relationships between Instructional Designers (IDs) and faculty at a large state university in the northeastern United States. The case study surveyed and interviewed IDs and faculty members to determine where the gap in perceptions and operationalization of the relationship exists so that IDs can better promote positive relationships with faculty. Quantitative survey items were analyzed for statistical frequency. Qualitative (open-ended) survey items and interview transcripts were analyzed and coded using thematic analysis. The case study discusses what makes that relationship work positively or negatively, focusing on how faculty and IDs work together during the process of creating courses, and how to improve that process. Results of the survey and interview data revealed a disparity between faculty and ID's perceptions of duties for each role when designing a course and identified the need for the ID to set the stage in early meetings to clarify perceptions for effective course design working relationships.*

**Keywords:** *Instructional designer, subject matter expert, learning, relationship, communication, collaboration, perception disparity, rapport, perception*

## INTRODUCTION

As instructional or learning designers working for a large institution, we find ourselves both passionate about our work and frustrated by its challenges. Often, perceptions about what an instructional designer does are unclear in the eyes of our colleagues and team members. Even the matter of our professional title is often uncertain. We must often go about establishing rapport while at the same time getting buy-in from faculty who are unclear about their own role. There is often confusion about how their role integrates with ours and that of those we work with in information technology. This case study is especially relevant as the emphasis on the role of the ID in guiding

faculty has come front and center with the growth in the field as a result of the pandemic. With this in mind, we sought to bring clarity to our roles and to clarify our understanding of all of the roles of the stakeholders in designing student-centered and effective learning (Chen & Carliner, 2021).

We looked first at the literature to determine the roles of the instructional designer (ID) and of the higher education subject matter expert (SME) during the course design process. The SME is the university faculty member, and to whom we will refer to as “faculty” for this case study. We sought to know how we should then be working together to create exceptional learning for students at our university and beyond. After looking at the

literature, we surveyed and completed structured interviews with IDs and faculty at our large institution to determine where the gap in perceptions and operationalization of the relationship exists, so that IDs can better promote positive relationships with faculty. This paper also provides recommendations to improve efficiency in the relationship to serve our learners.

Being in the role of ID we struggled with understanding the dynamics of the relationship with the faculty we work with. This case study topic came about in professional practice and curiosity about how to do our jobs better when serving faculty. To create an understanding of this relationship we looked to the literature to satisfy our curiosities about our individual and combined roles.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Role of the Instructional Designer*

An ID works for an educational institution (or corporation) and is tasked with taking content, as provided by a faculty (SME), and making it clear, efficient, and understandable for the novice, otherwise known as the learner. Keppell (2001) says the ID is focused on how instruction should be designed and developed while the faculty is focused on the content.

IDs accomplish this task by applying learning science and educational psychology principles to the content. IDs use many models and methods standard to the field as guides to practice (Pollard & Kumar, 2022) and they describe to faculty (SME) how these methods are applied in instructional design (Barron et al., 2005; Halupa, 2019; Keppell, 2000; Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017; Schwier et al., 2007; Wilson, 1997).

One of the challenges in the higher education environment is that faculty often misunderstand the role of the ID and considers them an information technology professional who puts classes online (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Chittur, 2018; Comolli & Prestera, 2007; Dykstra, 2020; Halupa, 2019; Pollard & Kumar, 2022). The purpose of the IDs' work is to do more than integrate pedagogy into the latest technologies; it is to interpret the pedagogy to the advantage of the learner, be that with or without technological integration. Sims and Koszalka (2008) define instructional design as "a purposeful activity to facilitate learning through a combination of strategies, activities,

and resources" (p. 573). These may include things such as assessment, evaluation, and much more. For IDs, there can be a disconnect between their perceived value by their colleagues and faculty and their feelings of being valued (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Dykstra, 2020).

Most IDs have received formal training on pedagogy and educational technology. At our large institution, most designers have obtained their master's degrees and some have doctoral degrees. IDs participate as professionals in professional organizations and have competencies that they abide by (Ashbaugh, 2013a; Halupa, 2019; Richardson, et al., 2019; Sims & Koszalka, 2008).

Kumar and Ritzhaupt (2017) interviewed eight instructional designers from a variety of higher education institutions including community colleges and public research universities, as well as for-profit universities and career colleges. According to Kumar and Ritzhaupt (2017), the duties of instructional designers primarily included: Course development and improvement, project management, formative and summative evaluation, faculty training, and communication. Kumar and Ritzhaupt (2017) also included participating in university committees, professional development, and research as possible activities. The knowledge and skills needed by IDs were summarized as understanding learning environments, instructional design models, quality models and processes, multimedia development, and communication design, along with being grounded in quality educational practice. While technical skills are important, Kumar and Ritzhaupt (2017) deem them secondary to pedagogical knowledge. They also mentioned time management and problem-solving abilities as a part of project management. The technical skills they mentioned included technical support, web design, LMS implementation, and the development of summative evaluations of courses.

### *Role of the Subject Matter Expert or Faculty Member*

The demand for online courses and blended learning environments has required higher education institutions to task faculty with taking on the role of subject matter expert. In this role, the subject matter expert is defined as a professional who is an expert in their field of study who has been entrusted with authoring a course at the

undergraduate or graduate level. In higher education, the subject matter expert is typically a faculty member; however, in some cases, the person in this role can be an adjunct instructor or a doctoral student. Faculty provide the necessary content expertise, but many faculty have not developed expertise in effective instructional design.

In their paper, Keengwe and Kidd (2010) stated:

*In the shift from the traditional learning environment and teaching modality to online or blended teaching and learning environments, it is critical for faculty to not only strive to learn the technologies associated with online learning, but also understand the need to fundamentally change and transform their pedagogical approaches to the learning and teaching process to meet the instructional needs of online students.* (p. 4)

This emphasis on having faculty change pedagogical approaches could be influenced by their relationship with an ID (Colaric & Taymans, 2004; Grosse & Renkl, 2004; Kurzweil & Marcellas, 2008; Maguire, 2005; Nelson & Thompson, 2005; Panda & Mishra, 2007). Technology alone does nothing to enhance online pedagogy (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). According to Jacobsen et al. (2002), the real challenge is to “develop fluency with teaching and learning with technology, not just with technology, itself” (p. 44).

#### *Relationship between the Instructional Designer and the Faculty Member*

Instructional design is a systematic process, involving distinct steps in the design and creation of online content. There are several instructional design models, but in this case study it was most relevant to focus on defining the relationship by using the ADDIE model (Branson et al., 1975; Molenda, 2003; Watson, 1981).

Through the progression of the process in Figure 1, the ID and faculty developer’s relationship is formed (Brown et al., 2013; Parscal & Riemer, 2010).

“By pairing faculty with instructional design and curriculum specialists in an environment that provides project management, process infrastructure, and tools and support systems, online courses can be developed on a large-scale while maintaining high quality” (Parscal & Riemer, 2010,

Figure 1.  
ADDIE Model



p. 2). It is vitally important then to onboard the faculty regarding the ID’s role and the typical or expected course design process for the institution and how the ID can fit into this process (Gardner, 2010; Halupa, 2019; Hart, 2020). If the faculty is not onboarded properly, the ID can be seen as an obstacle in the way of getting their work completed and there can be conflict between the two (Castro-Figueroa, 2009; Chittur, 2018; Clearfield, 2019; Halupa, 2019). By way of seeing the influence of the ID as more than an information technology specialist, the faculty may begin to see the ID as a partner in teaching and learning rather than as someone only bringing technological knowledge.

When entering into a relationship with a faculty developer, the ID must be sensitive to the faculty member’s unique situation, context, culture, perceptions, and preconceived notions (Halupa, 2019). The ID must have situational awareness of how each project and faculty member functions in facilitating the pair’s integrity (Pan & Thompson, 2009).

In the initial meetings with a faculty member, IDs must clearly define the roles and expectations of the faculty member and each member of the creative team (Hixon, 2008; Meyen et al., 1999; Stevens, 2012). They must also be sure to clearly explain the purpose of their involvement in the process, pointing out that they are focused on the online pedagogical aspects of the course rather than the content (Hart, 2020). Although the ID and the faculty have distinct roles, these roles will be part of an interdependent process and require mutual respect for each other’s expertise (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Meyen et al., 1999; Pan et al., 2003).

Meyen et al. (1999) suggest that a transdisciplinary approach be used where the faculty member and ID should share their skills and learn the skills of the other with the intent to better understand the range of skills required and to be a more productive team member (p. 27).

During the analysis phase, the ID will dive deeply into the student context and needs before beginning the design process. The designer will work with the faculty member to determine student demographic information and then discuss the course goals (Chen & Carliner, 2021).

#### *Design Phase Focuses on the Course Content, Learning Activities, and Assessments*

Faculty participation and dedication to the project are vital in this phase, as they are the subject matter experts. The designer and faculty members discuss the lesson objectives and the designer needs to ensure that the objectives align with the course goals. When an agreement is reached, the faculty will then begin working on the lesson content. After being provided with the content from the faculty, IDs can make recommendations on instructional strategies and assessments to use with the course.

Working with an ID can transform perceptions about online education and subsequently improve the quality of online teaching (Chittur, 2018; Uibelhoer, 2020). Faculty perceptions of online learning and its value will differ. Kumar and Ritzhaupt (2017) reported that IDs “meeting with faculty members one to one to help them learn or develop materials was considered crucial by IDs because this enabled them to address individual need and problems” (p. 384).

Ashbaugh (2013b) states that IDs must research strategies and stay abreast of emerging technologies so they can fully explain and support their design recommendations to faculty, as well as take on the responsibility for the outcome of these recommendations. IDs must assume a leadership role with faculty where they communicate their ideas and acknowledge the faculty members’ ideas in a patient, respectful, and honest manner (Ashbaugh, 2013b; Bawa & Watson, 2017; Gies, 2020; Shaw, 2012).

IDs need to establish and continually build a relationship with faculty during the course development phase that creates an atmosphere of trust. Campbell et al. (2009) suggest that faculty working with IDs “...are actually engaging, as learners,

in a process of professional and personal transformation that has the potential to transform the participants and the institution” (p. 646).

In the implementation phase, the course has been created and the ID works with the faculty member to monitor how the instructional strategies are working. Often during this phase IDs work with faculty to create student surveys that are designed to gauge the effectiveness of course activities and measure student engagement. Bawa and Watson (2017) specifically call for no role for the ID in the teaching responsibilities. Chittur (2018) reported that as a result of working with an ID, faculty incorporated more student-centered approaches to their teaching after seeing better student outcomes:

*This qualitative research explored the interaction between instructional designers and professors that led to improved teaching on the part of the professor. Because so many professors work with instructional designers to create their online courses, they are in a good position to be exposed, some for the first time, to principles of good college teaching practice (p. 10).*

Evaluation, the last step of the ADDIE model, occurs throughout the design process as the ID and the faculty work together to refine the course. ID and faculty may employ summative evaluation methods (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017). Additional evaluation occurs based on student and faculty feedback, as well as by looking at student assessment data to determine whether they are learning and meeting learning outcomes.

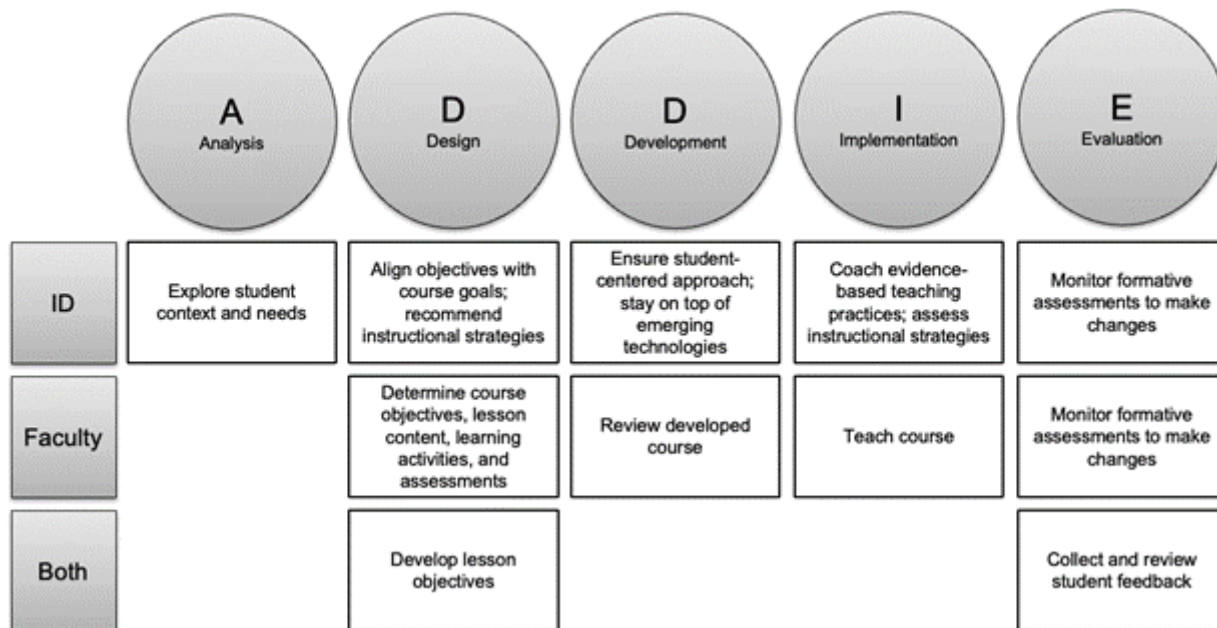
#### **AIMS**

The literature reviewed reveal the responsibilities of ID and SMEs during online course development. Figure 2 shows those responsibilities in relation to the ADDIE model. This paper seeks to see if this set of duties in the context of the theoretical model holds true at our institution.

No literature was found that showed that, at any point in the development process, the ID and faculty might find their relationship to be less than workable. No literature was found that examined the practical working relationship and any disparities between the ID and faculty perceptions of how each worked during the course design process. This case study sought to examine the gap between



Figure 2.  
Duties of the ID and Faculty in the Context of the ADDIE Model as Found in the Literature



the relationship the literature suggested and the operational relationship at our R1 institution, and how that relationship might look when it is working well and when it is not.

### Case Study Questions

1. At our R1 Institution, how does the relationship between Faculty and IDs operationalize as compared to how it is characterized in the literature?
2. What makes that relationship work during the course design process and how can it be improved?

### METHODS AND DESIGN

This case study is designed as a mixed-methods study that initially queried participants using an anonymous survey. Then, participants were invited to semistructured interviews. An application was made to the Institutional Review Board (IRB #6566) as an exempt educational study for which approval was granted.

#### Participants

This study surveyed IDs and faculty members to determine how the literature ideal matched up with the actual operationalized relationship. Study participants were invited to complete the study using a snowball method through institutional

social media, Yammer, and listservs. IDs and SMEs were all from the same R1 institution in the Northeastern United States. The estimated number of people solicited was 150. The response rate was approximately 34%. In total, 52 IDs and faculty from six colleges inside the institution participated in the survey anonymously, of which 26 were faculty and 26 were IDs. Faculty participating were teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Participants in the survey were invited to participate voluntarily. If a faculty or ID expressed interest in participating, they were allowed to take part in the qualitative interview. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Five faculty and two IDs were interviewed.

#### Instruments and Procedures

Using mixed methods this study used both an open-ended quantitative survey and qualitative interview questions.

#### Survey

An initial 20-item survey was administered to the study participants. It consisted of 17 open-ended, two multiple-choice, and one multiple-answer questions. The instrument was piloted with five IDs and five faculty volunteers from the institution. Ambiguous questions were identified and edited

based on the pilot feedback to create the final survey instrument.

Data collected in the survey were reported anonymously as grouped data. Based on the participant's responses in the survey, semistructured interview questions were created to further explore their responses. (See Appendix A for the survey instrument.) Quantitative items were analyzed for simple frequency, and open-ended items were analyzed for themes. Four themes emerged and aided in the development of follow-up interview questions.

### *Interview Questions*

The interview questions were drafted to gain further insight into the factors that made the relationship work well and the factors that stymied the relationship. (See Appendix B for the interview questions.) The respondents were asked to consider whether and when the relationship was working well or not around the following four themes:

- Communicating together (e.g., frequency, type, methods, etc.).
- When looking for or using methods of planning and gathering, selecting, organizing, and sequencing content.
- When using processes and strategies for creating a good working relationship.
- When working within the time frame you were given.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The survey was administered using an institution-hosted Qualtrics survey platform. The last survey item invited study participants to participate in the follow-up interview. The interviews were facilitated and recorded via Zoom web conferencing. These recordings were manually transcribed.

Quantitative survey items were analyzed for statistical frequency. Qualitative (open-ended) survey items and interview transcripts were analyzed and coded using thematic analysis. We searched across the data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns. This involved a six-step process: familiarizing ourselves with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The same codes were then applied to the qualitative interview data. Information on specific coding procedures and code book are available by request.

## RESULTS

### *Survey Results*

When asked to define the role of the Instructional Designer (ID) when working with a faculty member, respondents (N = 52) indicated that the primary role of the instructional designer is to give suggestions, recommendations, and guidance (48%, N = 25). We also noted that the IDs focused on student learning (46%, N = 24), technology integration (42%, N = 22), guidance in the course development and design process (38%, N = 20), and teamwork with the faculty (36%, N = 19). A faculty member said, "They are the project managers in the course development process and lay out the timeline, assign tasks, and make sure the project stays on course." One faculty member described the ID as "helping to put the brakes on what would have been completely out of the realm of possibility." Another described a "partnership" with faculty to create learning experiences.

When asked to define the role of the faculty members when working with an ID, (N = 52), 100% indicated that it was their responsibility to provide content and materials or be the SME (N = 52), in addition to providing vision or organization for the course (34%, N = 18) and to work with the ID and anyone else as a team (36%, N = 19). Of interest, we also noted that their role was leading the pedagogical development of the course (23%, N = 12).

When asked, how do you begin to build a common language between the roles, respondents (N = 48 or 92%) indicated that the two parties must talk or meet (61%, N = 32), communicate roles (28%, N = 15), and ask questions (28%, N = 15). One faculty member said, "I'm convinced that there is nothing that can possibly replace face-to-face meetings as a way to begin an effective working relationship." Simply "getting to know one another" was indicated as crucial to building a common language, as was "changing any ID buzzwords or terminology" to more common terms. Also discussed were course components—schedule, syllabus, assignments, assessments—(26%, N = 14) and the development of a plan for creating the course (21%, N = 11). Some indicated that they generally followed the golden rule by showing respect to the other (21%, N = 11). One respondent noted, "I always assure my faculty members that I am not the content expert; they know their field of study."

Respondents' methods of communication (N = 48) with an ID or faculty to create an instructional product were primarily email (20%, N = 46), face-to-face meetings (18%, N = 42), and web conferencing tools, such as Zoom, Skype, and Adobe Connect (16%, N = 38). To a lesser degree, audio conference or telephone (13%, N = 32) and printed documents were used. Less than 3% reported using electronic chat or other technologies (2.18%, N = 5) for communication. Communication tools mentioned that enhance the relationship also included collaborative documents and document storage, such as Google documents and Box (14%, N = 9).

When asked, what do you believe is the greatest barrier to communication between the ID and faculty, respondents (N = 48) indicated that time constraints (39%, N = 19) were the greatest barrier to communication. One faculty member indicated that course development would "fall apart because both parties are too busy to dedicate hours and resources to the project." An ID said it was "the time of the faculty member, especially if they are not getting compensated or release time for the course design and development." Other respondents (5%, N = 9) said there were no barriers to communication. Lack of timeliness (14%, N = 7) and confusion over the differing roles (14%, N = 7) were also noted.

When asked to describe their process for going about planning and gathering content, respondents (N = 47 or 90%), indicated creating a course outline or lesson plans (38%, N = 18) and creating a vision that guides the process (34%, N = 16) were the primary process for planning and gathering content. Other responses included meeting to discuss the design process (31%, N = 15) and augmenting lessons with personal study (29%, N = 14). Starting with or adjusting a current syllabus (25%, N = 12), adjusting a current face-to-face class outline (25%, N = 12), selecting readings (25%, N = 12), and using general content development materials (23%, N = 11) were also noted.

When asked, what tools or methods do you use to enhance the working relationship between you and your ID or faculty, more than half of the respondents (N = 46) indicated simply communicating with the other party (53%, N = 25) was a method for enhancing their relationship. One respondent said, "Consistent open communication is the most important key." Approximately a third

noted face-to-face meetings (30%, N = 14) and providing feedback (25%, N = 15). One respondent felt that "Each must be open to suggestions about how to improve courses. I require myself to be open to suggestion!" Fostering interpersonal relationships with the ID and faculty partner (14%, N = 9) and establishing deadlines and timelines (14%, N = 7) were also noted. A respondent mentioned timelines: "We establish deadlines together at each meeting. Staying on a timeline was critical to success."

When asked, how do these methods or tools change if your ID or faculty does not communicate as you expected or they are uncooperative, 30% of respondents (N = 46) reported that they did not experience problems in communication or cooperation with their partner (N = 14). More than half reported that they would communicate more if there was an issue (43%, N = 40). Other methods noted for resolving issues were making changes to the current plan or creating a new plan (22%, N = 10), elevating the issue to their supervisor (22%, N = 10), and seeking peer support (20%, N = 10). One respondent said, "After attempting to understand why this is a problem, I would raise the issues to an increased level of management."

Strategies used to build trust or rapport between the ID and faculty (N = 46) included nurturing a professional relationship (69%, N = 33), basic communication (35%, N = 17), and regular meetings (31%, N = 15). Being nice to the other person (29%, N = 14), doing the work (25%, N = 12), and following a schedule (21%, N = 10) were also noted. One respondent said: "I try to meet all agreed-upon deadlines, and I hope this facilitates trust. I treat the ID with the same respect I would like to be treated."

When asked about how the course development team was built, close to half of the total respondents (N = 46) indicated that the team was chosen for them (41%, N = 19), whereas 12% reported being a team of one (N = 22). Respondents also indicated that they pull in other people to join the team as needed (63%, N = 30).

Regarding the time frame given to complete course development, almost half the respondents (N = 47) said they had two semesters to do the course development (44% N = 21) while the rest said one semester (26%, N = 12), less than one



semester (26%, N = 12), or more than one year (4%, N = 2).

When asked, do you approach course development differently if you have more or less time, (N = 48 or 92%), 50% of respondents indicated that the approach changed with time (N = 24). A respondent said, “Yes if we are working ahead we have more time to be precise. If I have a tight deadline, it is more like putting together a puzzle as fast as possible and we’ll find out what pieces don’t fit after the course is taught.” Others indicated there were no changes with time (35%, N = 17) and a few said that more time makes development better (19%, N = 9). An ID said: “No, it doesn’t matter how long or short of a period of time we have, the process stays the same. The only item that could change would be the timeline due dates.” A faculty member said: “Not really. I still focus on the best delivery modalities for the learning objectives. If I have less time, I may have to refine my methods next time I teach the course.”

When asked about their perception of their counterpart (the other person) in describing the roles, (N = 51 or 98%), 29% (N = 15) of the respondents indicated that the other person sees it as they do. Some participants indicated that faculty do not understand the role of ID (29%, N = 15). One ID said: “They (faculty) see our help as threatening as if they are not good at their job. However, they fail to recognize they may be experts in the field but they are not trained, teachers/educators.” Some indicated that faculty believe ID roles are limited to technology push or help desk services (25%, N = 13). One ID said, “Sadly, many see the ID as having little value; they see us as the tech/AV person that provides a low-level of service without understanding the true nature of the strengths we bring to the conversation.” A few felt that the ID handles it all or does everything (15%, N = 8).

Methods for selecting, organizing, and sequencing instructional content which respondents (N = 48) reported most frequently included following course objectives (27%, N = 13), organizing by unit and/or module (19%, N = 9), aligning with the textbook (19%, N = 9), trial and error (17%, N = 8), selecting homework or assessments or deliverables first (17%, N = 8), and using a syllabus or course design blueprint (15%, N = 7). Overall, 33% (N = 16) noted a goal

of creating a logical flow when organizing and sequencing content. One ID noted working with the faculty to identify and design solutions to overcome instructional “pain points.” A faculty noted sequencing “in a way that provides my students with a well-illustrated story that is easy to understand.” Another reported the time required to develop the first lesson as being several weeks, after which the development of subsequent weeks went quicker.

When asked, what do you believe could be done to create better efficiency between ID and faculty, (N = 48 or 92%) 25% of the respondents 25% (N = 12) indicated that better efficiency could be achieved by providing faculty and ID development. In addition, it could be made more efficient with better communication (21%, N = 10) and if the administration had provided guidelines (19%, N = 9). Efficiency could have been better if someone had explained the role of the ID (17%, N = 8), provided scheduling support (15%, N = 7), increased resources (1%, N = 6), and built trust (1%, N = 5).

When asked, what can be done to create a more effective relationship between the ID and faculty, (88%, N = 46), 41% indicated better communication (N = 19) and setting expectations ahead of time (27%, N = 13) could make for a more effective relationship. Some had effective relationships and felt that nothing (8%, N = 4) needed to be done to improve the relationship.

### *Interview Results*

Respondents were asked to answer prompts and consider when the relationship was working well or not around the following four themes:

- Communicating together (frequency, type, methods, etc.).
- When looking for or using methods of planning and gathering, selecting, organizing, and sequencing content.
- When using processes or strategies for creating a good working relationship.
- When working within the time frame you were given.

As a result of answering the prompt related to communicating together, faculty and IDs reported the following items seen in Table 1.



Table 1.  
Respondent Answers to What Went Well or Not Well When Communicating Together

When it was going well:	When it was not going well:
the pair maintained a good relationship	role of the ID was misunderstood
the pair met in person or virtually regularly to accomplish tasks	expectations of how they work together were misunderstood
the pair accomplished course design	the pair had issues meeting regularly to accomplish tasks
the pair accomplished course completion in a timely manner	the ID found resistance to feedback or suggestions
the pair gained a better understanding of the role of each professional position	the faculty felt a lack of community
the pair gained a better understanding of the barriers to their work together	the pair felt fear or insecurity about the process
the pair gained a better understanding of the strategies they could use to remove barriers	a lack of connection and trust was present
	leadership had not set expectations for the relationship

When communication in the pair was going well, there was a match with the literature. Pairs were able to move through the process, have a good relationship, get the work done, and come to a symbiotic relationship because of the work.

A faculty who had a great working relationship with their ID highlighted the growth of the relationship over time said, "...the first year or two of collaboration and working together was to see who owns what and what is owned jointly. Doing so brings our work to a successful conclusion. That's what takes you from difficulties to great success."

An instructional designer discussed the importance of getting to know and understand the faculty member's perspective:

*Even if they're getting paid, and if they're not, more so especially, asking what other commitments they might have. Whether it's for tenure or personal obligations, etc. Considering that as part of the development timeline to make sure it gets done in a timely beneficial manner was kind of key.*

When communication was not going well there was difficulty and misunderstanding that made moving through the course development process unpleasant. Both the ID and the faculty member face issues with conflict and struggle with relational growth. An instructional designer noted the following while discussing faculty resistance to feedback and suggestions: "Feedback from me was very hard to take. In time, I realized I really need to do a lot of praising of what was going really well."

A faculty member, when talking about how the relationship changed over time, wished that administration had taken a role in setting the tone:

*We had to be educated as instructors as to why we had to work with an ID and use a module structure for content. I believe this is attributed to the fact that no leadership took responsibility for ironing this out early. I did not think of the course design as a collaboration.*

As a result of answering the prompt related to using methods for planning and gathering, selecting, organizing, and sequencing content, faculty, and IDs, the answers are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.  
Respondent Answers to What Went Well or Not Well When Using Methods for Planning and Gathering, Selecting, Organizing, and Sequencing Content

When it was going well:	When it was not going well:
the pair gained a greater understanding of the other person's role	there was conflict over whose ideas will be adopted
the pair gained an understanding of how the person in the other role normally does design tasks	development timelines were not met
the pair gained an understanding of how to best organize the content for the other person	faculty circumvented the relationship with the ID going to other faculty instead
development timelines were met	faculty lacked context on how much time students spend in an online class
	ID kept trying to work through the barriers with trial and error
	faculty were not informed of significant learning models and best practices
	courses lack logical flow

When discussing the idea of courses lacking logical flow, a faculty member said, “I think the only complaint would be how the unit insists the ID structure the courses... I felt I was not able to update lectures which make for lesser quality for students.”

When discussing the idea of conflict over whose ideas would be adopted, a faculty member said, “I needed to know who’s responsible for what and what are we responsible for together and what the mission really was before we could agree on the content.”

As a result of answering the prompt related to using processes and strategies for creating good working relationship pairs, faculty and IDs highlighted the following answers in Table 3.

*Table 3.*  
*Respondent Answers to What Went Well or Not Well When Using Processes and Strategies for Creating Good Working Relationship Pairs*

<b>When it was going well:</b>	<b>When it was not going well:</b>
worked collaboratively to be successful	there was a misunderstanding of the roles each serves
met regularly and communicated both in person and virtually	there was disrespect for one another in the pair
developed the course in a timely manner	there was a lack of communication in the pair
developed the course (successfully?)	

When challenges occurred in the relationship, faculty identified issues with understanding their roles, and both faculty and IDs indicated the root of the obstacles were communication and respect. The communication of roles and building professional relationships based on respect and communication were the primary complicating factors in their working relationship.

When discussing the idea of lack of respect between the two, an ID said:

*You have to be able to let things like that go. And just really think about you both having the same goal in mind. It’s letting go of that ego and just trying to find... listen to the person you’re working with and find a path that you can take together to reach the same goal. If that makes sense?*

As a result of answering the prompt related to the time frame the pairs were working in to develop courses, faculty and IDs highlighted

the following. All faculty interviewees and one of the two instructional designer interviewees reported engaging in course design projects that were more than one semester (a semester is four months) in length. One faculty member reported course design projects of a semester in length and longer than a semester. One faculty member reported receiving a course release to engage in the course design project. Faculty expressed that there were challenges with the process that specified a one-semester time frame to work with the instructional designer on a course.

## DISCUSSION

In summary, the literature defines the role of the ID as a person who works for an educational institution and is tasked with taking content, as provided by faculty, and making it clear, efficient, and understandable for the novice, otherwise known as the learner. IDs accomplish this task by applying learning science, educational psychology principles, and learning theories to the content. IDs participate in professional organizations and have competencies that they abide by (Ashbaugh, 2013a; Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Sims & Koszalka, 2008). The literature defined the role of the subject matter expert as a professional who is an expert in their field of study that has been tasked with authoring a course at the undergraduate or graduate level. These experts in the university environment usually have a high level of education in their field but not necessarily in educating others (Chen & Carliner, 2021).

When working together, the role of the faculty is to collaborate with the ID on the development of an online or blended course. The role of the ID is to onboard the faculty regarding the ID’s role and the typical or expected course design process for the institution and how the ID fits into this process (Gardner, 2010). If the faculty is not onboarded properly, the ID can be seen as an obstacle in the way of getting their work completed. The role of the ID then is to introduce faculty to instructional design as a systematic process, involving distinct steps in the design and creation of online content. Through the progression of the process previously described, the ID and faculty developer’s relationship is formed. This relationship can be successfully developed and nurtured, or it can be stymied and involve an ongoing struggle to work

together to create a quality learning product.

When entering into a relationship with a faculty developer, the ID must be sensitive to the faculty member's unique situation, context, culture, perceptions, and preconceived notions (Richardson, et al., 2019). Some faculty members may enthusiastically volunteer to create content whereas others may be reluctant participants who were coerced by administrators to assume this role.

When considering each design stage, the faculty must stay focused on the course content, learning activities, and assessments, and share this information with the ID to ensure that the lesson objectives align with the course goals and that IDs can make recommendations on instructional strategies to use with the course that is appropriate for students and meet pedagogical and institutional considerations.

Comparing the data about the actual operationalized relationship to what we found in the literature, there are similarities. However, some additional details become apparent in actually doing the process. Additionally, the responses to the survey questions did not elicit specific data regarding the operational relationship of faculty and ID as it relates to the last two parts of ADDIE: Implementation and Evaluation.

Figure 3.  
Duties of the ID and Faculty in the Context of the ADDIE Model  
as Found in the Study

	A Analysis	D Design	D Development
ID	Onboard faculty regarding roles. Introduce process. Provide context for online student.	Align lesson objective with the the course goals. Recommend instructional strategies. Provide feedback to faculty.	Timelines and project management, pedagogical development, and technology integration.
Faculty	Provide course content overview and student context.	Course content, learning activities, and assessments	Review and feedback.
Both	Explore content and student context.	Engage in regular communication, brainstorming.	Regular communication and evaluation

The data on the role of the ID reveals that both faculty and IDs expect IDs to be very involved in the process by (a) providing technical advice and integration, (b) giving suggested recommendations

and guidance to the process, (c) ensuring student learning, and (d) working as a team with the faculty. The data on the role of faculty reveals that their primary purpose is to provide content and materials in an organized way and to work with the ID and anyone else on the team.

The data found that there were some common misconceptions that IDs and faculty had about one another. Some IDs in our study noted that faculty are uncooperative or untimely in their work. They thought that faculty are not open to pedagogical suggestions from the ID. Some faculty said that they see the ID role as being solely information-technology related. If it was not that, it was something they did not understand or found potentially threatening.

At the time of the data collection, IDs and faculty were found working together primarily in a face-to-face manner, but virtual meetings were also common. To share information IDs and faculty adopted collaborative document storage spaces for sharing documents. Remote working and teaching conditions resulting from Covid-19 precautionary measures moved our reported face-to-face meetings between IDs and faculty to the online web conferencing space.

During their meetings, faculty and IDs reported working together to select, organize, and sequence content although some conflict did arise in this area. Faculty felt that this task should be primarily done by faculty because of their personal study of the topic, thereby leaving out the ID in the process. IDs felt the process should be done in meetings together. Some methods that were discussed for this process included creating a logical flow, blueprint, or syllabus arranged by objectives, units, and textbook chapters. Another was selecting assessments first and then designing backward. Both faculty and IDs felt that if more time were available in the design process more could be done.

Our research found that when things work well between ID and faculty, a few key things have happened during the process. Before their initial meeting, their administrators may have set the tone and expectations for the work. If not, the expectations of the process are set upfront in an initial meeting, and as a result of this communication, an understanding of each other's roles is solidified, resources are provided, and timelines are established.

During the process, regular meetings and collaboration are happening. Good communication in these meetings allows for the relationships to be built and maintained (Cestone, et al., 2021). This results in teams being respectful and nice. The process provides an understanding of how the other person designs and develops learning. This is positive and allows for feedback loops to be established. The results of these successful working relationships are that courses are designed and developed in a timely manner. Ultimately an understanding of barriers to working together and how to overcome these barriers happens.

On the contrary, when things do not go well in the relationship, it is because (a) other priorities were happening before this work, (b) there is a lack of time to work together, and (c) in-person or virtual meetings are being missed. These factors might then cause a lack of communication. When communication was not happening, IDs and faculty said they needed to make efforts to come up with a new plan so they can communicate more often. When this was not effective, they might need to call in support from a peer or supervisor.

Other causes of breakdown in the relationship included resistance to feedback and instructors feeling like they lacked community or were the only person in their department teaching online. Taking the lead of those in charge was also seen as important, and if the department leadership did not set expectations with the faculty member, the relationship might suffer. When working on materials there was sometimes conflict over whose ideas would be adopted in the design, or faculty were not understanding and were minimizing the role of the ID.

Gaps, unfortunately, still exist in the operational relationships between ID and faculty at our large institution. These gaps are closing over time as faculty perceptions of working with an ID change with experience. As roles are more clearly understood the relationship works better. Time constraints impact the process in two ways. They are a barrier to communication between the ID and faculty and they impact their approach to the project. Efficiencies are realized in the project when both roles are clearly identified and communication is good between ID and faculty.

A greater number of faculty and IDs are working together because of the remote and flexible

learning requirements brought about by Covid (Chen & Carliner, 2021). With the design expertise of the ID and the subject matter expertise of the faculty member, there is an opportunity for the utilization of instructional design models in course design (Karakaya, 2021). The study found that university instructors' design process did not appear to draw on instructional design models (Karakaya, 2021). Therefore, understanding the relationship between the two parties is critical as higher education continues to navigate the uncertain future.

### **CASE STUDY LIMITATIONS**

Certain limitations of this study would need to be addressed in future research. For example, in both sections of the inquiry, the participants overall had a positive experience working together. Though it might have started with some negative aspects, it ended in a positive working relationship. As a result of this limitation, we recommend a deeper quantitative study of those who identify with having poor relationships to learn more specifically what the problems might be. Further study might work to determine what is inherent in the decline or what factors enable that negative relationship to continue.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study results have some potential intervention implications. Based on our findings, the following actions are recommended to be taken on the part of the instructional designer. To start, the ID can hold very comprehensive initial meetings and then set expectations for the process to avoid gray areas.

During the initial meeting with ID and faculty, the ID should begin to build the relationship between the pair. Part of this task includes defining the roles of faculty, ID, and others who may be involved in the process. It might also include sharing commonly used terms in the course development process. The ID should come prepared with a detailed timeline and a list of deadlines for the project. Taking time to listen to the faculty discuss their vision, questions, and high-level expectations for the course plan is important. In addition, time should be allotted for the faculty to ask questions and negotiate deliverables within the course design timeline and to schedule regular follow-up meetings.

In this way, the ID is setting the stage for future interactions, which are then set to open dialog,



build a common language, and foster a relationship that focuses on the area in which there might be a misunderstanding of whose tasks or responsibilities are whose. We recommend the ID cover the following topics in these meetings:

- Discuss the conception of the counterpart for what they anticipate from the process.
- Ask questions and listen to faculty input on their vision for the course at its completion, including:
  - Overall outcomes
  - Course components
  - Starting points, like a former syllabus or face to face course outline
- Provide a plan for the timeline based on what is available and discuss adjustments based on the faculty's life and needs.
- Set up regular meetings to ensure dedicated hours and points of accountability are in place to meet the timeline.
- Ensure there is administrative buy-in and support to define the roles of the ID and faculty and to set the project time frame.
- Ascertain faculty preparedness and comfort level with the university and the LMS and web conferencing tools for collaboration.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research looked at how faculty and IDs gather and plan content, and select, organize, and sequence the content. This study did not request information on who should be in charge of each part of the development of that content. A future study could include task distribution and assignment to clear up the gray areas where one person might feel ownership over a certain part of the work. Further research that drills down to better understand faculty perceptions on this task distribution might be helpful.

Further research that explores more about the perceptions or needs of the pair or the institutional unit might include:

- Conducting this study across other Carnegie Institutional classifications.
- Examining what factors influence faculty to perceive IDs as information technology staff and not pedagogical partners.

- Undertaking an in-depth exploration of faculty challenges in this process.
- Looking at best practices for how they help or hinder the ID and the faculty's working together.
- Looking at how different designers or units might work differently to establish roles for their context. Is the way a specific unit works helpful for the design team relationship? How do they communicate roles, expectations, timelines, and general communication? Are there variations in how the practice of ID happens in these contexts?
- Examining the factors that keep the relationship stable. Does the golden rule idea apply widely?
- Learning the touchpoints between the pair after an initial design. How do the faculty and ID work together after a completed project? How often do they work on revisions? What factors bring them back to work?
- Understanding how administration plays a role in setting the tone for the relationship.

Further research that explores more about the perceptions or needs of the faculty might include:

- When looking at faculty understanding of the roles, how does the growth of their understanding change the process? Are efficiencies realized in subsequent course development or revision projects?
- How do faculty's perspectives on course development or revision and their teaching practice change after working with an ID?
- What happens when the faculty feels threatened by the role of the ID? Or when they think they don't need an ID?
- As faculty in a program or college work more with IDs and better understand how the collaboration improves course quality, how do their positive experience and good relationship with an ID spread and map to other faculty?

## **CONCLUSION**

This study surveyed and interviewed Instructional Designers and faculty at a large institution to determine how the literature and

the operationalized relationship between the ID and faculty match up. We sought to determine what makes the ID and faculty relationship work towards the positive or the negative outcomes. We focused on how faculty and ID work together during the process of creating courses, and how to improve that process. Both faculty and ID voices were included in the data collection, which is an advancement from past research (Chen & Carliner, 2021). The collected responses provide clarification of the role of the designer and the faculty member in the process of designing a course. We identified the need for the ID to set the stage in early meetings to clarify perceptions so that a better working relationship can be attained.

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## APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Q1: You are invited to take part in a research survey about the relationships between Instructional Designers and Faculty. Your participation will require approximately 20 minutes and is completed online at your computer. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey. This study hopes to create results that identify the gap between Faculty and Instructional Designer expectations for their functional roles and make suggestions for improving operational relationships. This identification should contribute to the industry's understanding as a whole towards improving ID and Faculty relations. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you can withdraw at any time.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified. If you have questions about this research, wish to withdraw or want a copy or summary of this study's results, you can contact the researcher by emailing [information hidden].

Choosing "Yes" below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older and indicates your consent to participate in this survey. Are you willing to participate in this research?"

### YES/NO

Q2: My daily work role is: Faculty or Instructional Designer

Q3: As you understand it, what is the role of the Instructional Designer (ID) when working with a Faculty member? (Open Ended)

Q4: As you understand it, what is the role of the Faculty members when working with an Instructional Designer (ID)? (Open Ended)

Q5: What do you believe is the perception of your counterpart in describing the roles? (Open Ended)

Q6: When working with your ID or Faculty, how do you begin to build a common language between you? (Open Ended)

Q7: What methods of communication do you use when working with an ID or Faculty to create an instructional product? Face-to-Face, Video Conference, Audio Conference or Phone, Email, Chat, Printed Documents, Electronic Documents, Other

Q8: What do you believe is the greatest barrier to communications between the ID and Faculty member? (Open Ended)

Q9: Describe your process for going about planning and gathering content? (Open Ended)

Q10: What methods do you use to go about selecting, organizing, and sequencing content? (Open Ended)

Q11: What tools or methods do you use to enhance the working relationship between you and

your ID/Faculty? (Open Ended)

Q12: How do these methods/tools change if your ID/Faculty does not communicate as you expected or is uncooperative? (Open Ended)

Q13: What are some strategies you use to build trust or rapport between you and your ID/Faculty? (Open Ended)

Q14: How do you go about building your course development team? (Open Ended)

Q15: Typically, what time frame are you given to complete course development? Less than 1 semester, 1 semester, 2 semesters, Longer than 1 year

Q16: Do you approach course development differently if you have more or less time? (Open Ended)

Q17: Do you participate in any professional development or communities of practice with others in a similar role to you? Yes, No

Q18: What do you believe could be done to create better efficiency between ID/Faculty? (Open Ended)

Q19: What do you believe could be done to create more effective relationships between ID/Faculty? (Open Ended)

Q20: Are you willing to be a part of an interview to hear more about your experiences as an ID or Faculty member? If so, please tell us your name and email address. (Open Ended)

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTION INSTRUMENT

- A. Think about a time when you were working well (or not well) when communicating together (frequency, type, methods, etc.). Can you tell us about that?
- B. Think about a time when you were working well (or not well) when looking for or using methods of planning and gathering, selecting, organizing, and sequencing content. Can you tell us about that?
- C. Think about a time when you were working well (or not well) when using processes/strategies for creating a good working relationship. Can you tell us about that?
- D. Think about a time when you were working well (or not well) within the time frame given. Can you tell us about that?