A Quality Matters Event

QM Research Online Conference

Active/Applied Research on Online Learning and Quality Assurance

February 27, 2025 | Online

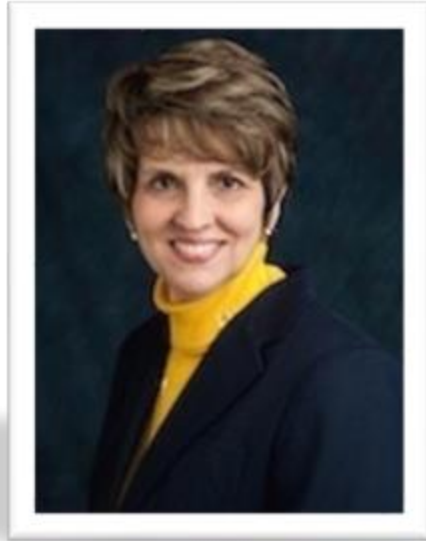# Mentoring Instructional Designers in Higher Education: A Needs Assessment

Dr. Rae Mancilla and Dr. Barbara Frey

Presenters

Barbara Frey
Instructional Design Consultant

Rae Mancilla
Executive Director of Online Learning

Session Goals

- Identify key mentoring needs of instructional design professionals in higher education.

- Analyze how factors such as years of career experience, team format, and team size impact the mentoring needs of instructional designers.

- Develop institutional strategies for addressing the mentoring needs of instructional designers.

Participant Poll

What is your experience with mentoring?

- Current Mentor
- Past Mentor
- Mentee
- Both
- Neither mentor nor mentee

Background

Definition of Mentoring

- A professional development relationship in which a more experienced instructional designer assists a less experienced one in developing a career.

(adapted from Dennen, 2013)

Instructional Designers in Higher Education

- 9% projected career growth from 2020-2030
- Critical to scaling online and hybrid learning
- Highly educated, diverse group
- Non-linear career paths
- Gaps in formal training
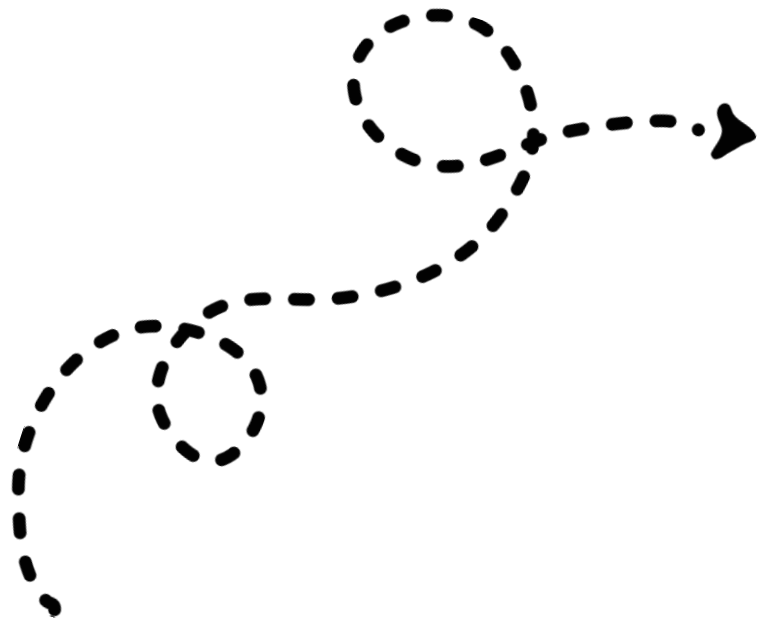
On-the-Job Training for IDs

- Onboarding or orientation
- Cognitive apprenticeship (Mancilla & Frey, 2020)
- Mentoring during onboarding (Rabel & Stefaniak, 2018)
- Need to explore mentoring beyond onboarding

Mentoring for Professional Development

- Mentoring common to faculty and students (Lundsford et al., 2018)

- Mentoring yields multiple benefits (Feldman et al., 2010):
    - Career satisfaction
    - Departmental moral
    - Self-confidence
    - Professional Identity
    - Retention rates
    - Productivity

- There is no research on mentoring for IDs

Methods

Research Goals

What are the perceived mentoring needs of instructional design professionals?

What factors impact the mentoring needs of design professionals?

Theoretical Framework

- Social constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978)

- Zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978)

FRUSTRATION ZONE

Can't Do With Help

ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Can Do With Help

Can Do Alone

COMFORT ZONE

Source: Growth Engineering

Methodology

- Descriptive, quantitative design

- Needs assessment survey

- Survey consisted of 30 questions

  - Institutional and participant demographics

  - Mentoring needs 25 items

- Validated mentoring needs subscale with Cronbach's alpha

Procedure

- Voluntary self-selection and snowball sampling of instructional designers

- Recruitment through major professional networks, social media, and listservs
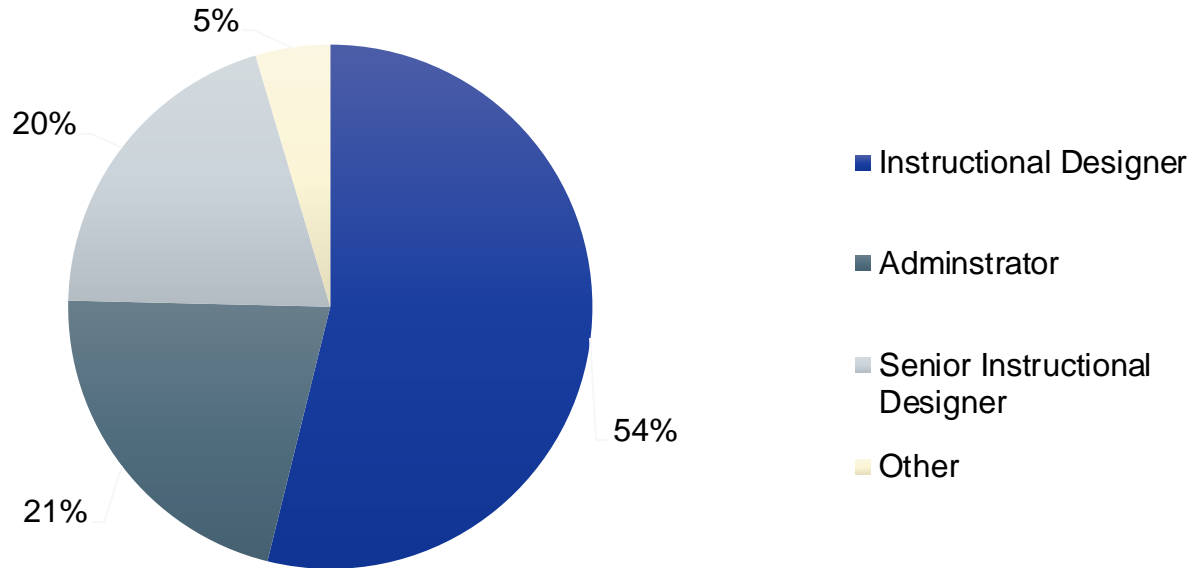
- Qualtrics survey completion

Participants

- 103 surveys initiated
- 65 completed surveys

SURVEY

Participants by Job Title

- Instructional Designer — 54%
- Adminstrator — 21%
- Senior Instructional Designer — 20%
- Other — 5%

Participants by Years of Experience

Pie chart:
- 17% — 0-3 years (Junior IDs)
- 29% — 3-7 years (Mid-level IDs)
- 54% — 7 + years (Senior IDs)

Legend:
- ■ 0-3 years (Junior IDs)
- ■ 3-7 years (Mid-level IDs)
- ■ 7 + years (Senior IDs)
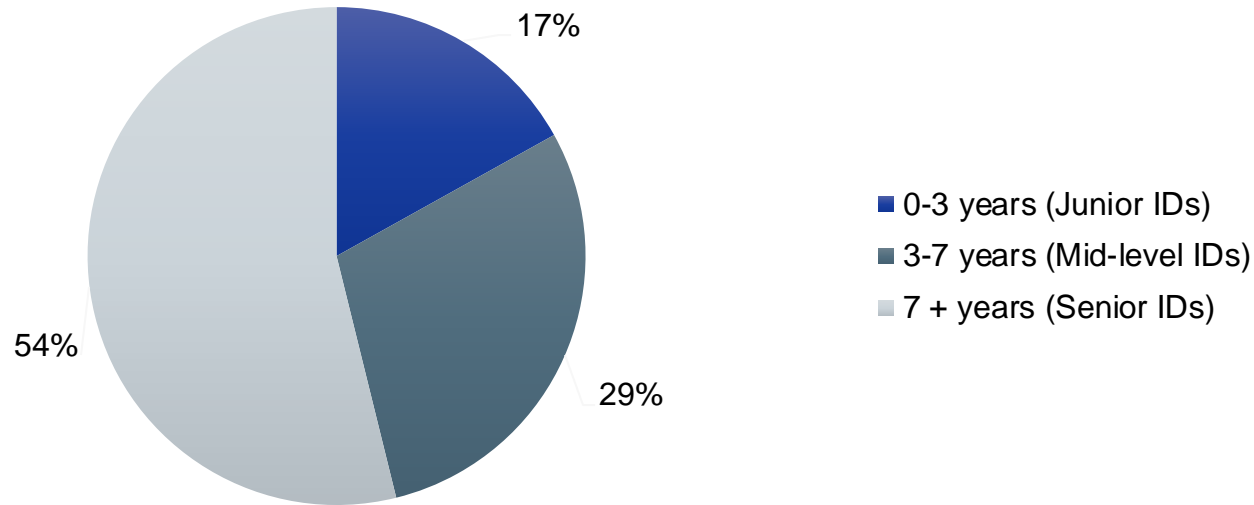
Participants by Institution
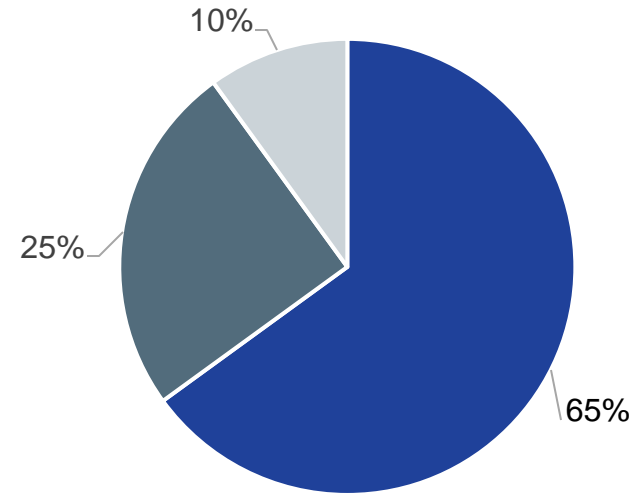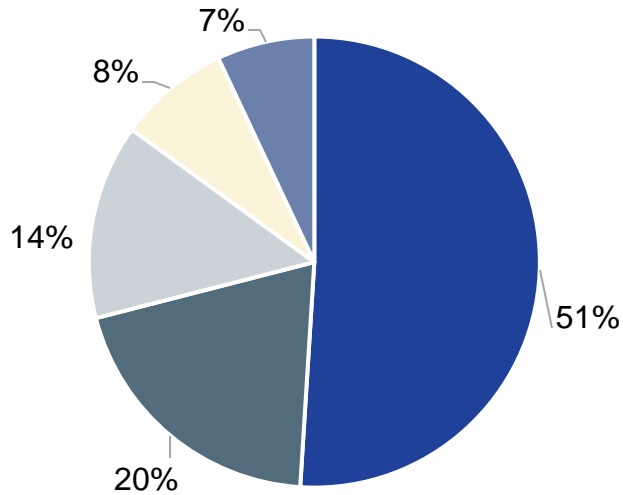
Pie chart 1 (left):
- 51% — 4-year public
- 20% — 4-year private non-profit
- 14% — 2-year
- 8% — technical
- 7% — private, for profit

Legend:
- ■ 4-year public
- ■ 4-year private non-profit
- ■ 2-year
- ■ technical
- ■ private, for profit

Pie chart 2 (right):
- 65% — hybrid
- 25% — remote
- 10% — on-site

Legend:
- ■ hybrid
- ■ remote
- ■ on-site

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis with SPSS version 29.0.20

- Descriptive statistics
- Frequency distributions
- Non-parametric analyses
  - Kruskal-Wallis
  - Mann-Whitney tests for post-hoc comparisons

Results

Research Question 1

What are the perceived mentoring needs of instructional design professionals?

High Importance

MENTORING NEED	MEAN
1. Communicate effectively with colleagues	4.49
2. Provide constructive feedback	4.48
3. Guide development process	4.46
4. Build trust with colleagues	4.38
5. Set clear expectations with stakeholders	4.35
6. Model professional behavior	4.23
7. Manage projects	4.20
8. Develop pedagogical strategies	4.14
9. Develop technology skills	4.14
10. Support work-life balance	4.06

Average Importance

MENTORING NEED	MEAN
11. Solve design or technology problems	3.98
12. Establish long or short-term goals	3.92
13. Acclimate to department/team culture	3.92
14. Enhance sense of belonging	3.89
15. Grow professional network	3.80
16. Acclimate to the university culture	3.72
17. Plan a career progression	3.69
18. Understand the promotion process	3.52
19. Identify teaching or consulting opportunities	3.48
20. Develop a design portfolio or CV	3.43
21. Participate in a professional organization	3.37
22. Prepare a professional presentation or poster	3.00

Low Importance

MENTORING NEED	MEAN
23. Develop a research project	2.97
24. Navigate the IRB process	2.83
25. Publish a manuscript	2.62

Research Question 2

What factors impact the mentoring needs of instructional design professionals?

Impact of Years of Experience

- Developing a research project

- Navigating the IRB process

- Setting long-term and short-term goals

- Identifying teaching/consultation opportunities

- Publishing a scholarly manuscript

- Building trust with colleagues

- Guiding the course development process

- Developing pedagogical skills

- Preparing a presentation/poster

- Setting clear expectations with stakeholders

- Maintaining work-life balance

Mid vs. Junior IDs

- Setting expectations among stakeholders
- Supporting work-life balance

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Mid vs. Senior IDs

- Navigating the IRB process
- Setting long-term and short-term goals
- Identifying teaching and consulting opportunities
- Publishing a manuscript
- Guiding the course development process
- Preparing a professional presentation or poster

Mid vs. Senior & Junior IDs

- Developing pedagogical strategies
- Developing a research project

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Other Differences

- Mid and Senior IDs indicated building trust with colleagues as more important than Junior IDs

Impact of Team Type

- Hybrid team members ranked solving design or technology problems as more important than on-site colleagues

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Impact of Team Size

- Small (0-2 IDs)

- Medium (3-6 IDs)

- Large (>7 IDs)

- Manage projects

- Communicate effectively with colleagues

- Understand the promotion process

Medium vs. Large Teams

- Communicating effectively with colleagues
- Understanding the promotion process

Medium vs. Small Teams

- Managing projects

Implications

Take-Aways for Mentors

- Recognize mentoring is for all career stages
- Be aware that mentoring needs vary by experience, team format, and size
- Plan for long-term and continuous engagement with mentees
- Use the mentoring checklist for assessing needs
- Refer mentees to professional development resources

Take-Aways for Mentees

- Actively engage in mentoring
- Use checklist to prioritize areas for growth
- Create personal development plan
- Find a near peer for informal mentoring
- Recognize multiple mentors may be needed

Take-Aways for Administrators

- Establish programs to train mentors
- Foster mentoring for Mid and Senior IDs
- Recognize mentoring differs from onboarding
- Incentivize mentoring (e.g., release time, reduced course load)
- Allocate funds for professional development

Discussion & Next Steps

- Based on the mentoring needs discussed, which are the highest priority items for you?

- Based on your current team, what are some strategies that could be used to meet these mentoring needs?

Conclusion

Questions?

Please type your questions in the Q & A box.

References

Mancilla, R., Frey, B., & Doring, A. (2024). Mentoring instructional designers in higher education: A needs assessment. *Performance Improvement Journal*, *62* (3), 62-73.

Contact Us

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