

From Classroom to Career Through an Instructional Design Internship Program (IDIP)

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communication and collaboration

project-specific tasks

technology and tools training

This paper introduces the Instructional Design Internship Program (IDIP), a replicable virtual internship model for equipping the next generation of instructional design professionals for the higher education workplace. It outlines programmatic origins, structure, implementation, and outcomes, emphasizing its value in preparing novice designers through an experiential, hands-on approach. Findings support the internship program as a strategic professional development approach that strengthens instructional design talent pipelines and provides mutual benefits to interns and cooperating institutions.

Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. institutions of higher education have struggled to meet the increased demand for online learning. While current figures indicate that nearly 10 million students are now enrolled in at least one online course (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), many colleges and universities have just begun to invest in the infrastructure needed to support online learners (Simunich et al., 2024). Such investments include the hiring of instructional design professionals, who are critical to the successful development and implementation of online programs and courses (Petherbridge et al., 2022).

As the interest in online learning continues to expand, the need for instructional design (ID) services has experienced unprecedented growth, with an anticipated 12% increase in the labor market from 2023 to 2033, outpacing most professions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Online administrators have been cautioned of the mismatch between the institutional demand for instructional designers (IDs) and the available supply, with insufficient ID staffing identified as the most serious long-term vulnerability for the growth of online enrollment (Garrett et al., 2022; Kim, 2022). Considering this trend, there is a significant need to develop ID talent for higher education settings.

Despite decades since the emergence of the ID industry in World War II, the professional preparation of designers for the higher ed workplace remains poorly understood and non-linear in nature (Mancilla & Frey, 2020). Scholars have noted that IDs typically hail from a variety of backgrounds and career paths, reporting their profession as “found as opposed to sought, rather than taking a path through a degree or other training in order to become an ID, they find their way into those roles as a result of their experiences and skill sets” (Pollard & Kumar, 2022, p. 11). Likewise, formal educational preparation for ID occupations is still uncommon, with studies reporting gaps between what ID students have been trained to do through academic curricula and actual job responsibilities (Bond & Dirkin, 2020).

Furthermore, concerns regarding the career readiness of ID graduates have been raised by scholars who have highlighted the need for new competency models that address the unique aspects and expertise needed for the higher education workplace (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017; Park & Luo, 2017). The clear disconnect between ID theory and praxis in programs designed to equip ID professionals for the workforce can be bridged through experiential learning programs, such as internships. These programs enable students to gain relevant hands-on experience and qualifications for the higher ed workplace (Perkins & Irwin, 2023). Fostering internal ID internship programs may also serve as a strategic solution for cost-effectively addressing workforce shortages, allowing institutions to develop emerging talent while meeting the growing demand for design expertise.

Given this pivotal time in online learning, this paper aims to contribute a model for designing and implementing a virtual ID internship program that can be scaled to any institution of higher education. This case study report details the successful collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), offering a standards-based framework with concrete examples to guide institutions in adopting such a model. The article concludes with a discussion of outcomes, key learnings, and recommendations for institutions seeking to strengthen ID preparation through virtual internships.

Literature Review

Preparing Instructional Design Professionals for Higher Education

Designers constitute a diverse group of learning professionals who migrate into the discipline from adjacent educational and professional backgrounds, including education, communication, psychology, digital media, library science, and more (Pollard & Kumar, 2022). IDs wear many working titles, such as learning designer, learning engineer, learning scientist, educational technologist, and e-learning developer (Yalçın et al., 2021). In higher education, IDs are responsible for serving faculty, staff, and students in the areas of course design, development, evaluation, faculty development, technical training, and pedagogical consultation (Ritzhaupt et al., 2021). ID scholars have categorized their responsibilities into designing, managing, training, and

providing faculty support for online, residential, and hybrid courses (Beirne & Romanoski, 2018). Aggregated research on competencies for ID practitioners has emphasized the need for strong communication/interpersonal skills, knowledge of ID models/learning theories/evaluation, technology and project management skills, expertise in faculty development, and leadership abilities for successful job performance (Ritzhaupt et al., 2021).

Professional associations offer foundational guidance on the competency development of design professionals. Their standardized frameworks define the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities IDs must possess to adequately perform their roles. These competencies encompass critical domains such as online pedagogy, learning environments, digital technology, project management, assessment, and professionalism. For higher education, the organizations commonly responsible for benchmarking learning design mastery are the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI), Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), and University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA).

Each of these associations has historically taken a different focus, with AECT standards underpinning the educational development of IDs through formal academic degree and certificate programs. UPCEA has been concerned with promoting excellence in online learning leadership, particularly among professionals working in continuing education and executive programs. Of the various associations, IBSTPI (2021) is mostly closely aligned with the higher education workplace, offering 22 validated standards classified into five domains, including professional foundations, planning and analysis, design and development, evaluation and implementation, and management. Each domain is accompanied by a competency and descriptors to guide the professional practice of IDs across the career lifespan, as they transition from novice to administrative roles (e.g., essential, advanced, managerial).

In sum, IDs can build competency and experience for their roles through traditional pathways, such as academic degrees or certificates in the field, as well as professional networks that offer career development pathways. However, even IDs who are formally credentialed “can find it difficult to apply what they have learned when they begin a job, given the complexity of instructional design projects and the diverse stakeholders involved” (Ritzhaupt et al., 2021, p. 90), underscoring the importance of on-the-job training and workforce development programs.

Internships for Experiential Learning

Internships serve as a short-term work experience to provide students and recent graduates with practical knowledge and skills in a specific professional domain (National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 2025). Internships are “a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting” (NACE, 2025, p. 1). The benefits of internships are well-documented, offering students the opportunity to refine their skills, build professional networks, and enhance career readiness through guided mentorship and industry exposure (Auerbach & Wolinsky-Nahmais, 2020).

To establish uniformity, NACE developed a framework comprised of seven essential criteria for an opportunity to be considered an internship. These criteria stipulate that: (1) the experience must be an extension of classroom learning, rather than work performed by a regular employee; (2) acquired skills must be transferable to other professional settings; (3) internships must have a defined start and end date, along with a clear job description and desired qualifications; (4) learning objectives must align with the student’s academic coursework and career goals; (5) supervision must be provided by an experienced professional in the field; (6) interns must receive regular feedback from their supervisors; and (7) necessary resources, equipment, and facilities must be provided to support the learning objectives. These criteria coincide with the three essential components of designing any work-integrated learning experience: (1) students must receive adequate preparation before the experience, (2) students must receive ongoing support and guidance throughout the learning experience, and (3) students must assess and reflect on their strengths and development needs (Perkins & Irwin, 2023; Smith et al., 2010).

Designing effective internships that provide guided experiential learning takes time and collaboration from multiple stakeholders (Mason, 2022). Intentionality, commitment, and an equal emphasis on both theoretical and practical aspects is essential for maximizing the learning outcomes of internships. When well-implemented, internships can foster deep, engaged learning, helping students develop self-awareness, practical skills, and a sense of responsibility (King & Sweitzer, 2014). Although colleges and universities emphasize internships as an important aspect of career preparation, many students do not have the opportunity to intern due to lack of placement opportunities, barriers within the higher education system, and difficulties navigating work, school, and life balance (Williams et al., 2024).

Virtual internships can mitigate barriers for internship placement and have been on the rise in higher education since the Pandemic (Dean & Campbell, 2020). Virtual, or online internships, provide an alternative to traditional, in-person work-integrated learning. These internships enable students to work from anywhere, provided they have access to an internet connection and a laptop. This flexibility can dismantle geographical and socio-economic barriers (e.g., rural students), making online internships an inclusive and equitable option (Josad & Attewell, 2020; Kraft et al., 2019). Due to the online medium, virtual internships require strong communication skills, as interns collaborate with colleagues, mentors, and supervisors via multiple communication platforms (e.g., synchronous online meetings and chats, email, project management software) (Bowen, 2020; Wang et al., 2023).

Internships for Instructional Design Professionals

While seminal literature supports internships as a means of developing ID expertise among graduate learners, there are few documented examples of programs, particularly within the U.S. context (Johari et al., 2002; Noble, 2002). Early work by Van der Westhuizen and Lautenbach (2004) documented the value of a mini-internship (e.g., 8-weeks) for South African in-service teachers on multimedia design. These graduate students focused on building an instructional module in corporate settings and reflected on their learning through weekly discussions, journal postings, storyboard submission, and a final presentation. Similarly, Ruggiero and Boehm (2016) reported on an 8-week virtual internship for graduate learning and design students in the U.K. These students collaborated internationally with corporate clients to produce a single deliverable, an instructional module that underwent usability testing. Their research underscored the benefits of a virtual internship model for ID interns.

Within the U.S., Chen (2012) described a graduate internship seminar (e.g., 60 hours) for instructional design and technology (IDT) students. The program placed students within a combination of corporate, non-profit, K12, and university settings to complete fieldwork activities such as planning a professional development workshop, creating training modules or materials, developing websites, technical troubleshooting, assessing program effectiveness, among others. The program was highly structured, requiring students to complete an intern profile, professional growth plan, project plan, time log, midterm and final evaluations, journals, and a final presentation or report. Ultimately, this research demonstrated that IDT fieldwork experiences yielded multiple benefits for aspiring design practitioners, including psychosocial gains in confidence and the development of a professional identity. It also concluded that internship supervisors must take care to ensure interns can adequately balance academic and workplace responsibilities. Given the rapidly evolving field of ID, it is necessary to revisit and augment Chen's (2012) model for ID internship programs.

Conceptual Framework

The Instructional Design Internship Program (IDIP) is rooted in the tenets of experiential learning theory, which conceptualizes learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). More simply, experiential learning is learning by doing, which undergirds the hands-on practicum experiences that are common to internships where learners engage directly in real-world experiences, reflect on them, and apply their insights to future endeavors (Kong, 2021). Experiential learning is a cycle consisting of four progressive stages: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation. Internships exemplify this process by immersing interns in authentic professional contexts where they can apply theoretical knowledge, practice new skills, and

refine their understanding of industry expectations. Moreover, internships provide concrete in situ learning experiences that initiate the experiential learning process and have been proven beneficial for helping students reinforce concepts through transfer and application beyond the classroom (Leary & Sherlock, 2020).

Internships are a form of job-embedded learning akin to apprenticeships (Dickey, 2008). Apprenticeships involve a novice learning their craft or trade by observing and assisting an expert practitioner. Beyond the mastery of motor tasks, apprenticeship has been applied as a methodology to equip novice IDs with the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind for the workplace (Mancilla & Frey, 2020; Tracey & Boling, 2014). Specifically, the cognitive apprenticeship principles of modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration have been infused into the higher education curricula for educating IDs and teaching complex problem-solving skills (Collins, 1989; Ertmer & Cennamo, 1995). The IDIP program draws from these apprenticeship phases as interns, culminating in independent practice, work alongside a senior ID professional.

Instructional Design Internship Program

The following section provides an overview of the IDIP for higher education developed by Pitt and IUP. Details are shared regarding the cooperating institutions, program origin, instructional objectives, structure, processes, exemplars, evaluation, and outcomes.

Institutional Background

School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences: Office of Online Learning

The School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS), part of Pitt, is a national leader in providing health care education, research, and clinical practice preparation across fourteen academic disciplines. SHRS established the Office of Online Learning (OOL) in 2018 to support the strategic development of online and hybrid degree programs in graduate and professional disciplines in alignment with its mission to increase enrollment, diversify the student population, and equip healthcare providers in rural areas. The OOL team currently consists of ten full-time professionals, including a director, IDs, instructional technologists, multimedia specialists, and administrators. In addition, OOL benefits from a cadre of part-time ID personnel and ID interns. Together, this team has developed and launched seven new online and hybrid programs in five years.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania: Master of Arts in Instructional Design and Learning Technologies

The Master of Arts in Instructional Design and Learning Technologies (IDLT) at IUP is an intensive graduate program designed for both full-time and part-time enrollees that aims to balance academic preparation, individual research, and practical field experience. Curricular topics include the history and philosophy of ID, technology, learning sciences, program planning and evaluation, teaching methods, organizational theory, leadership and management, research skills, and current issues and trends in the field.

IDLT students seek internships in various industries, including corporate, government, and higher education settings. Placements in corporate, government, and non-profit organizations are advertised through job, volunteer, and internship boards. However, internships in higher education are not as prevalent. While the IDLT program offers placements within the University's Center for Teaching Excellence, external internships allow students to learn from practitioners aside from their program faculty members.

As part of their non-thesis option, IDLT students may elect to complete either an internship or a research course, earning three graduate credits (e.g., 120 hours of internship = three credits). Students can earn an additional three credits by taking an elective course or participating in a second internship, which can be completed at the same site as a continuation or at a combination of two different locations (e.g., higher education institution + non-profit organization). Internships are typically completed during students' final semester in the program.

Program Rationale

The IDIP was conceptualized in 2021 in response to a problem of practice. Specifically, OOL had just launched its first two online programs and was poised to begin development on its signature clinical (residential) program, the Doctor of Physical Therapy. As the first nationally accredited hybrid program of its kind, the stakes for a successful launch were high. It was necessary to secure sufficient ID talent to embark on this endeavor due to the complexity and length of the curriculum, consisting of over 30 new online courses.

While SHRS had made significant investments in hiring full-time design personnel, online administrators noted the considerable challenge of preparing IDs to work with clinical content, even those with previous design experience, and the insufficient pool of ID candidates with higher education expertise. This observation was in line with research on the expansion of information technology for health sciences, which has increased the demand for effective clinical learning experiences incorporating the latest digital tools (Carlton, 2024; Frenk et al., 2022). Foregrounding the need for an ID pipeline that equipped IDs for both the higher education workplace and with the niche skills for designing clinical coursework, OOL searched for an institutional partner for an internship program. It later executed an affiliation agreement with IUP.

OOL received its first intern in 2022 and has now hosted five interns over the course of five academic semesters. The IDIP partnership has provided a pipeline of skilled ID talent for Pitt's learning and development initiatives, while giving IUP students access to mentorship and networking opportunities within a large research institution.

Program Objectives and Overview

The IDIP is guided by the following four programmatic learning objectives:

1. Application of Theory to Practice

1.1: Interns will effectively apply instructional design theories, models, and research to real-world educational settings by developing course materials and learning activities that align with best research practices.

1.2: Interns will integrate both pedagogical and andragogical principles to create inclusive, engaging, and effective learning experiences for diverse learner populations.

2. Exposure to New Learning Opportunities

2.1: Interns will explore and utilize emerging technologies and tools in instructional design, gaining hands-on experience with learning management systems, multimedia creation, and interactive content development.

2.2: Interns will engage in collaborative projects with faculty, staff, and peers, expanding their understanding of diverse instructional design challenges and innovative solutions.

3. Acquisition of Independent Work Experience

3.1: Interns will independently manage instructional design projects from inception through completion, showcasing initiative, time management, and problem-solving abilities.

3.2: Interns will develop and execute comprehensive project plans, including conducting needs assessments, creating design documents, establishing timelines, and implementing evaluation strategies.

4. Reflection on Practice and Scholarship

4.1: Interns will engage in regular reflective practice, documenting their experiences, challenges, and successes through a professional journal, blog, or similar medium.

4.2: Interns will critically evaluate their instructional design projects, using scholarly literature to support their reflections and identify key areas for future professional growth.

Internship Timeline

The IDIP spans a total of 15 weeks with a timeline that commences one semester prior to the practicum experience and entails a series of post-internship tasks. Table 1 maps the cycle of pre, during, and post-internship activities, from pre-internship setup to post-internship evaluation. This approach ensures that both the intern and the institution are aligned in expectations, goals, and outcomes. The timeline prioritizes interns' development, providing opportunities for hands-on experience, mentorship, and continuous feedback. Each stage highlights the responsibilities of both interns and supervisors, ensuring a smooth and productive internship experience, culminating in a reflection and evaluation process that facilitates interns' professional growth.

Table 1

Timeline of Internship Stages

Stage	Timeline	Activity
Pre	One semester prior to start	Faculty internship coordinator identifies potential interns
	One semester prior to start	Internship site supervisor screens recommended candidates and selects an intern
	One month prior to start	Internship site supervisor and intern mentor collaborates with the intern to co-create clear and achievable internship goals
	Two weeks prior to start	Internship site supervisor ensures all technical onboarding, account setup, and resources are accessible for the intern
During	Start date	Internship site supervisor conducts a welcome meeting to introduce the intern to the team and outline the first steps of the internship
	Within three days of start date	Intern meets with their mentor to set expectations, clarify internship objectives, and schedule regular check-ins
	Midpoint	Site supervisor and intern mentor evaluate the intern's progress, adjusting the scope of work and providing additional resources if necessary

	Throughout	Intern receives ongoing support and feedback from the site supervisor and mentor, ensuring they are on track and their learning needs are being met
	One week before completion	Intern mentor reviews intern's work, providing constructive feedback, supports portfolio creation, and evaluates workload to ensure a smooth wrap-up
Post	One week after completion	Intern submits a final report and reflection, highlighting achievements and challenges, to both the site supervisor and faculty internship coordinator
	One week after completion	Site supervisor signs off on completed hours and ensures all internship deliverables are finalized
	One week after completion	Site supervisor completes an evaluation of the intern's performance, offering feedback for future growth

Programmatic Milestones

This section outlines the key programmatic milestones distributed across five main stages: (1) participant recruitment, (2) internal planning and preparation, (3) internship experience, (4) feedback and evaluation processes, and (5) continuous quality improvement.

Stage 1: Participant Recruitment

The recruitment stage serves as the entry point for potential interns, focusing on identifying candidates who fulfill the needs of the internship site. To be eligible as interns, students must be in good academic standing within their graduate program. The Faculty Internship Coordinator works closely with them to identify suitable opportunities that align with their professional goals and academic focus. Afterward, the Faculty Internship Coordinator provides a list of possible candidates to the Site Supervisor at Pitt to commence the screening process. In this stage, the Site Supervisor conducts interview screenings with all recommended interns to assess their knowledge, skills, readiness, and fit for the position. Standardized interview protocols and position descriptions with clear expectations of the intern role (Table 2) are implemented to ensure consistency and fairness throughout the selection process. Ultimately, the number of ID interns varies based on the capacity of the host site to provide sufficient mentoring support. Pitt typically caps the number of semester interns at two. Final candidates are notified through a welcome email to formalize the collaboration and set the tone for a professional and engaging internship experience (Appendix A).

Table 2

Internship Stakeholder Roles

Role	Responsibilities
Site Supervisor	• Sign the Affiliation Agreement • Help the student develop and sign the Internship Contract • Monitor student progress on the internship • Complete the Site Supervisor Feedback Form

Faculty Internship Coordinator

- Work with students to help them develop ideas for internships and fit the internship experience into their overall academic program
 - Approve the internship contract along with the site supervisor and the student
 - Assist the student and the site supervisor during the internship as needed
 - Review and approve the final internship project submitted by the student
 - Assign a grade for the internship based on the final report, the evaluation of the site supervisor, and the internship coordinator's observation of the student during the internship
-

Student Intern

- Engage in new learning through the practical experience of completing the internship
 - Provide the host organization with the benefit of the student's professional knowledge and experience
 - Act professionally and carry out their duties in a responsible manner, including obeying all rules and regulations of the host organization
-

Stage 2: Internal Planning and Preparation

The planning and preparation stage lays the necessary foundation for a successful internship. Internal alignment ensures the host site is well-positioned to integrate interns, fostering an environment of clarity and teamwork. Key activities include the collaborative completion of the internship contract (Appendix B), which defines the internship objectives, documentation of learning activities, and end-of-program deliverables. These objectives are customized to meet the unique needs of the site, accounting for interns' prior learning and career objectives, and require the sign-off of the Faculty Internship Coordinator. This stage also entails the internal coordination of onboarding materials, including tools and licenses procurement, access to platforms and systems, and an initial project list created by the site supervisor and team members. Interns are provided a comprehensive onboarding checklist (Appendix C) at their first welcome meeting with the site supervisor.

Stage 3: Internship Experience

The internship experience represents the culmination of the intern's preparatory work, offering an immersive opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world setting. In this stage, interns transition from learners to contributors, taking on active roles within their placement sites. It serves as a dynamic, hands-on learning process that equips them with practical skills, professional insights, and a portfolio of work that demonstrates their growth. Components of the IDIP program include weekly mentorship, project-based learning, project management, and skills development, which foster the acquisition of core IBSTPI competencies for ID practitioners across the domains of professional foundations, planning and analysis, design and development, and management (IBSTPI, 2021).

Professional Foundations Domain

Weekly Mentorship

A defining feature of the internship experience is the ongoing mentorship provided by the site supervisor. Weekly one-on-one check-ins create a safe environment for guidance and reflection. These sessions foster a collaborative relationship between interns and supervisors, ensuring interns feel supported while maintaining accountability. These meetings are instrumental in helping interns:

1. Navigate the course development cycle and relevant tools.
2. Discuss research and theoretical aspects of instructional design.

3. Refine communication and collaboration skills with confidence and professionalism.
4. Clarify expectations for upcoming projects or deliverables.
5. Receive constructive feedback on their work.
6. Address challenges or obstacles they encounter.
7. Share reflections and insights gained through their work.

Planning and Analysis; Design and Development Domains

Project-Based Learning

Throughout the semester, interns engage in a variety of design projects aligned with their individual learning goals and professional aspirations. These projects offer interns the chance to meaningfully contribute to the host site's objectives while simultaneously honing essential skills. By participating in these initiatives, interns develop technical expertise by gaining proficiency in tools and techniques integral to design, including learning management systems (LMS), multimedia production software, and assessment platforms. The projects increase in complexity over time, providing interns with a gradual and supportive pathway to build competence. For example, early assignments might involve foundational tasks such as curating content or editing materials, while more advanced projects could include designing comprehensive instructional modules, conducting usability testing, or developing multimedia assets. This deliberate progression ensures that interns develop confidence and proficiency as they take on increasingly challenging responsibilities (Table 3).

Table 3

Sample Intern Tasks

Tasks	Description
Perform needs assessments	Explore evidence-based practices in instructional design and apply appropriate design strategies for specific use cases.
Design and develop instructional materials	Design and implement instructional modules, lesson plans, and assessments aligned to learning objectives.
Create multimedia assets	Storyboard instructional videos, infographics, and interactive learning elements to enhance learner engagement and understanding.
Collaborate with strategic partners	Work closely with internal and external partners to align project deliverables with organizational goals.
Apply quality standards	Evaluate course content for adherence to accessibility, usability, and general quality standards.
Use project management tools	Employ tools to track, progress, and organize tasks to track, progress, and meet deadlines efficiently.

Management Domain

Project and Relationship Management

Interns develop competency in managing both projects and relationships throughout the IDIP program. They plan and manage design projects through the team's project management software (i.e., Airtable), which offers a valuable introduction to

industry-standard tools. This system facilitates task tracking and time management, transparent progress monitoring for interns and supervisors, and real-time adjustments to priorities and deadlines. Figure 1 showcases an example of intern workflow tracking, illustrating how they log their hours and document project milestones. These records ensure that all internship requirements are met, while providing a clear sense of achievement.

Figure 1

Intern Project Tracking in Airtable

All Projects-Intern's Projects				
Project Name	Hours Tracked (FA24)	Status	Priority	Description
Built out SharePoint module for the faculty Toolkit	0.50	Completed	Low	SharePoint Module Outline_New.docx
HI 2021 Revision Checklist	4.00	Completed	Low	HI 2021 Airtable revision checklist HI 2021 SharePoint - Practical Statistical and Programming Using R HI 2021 Canvas Course
Faculty Checklist Deliverable	2.00	Completed	Low	SharePoint Folder - Faculty Checklist Deliverable
Built out Panopto Module for the Faculty Toolkit	0.50	Completed	Low	Panopto Module Outline.docx Please build in Canvas Sandbox
HI 2021 Course Schedule	1.25	Completed	Low	Please update the live session dates for the course schedule. The document with the dates and course schedule are in the SharePoint folder. SharePoint Folder: Term Prep_Revision FA24 Please reach out in you have any questions!

Collaboration is an essential element of the IDIP program. Through supervisor modeling, interns learn how to build effective internal and external partnerships with team members, faculty, staff, and leadership. Professionalism is also emphasized, as interns develop durable skills and gain insights into workplace norms, ethical practices, and strategies for managing complex relationships. Figure 2 provides an example of email communication between interns and faculty members.

Figure 2

Sample Intern Email to Faculty



[Redacted Name]



Reply



Reply all



Forward



To: [Redacted]

Cc: [Redacted]

Tue 2023-01-31 11:33 AM

Hi Cara,

I'm reaching out today to introduce myself. My name is [Redacted], and I'm the Instructional Design Intern working with Rae Mancilla and Sally Russick, to support you with your requested revisions for [Redacted] Implementation Evidence for the Summer 2023 semester.

Cara, you have been added to the [Canvas Revision Shell](#). The previous course, 2227 [Redacted] IMPLEMENTATION EVIDENCE, has been cloned to this shell. Also, a Revision Folder, [Revisions \(SU 2023\)](#) has been added to the [Redacted] SharePoint Folder. I have gone ahead and added the Module Review Spreadsheet, please feel free to upload any documents that may be needed as I work through your revision updates.

I'd be happy to schedule a meeting to address any questions you may have. If that's something you'd like to do, let me know and I'll get a meeting on our calendars.

I look forward to working with you. Thank you for your time.

Have a great day!

[Redacted]

-

Instructional Design Intern | Office of Online Learning
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Finally, interns grow in their critical thinking as they devise innovative solutions for design challenges and adapt to workflow obstacles with creativity.

Stage 4: Feedback and Evaluation

Feedback and evaluation are integral to the IDIP program, serving as the foundation for intern development and programmatic improvement. The program employs systematic assessment methods, both formative and summative, to support interns' growth and ensure completion of program objectives. Formative assessment measures, such as regular check-ins, provide ongoing opportunities for constructive feedback. Summative measures, conducted by the Faculty Internship Coordinator and site supervisor, include final evaluations to assess overall performance and competency achievement. Likewise, interns engage in summative reflective exercises for self-assessment purposes. This stage aligns with the IBSTIPI evaluation and implementation domain.

Formative Assessment

The site supervisor is central to the formative assessment process, playing a pivotal role in mentoring and evaluating interns throughout the internship. Regular check-in meetings provide a space for constructive feedback, reflection, and guidance, fostering a collaborative and supportive relationship. Based on supervisor feedback, interns may be asked to revise their design projects to better meet learning objectives. Supervisors can also introduce new tasks to expand learning opportunities or provide additional scaffolding to address specific challenges. This proactive and tailored approach encourages interns to push beyond their comfort zones and build confidence in their abilities.

Summative Assessment

The internship culminates in the submission of a final internship log and report, or portfolio, submitted to the Faculty Internship Coordinator for evaluation. This log serves as a diary of internship activities and documents interns' fulfillment of required hours and detailed activity tracking (Appendix D). Content of the final report or portfolio varies based on interns' goals and task types assigned by the site supervisor throughout the semester. Table 4 outlines a sample of portfolio deliverables aligned with IBSTPI competencies.

Table 4*Example Portfolio Deliverables*

Artifact	Description	IBSTPI Competency
Export of an H5P interactive learning object	A formative interactive knowledge check quiz created to accompany a lecture video.	Design and Development: Design learning assessment
Guide to netiquette infographic created in Canva	A student-facing infographic outlining aspects of netiquette for online learning environments.	Professional Foundations: Identify and respond to ethical, legal, and political implications of design in the workplace
A course-level and module-level outline	Design documents for a new course development featuring feedback and suggestions to faculty or subject matter experts.	Planning and Analysis: Select and use analysis techniques for determining instructional content

Site supervisors also play a role in the final evaluation of interns. This summative evaluation supports the overall learning process and ensures accountability while providing clear data points for interns' future development. Table 5 displays the comprehensive framework used by site supervisors to evaluate intern performance, capturing insights into their effectiveness, contributions, and areas for growth.

Table 5*Site Supervisor Feedback Form*

Item	Description
1.	What is the quality of work of the student intern?
2.	How professional did the student intern behave?
3.	What is the level of the contribution of the student intern to your organization?
4.	What is your overall assessment of the student intern's performance?

*5-point Likert scale from unacceptable to excellent

Self-Assessment

Interns engage in reflective practice to monitor progress and achievement toward their internship outcomes. Interns are encouraged to keep a journal and compile portfolio entries that serve as artifacts of their learning. Upon completion of the internship, interns submit a final reflection to their site supervisor, assessing their overall experience and articulating areas for professional growth.

Stage 5: Continuous Quality Improvement

This stage focuses on assessing IDIP's overall impact on workforce development to ensure its continuous improvement and alignment with organizational goals and industry needs. Tracking post-internship completion metrics, such as job placement in higher education settings and alumni success stories, validates the program's effectiveness in preparing interns for career readiness. While the IDIP program is still in its early phases, 75% percent of graduated interns have secured positions in ID or adjacent fields (e.g., educational technology, training). Furthermore, qualitative feedback gathered from interns about the role of IDIP in their career preparation has been positive. One intern captured the value of IDIP in the following quote:

The trajectory of my career was shaped by an internship in higher education instructional design. Guided by the mentorship of seasoned instructional design professionals, I navigated the nuances of the field while bridging the gap between my graduate studies and real-world application. This transformative opportunity laid the foundation for my professional growth in learning and development. One of the most rewarding aspects of my time as an intern was contributing to the creation of a physician assistant graduate course. Collaborating with the instructional design team, I helped build 15 modules, design visual assets, and develop interactive elements. The trust and support I received gave me the confidence to work closely with subject matter experts, incorporate their feedback, and deliver a polished course aligned with objectives, adult learning principles, and accessibility standards. The internship not only strengthened my ability to manage complex projects but also deepened my appreciation for the impact of thoughtfully designed learning experiences. Today, I am excited to apply these skills and insights as I continue to thrive in a field I am passionate about.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through the case of Pitt and IUP, this paper introduced the Instructional Design Internship Program (IDIP), providing a model for experiential workplace learning for ID interns aspiring to careers in higher education settings. The virtual internship represented a strategic partnership between two institutions that spanned one academic semester, with five phases of implementation, including participant recruitment, internal planning and preparation, internship experience, feedback and evaluation, and continuous improvement processes. To adequately equip future design practitioners, the internship was guided by the IBSTPI Instructional Design Standards, addressing the five ID competency domains of professional foundations, planning and analysis, design and development, evaluation and implementation, and management. Although the program was situated within a health sciences school, applying the IBSTPI framework fostered interns' development of holistic ID competencies that could readily transfer to any academic discipline beyond clinical education (e.g., working with faculty and subject matter experts, conducting a needs analysis, selecting instructional materials, managing instructional design projects).

Across multiple offerings, IDIP has yielded valuable insights that guide program iteration. SHRS administrators have learned that hosting interns is a reciprocal endeavor that ultimately fosters the mutual growth of both interns and team members. Sponsoring institutions must be prepared to make significant investments in human and fiscal resources (e.g., technical licenses) to receive interns, with the understanding that they become active contributors who balance the collective workload. Interns can also add substantial value to the team, diversifying the team culture and skillset in ways that infuse emerging theoretical and technical knowledge into the workplace. While this mutual exchange can upskill existing team members, it requires a growth mindset on behalf of experienced personnel. To cultivate a favorable learning environment, administrators should prepare the team in advance for intern onboarding, emphasizing the reciprocal benefits of mentoring, and their prior knowledge.

After receiving multiple interns, SHRS administrators also concluded that not all mentorships are equally successful. IDIP cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach. In some cases, interns have lacked the requisite technical skills to work autonomously in course development, which resulted in a significant time investment on behalf of mentors and the inability of interns to reach their learning objectives. To avoid such cases and ensure adequate skills alignment, site supervisors should diligently screen intern candidates, seeking opportunities to review tangible work products when possible (e.g., student portfolio). Conversely, some interns develop skills more quickly and may benefit from an extended internship experience that allows them to refine their practice. Administrators can recommend that interns continue for an additional semester on a case-by-case basis, acknowledging that each intern candidate is unique.

At its current juncture, SHRS seeks to expand IDIP to accommodate more interns. Scaling the program will require supervisory training for new mentors, due to the time-intensive nature of mentoring. Legacy mentors can develop a train-the-trainer program to equip future mentors with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions for the role. Conversely, to scale IDIP will also require a steady pipeline of intern candidates from academic institutions. Despite the enrollment cliff facing many institutions of higher education, and fluctuating political dynamics that impact institutional policy, funding, and campus climate, attracting more interns to IDIP is a feasible goal, as learning sciences remains one of the fastest-growing degree programs for undergraduate and graduate students (Hanover Research, 2024). To date, IDIP has relied on word of mouth and faculty referrals to recruit interested candidates from a single institution. Greater investment in marketing efforts and the formation of strategic partnerships with other institutions may help to create a more robust intern pipeline.

As a relatively new initiative, IDIP offers many opportunities for future research. Scholars from institutions that implement the program may document case studies, focusing on effective strategies for mentoring novice IDs and differing needs across candidate subgroups (e.g., K12 teachers, career changers, etc.). They may also consider the impact of varying design tasks on intern preparation and dispositional or affective factors such as professional identity development. As the IDIP program has approached the four-year mark at the University of Pittsburgh, it is fitting to conduct a full program evaluation with an eye toward continuous improvement. Creating instruments and protocols to support program assessment is also an area for future development.

In conclusion, given the pivotal time in online learning for U.S. institutions of higher education and the unprecedented growth in the ID profession, there is a need to prepare the future ID workforce. This paper provides a transferrable blueprint that administrators can follow to implement and evaluate a virtual internship program as a cost-effective professional development strategy that leverages internal expertise to cultivate new online professionals.

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Appendix A

Welcome Email

Greetings [intern name]!

Welcome aboard! 🎉 The Office of Online Learning is thrilled to have you join us as our intern for the [term]. This email is designed to guide you through the initial steps of the onboarding process.

To get started, we kindly ask you to complete the following tasks:

1. Sponsored Email Account: Our IT department has initiated the process to provide you with a sponsored email account. You should have received an email regarding this at your IUP email address. It's essential to activate your sponsored account promptly, as it will serve as your credentials for accessing the University interface.
2. Initial Onboarding Meeting: To assist with the onboarding process, I would like to schedule a meeting with you early next week. This meeting is estimated to last between 45 and 60 minutes.

We're looking forward to connecting with you and supporting you as you begin your instructional design journey with us. While you're working through the tasks outlined above, please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions, concerns, or encounter any issues.

The team is here to help and happy to assist in any way we can!

Warm regards,

[Site Supervisor]

Appendix B

Internship Contract

Student Information

Name:

Student ID:

Address:

Phone:

Email address:

Semester

Three (3) Credits – 120 hours

Duration of Internship: # weeks

Start and End Dates:

Internship Site Information

Name of Site Supervisor:

Site Supervisor Title:

Name of Organization/Institution:

Organization Address:

Organization Phone Number:

Site Supervisor Email:

Goals, Objectives, & Documentation of Learning

Goal 1: Develop familiarity with course development process for new and revision courses, design documents, and templates

1. Objective: Identify the phases of the development process for new/revision courses and associated design documents and templates.
2. Objective: Use design documents and templates to outline new/revision course content.
3. Objective: Assist instructional designers with asynchronous communication with faculty using guides.
4. Deliverables: Design documents and templates (e.g., schedule, syllabus, outlines, etc.); sample emails to faculty

Goal 2: Develop technical expertise with the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) and Integrations

1. Objective: Apply basic Canvas features to build new modules and courses within the Canvas LMS under the guidance of an ID.
2. Objective: Integrate relevant internal/external Canvas tools, media, interactives, and course elements into a course build.
3. Objective: Assess Canvas pages, assignments, quizzes, and rubrics and action appropriate revisions aligned to the best practices for online learning.

1. Deliverables: Screenshots of completed Canvas modules; before/after examples from updated Canvas content

Goal 3: Apply multimedia design principles to the creation of instructional assets

1. Objective: Conduct a needs assessment to scope interactive learning content.
2. Objective: Draft a storyboard of interactive learning content based on results of needs assessment.
3. Objective: Utilize appropriate interactive authoring tool and best practices of multimedia development to create interactive learning content.
4. Objective: Revise interactive learning content based on faculty and design team feedback.
5. Deliverable: Needs assessment; storyboard, interactive learning object

Signatures

Student: _____ Date: _____

Site Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

Internship Advisor: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Instructional Designer Intern Onboarding Checklist

Orientation and Onboarding

- ☐ Review the university's mission, vision, and values.
- ☐ Complete all required HR documentation and compliance training.
- ☐ Familiarize yourself with university policies and procedures related to instructional design.
- ☐ Receive access to relevant systems (e.g., sponsored account, LMS, project management tools, email).
- ☐ Attend an orientation session with the instructional supervisor and be assigned Instructional designer mentor (if applicable).

Technology and Tools Training

- ☐ Complete training on the Learning Management System (LMS) used by the university.
- ☐ Explore course authoring tools (e.g., H5P)
- ☐ Learn how to use collaborative platforms (e.g., Teams, Airtable)

- ☐ Gain an understanding of accessibility tools.
- ☐ Review tools for video creation and editing (e.g., Panopto).

Project-Specific Tasks

- ☐ Participate in initial project meetings and review project scope.
- ☐ Assist in creating instructional materials (e.g., PowerPoint slides, course syllabi).
- ☐ Review and suggest updates for existing course content.
- ☐ Conduct quality assurance checks for course content in the LMS (e.g., UDOIT).
- ☐ Support faculty with LMS troubleshooting or content uploads.

Design and Development

- ☐ Apply instructional design principles (e.g., ADDIE, backward design).
- ☐ Assist in developing interactive course elements.
- ☐ Ensure content aligns with accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG).
- ☐ Review course content for consistency and adherence to design standards.

Communication and Collaboration

- ☐ Attend regular team meetings and provide project updates.
- ☐ Schedule and participate in check-ins with a mentor or supervisor.
- ☐ Collaborate with faculty members.
- ☐ Document feedback and revisions for ongoing projects.

Professional Development

- ☐ Participate in the ID toolkit course related to instructional design.
- ☐ Stay updated on trends in eLearning and higher education technology.

Documentation and Reporting

- ☐ Maintain a work log of tasks completed and ongoing projects.
- ☐ Contribute to the development of project documentation or reports.
- ☐ Prepare a reflection at the end of the internship, highlighting key learnings and contributions.

Evaluation and Feedback

- ☐ Schedule midpoint and final evaluations with your supervisor.
- ☐ Seek feedback from faculty and team members on your contributions.
- ☐ Reflect on your experiences and identify areas for future growth.

End-of-Internship Tasks

- ☐ Ensure all project deliverables are complete and documented.
- ☐ Submit any required internship assignments or reflections.
- ☐ Provide feedback about the internship experience to the instructional design team.

Appendix D

Internship Activity Log Example

1			Indiana University of Pennsylvania	
2				
3		Date	Description of Work	Hours Tracked
4		15-Mar-24	Met with Sally and Rae to discuss internship and write up the contract.	1
5		5-May-24	Weekly Meeting with Sally. Spoke about what the goal was for the week, and what we were waiting on through Pitt.	1
6		28-May-24	Weekly Meeting with Sally. Got some access. Went through the websites with Sally.	1
7		29-May-24	Built out the SharePoint module for the Pitt Faculty Toolkit.	1
8		30-May-24	Started to get familiar with HSP.	1
9		31-May-24	Met with faculty advisor.	0.5
10		3-Jun-24	Weekly meeting with Sally. Went over the SharePoint module and assigned work for the week.	1
11		5-Jun-24	Built out the Panopto module for the Pitt Faculty Toolkit.	2
12		10-Jun-24	Weekly Meeting with Sally. Assigned me to the draft of the Faculty Checklist.	1
13		11-Jun-24	Started to work on multiple drafts and ideas for the Faculty Checklist. Started working in OneNote.	2
14		12-Jun-24	Started to make another draft of the Faculty Checklist through Word and Excel.	3
15		12-Jun-24	Tried to make another draft of the Faculty Checklist through Canva with the Pitt Branding.	2
16		12-Jun-24	Continued to look and practice with HSP.	2
17		17-Jun-24	Weekly Meeting with Sally, Rae joined. I presented my ideas for the Faculty Checklist and got feedback. Sally assigned my work for HI course.	1
18		19-Jun-24	Started reforming the Faculty Checklist on Word.	2
19		19-Jun-24	Started reforming the Faculty Checklist on Excel. This did not work out.	1.5
20		20-Jun-24	Started to work on Course Schedule for HI course.	2
21		21-Jun-24	Met with faculty advisor.	0.5
22		24-Jun-24	Weekly Meeting with Sally. Went over the Faculty Checklist together and the Course Schedule. Assigned me check through the Canvas for HI course.	1
25				
75			Total Hours:	129
76				
77				
78			Intern Signature	
79			Site Supervisor Signature	
80			Internship Coordinator Signature	



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