

# Succeeding as a Faculty Member in an Instructional Design Program

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**Abstract.** This article first defines criteria one might apply in judging success as a faculty member. The criteria are then examined in detail, typical activities described and their relative importance judged. The article concludes with a summary of suggestions for how to be successful.

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Being a faculty member in an academic program that prepares instructional designers can be one of the most stimulating and rewarding opportunities in the world. Personally, other than being an astronaut, I can think of no other role I would prefer. But what does it take to be a success as a faculty member? Well, as the saying goes, "It all depends." It depends on you and on the institution in which you work. Success can be defined both internally and externally. What makes you happy and gives you a sense of personal and professional worth and satisfaction? And what does your institution reward you for doing? Several definitions of success are offered below. Your challenge is to decide which ones will contribute to your internal and external success.

## What is Success?

Success can be defined using a variety of criteria depending on the individual and the environment. Thus, you may or may not agree with the analysis and conclusion presented in this article. Your success will depend on your personal goals and values and the college setting you have in mind. Also, the relative importance of each criterion may vary widely over your career. This article assumes the setting is a major academic institution and that you seek to be a high performer. Some degree of balance among several, but not necessarily all of

the criteria, is essential to any definition of success. Success is defined here only in terms of the individual, but individual success is linked to program success, a topic that is beyond the scope of this article. The criteria to be considered here are: promotion, tenure, salary, professional recognition, consulting, and "perks." Each of these criteria is discussed below.

## Promotion and Tenure

Promotion and accompanying tenure are probably the sine qua non of success as a faculty member. Failure to achieve them results in non-renewal of appointment, which, by any definition, is not success. As will be discussed later, scholarly productivity is the key to promotion and tenure in most major institutions today. Promotion and tenure are much more difficult to achieve today than in the sixties when higher education was in a boom economy and faculty were in great demand. In those days even a mention of moving to another institution often resulted in promotion and tenure. Today the situation is much more competitive and instructional design faculty must compete with their colleagues in other disciplines for the few available tenure positions that open.

## Salary

Salary tends to be a relative criterion since almost no faculty member enjoys a salary comparable to colleagues in commercial settings. In fact, it is common for new graduates in instructional design to take positions in industry at salaries higher than all but the senior faculty in the program from which they just graduated. Within the university small differences in salary may result from being an exceptionally high or low performer. Faculty tend to place great weight on even these small differences in salary as indicators of their success. Depending on your institution, scholarly productivity and teaching in that order of importance are usually the basis for determining salary increases.

## Professional Recognition

Professional recognition by peers may also represent success. Election to office, invitations to serve on visitation teams and citations of one's works are some of the indicators of having achieved professional recognition. Achieving professional recognition usually requires becoming active in professional organizations including serving on committees, volunteering for task force assignments and making presentations. An active publication effort will also aid your professional recognition.

## Control of Environment

Control of one's environment is a little less easy to define. No one has complete control of the environment, but the ability to select courses to teach, select advisees and choose R & D activities in which to participate are all indicators of the degree to which a faculty member controls the environment. Becoming the resident expert in one or more specific areas (eg., evaluation or videodisc design), will help you become identified with selected courses and may provide opportunities to be invited to work with senior faculty on their R & D projects. Obtaining your own external funding is probably the best way to control your environment, but this usually takes considerable time and effort to achieve.

## Consulting

Consulting may also rank highly as a measure of success. The amount, location, type of consultation, fee, and client all affect how a faculty is perceived by colleagues and administrators. Highly successful faculty are often considered to be those who make a lot of money consulting on innovative projects and consulting only with Fortune 500 companies. Consulting opportunities arise as a result of visibility and expertise in selected areas. Active participation in professional associations is one of the best ways to generate consulting opportunities.

## Perks

The final measure of success to be considered is perks. These vary among institutions but may include ample travel funds, secretarial support, phone use and equipment. Carpeting in one's office may also be considered a perk. Some perks such as equipment may affect professional performance while others, such as an office with a window, serve mostly to communicate to co-workers that one has succeeded. Since the number of institutionally provided perks is usually small, you are competing directly with your colleagues for them. Young faculty are best advised to avoid this internal competition and seek outside funding to acquire travel, equipment and supplies funds, which are the most important perks for achieving future success.

## Typical Faculty Activities

We now turn to the typical activities of a university faculty member and how they are related to these criteria of success. First, the three universal functions of faculty—teaching, scholarly activity and service—are examined. Then, two activities that often place unique burdens on instructional technology faculty—organizational support and developmental projects—are considered.

### Teaching

There are few activities that can compare with teaching in providing strong positive psychological reinforcement. Watching students learn and grow and realizing you are contributing to their development helps explain why many good faculty stay in universities rather than heed the call of larger salaries in business and industry. Of course, the psychological reward is largest when one is teaching students with whom one feels an affinity. These may be undergraduates, graduate majors or non-majors depending on one's preference. Being in a position to select what courses and which students to teach adds greatly to one's sense of success. Advising is another activity that can provide a sense of success. Working with bright, motivated advisees can be both intellectually stimulating and psychologically rewarding. Being a good teacher may have the additional benefit of building a core of devoted alumni who seek you out as a consultant as they move into influential positions in their organizations.

But how well must a faculty member teach and advise to be a success? The

answer to this question depends on one's criteria. Unfortunately, all too often in terms of promotion, tenure, and salary, one can be mediocre in the classroom and still advance rapidly given other strengths. Being an outstanding teacher can provide great internal satisfaction. But average and even mediocre teachers receive about as many rewards from the university. The sad truth is that, short of being a total disaster in the classroom, almost any level of performance that satisfies the faculty member is defined as success in most institutions.

Fortunately, being a good teacher is not extremely difficult. Using your skills as an instructional designer to plan your own courses puts you at a distinct advantage. Caring for your students and keeping your courses up to date are also important. And lastly, being available to your advisees and being informed on

tion. Once you have achieved status as a full professor with tenure, you may concentrate on the more valued forms of publication and be less concerned about quantity.

### Funded Research

Funded research is another valued activity at most universities. Interestingly, merely obtaining funds is often used as a measure of one's scholarly performance. Grants and contracts from prestigious agencies such as NSF, Carnegie, etc. are valued more highly than those from state agencies. Furthermore, research projects rate higher than development or service contracts. However, for faculty who want to get ahead, they all count. Obtaining research or development funding requires building a solid set of ideas and then searching out potential funding sources. Matching ones' ideas to the goals and priorities of the funding agen-

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current academic requirements and how to meet them will gain their lasting adoration (and high student evaluations).

### Scholarly Activity

In contrast to teaching, scholarly activity is the premier criterion for measuring and rewarding performance in most major institutions. The quantity and quality of research, writing, and presentations at conferences are fundamental to success as a faculty member. New faculty must establish an active and productive agenda for publication. Publication in refereed journals and authorship of books are the two most valued outlets. Non-refereed national journals and book chapters are next in value, with state level journals, presentations at conferences, monographs and other publications being least valued.

The key to survival for young faculty members is to get into print at all three levels to build up their bibliographies. But remember, refereed publications are the "coin of the realm" in higher educa-

cy must be carefully done before spending time preparing a proposal. Proposal writing is an important skill that can be developed by working closely with successful senior faculty and by reviewing successful and unsuccessful proposals. The other key to success in obtaining funding is persistence. Most proposals are not initially funded, but through continued revision and improvement and resubmission to the same or other agencies, your chances can be greatly improved.

### Service

Service activities of faculty typically include serving on committees, working in professional organizations, non-fee consulting with schools and other agencies, engaging in organizational support and participating in development projects. Committee work is the bane of existence for most faculty, but all of us face the prospect of serving on one or more committees every year. Examples are program development, promotion and tenure, search, and grievance com-

mittees. The best advice I can give is to seek membership on university-wide committees, but keep careful control over other assignments to avoid wasting a lot of valuable time. Exceptions should be made for prestigious assignments such as Dean search or research proposal review committees. Faculty governance committees at most institutions are largely ceremonial. They should be avoided like the plague unless you are up for promotion or need to make contacts with senior faculty in other departments.

Much of what has been said about committee work also applies to participating in professional organizations. Unless the activity brings visibility and is viewed by others as significant and valuable (such as holding an elected office), a little goes a long way. Similarly, non-fee consulting should be carefully controlled. While the value to the recipient may be great and your sense of satisfaction high, the recognition and reward from the university are usually low. Moderation, not abstinence, is the watch word.

#### **Organizational Support and Development Projects**

Organizational support and participation in development projects are two areas in which there are unique demands on faculty in instructional design and technology. Demands on time arise because of the expertise instructional design faculty possess in analysis, design, production, evaluation and organizational change. ID faculty also have an action orientation and are used to working under short time lines and as part of a team. These skills are in short supply on most college campuses. Hence, extra demands often fall on ID faculty. Failure to recognize these unique conditions can be hazardous to your professional health.

Organizational support activities such as helping to establish a technology services center or conducting a needs assessment for a new degree program in another program area are often of great interest to college administrators. In seeking guidance and assistance they frequently turn to instructional technologists who are seen as having appropriate expertise. Faculty in other departments may also seek out technology faculty for advice and assistance in planning projects, selecting equipment and materials, producing instructional materials, designing facilities or designing project evaluations. While

it may be gratifying to be sought out for your expertise, these requests can become a bottomless pit, consuming vast amounts of time and producing little reward. Probably the best way to avoid this problem is to schedule less of your time in the office and more in the library or working at home.

Development projects within one's department, or even directed by you, can create the same dilemma as requests for organizational support. Managing one development project is an excellent professional experience. Managing a second and third project rapidly decreases their value as a learning experience. To avoid the trap of becoming very busily engaged in routine production and management tasks, the type and amount of your participation in development projects must be carefully monitored. Here are some suggestions. Pick projects that have high potential for publication and hence visibility. Avoid large, long term projects unless the payoff is very high and select projects whose scope is within your immediate area of interest. Consider the location and how much time and logistical complexity remote sites add to the project. Avoid the appearance of conflict of interest between private consulting and university related projects and consider the potential for student involvement as interns or employees. And finally, seek funds to hire a "go-fer" or project assistant to handle much of the routine associated with projects.

In summarizing the areas of organizational support and participating in development projects, it is best to use caution. Certainly the experience gained and contacts made can be invaluable. The key to success is judicious selection of activities in which to participate. Projects add to the vitality and excitement of an instructional technology department. They provide a source of financial support for students and credibility for the faculty. They also provide a proving ground for new R & D efforts and can keep faculty on the cutting edge. Unfortunately, they can also burn out faculty, trap them into a cycle of repetitive activity and grind them down with mindless detail. Striking a balance among these conflicting conditions is essential to long term success.

#### **Conclusions**

The following statements summarize my advice on how to be a success.

1. *Balance competing demands.* No single criterion of success can provide

you with both psychological and financial satisfaction.

2. *Guard time for scholarly activity.* Young faculty should work on articles and presentations first and then move to books.

3. *Do a credible job of teaching and advising.* Your self respect and the reputation you build with students and alumni provide ample reward even if your institution does not.

4. *Select development projects for their research and publication potential.* Don't do a lot of projects from which you will not learn or publish (or both).

5. *Bring in R & D money.* Money talks.

6. *Consult for growth and profit.* Seek consulting opportunities that provide for your professional growth and contracts.

7. *Limit service activity.* Some is necessary, but a little goes a long way.

8. *Limit organizational support activity.* See number seven above.

9. *Go for the perks.* Go especially for perks that will improve your productivity or visibility nationally (computers, travel, telephone, etc). Don't go after perks for show. They may make you a target for some of your colleagues.

I would like to add one final editorial thought. I hope this article has not convinced you to avoid a faculty position in higher education. Higher education is imperfect, but so is everybody's world of work. There are many happy, successful and relatively prosperous faculty in ID programs at major universities. Each is quite different in temperament, interest and activities. Yet all are highly successful by the criteria described above. I encourage you to become a faculty member (or stay in the profession if already there). These are exciting and challenging times and we need all the good minds we can get!