

What is an instructional designer?

In preparation for writing this Teaching Tip, I began refreshing myself with the history and origins of instructional design. I scoured philosophies of education that designers are steeped in. I pondered the various technical, communication and organizational skills that designers have. And then, I realized that while all of these things have influences upon the way in which designers work and make decisions, none of these things are as critical as having you and your students in mind.

Instructional designers are masters in the science and art of education. When faced with teaching and learning challenges, we know why a particular curriculum design choice makes the most sense. We know what's the best technology for a task and how to use it. We also know and are happy with the fact that we are not the expert in the actual discipline. You are. That's one of the hidden job benefits of being an instructional designer; we get to interact with brilliant and dedicated faculty who are champions of their discipline and care about student learning.

WORKING WITH A DESIGNER

While most of our work involves developing courses for online students, we also work with faculty in face-to-face delivery. In fact, the UAF eCampus design team combined with our student support staff offer a huge variety of support for faculty. A description of all of our faculty services won't fit on a single page, but with the help of a little web magic, we've tried: <https://iteachu.uaf.edu/services/>

After working with faculty for several years, I've made some observations about how to get the most out of your time with an instructional designer.

- **Keep an open mind.** Before working with an instructional designer you might have a strong idea about how to approach a design challenge. Before settling on one solution or course of action, ask your designer about how other classes handle similar issues.
- **Sketch first, detail later.** Sometimes we concentrate on the lesson or the limitations of a particular tool, losing sight of the overarching course learning goals. Think about course design from the 40,000-foot altitude first, then fill in the mountains and valleys of learning units.

- **Make intentional course design decisions.** When you select one learning activity over another, do so with a result in mind. Each decision about course design should be weighed against the effect on student learning and your ability to effectively teach.
- **You're in charge.** Designers provide advice and some support in terms of course building, but you, the instructor, are the one in charge of the course. Domain knowledge is the specialized information about your field of expertise that you have gathered over time and share with students.
- **Most designers are also instructors.** Every designer at UAF eCampus has taught courses. We have teaching experience that we can share and offer insights from our experience.
- **You might work with multiple designers.** Depending on what kind of assistance you seek, you may be working with a variety of designers with a range of backgrounds and skills.

Get to know the [instructional design team](#) at UAF eCampus and visit us during [open labs or events](#).