

Roadmap to Effective Distance Education Instructional Design

Distance Education Team Members

Providing instruction to students at a distance is not the sole responsibility of the instructor. In a distance education situation, **teamwork** becomes important in the development and dissemination of instructional materials.

Instructor

The first member of the "basic" distance education team is the **instructor**, the expert in the subject-matter area, but not necessarily an expert in the technology used to deliver instruction. However, it's a good idea for instructors to understand the workings of the distance education technology used in the course. Such skills will make them more comfortable when they interact with students through the technology. Instructors may have basic or intermediate knowledge and skills in technology, but may have difficulty with "high-end" technology. The instructional designer may need to step in and help train or assist instructors with complex technology.

Instructional Designer

The distance education **instructional designer** knows how to take a systematic, sound approach to planning and producing an instructional unit, knows or can find out the distance education resources available in an academic institution, knows how certain technologies and media work, and serves as an intermediary between the instructor and the educational technology specialists. Sometimes the instructional designer is the educational technologist, as well.

Educational Technologist

Educational technologists, such as computer specialists and educational television producers, have the production expertise to assist in the development of the distance education program or course. Because of their professional backgrounds, they understand the specific instructional design needs dictated by the requirements of the media. Other media development professionals, such as Web designers, graphic artists, and editors, could be considered educational technologists.

Support Staff

Support staff ensure that the little details are taken care of, so a distance education course can run smoothly and successfully. Staff members handle such tasks as student registration, materials duplication and distribution, securing copyright clearances, facilities scheduling, and textbook ordering.

Site Facilitator

Site facilitators assist the instructor at sites across the state or country. Primarily, they should be able to handle technical problems that may arise at the sites and be well-versed in interactive strategies to involve the students as much as possible in the course activities.



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Team Effectiveness

As the instructional designer, don't assume that instructors know everything you do about the technologies or the instructional methods to be used for a distance education course. The strengths and weaknesses of the distance education program and planned delivery systems should be discussed, focusing on the opportunities, challenges, and potential difficulties to be faced. Technical systems should be described in the language of the user, not the technician, and incorporate easily understood and jargon-free language. Instructors should be provided with handbooks and other resource materials that clearly and concisely detail a step-by-step process for developing distance-delivered instruction. Probably most importantly, do as much **hands-on training** with the instructors as possible, using the technologies they will be incorporating in the classroom.

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