



# Build a Great Course with an Instructional Designer

## Teaching Beyond the Podium Podcast

### 00:06 Micah Jenkins

Hello, my name is Micah Jenkins and welcome to the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. This podcast is hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida. Our guests share their best tips, strategies, innovations and stories about teaching. This episode's topic is on instructional design. And we sat down with Allyson Haskell and Laura Jervis, instructional designers at the Center for Instructional Technology and Training, also known as CITT. Both Allyson and Laura began teaching and discovered that the part of teaching they like the most, instructional design, could be a full time career. Laura describes in its simplest terms, what an instructional designer does.

### 00:43 Laura Jervis

I think of it as like teaching for introverts where I have all the fun of helping somebody lesson plan and thinking about teaching, but I'm not the one who has to grade papers at the end of the week.

### 00:58 Micah Jenkins

Instructional designers switch between many roles and responsibilities. Allyson typically works to pinpoint instructional solutions.

### 01:05 Allyson Haskell

I think, primarily, my role is to listen to instructors needs and recommend student centered solutions that will help them do what they want to do as instructors. So whether that's talking about new methods of teaching or new technologies, or maybe making a course site more accessible, just trying to help solve their problems.

### 01:22 Micah Jenkins

In addition to helping instructors with their pedagogical questions, Laura describes how IDs also play a role as project managers.

## 01:29 Laura Jervis

So there's a project management aspect, I might be helping them schedule appointments to record lectures and making sure that they're on task to complete on time. I also will advise about, you know, pedagogy and best practices. And I also help them with educational technology. And that could be just Canvas, or it could be an external tool, it depends on what they need.

## 01:56 Micah Jenkins

In general, a well-designed course feels clear and intuitive to students. Allyson explains why that's so important for learners.

## 02:03 Allyson Haskell

Good course design is almost like, you almost don't notice it when a course is designed really well. But everything is just where it needs to be and students are able to achieve their learning goals without it being stressful or, or taking anything away from their learning experience. So I think having a clear path for them to focus on the course and the content and an environment online or in person or wherever, where they feel supported and welcomed. One of the things at CITT that we make sure to include is some kind of Start Here section for the course site so that when students come to the course site, the main page immediately is showing them where they should go and what they should do to get started. So things like that like including navigation that makes sense, different pathways to get to the material. So if one learner prefers using the modules in Canvas and another person prefers using links on the front page to get to all of their coursework they can. And then when we survey students, some of their positive feedback is, like I said, focus on clarity design of the course site. But I think they also really appreciate clarity when it comes to assignment instructions, and expectations from the instructor. So we also really try to focus on making sure that what the instructor wants out of an assignment is what they're asking for, and that they've also explained to the student why that aligns with their outcomes or student learning objectives for the course.

## 03:18 Micah Jenkins

Good course design also applies to online courses. Laura explains how extra planning may be required.

### 03:24 Laura Jervis

In theory, it seems easy record a few lectures and you give some tests, but that's not really the same quality course as it would be in person. And so if you're trying to convert, for example, active learning strategies to an online format, there are a lot of challenges there. When I was teaching, I used to plan for the week ahead, but now I'm helping people prepare for the whole semester before the semester starts.

### 03:55 Micah Jenkins

The CITT office is located on campus in the Hub, so who can drop in for help?

### 04:00 Allyson Haskell

So our office, you know, we're centrally located on campus, and we support pretty much all of campus. Anybody who wants to come to us can come for a consultation, and we can talk about a specific issue or thing that an instructor wants to do in their course. So it could be revising an assignment, creating a new project and thinking about how to scaffold that for the students, or it could be how do I make my Canvas page look like this other site that I've seen so we kind of handle all sorts of consultations.

### 04:29 Micah Jenkins

Laura knows that instructors wear many hats and can sometimes become overwhelmed. She encourages instructors to reach out for teaching support when they need it.

### 04:37 Laura Jervis

Being a professor or a faculty member, for example is a really, it's an intense job if you have research duties and teaching duties. You also have subject area expertise like that's a lot of things that we're expecting you to be fantastic at. So instructional designers like me can help you be fantastic at teaching even if your background or your degree is in something else.

## 05:02 Micah Jenkins

Course design assistance isn't just for courses you're currently teaching. CITT can help you design future courses too.

## 05:08 Allyson Haskell

So if an instructor wants to come and you know, dedicate a semester of time to creating a course for a future semester, one of our instructional designers will work with them, meet with them weekly, and guide them through the process of submitting their content to us. And then we provide them feedback on where we think alignment could be improved, or where we have questions about expectations for the assignment or anything like that.

## 05:29 Micah Jenkins

The TILT framework, which stands for transparency in teaching and learning is one of CITT's favorite instructional design strategies.

## 05:37 Laura Jervis

I know that when I was teaching, at first, I kind of thought that I had to be an authority figure for my students. When I stopped feeling that way, I started just telling them why I was doing everything I did in class, and my relationship with my students really improved. But their learning also improved because they didn't sit around thinking I was giving them busy work. Even if we had an assignment that I knew might feel a little bit boring, I would tell them why it was important. And that would help them get through it. So I think that having a really clear purpose to assignments is a big help in that. There's something called the TILT project. So our website is [tilt higher ed.com](http://tilt.higher.ed.com). And they ask instructors to have a three part assignment instructions. So the first part would be the purpose. The second part is the task. And then the third part is criteria. So if a student is doing that assignment, they know this is why I'm even doing this, then they know what to do, and then they also can evaluate on their own whether or not they think they have met the assignment criteria before the instructor ever sees it. So it helps promote self directed learning and also you might get better assignments coming in.

## 07:01 Micah Jenkins

The TILT method also applies to online courses.

## 07:04 Laura Jervis

If you're in a classroom, you can just tell your students hey, remember, we have a test on Friday. But in an online class, you might not be able to do that, especially if there's no synchronous session. You have course announcements, but students got a lot of communication, they might miss something they might have accidentally or on purpose turned off notifications. So your course has to be really well organized and really clear so that it's transparent what you're asking them to do. I think that having a good structure, having to do lists, having a really predictable way of moving through the course can help students not miss assignments. Sometimes it can feel a little bit muddy if that's not present.

## 07:51 Micah Jenkins

If you're just getting started in course design, Allyson suggest taking a look at the resources currently available.

## 07:57 Allyson Haskell

Explore both the CTE and the CITT websites and see what resources we have available to just use when you're ready for them right away. And then also to talk to some other instructors that you know are teaching online and enjoying it or be successful at it, and find out what they did first and what they liked. And then I would say when you're ready to start designing a course, that's probably the time to reach out and ask CITT when we could work with you to develop a course.

## 08:26 Micah Jenkins

Instructional design help maybe even closer than you think.

## 08:29 Allyson Haskell

Some departments on campus have their own instructional design team so check first if you have an instructional designer already available near you in your unit. And then we're also available to any state courses that are for college credit. If it's a credit course at UF, then we would love to help you.

## 08:46 Micah Jenkins

So what can you expect from a consultation with an instructional designer? Laura describes her process.

## 08:51 Laura Jervis

Usually when I work with faculty, we start with a course map or course architecture. I ask them about their student learning objectives, and we kind of map it to a module or a unit structure. I always use modules because that's the terminology that Canvas uses, but you might call it a unit or a chapter. I asked instructors to then kind of go module by module with me. They'll show me a module outline page that will have student learning objectives, it will have a to do lists, it will have reminders, it will have links to assignments and things like that. And they'll also give me assignment instructions. Sometimes they'll give me PowerPoints for lectures that they want to record and I can help them make sure that their PowerPoints are more accessible to students with disabilities before they record. And I kind of evaluate their material with an outsider's perspective and I can help tell them if there's something that's confusing or something that's missing. Sometimes it's just nice to have a fresh pair of eyes look at something because you get so used to it, you've taught it for three years now, you know what this assignment should be. But I can show you what it's like for a new person to look at it and say that part actually might be a little confusing.

## 10:12 Micah Jenkins

The UF, plus Quality Matters standards offer a framework for great online course design at UF. CITT can help make sure your online course meets these standards. And you may even be rewarded for it by participating in the pathways to online teaching excellence course reviews with the Center for Teaching Excellence.

## 10:28 Allyson Haskell

We use it for every course we develop and we recommend that anybody even if they're not working with us use that as their sort of guide for how to create a course that's going to be high quality. One thing we always try to do is make sure that all of the instructors when they develop their courses, they're meeting those UF plus QM standards that are so helpful in making sure that our courses that the students take are really high quality and meeting those expectations that we have for online learning. Whenever we get a course that is really just like checking all the boxes, and is just fantastic, we try to recommend that that course be nominated. We have had courses that have been developed at CITT and then have later won those awards and distinctions. So that's been fantastic.

## 11:11 Micah Jenkins

Group work online can be challenging to coordinate. Laura offers a few tips to make sure your online group assignments are successful.

## 11:18 Laura Jervis

One of the challenges to group work is that students are sometimes less aware of the benefits of group work. So, I often really encourage instructors to get buy in from students in the beginning. If you're using that TILT formula, you could explain the benefits of collaboration and practicing collaboration. You also are going to want to make sure that there's a really clear deliverable and that there are clear expectations. And even more than in an in-person class, I think it's really important to have benchmarks. Like make sure that your students have identified their topic at a certain point in the semester, they've started, you know, the research at this point in the semester. Have a few check-in points because it's always easy to let something slip through the cracks but it's even easier in an online classroom and you can't tap your classmate on the shoulder after class and ask them why they didn't email you back.

## 12:20 Micah Jenkins

Instructors really appreciate the course design help CITT has to offer.

## 12:24 Allyson Haskell

So I think most of the time we get really positive feedback from instructors who have gone through the full course design process with us. They also like to tell us that it was a lot more work than they were expecting, which I think is very fair, because we really do put a lot of time into the development process and it is a weekly meeting, and there's always something to do for every week. So it's you know, we're helping instructors sort of stay ahead of the game so that they're not then trying to create content right before having to teach it but it's really a lot of work. But I think it also really pays off and they're very appreciative and they feel supported in trying to do new things and be creative in their teaching. So I think one of the things we do is try to make it feel safe to try something new and then support the instructors through the semester as they're doing that and help them adapt if they need to.

## 13:13 Micah Jenkins

Thank you for listening to this episode of the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. For more helpful resources developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence at UF, visit our website [teach.ufl.edu](http://teach.ufl.edu). We're happy you joined us and we hope to see you next time for more tips, strategies and ideas on teaching and learning at the University of Florida.