

Instructional Development Philosophy

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The ultimate goal for any teaching center is to have a significant and positive impact on students' learning. The best way to achieve this is for instructional developers to work in partnership with a variety of constituents and potential clients including faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and university administrators. Through such partnerships higher education can make progress toward alignment of classroom teaching practices with current knowledge from the research on human learning. This research indicates that effective learning environments engage students in the learning process, foster development of complex thinking skills, and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.

While students are the primary beneficiaries of a teaching center's work, faculty and teaching assistants are the primary constituents. Faculty and TAs are the most powerful agents of pedagogical change because they have the greatest opportunity to impact instructor-student and student-student interactions. Instructional development programs and staff also consider campus administration as a primary constituent because administrators are the ambassadors for disseminating information about pedagogical successes to the larger community and can provide support for all efforts to improve teaching and learning.

The Center's duty is to help clients identify or clarify issues, set goals, provide resources, and enhance their abilities to make informed decisions about teaching and learning. Four principles guide this work between teaching center staff and constituents:

- **Ownership.** Clients must retain ownership of the instructional development process for it to be successful. Client authority is fostered by offering services that are voluntary, collaborative, and confidential. Success is fostered if clients seek Center services and participate in activities on a voluntary basis. Ownership is also encouraged when clients participate in data collection and analysis, and decide how and when to use the data.
- **Context.** Center success is dependent upon understanding the institutional, disciplinary, and individual contexts in which clients operate. In order to provide appropriate information and resources, center personnel need to "start where people are" by gathering information from clients, collecting background information on departments and curricula, utilizing public data sources and collecting additional data.
- **Variability.** Instructional development is not a 'one-size-fits-all' endeavor. Just as all students do not learn in the same way, a center needs to offer its clients access to information and support in a variety of formats (e.g. individual consultations, seminars, workshops, courses, informal discussions, and working meetings). Effective instructional developers acknowledge disciplinary differences in the kinds of information valued, used, and considered credible by clients. Providing discipline-centered services, strategies, and examples can enhance communication, foster collaboration, and break down barriers.
- **Outcomes.** Teaching centers need to provide explicit and tangible evidence of impact and pedagogical change both to clients and the larger community. Attracting new clients and demonstrating the center's value to the institution necessitates development of a strategic plan linked to institutional priorities, variables for measuring outcomes, and a plan to disseminate its successes.

Using these four principles to guide design and delivery of center services ensures that members of different constituencies receive information and resources that are appropriate, applicable, accessible, and assessable.