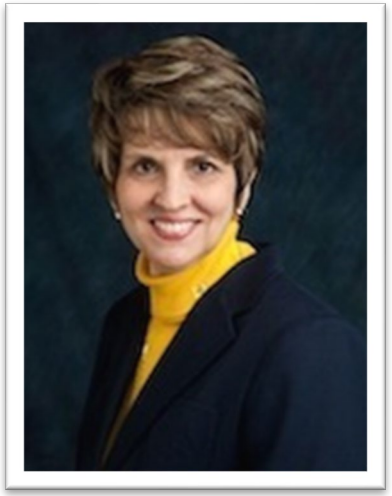
Mentoring Matters: Research-Informed Insights from Instructional Design Professionals

Rae Mancilla, Barbara Frey, Florence Williams, & Vanessa Dennen

Panelists



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Session Goals

- Identify key mentoring needs across career stages (junior, mid-level, senior) in relation to professional development goals.
- Analyze the strengths and limitations of institutional and professional mentoring approaches based on current research.
- Apply evidence-based strategies to design or enhance mentoring programs within their own institutions.

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)

Growing Need for Mentoring Instructional Designers

- Online learning continues to expand in higher education
- Instructional designers are a mission-critical workforce
- Designers enter the profession through diverse pathways
- Professional development often stops after onboarding
- Mentoring offers a scalable solution

An Exploration of Mentoring Programs for Online Instructional Designers in Higher Education



University of Pittsburgh®

Research Snapshot: Mentoring Programs for IDs

- **Purpose:** Examined the availability and structure of mentoring programs for IDs in higher education.
- **Sample:** Mixed-methods study of 65 IDs and 9 focus group participants (junior, mid-career, and senior levels).
- **Key Finding:** Interest in mentoring is high - 70% would participate in a formal mentoring program, yet only about 20% reported access to mentorship.
- **Mentoring Models:** A continuum of self-mentoring, peer mentoring, supervisor mentoring, and group mentoring across institutional and external networks.
- **Implications:** Mentoring reduces professional isolation, builds networks, and supports career development—but institutions must invest in programs.

Exploring Instructional Designers' Mentorship Experiences in Higher Education: A Mixed-Methods Approach



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Research Snapshot: Mentorship Experiences of Instructional Designers

- **Purpose:** Explore how instructional designers experience mentorship and how these relationships influence professional growth and career development in higher education.
- **Sample:** Mixed-methods study with 33 instructional designers working in higher education, representing a range of roles, team structures, and years of experience in the field.
- **Key Finding:** Mentorship experiences varied widely—some designers received structured mentoring, while many relied on informal networks or had no mentorship at all.
- **Mentorship Functions:** Mentorship supported institutional enculturation, faculty collaboration skills, and professional identity development.
- **Implications:** Effective mentorship emerges through a network of relationships, helping instructional designers navigate complex institutional environments and professional growth.

Relational Professional Development: Mentoring, Coaching, and the Learning Designer's Multidimensional Landscape

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Research Snapshot: Mentoring & Coaching as Relational Professional Development

- **Purpose:** Examine how mentoring and coaching function as relational professional development practices for learning designers in higher education.
- **Sample:** Qualitative interview study with three higher education learning design professionals representing early-career, mid-career, and senior levels of experience.
- **Key Finding:** Designers often rely on informal mentoring and coaching relationships, since institutional professional development frequently emphasizes compliance training rather than relational growth.
- **Key Distinction:**
  - **Mentoring:** career guidance, field-specific advice, professional identity development
  - **Coaching:** goal-oriented support focused on performance and growth.
- **Implications:** Mentoring, coaching, and professional learning networks collectively form a multidimensional ecosystem of professional development for learning designers.

Mentoring Recommendations

Take-Aways



Questions?

Please type your questions in the Q & A box.

Upcoming Publication

Mancilla, R., & Frey, B. (Eds.). (In press, June 2026). *Mentoring Instructional Designers: Professional Development in Higher Education*. Routledge.



References

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Mancilla, R., & Frey, B. (2025). An exploration of mentoring programs for online instructional designers in higher education. *Online Journal of Distance Administration 28* (2), 1-30.

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