

Faculty-instructional designer partnerships in higher education

by

Nicole Frances Poff

B.S., San Diego State University, 2010

M.A., University of Phoenix, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

Abstract

The expansion of online learning in higher education has increased the need for collaboration between faculty and instructional designers during the course development process. While instructional designers frequently support faculty in course design, pedagogy, and technology integration, less is known about how faculty perceive these collaborative relationships. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers in the development of online courses and to explore the factors that shape these collaborative experiences. Guided by Role Theory, this study employed a mixed-methods design integrating quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data. Quantitative data were collected using the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model Questionnaire (PINCOM-Q) to examine faculty perceptions across domains, including communication, role expectations, and organizational support. Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with faculty who had collaborated with instructional designers in developing online courses. Findings indicated that faculty generally perceived collaboration with instructional designers positively, particularly regarding communication and professional support. Qualitative analysis further revealed that collaboration experiences were shaped by role clarity, communication practices, institutional context, and workload constraints. The findings suggest that collaboration between faculty and instructional designers functions as a process of negotiating professional roles within institutional course development structures. This study contributes to the literature on online course development by highlighting the importance of clear role expectations, effective communication, and supportive institutional structures in fostering productive faculty–instructional designer partnerships.

Faculty-instructional designer partnerships in higher education

by

Nicole Frances Poff

B.S., San Diego State University, 2010

M.A., University of Phoenix, 2012

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Ambyr Rios

Copyright

© Nicole Frances Poff 2026.

Abstract

The expansion of online learning in higher education has increased the need for collaboration between faculty and instructional designers during course development. While instructional designers frequently support faculty in course design, pedagogy, and technology integration, less is known about how faculty perceive these collaborative relationships. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers in the development of online courses and to explore the factors that shape these collaborative experiences. Guided by Role Theory, this study employed a mixed-methods design integrating quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data. Quantitative data were collected using the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model Questionnaire (PINCOM-Q) to examine faculty perceptions across domains, including communication, role expectations, and organizational support. Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with faculty who had collaborated with instructional designers in developing online courses. Findings indicated that faculty generally viewed collaboration with instructional designers positively, particularly in terms of communication and professional support. Qualitative analysis further revealed that collaboration experiences were shaped by role clarity, communication practices, institutional context, and workload constraints. The findings suggest that collaboration between faculty and instructional designers functions as a process of negotiating professional roles within institutional course development structures. This study contributes to the literature on online course development by highlighting the importance of clear role expectations, effective communication, and supportive institutional structures in fostering productive faculty–instructional designer partnerships.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xii
Acknowledgements	xiii
Dedication	xvi
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Personalizing the Inquiry	1
Understanding Faculty Perspectives	2
Background	3
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions	7
Definition of Terms	7
Conceptual Framework	8
Significance of the Study	9
Methodology	10
Organization of Study	11
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	12
Introduction.....	12
Conceptual Framework in the Literature: Role Theory and Organizational Expectations.....	13
Nature of Online Courses	17
Nature of Faculty and Course Development.....	18
Newness of Instructional Design	18
Instructional Designer and Faculty Tasks.....	20
Instructional Designer Tasks.....	20
Faculty Tasks	22
Voices	24
Pairing.....	25
Relationships/Collaboration.....	26
Positive Relationships	26

Negative Relationships	27
Mixed Relationships	28
Cross-Cutting Themes	29
Positive Collaboration.....	31
Skill Development	32
Time Constraints	34
Recognition of Instructional Designer Expertise	36
Relational Roles of Instructional Designers	37
Respect and Collegiality	39
Trust	40
Occupational Conditions and Dimensions.....	41
Division of Labor and Fit.....	41
Perspective and Voice	42
Relational Conditions.....	43
Implications for Practice	44
Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Present Study.....	45
Chapter 3 - Methods.....	48
Research Questions	48
Researcher's Positionality.....	49
Conceptual Framework.....	51
Research Design	53
Selection of Participants	54
Quantitative Sample.....	55
Qualitative Sample.....	55
Instruments.....	57
Survey	57
Qualitative Interview Protocol.....	57
Data Analysis	60
Quantitative Data Analysis	60
Qualitative Data Analysis	61
Qualitative Analysis Procedures	65

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data.....	67
Quantitative Validity and Reliability	67
Qualitative Trustworthiness	68
Ethical Considerations	69
Delimitations of the Study	69
Chapter 4 - Results.....	71
Quantitative Results.....	72
Quantitative Analysis Procedures	72
Description of the PINCOM-Q Instrument.....	72
Participant Characteristics	76
Descriptive Statistics for PINCOM-Q Constructs	80
Construct-by-Construct Interpretation	81
Motivation.....	81
Role Expectancy	82
Personality Style	82
Professional Power.....	83
Group Leadership.....	84
Coping.....	84
Communication.....	85
Social Support.....	85
Organizational Culture.....	86
Organizational Goals	86
Organizational Domain	87
Organizational Environment.....	87
Reliability Analysis.....	88
Domain-Level Findings	91
Correlation Analysis	92
Associations Between Collaboration Perceptions and Contextual Variables.....	93
Quantitative Findings Synthesis	95
Qualitative Findings.....	97
Overview of Qualitative Findings.....	99

Theme 1: Clear Roles Support Successful Collaboration	101
Theme 2: Trust, Communication, and Mutual Respect Shape Collaboration Quality	102
Theme 3: Authority and Decision-Making Boundaries Remain Sites of Tension	104
Theme 4: Structured Process and Project Management Reduce Uncertainty	105
Theme 5: Institutional Structures Strongly Influence Collaboration	106
Theme 6: Workload, Pacing, and Time Pressure Affect Collaboration Quality	108
Theme 7: The Strongest Collaborations Are Experienced as Creative Partnerships	109
Summary of Qualitative Findings	111
Integrated Findings Across Quantitative and Qualitative Data	112
Integrated Finding 1: Collaboration Between Faculty and Instructional Designers Is Generally Viewed Positively	114
Integrated Finding 2: Role Clarity Is Central to Effective Collaboration	116
Integrated Finding 3: Communication and Mutual Respect Support Collaborative Relationships	117
Integrated Finding 4: Authority and Decision-Making Boundaries Can Create Tension...	119
Integrated Finding 5: Institutional Structures Influence Collaboration Experiences	120
Integrated Finding 6: Workload and Time Constraints Affect Collaborative Course Development	122
Research Question Synthesis	123
Chapter 4 Summary	127
Chapter 5 - Discussion	129
Introduction	129
Research Question Synthesis	131
Interpreting the Findings Through Role Theory	134
Communication and Relational Trust in Collaborative Course Development	141
Negotiating Authority and Professional Expertise	144
Institutional Context and Organizational Structures	146
Workload, Time Constraints, and Role Overload	148
Collaboration as an Evolving Professional Practice	150
Recommendations	152
Recommendations for Institutional Leaders and Administrators	152

Recommendations for Instructional Designers and Instructional Design Teams	155
Recommendations for Faculty	157
Implications for Practice	159
Contributions to the Field	163
Limitations of the Study	165
Future Research	167
Conclusion	168
References	172
Appendix A - Questionnaire	180
Appendix B - Semi Structured Interview Guide.....	187
Appendix C - IRB Approval	188
Appendix D - The PINCOM Model Figure.....	189
Appendix E - Progression of Qualitative Codes From Initial Coding to Final Themes	190

List of Figures

Figure 5.1 IRB Approval	188
Figure 5.2 Appendix D - The PINCOM Model Figure	189

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Application of Role Theory constructs to faculty-instructional designer collaboration (Biddle, 1979)	16
Table 2.2 Faculty - Instructional Designer Literature Review Themes.....	29
Table 3.1 Semi-Structured Interview Protocol with Research Question and Role Theory Alignments	59
Table 4.1 Item Directionality by PINCOM-Q Construct.....	75
Table 4.2 Survey Participant Demographic Characteristics	78
Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics for PINCOM-Q Constructs	88
Table 4.4 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for the PINCOM-Q Instrument, Domains, and Constructs.....	90
Table 4.5 Domain-Level Means and Standard Deviations for PINCOM-Q Domains	92
Table 4.6 PINCOM-Q Domain Score Descriptive Statistics by Contextual Variable	93
Table 4.7 Demographic Characteristics of Qualitative Interview Participants.....	97
Table 4.8 Summary of Qualitative Themes and Frequency Across Participant Interviews	99
Table 4.9 Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings.....	113

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not exist without the generosity, patience, and love of so many people who walked this journey with me.

To my husband, Donnie, you are my partner in every sense of the word. You jumped in without hesitation, took over so many weekends and evenings so that Kennedy and Reagan could still feel like life was normal, and gave me the space I needed to do this work without guilt. You never made me choose. I will never be able to fully express what that meant.

To Kennedy and Reagan, I know it wasn't always easy when Mom wasn't there. Your flexibility and your grace were a gift I didn't take for granted. I hope one day you look back on this season and know that you were part of something meaningful.

To my family, both the family I was born into and the one I married into, it truly takes a village, and I have been blessed with one of the best. Whether it was taking the girls, picking them up from school, or simply showing up exactly when I needed you, your willingness to jump in without being asked made all the difference. I am so grateful.

To my committee, Dr. Rios, Dr. Kraemer- Holland, Dr. Yang, and Dr. Porath, there are not enough words. I showed up with a busy life, an aggressive timeline, and a deep need for black-and-white answers in a process that is almost entirely grey. You met me there anyway and were gracious every time I had to sit with ambiguity I wasn't comfortable with. You never made me feel like my questions were too basic or my urgency was too much. The patience and investment you gave me went far beyond what any student has the right to ask of their committee. I did not just gain a new title; I gained mentors who shaped the scholar I am becoming. I am forever grateful.

And to Dr. Rios, my major professor and one of the most genuinely kind human beings I have ever had the privilege of knowing. You squeezed in calls when I panicked and was convinced my entire topic wouldn't work. You talked me off ledges I didn't even know I was standing on. And when personal tragedy struck right at the finish line, you offered to pick up my kids from school. The kindness, patience, and generosity you poured into me is exactly what I hope every student gets to experience at least once. Thank you will never feel like enough but thank you.

To my friends and colleagues, they say iron sharpens iron, and I have been sharpened well. Over the years, I have been lucky enough to experience colleagues become friends, and I do not take that for granted, because I know how rare it truly is. You pushed my survey when I needed responses and talked me through my framework when I wasn't sure it would hold. But what I will carry with me long after this is the moments that had nothing to do with the research. Running into you at conferences and having you ask, genuinely, *how's the PhD going?* Checking on me when the finish line felt far away. Cheering for me like my win was your win too. I am so grateful for the professional relationships we have built, and even more grateful that they have grown into something deeper. That kind of circle is not something I will ever take for granted.

To the participants and network who completed surveys, sat for interviews, and shared my work within their networks, this research only exists because you were willing to give your time and your honesty. I am deeply grateful.

And finally, to the students, the purpose behind all of it. Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of hearing your stories, and so many of you trusted me with something vulnerable: the feeling that your courses were not designed with you in mind. Those voices never

left me. They are the reason this work exists, and they are the reason I will keep going long after this dissertation is done.

Dedication

For Donnie, Kennedy, and Reagan — who never once made me feel like this dream was too big, too long, or too much. You are my reason for everything.

And for the students who will come after this research, especially those who, like me, found higher education more confusing than welcoming, more obstacles than opportunities. You deserve courses that were built with you in mind, by faculty and instructional designers who worked together intentionally, who asked what you needed before they decided what to teach. I did this work so that one day, a non-traditional student won't have to fight as hard as I did just to belong in a space that was always meant for them.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Personalizing the Inquiry

As a first-generation college student, I had to navigate higher education without inherited knowledge of how it functions. I learned to decode assignment prompts that assumed my familiarity with academic norms. I worked to interpret expectations that were rarely made explicit. I encountered what is often described as the hidden curriculum, that is, unstated rules about communication, structure, and performance that advantaged those already fluent in the system. Progress required not only persistence but also significant interpretation, which was often taxing for a student juggling a full-time job and a full-time course load.

As I advanced in my professional roles within higher education, I began to recognize similar patterns among the students I served. As an enrollment advisor working with adult and nontraditional learners, I frequently heard the same frustration: “This course wasn’t designed for working adults like you said it was.” Students who enrolled seeking flexibility encountered online courses that replicated in-person instructional models without adapting to the realities of their lives. Expectations were implicit. Navigation was unclear. Assignment instructions required decoding over relevance. Higher education has made strides in expanding access for students from broader populations, including first-generation learners, working adults, caregivers, and those balancing multiple responsibilities. Yet expanding access without reexamining instructional design risks reproducing the same structural barriers in digital form. If online education is to fulfill its promise of accessibility, courses must be intentionally structured to support diverse learners.

Through years of personally observing online course development, one pattern became increasingly difficult to ignore: when faculty members and instructional designers collaborated

with clarity and shared purpose, courses were more likely to reflect intentional structure, explicit expectations, and learner-centered design. When collaboration is fragmented or undefined, courses often rely on inherited assumptions about what it means to “successfully” engage in higher education, leaving students to navigate ambiguity alone.

If higher education is serious about expanding access, it must also be serious about redesigning how learning experiences are built. Online education cannot fulfill its promise simply by widening enrollment pathways; it must ensure that the courses students enroll in are intentionally designed to support them. That work begins not with platforms or policies, but with people; specifically, with how faculty and instructional designers understand, negotiate, and enact their roles in the development process.

Before institutions can consistently build strong online learning environments, they must understand how these collaborative partnerships function and why they sometimes falter. Guided by Role Theory (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978), which examines how clarity, ambiguity, and conflict in role expectations shape organizational behavior, this study investigated faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development and how institutional expectations influenced those perceptions. Strengthening collaboration is not peripheral to improving online education; it is foundational.

Understanding Faculty Perspectives

Building stronger online learning environments requires more than expanding access or increasing technological capacity (Bowen, 2013; Stefaniak et al., 2025a; Xu & Morris, 2020). It requires understanding how the professionals responsible for course development work together to design those environments (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Xu & Morris, 2020). While institutions have increasingly invested in instructional design support, far less attention has been paid to how

faculty interpret these collaborative partnerships and how institutional conditions shape their experiences with them (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

This study, therefore, examined how faculty members described and made meaning of their collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. This study examined how faculty understood expectations regarding authority, responsibility, and decision-making in the development process, and how contextual factors, such as workload and institutional support, influenced those perceptions. By clarifying faculty experiences of collaboration, this study sought to identify conditions that contribute to more effective course development processes. Strengthening online learning and ensuring that expanded access translates into meaningful educational opportunity depends in part on understanding how these collaborative roles are enacted within institutional systems (Bowen, 2013; Stefaniak et al., 2025a; Xu & Morris, 2020).

Background

Online learning has become one of the most significant forces shaping higher education in the twenty-first century. What began as an effort to increase access, reach nontraditional learners, and respond to changing student expectations has evolved into a defining feature of modern higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2014). As the number of online courses has expanded, institutions have faced growing concerns related to instructional quality, student engagement, and accountability for online learning outcomes (Singleton et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025; Xu & Morris, 2020). National surveys indicate that student persistence and retention remain more problematic in online courses than in in-person classroom settings, with more than 40% of chief academic officers identifying retention as a greater challenge in online

environments (Allen & Seaman, 2014). These concerns position online course design and instructional quality as institutional priorities rather than instructional preferences.

Because online learners often balance employment, family, and competing life responsibilities, designing high-quality online learning experiences requires a fundamentally different approach than developing face-to-face courses (Singleton et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). Whereas in-person classroom teaching allows for flexibility, spontaneous interaction, and real-time adjustment, online courses depend on intentional structure, clear communication, and carefully planned interaction patterns established in advance (Halupa, 2019; Singleton et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). Effective digital instruction demands expertise in pedagogy, technology integration, accessibility standards, and assessment alignment, which are areas that frequently fall outside traditional faculty preparation (Stefaniak et al., 2025a, 2025b; Xu & Morris, 2020).

Historically, colleges and universities relied primarily on tenure-track faculty with disciplinary expertise to design and deliver their own courses. However, as online enrollment expanded, institutions increasingly recognized that high-quality course development required specialized support (Stefaniak, 2024). To address this need, institutions began hiring instructional designers, professionals trained in learning theory, digital pedagogy, and technology integration, to partner with faculty in online course development (Drysdale, 2019; Halupa, 2019; Stefaniak, 2024).

The introduction of instructional designers fundamentally altered the course development process. Although these professionals were intended to enhance course quality and alleviate faculty workload, their emergence also challenged long-standing norms regarding curricular authority and ownership (Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020).

Instructional designers are typically positioned as staff rather than faculty, and their responsibilities vary across institutional contexts (Stefaniak, 2024). This variability contributes to role ambiguity and potential tension, particularly because faculty have historically maintained control over course content and instructional decisions (Drysdale, 2019; Halupa, 2019).

Complicating these dynamics further is the reality of faculty workload. Faculty frequently balance teaching responsibilities, research expectations, and service commitments, which can limit the time available for collaborative course design processes (Mueller et al., 2022; Rotar, 2024). Developing online courses introduces additional time pressures, structured timelines, and coordination demands (Mei et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018; Sanga & Brogdon, 2021). Compressed development schedules, institutional accountability expectations, and differences in communication styles between faculty and instructional designers may strain collaborative relationships (Watson-Held, 2024).

As policymakers and accreditors increasingly link student learning, retention, and completion metrics to institutional expectations for quality and accountability in online education (Singleton et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak et al., 2025a), institutions can no longer treat online course quality as optional. Ensuring high-quality online instruction requires more than faculty training alone; it requires effective collaboration between those who design courses and those who teach them (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). Research suggests that when collaboration functions well, faculty report increased satisfaction, improved course quality, and stronger student outcomes (Bawa & Watson, 2017). However, when collaboration breaks down, faculty may experience frustration, disengagement, and reluctance to participate in future design efforts (Halupa, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing institutional reliance on faculty–instructional designer partnerships, there remains a limited empirical understanding of how faculty perceive and experience these collaborations during online course development (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). While prior research has examined instructional designer identity, institutional barriers, and design practices (Bennett & Albrecht, 2021; Drysdale, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Magruder et al., 2019; Stefaniak, 2024), fewer studies have examined the faculty perspective to understand what fosters or hinders the quality of collaboration.

Understanding how faculty experience collaboration, including how workload, role expectations, institutional structures, and communication patterns shape their perceptions, is essential for strengthening course development processes (Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak, 2024). Without a clear understanding of the factors that contribute to positive or negative collaboration experiences, institutions risk perpetuating inefficiencies and relational barriers that undermine both instructional quality and the sustainability of online education initiatives (Mueller et al., 2022; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Watson-Held, 2024).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this concurrent mixed-methods study is to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. Specifically, the quantitative component investigates faculty perceptions across multiple dimensions of collaboration and examines the extent to which those perceptions were associated with institutional and contextual variables such as teaching load, research expectations, and access to instructional design support. The qualitative component explores how faculty describe their collaborative experiences and how institutional and role expectations shaped those experiences.

Guided by Role Theory, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how faculty perceived collaboration and how organizational structures influenced collaborative quality within higher education.

Research Questions

- [Quantitative] RQ1: What are faculty perceptions of the different dimensions of collaboration with instructional designers?
- [Qualitative] RQ2: How do faculty perceive their collaborations with instructional designers during online course development?
- [Mixed method] RQ3: To what extent are faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers associated with institutional and contextual variables such as teaching load, research expectations, and access to instructional design support?
- [Qualitative] RQ4: How do faculty describe the ways institutional and role expectations relate to their collaboration with instructional designers?

Definition of Terms

- **Faculty–Instructional Designer Collaboration:** A structured partnership between faculty members and instructional designers during the development or revision of online courses.
- **Instructional Designer:** A higher education professional trained in learning theory, instructional alignment, digital pedagogy, accessibility standards, and educational technology who supports faculty in course development.
- **Institutional Expectations:** Organizational policies, mandates, timelines, accountability measures, and structural conditions that shape collaborative processes.
- **Interprofessional Collaboration:** A process in which individuals from different professional backgrounds work together to achieve shared goals by integrating their expertise, perspectives, and responsibilities.

- **Online Course Development:** The process of designing, organizing, and implementing instructional content, assessments, and learning activities within a digital learning management system.
- **PINCOM-Q:** A survey instrument designed to measure perceptions of collaboration across individual, group, and organizational dimensions of interprofessional work.
- **Role Expectations:** Perceived responsibilities, authority, and behavioral norms associated with faculty and instructional designer positions within collaborative course development.
- **Role Theory:** A theoretical framework that explains how individuals interpret and enact expected behaviors, responsibilities, and authority associated with their professional positions within organizational contexts.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by Role Theory (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978), a sociological and organizational framework that explains how individuals function within systems of defined expectations. Role Theory posits that individuals occupy positions within social structures that carry associated responsibilities, behavioral norms, and authority boundaries (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966). When role expectations are clearly understood and mutually recognized, collaborative relationships are more likely to function effectively (Biddle, 1979). When expectations are ambiguous, conflicting, or excessive, individuals may experience tension that disrupts communication and performance (Biddle, 1979). These dynamics are particularly relevant in professional environments where interdependent roles are shaped by institutional structures rather than individual negotiation (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966).

The faculty–instructional designer partnership represents precisely this kind of role-dependent relationship. Faculty members traditionally hold curricular authority and responsibility for disciplinary content and student learning outcomes, while instructional designers contribute expertise in learning theory, course alignment, and instructional technology

(Chen & Carliner, 2021; Halupa, 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). As institutions have increasingly formalized online course development processes, these roles intersect within structured timelines, accountability frameworks, and competing organizational demands (Mei et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018; Stefaniak, 2024). How faculty interpret their own roles and the roles of their instructional design partners within these conditions is central to understanding how collaboration is experienced and enacted (Mueller et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

Role Theory provided the conceptual lens through which both the quantitative and qualitative strands of this study were designed and interpreted. The framework informed the selection of the survey instrument, the development of the interview protocol, and the analytic approach used to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration. A fuller discussion of Role Theory, its central constructs, and its application to the faculty–instructional designer context is provided in Chapter Two.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it advances understanding of faculty–instructional designer collaboration within the context of expanding online education. As institutions increasingly formalize online course development processes, collaboration between faculty and instructional designers has become integral to maintaining instructional quality, accessibility, and student success. However, institutional models often emphasize structural efficiency and design standards without fully accounting for faculty perceptions of the collaborative relationship.

Practically, the findings provide institutions with evidence to inform policies related to instructional design support, workload distribution, timeline structuring, and role clarification. By identifying the dimensions of collaboration most salient to faculty and examining the

contextual factors associated with those perceptions, this study offers actionable insights to improve collaborative processes. Strengthening these partnerships may enhance course design efficiency, faculty satisfaction, and ultimately student learning.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of Role Theory in higher education by examining how role clarity, institutional expectations, and contextual demands shape perceptions of collaboration. Methodologically, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data contributes to the literature by providing both measurable patterns and experiential insight into interprofessional collaboration within academic settings.

Methodology

This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods research design to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. A mixed-methods approach was selected to capture both measurable patterns in collaboration experiences and the deeper interpretive meanings faculty assign to those experiences.

The quantitative component used a survey instrument to measure multiple dimensions of collaboration, including communication, role clarity, trust, and perceived institutional support. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVAs, and independent-samples t-tests to identify patterns and examine associations between perceptions of collaboration and contextual variables such as teaching load, research expectations, and the type of collaboration.

The qualitative component included semi-structured interviews with faculty who had participated in collaborative online course development. Interview data were analyzed thematically to explore how faculty interpret authority, responsibility, and role expectations within the collaborative process. Data from both strands were analyzed separately and then

integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of how collaboration is experienced and enacted within institutional contexts. A more detailed description of research design, data collection, analysis procedures, and trustworthiness measures is provided in Chapter Three.

Organization of Study

- **Chapter One** introduces the study and establishes the context for examining faculty–instructional designer collaboration within online course development. This chapter presents the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study, definitions of key terms, and an overview of the methodology.
- **Chapter Two** reviews relevant literature related to the growth of online education, faculty authority and instructional design professionalization, collaboration in higher education, and Role Theory as a conceptual framework. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature that justify the present study.
- **Chapter Three** details the research design and methodology, including participant selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, analytic strategies, and measures to ensure validity and trustworthiness.
- **Chapter Four** presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses.
- **Chapter Five** discusses the findings in relation to the conceptual framework and existing literature, outlines implications for institutional practice and theory, acknowledges limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

Course development in higher education has historically been a faculty-driven process. Faculty members, as subject matter experts, have long held primary responsibility for creating and delivering courses, often working independently with little outside input (Halupa, 2019; Kenny et al., 2005; Richardson et al., 2019). However, with the expansion of online education, the design process has grown more complex. Online courses require not only disciplinary expertise, but also attention to pedagogy, technology, and accessibility (Singleton et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025b; Xu & Morris, 2020). This shift has brought instructional designers into the course development process and introduced a new dimension into how courses are built (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Xu & Morris, 2020). This new collaborative process creates a dynamic that is both promising and challenging.

Collaboration between these two roles is important, but not yet consistently understood. To fully understand this collaboration, it is necessary to consider three contextual dynamics. First, the nature of online courses presents unique challenges and demands greater intentionality than traditional, on-ground classrooms (Hsu, 2020; Ryan & Beck, 2018; Sanga & Brogdon, 2021). Second, the historical role of faculty in course development continues to shape experiences around ownership and authority (Bowen, 2013; Halupa, 2019). And third, instructional design remains a relatively new profession in higher education with responsibilities that differ widely across institutions (Magruder et al., 2019; Stefaniak, 2024; Xu & Morris, 2020). These contextual factors frame the collaborative landscape in which faculty-instructional designer partnerships occur.

Conceptual Framework in the Literature: Role Theory and Organizational Expectations

Role Theory provides the conceptual framework guiding this review of faculty–instructional designer collaboration within higher education. Originating in sociological and organizational research, Role Theory posits that individuals occupy positions within structured systems that carry associated expectations, responsibilities, and norms (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978). These expectations shape behavior, communication patterns, and interpretations of authority (Biddle, 1979). Within organizational contexts, collaboration quality is often influenced not solely by individual competence but by the clarity, compatibility, and negotiation of role expectations (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). When expectations are clearly defined and mutually understood, collaboration tends to function more smoothly (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Conversely, when expectations are ambiguous or conflicting, tension may emerge (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966).

Role Theory has its origins in a broad, interdisciplinary intellectual tradition that developed across multiple fields in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Early contributions came from American psychologists and social philosophers, including William James, James Mark Baldwin, and John Dewey, whose work on the self, identity, and social behavior laid important groundwork for understanding how individuals interpret and enact social roles (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). During the same period, European sociologists and philosophers such as Emile Durkheim and Henri Bergson contributed perspectives on social structure and collective expectations that would later inform role-based frameworks. In the early twentieth century, American sociologists and anthropologists, including Charles Cooley and later George

Herbert Mead, extended these ideas by examining how social interaction shapes individual identity and behavior within group contexts (Biddle & Thomas, 1966).

By the 1920s and 1930s, Role Theory had begun to take on a more defined form as scholars across disciplines converged on the idea that human behavior is organized around sets of expectations associated with social positions (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Contributors such as Jacob Moreno and Georg Simmel brought European sociological perspectives emphasizing the relational dimensions of roles, while Jean Piaget contributed insights into how role-based thinking develops across the lifespan (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Taken together, this intellectual history reflects the depth and durability of Role Theory as a framework that emerged not from a single discipline but from decades of converging inquiry into how social expectations shape human behavior (Biddle & Thomas, 1966).

At the foundation of Role Theory is the concept of role expectations: the shared beliefs and norms that define how individuals should behave in each position (Biddle, 1979). In the context of faculty–instructional designer collaboration, role expectations shape how each party understands their own responsibilities and interprets the responsibilities of their partner, establishing the baseline from which clarity, ambiguity, conflict, and overload emerge (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). Several core constructs within Role Theory are particularly relevant to faculty–instructional designer partnerships. Role clarity refers to the degree to which individuals understand their responsibilities and the boundaries of their authority (Biddle, 1979). In collaborative course development, clarity may involve a shared understanding regarding who defines learning outcomes, who determines assessment structure, and who holds final decision-making authority (Drysdale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). Role ambiguity arises when expectations are unclear or inconsistently communicated, often resulting

in uncertainty or frustration (Biddle, 1979). The literature on instructional design partnerships frequently describes blurred boundaries and confusion regarding authority, particularly when institutional structures fail to explicitly define responsibilities (Drysdale, 2019; Mueller et al., 2022; Xu & Morris, 2020). These patterns closely align with Role Theory's conceptualization of ambiguity as a source of organizational strain.

Role conflict, another central construct, occurs when incompatible expectations exist between individuals or within systems (Biddle, 1979; Kahn et al., 1964). In faculty–instructional designer collaboration, conflict may emerge when faculty expectations of curricular autonomy intersect with institutional mandates for standardized design processes (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Rotar, 2024). Instructional designers may experience conflict when institutional policies position them as compliance enforcers while faculty expect collegial partnership (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Richardson et al., 2019). Such tensions are not inherently interpersonal; rather, they reflect structural incompatibilities embedded within institutional roles. The literature on power misalignment and authority negotiation can be interpreted through this theoretical lens (Drysdale, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023).

Role overload, sometimes described as role strain, refers to the stress experienced when demands exceed available time or resources (Biddle, 1979). Faculty frequently report balancing multiple professional responsibilities, including teaching, research, and service commitments, which can limit the time available for collaborative course development (Mueller et al., 2022; Rotar, 2024). Instructional designers similarly manage heavy caseloads across multiple programs (Stefaniak, 2024). When collaborative course development is layered onto existing workloads without adequate institutional support, perceptions of collaboration may be shaped less by relational dynamics and more by structural strain (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Richardson et al., 2019;

Rotar, 2024). The intersection of workload expectations and collaboration quality directly aligns with the contextual focus of the present study.

Role fit refers to the degree of alignment between one's role expectations and those of others within the organization (Biddle, 1979). When faculty and instructional designers share a mutual understanding of their respective responsibilities and authority boundaries, role fit supports trust, open communication, and sustained collaboration. The presence or absence of role fit is central to this study's inquiry, as it provides a theoretical basis for understanding not only where collaboration breaks down but also what conditions allow partnerships to thrive.

As the literature is examined in the sections that follow, the constructs of Role Theory provide a consistent lens for understanding how role expectations, authority, and institutional conditions shape collaborative experiences. By examining collaboration through the lens of Role Theory, this review moves beyond surface-level descriptions of faculty-instructional designer interactions to consider how institutional expectations, role boundaries, and organizational conditions shape the collaborative experience. With Role Theory established as the conceptual lens for this review, the following sections examine the contextual landscape in which faculty and instructional designer collaboration occurs, beginning with the nature of online courses, the historical role of faculty in course development, and the relative newness of instructional design as a profession in higher education.

Table 2.1 Application of Role Theory constructs to faculty-instructional designer collaboration (Biddle, 1979)

Role Theory Construct	Faculty-Instructional Designer Context
Role Expectations: Shared beliefs and norms that define how individuals should behave within a given position	How faculty define their responsibilities and the ID's responsibilities during course development

Role Conflict: Tension that occurs when competing demands or obligations create incompatible expectations	Conflicting expectations from departments, administrations, and personal teaching philosophies
Role Ambiguity: Uncertainty about one's responsibilities or the behaviors expected in a role	Unclear boundaries between content expertise (faculty) and design expertise (instructional designer)
Role Overload): Stress experienced when the demands of a role exceed available resources or capacity	Demands of the role exceed the capacity or resources (workload)
Role Fit: The degree of alignment between one's role expectations and those of others in the organization	Shared understanding and alignment of roles that support effective, trusting collaboration

Nature of Online Courses

Enrollments in online courses and programs have seen double-digit growth for much of the past two decades (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The growth of online education has been driven in part by the increase of open-access institutions and the rising demand from nontraditional students, many of whom balance employment, family, and other responsibilities and seek flexibility in scheduling (Bowen, 2013). Yet, translating a successful face-to-face course into an online format is not straightforward. Online classrooms require more intentional design, as opportunities for real-time explanation and clarification are limited (Xu & Morris, 2020). Effective online courses demand careful attention to clarity, structure, usability, and inclusivity,

which are features that typically extend beyond the scope of the content expert but can be effectively handled by the expertise of an instructional designer (Watson-Held, 2024).

Nature of Faculty and Course Development

Faculty have traditionally served as both content experts and course developers, with strong ties to academic freedom and control over the curriculum (Bawa & Watson, 2017). The centrality of faculty authority is reinforced by disciplinary traditions, tenure systems, and governance structures, which keep faculty at the center of academic decisions. While these traditions ensure that faculty expertise drives course content, they can also complicate collaborative processes. When instructional designers are involved in course development, faculty may perceive their authority as challenged or may struggle to integrate external pedagogical guidance with disciplinary norms (Halupa, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023). The faculty role represents both a foundation for content expertise and a potential source of tension in collaborative course design (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2021). From a Role Theory perspective, this tension reflects how deeply embedded role expectations surrounding academic authority can complicate the negotiation of shared responsibilities in collaborative relationships.

Newness of Instructional Design

Unlike the role of faculty, instructional design is a relatively new profession in higher education. While instructional designers began appearing in university settings in the latter half of the twentieth century, their role became increasingly formalized and widespread only with the rapid expansion of online learning in the early 2000s and it was not until the past two decades that instructional designers became a normalized and often essential component of course development at many institutions (Cox & Scunthorpe, 2003; Kenny et al., 2005). Despite an instructional designer's expertise in pedagogy, learning science, and design, their contributions

are shaped by several contextual factors that influence how collaboration occurs during the course design process. The instructional designer role itself is often defined differently across institutions and positions within different colleges or departments (Richardson et al., 2019).

While some schools utilize instructional designers as tech support, others utilize instructional designers as course development partners (Halupa, 2019; Hsu, 2020; Xu & Morris, 2020). Instructional designers' backgrounds are equally diverse, ranging from master's degrees in education or instructional design to K-12 teachers transitioning into the field. In many cases, instructional designers lack formal college classroom teaching experience (Stephens et al., 2022). Instructional designers rarely hold decision-making authority over curricular matters, which can make their presence in the course design process somewhat confusing (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Mueller et al., 2022). Although working with an instructional designer can reduce faculty workload and create strong learning environments for online learners, the faculty-instructional designer pairing remains relatively new to most faculty (Cox & Scunthorpe, 2003; Kenny et al., 2005).

Together, these contextual dynamics illustrate the complexity of faculty-instructional designer collaboration. Online courses require intentional design beyond simple content transfer; faculty bring disciplinary authority rooted in longstanding traditions; and instructional design remains an emergent, inconsistently defined, and readily integrated field (Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). These nuances shape how collaborations are formed, negotiated, and experienced in practice. Understanding the interplay of these factors is essential for examining how the relationship between faculty and instructional designers is described in the literature (Brown & Green, 2022; Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019). Role Theory offers a particularly useful lens for this examination, as it provides a

framework for understanding how the clarity, ambiguity, and conflict embedded in professional role expectations shape the way collaboration is formed and experienced within organizational contexts.

Instructional Designer and Faculty Tasks

One of the most consistent findings across the literature concerned how responsibilities were distributed between instructional designers and faculty during course development. The tasks and responsibilities used to describe instructional designers were typically broad and multifaceted, spanning pedagogy, technology, and project management (Ramani, 2022b; Richardson et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025). On the other hand, faculty responsibilities were more narrowly clustered around subject-matter expertise and curricular ownership. The unequal and varied division of labor helps explain how this partnership can be both complementary and a source of tension at the same time (Drysedale, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Rotar, 2024).

Instructional Designer Tasks

Instructional designers were described with a wide range of responsibilities. The most frequent areas of focus were course design and structure, technology integration, and faculty development. Other tasks included pedagogical guidance, project management, accessibility and standards, and continuous feedback. Studies have consistently emphasized both the breadth and the ambiguity of designers' responsibilities. Xu & Stefaniak (2020) described the instructional designer role as spanning the full course design cycle, including alignment mapping and accessibility checks. Magruder et al. (2019) similarly found that a broad set of responsibilities often left instructional designers to navigate unclear or overlapping expectations across institutions. Faculty development was a recurring component of the instructional designer role. One study demonstrated how designers not only supported course builds but also structured

faculty training sessions to strengthen teaching practices in the online modality, effectively blending development and design into a single process (Mueller et al., 2022). Even when frameworks such as CISSCO were proposed to delineate responsibilities clearly, designers still reported that in practice they were negotiating blurry boundaries with faculty partners (Bennett & Albrecht, 2021).

Beyond general responsibilities, several studies illustrated how the instructional designer's contributions to the course design process played out in specific domains of course development. One study highlighted the role of designers by embedding universal design for learning strategies. In this case, designers guided faculty in creating accessible course documents, videos, and assessments to ensure that accessibility was integrated into the design process (Singleton et al., 2019). Another study, focusing on health profession programs, described a different model and positioned instructional designers as the chief operating officers of the course (Ryan & Beck, 2018). They oversaw alignment, assessment strategies, and technology integration, allowing faculty to focus solely on content expertise. Similarly, Chen & Carliner (2021) presented evidence that when designers were understood as pedagogical translators, or professionals who could help convert disciplinary content into student-centered and aligned course structures, their contributions were seen as essential to course quality. These types of studies emphasized the value of recognizing the instructional designer's expertise beyond technology and framed their role as a critical partner in shaping the learning experience.

Other studies noted that faculty did not always view the instructional designer's contributions in such expansive terms. Multiple studies revealed that faculty often describe instructional designers primarily as technical support (Halupa, 2019; Hsu, 2020; Xu & Morris, 2020). This narrowed perspective reduces the work to implementation tasks rather than

recognizing the instructional designers as pedagogical experts. In these contexts, instructional designer skills and responsibilities were often undervalued or confined to project management duties. Watson-Held (2024) similarly documented a mismatch in perceptions, in which faculty underestimated the scope of design contributions, while instructional designers emphasized their expertise in pedagogy and alignment. This was taken a step further when a study found that role perceptions often led to conflict, with instructional designers reporting frustration at being treated as a service provider rather than as course collaborators.

Faculty Tasks

Faculty tasks and responsibilities were coded far more narrowly than those of instructional designers. The vast majority of the studies discussed content expertise and the development of disciplinary course material as the primary responsibility of the faculty (Ramani, 2022a; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). Similarly, extant research robustly discussed how faculty make course design decisions (Drysedale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). Far fewer studies described faculty engaging in training or coaching from instructional designers, reflecting the perception that faculty enter the course design process with a singular primary goal of serving as the subject matter expert (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Ramani, 2022a).

Several studies reinforced the centrality of content ownership. One study emphasized that faculty saw themselves as the primary guardians of disciplinary expertise, and tensions arose when designers offered input on pedagogy or structure that was perceived as infringing on this domain (Halupa, 2019). Similarly, it was found that faculty frequently defined their role in terms of maintaining academic freedom over content, while leaving issues of alignment and accessibility to designers (Chen & Carliner, 2021).

Studies also revealed that faculty struggled with modality shifts and leaned heavily on instructional designers for support. One study examined online engineering courses and noted that, while faculty provided subject-matter expertise, they relied on instructional designers to translate lectures and lab-based content into online-appropriate formats (Hsu, 2020; Laurillard et al., 2018; Sanga & Brogdon, 2021). Another study observed a similar pattern and reported that faculty primarily identified as teachers and researchers, treating course design as a secondary responsibility (Laurillard et al., 2018). This positioning often left faculty feeling underprepared for the pedagogical and technical demands of online course development, which magnified their reliance on instructional designers.

In grant-funded or externally supported projects, faculty themselves described being overwhelmed by the demands of course design. Chatterjee et al. (2023) reported that faculty in such contexts frequently acknowledged they could not have navigated the course-design workload without the structural and technical guidance provided by designers. Other case-based studies echoed this theme, with faculty affirming that, while they held authority over content, they relied on instructional designers to ensure that materials were ready for online delivery (Drysdale, 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). These challenges extend into partnership-driven contexts as well. Ramani (2022a) argued that when universities work with online program managers (OPMs), faculty often enter course design with a limited learning mindset, treating instructional collaboration as a compliance requirement rather than an opportunity to expand their own pedagogical capacity. This further reinforces the perception of content expertise as the sole faculty role and constrains the potential of faculty–designer collaboration.

Voices

A key finding across the literature was not only what was reported about collaboration, but also whose voices were represented. In an invited reaction to Lubin & Reio's work (2023), Chen & Carliner (2021) note that prior research on instructional designer partnerships has primarily presented the designers' point of view while underrepresenting faculty. Across the studies, instructional designers' voices were emphasized almost twice as many as faculty voices (Stefaniak et al., 2025a; Chen & Carliner, 2021; Lubin & Reio, 2023). Very few studies incorporated additional perspectives from administrators, staff, or students, which leaves most of the literature centered on two primary voices in course design.

The ways voices were gathered and represented in the scholarship influenced how collaboration was portrayed in the literature. Large-scale surveys, such as Magruder et al. (2019) and Stefaniak et al. (2025), amplified designers' experiences across institutions but often did so at the expense of faculty perspectives; capturing breadth while sacrificing the depth of individual faculty accounts. In contrast, case-based work like Pulcini and Taylor (2021) and Ryan and Beck (2018) incorporated both voices within specific institutional settings, showing how faculty stressed trust and autonomy while designers emphasized alignment and process. Multi-case designs, such as Maguire et al.'s (2021) analysis of instructional design teams, created space for both faculty and designer voices to emerge simultaneously, which highlighted differences in how each group defined effective collaboration.

The framing of perspective further contributed to the imbalance. Some studies were explicitly written from the standpoint of instructional designers (Lubin & Reio, 2023), while others sought to juxtapose perspectives more deliberately. Brown and Green (2022), for example, emphasize the value of reflective practices, such as debrief sessions, for examining

collaborative processes, while Richardson et al. (2019) and Rotar (2024) examine faculty–instructional designer partnerships across institutional contexts to illustrate how organizational structures shape perceptions of collaboration. Even in these more balanced accounts, however, designer perspectives tended to be richer and more detailed, while faculty voices were often fewer and less elaborated.

Pairing

To better understand factors that contribute to collaboration, the literature was examined to explore how instructional designers and faculty were paired for course development. In most cases, collaboration was presented as a given, with little explanation of how the relationship was initiated or structured. The absence of explicit discussion around pairing decisions was itself a notable pattern. Most studies simply described collaborative relationships as already existing without examining how they were formed, who made the decision, or whether intentional matching of expertise or working style played any role (Drysdale, 2019; Maguire et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

Several studies described pairing as a function of institutional structures or team designs. For example, a multi-case study of instructional designers found that partnerships often emerged within formalized team structures, in which faculty and instructional designers were brought together by instructional mandates (Drysdale, 2021; Maguire et al., 2021). Another cross-institutional study described collaboration pairing based on institutional availability (Rotar, 2024; Ryan & Beck, 2018). In these accounts, pairing was a matter of logistics rather than intentional alignment of expertise or working style.

A few studies suggested a more deliberate form of pairing. In one case study, faculty sought out instructional designers because of trust built over time, which suggested that

relational history could influence pairing. Similarly, in the context of pharmacy education, a long-term collaborative model was documented, in which faculty and designers developed sustained partnerships that functioned as standing teams (Ryan & Beck, 2018). While these studies briefly discuss how instructional designers and faculty are matched, they make no explicit mention of the concept of pairing.

Relationships/Collaboration

The central purpose of this literature review was to gain a deeper understanding of how working relationships and collaboration between instructional designers and faculty are portrayed. Across the studies, most did not present collaboration as wholly positive or wholly negative, but as something more complex. Of the studies reviewed, many described mixed relationship dynamics (Drysdale, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023; McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Ramani, 2022a; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak et al., 2025a). A few emphasized primarily positive relationships (Drysdale, 2019; McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Mei et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2019). A few also emphasized negative or strained relationships (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Ramani, 2022b; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). This variance suggests that collaboration is often characterized by both complementarity and tension, adding nuance to it.

Positive Relationships

Positive relationships between faculty and instructional designers have been consistently marked by mutual trust, respect, and recognition of expertise. Pulcini & Taylor (2021) found that faculty identified trust and open communication as the most critical elements of successful collaboration and that when these were present, designers were viewed as true partners rather than peripheral support. Similarly, it was reported that cross-institutional design collaborations flourished when instructional designers were positioned as equals in the decision-making rather

than implementers of faculty directions (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). It was also emphasized that course development collaborations benefited most when faculty acknowledged the pedagogical expertise of designers alongside their own disciplinary authority (Drysdale, 2019). Cross-institutional efforts have also shown the benefits of sustained partnerships. For example, Slagter van Tryon et al. (2018) described how faculty and instructional designers collaborated to prepare new professionals in the field, emphasizing trust, mutual respect, and recognition of complementary expertise as central to the project's success.

Positive relationships have also been noted when long-term collaboration existed. Multiple studies noted that sustained collaboration created conditions for long-term, positive relationships (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). By embedding instructional designers into long-term curriculum teams, trust developed gradually, and instructional designers became indispensable in ensuring academic quality. The literature shows that structured, ongoing partnerships reduced initial skepticism and built relationships grounded in mutual recognition of value (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021).

Negative Relationships

However, negative or strained relationships between faculty and instructional designers were often characterized by role conflict, lack of recognition, and tension over authority. Several studies reported that instructional designers frequently felt their expertise was undervalued or reduced to technical support (Halupa, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Mueller et al., 2022; Watson-Held, 2024). Faculty tended to see themselves as the sole owners of course content and often dismissed instructional designer contributions to pedagogy, alignment, or assessment (Halupa, 2019). Likewise, instructional designers documented frustrations when faculty resisted

pedagogical input and treated designers primarily as implementers of technology (Lubin & Reio, 2023).

Strained dynamics were also evident when expectations were mismatched. Faculty frequently underestimated the scope of design work, creating friction and leaving instructional designers feeling marginalized in the process (Watson-Held, 2024). Additionally, the collaboration was described as adversarial when faculty framed the relationship as transactional rather than collegial, which leads to frustration on both ends (Mueller et al., 2022).

Mixed Relationships

The majority of studies fell into the category of mixed or evolving relationships, which suggests that collaboration is rarely static or rigidly defined. These accounts frequently described partnerships that included friction, growth, and ongoing negotiation. McDonald (2023) characterized this as the “everydayness” of design work and revealed that collaboration is built through small, iterative interactions rather than formal agreements. Even when challenges arose, these ongoing exchanges created opportunities for trust and mutual understanding to develop.

Other studies demonstrated how tensions could lead to growth. Through reflective debriefs with faculty and instructional designers, perceived mismatches initially created frustration but also provided opportunities for dialogue that improved collaboration over time (Brown & Green, 2022; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019). A multi-case study of instructional design teams documented wide variability within and across institutions and revealed that relational quality varied with workload, prior collaboration experience, and institutional context (Maguire et al., 2021). It was also noted that, while some faculty initially resisted input from instructional designers, structured collaboration gradually shifted the relationship toward greater collegiality (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021).

These studies emphasize that relationships are dynamic and adaptive and can move between positive and negative qualities depending on context and history. Rather than portraying collaboration as inherently good or bad, positive or negative, the literature frames collaboration as a process of continual negotiation where challenges can serve as catalysts for stronger partnerships when handled constructively (Brown & Green, 2022; Maguire et al., 2021; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). These distributions point to the mechanisms explored next: trust, communication, recognition, time, and role alignment, as the levers that tilt collaboration toward collegiality or conflict.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Beyond specific models, tasks, and relational categories, the literature revealed how instructional designer-faculty collaboration is portrayed. Collectively, the literature documents how positive collaboration, skill development, time constraints, power and role misalignment, recognition of instructional designers' expertise, the relational roles of instructional designers, respect and collegiality, and trust are portrayed in designer-faculty relationships. Each of these categories of literature provides a lens for understanding the complexity of collaboration and illustrates the promise and challenges of building effective partnerships in higher education course design. Table 2.2 presents the descriptions of each theme and examples from the literature.

Table 2.2 Faculty - Instructional Designer Literature Review Themes

Theme	Description	Examples
Positive Collaboration	Collaboration characterized by partnership, shared goals, open communication, and mutual recognition of expertise, resulting in a collegial rather than	• Treating IDs as equal partners encouraged faculty innovation (Richardson et al., 2019; Chen & Carliner, 2021). • Faculty and IDs described course design as collegial when pursued jointly

	transactional design process.	(Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). • Clear communication structures transformed disagreements into productive exchanges (Watson-Held, 2024).
Skill Development	The reciprocal growth in knowledge and abilities that occurs through collaboration, with faculty gaining pedagogical and technological skills and instructional designers deepening their ability to manage projects and conflicts.	• Faculty learned to apply UDL strategies and new technologies (Singleton et al., 2019). • Grant-funded projects introduced faculty to alignment mapping and assessment design (Chatterjee et al., 2023). • IDs gained negotiation and conflict-management skills through partnership (Mueller et al., 2022).
Time Constraints	The limiting effect of compressed timelines, heavy workloads, and short development cycles on the depth, quality, and sustainability of collaborative design.	• Accelerated schedules reduced opportunities for trust-building (Ryan & Beck, 2018). • Faculty defaulted to viewing IDs as project managers under time pressure (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). • Novice faculty lacked capacity to redesign effectively under tight deadlines (Kanjapongpaisal & Antee, 2021).
Power and Role Misalignment	Tensions arising from unclear authority, academic freedom, or role boundaries, often leading to conflict over ownership of content and decision-making power.	• Faculty asserted sole ownership of content, resisting pedagogical input (Halupa, 2019). • Institutional policies framed IDs as service providers rather than partners (Mueller et al., 2022). • Misalignment was most pronounced when responsibilities were undefined early (Drysdale, 2019)
Recognition of Instructional Designer Expertise	The degree to which faculty acknowledge instructional designers' pedagogical and technical expertise, legitimizing	• Recognition of expertise was linked to stronger course quality outcomes (Drysdale, 2021). • Faculty skepticism lessened as IDs demonstrated value in practice (Pulcini

	their contributions as partners rather than technicians.	• & Taylor, 2021). • Faculty framed designers as technicians when expertise was not acknowledged (Halupa, 2019).
Relational Roles of Instructional Designers	The interpersonal and situational roles designers assume, such as mediator, mentor, coach, or project manager, that shape the dynamics and outcomes of collaboration.	• IDs managed projects and timelines to sustain momentum (Maguire et al., 2021). • Designers mediated conflict between faculty and institutional expectations (Watson-Held, 2024). • IDs coached faculty through adopting UDL practices (Singleton et al., 2019).
Respect and Collegiality	Respect and Collegiality Mutual regard for each other's expertise and professional identity, expressed through treating faculty and designers as equals and fostering collegial rather than hierarchical relationships.	• Acknowledging each other's expertise produced innovative redesigns (Chen & Carliner, 2021). • Structured partnerships built collegiality and reduced skepticism (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). • Lack of respect reinforced hierarchical perceptions and conflict (Halupa, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023).
Trust	Confidence in the reliability and competence of one's collaborative partner, enabling risk-taking, open dialogue, and sustained partnership.	• Trust encouraged faculty to experiment with new pedagogy (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). • Trust developed gradually through structured, ongoing partnerships (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). • Low-trust contexts reduced collaboration to compliance-driven exchanges (Maguire et al., 2021; Watson-Held, 2024).

Positive Collaboration

A recurring theme across the literature was that effective collaboration between instructional designers and faculty was most often described in positive, partnership-oriented terms. Multiple studies emphasized collaboration as strengthened by shared goals, open communication, and recognition of complementary expertise (Drysdale, 2019; Maguire et al.,

2021; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019). Several studies illustrated how collaboration fostered a sense of shared ownership in course development. Faculty and instructional designers who approached course design as a joint endeavor described the process as collegial rather than transactional (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). It was also found that treating instructional designers as equal partners in decision-making encouraged faculty to adopt innovative practices, which led to positive collaboration (Carliner, 2023; Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). When faculty acknowledged the positive pedagogical expertise instructional designers brought to the course design process, there was also greater emphasis on improving course quality and fostering positive collaboration (Drysdale, 2019).

Positive collaboration was also closely tied to effective communication practices. It was noted that while disagreements were common, faculty and designers who prioritized regular communication resolved issues productively (Watson-Held, 2024). Teams with clear communication structures were better equipped to navigate differences in perspective, which strengthened relational trust (Maguire et al., 2021). Similarly, it was emphasized that open, ongoing communication was critical to building confidence between partners (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Additionally, structured conversations, whether through formal team processes or reflective debriefs, helped transform potential tension into stronger collaboration (Brown & Green, 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Ryan & Beck, 2018).

Skill Development

Course design collaboration between instructional designers and faculty also produced opportunities for skill development on both sides. Roughly 20% of the studies explicitly mentioned growth in skills as an outcome of collaboration (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Laurillard et al., 2018; Mueller et al., 2022; Ryan & Beck, 2018; Sanga, 2021; Sanga & Brogdon, 2021;

Singleton et al., 2019). Faculty most often gained exposure to instructional design principles, technologies, and accessibility practices, while instructional designers deepened their understanding of disciplinary content and faculty work cultures. In some cases, designers were explicitly positioned as both adult learners and educators, navigating their own knowledge construction even as they supported graduate faculty in developing online teaching skills (Stephens et al., 2022).

For faculty, partnerships frequently expanded pedagogical and technological skills. Faculty reported that working with instructional designers on universal design for learning strategies provided faculty with new tools for creating accessible assignments and assessments (Singleton et al., 2019). Additionally, grant-funded projects often gave faculty their first structured exposure to design methods such as alignment mapping and assessment planning (Chatterjee et al., 2023). In professional programs, faculty reported that instructional designers helped them adopt online teaching skills, such as LMS tools and assessment strategies, which they could later apply independently (Ryan & Beck, 2018; Xu & Morris, 2020). Mentorship-based models also revealed long-term benefits. In cooperative mentorship programs, faculty described increased confidence and preparedness for online teaching, crediting the sustained partnership with instructional designers as central to their growth (Olesova & Campbell, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019).

Instructional designers also developed skills that extended beyond formal training. It was found that instructional designers gained a deeper awareness of disciplinary traditions and faculty teaching cultures, which ultimately shaped their approach to collaboration (Laurillard et al., 2018). Similarly, systematic constraints required instructional designers to hone conflict management and negotiation skills (Mueller et al., 2022). It was also found that reflective debrief

sessions improved the instructional designer's communication strategies, which equipped them to address tension more directly (Brown & Green, 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Together, these findings suggest that skill development was a reciprocal benefit of collaboration.

Time Constraints

Time was one of the most frequently cited barriers to collaboration. Over half of the studies reported that limited time and heavy workload influenced how partnerships unfolded, which constrains the depth of interaction and relational development (Maguire et al., 2021; Mueller et al., 2022; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Rotar, 2024; Ryan & Beck, 2018; Stefaniak, 2024; Watson-Held, 2024).

Several studies emphasized that short development cycles limited the opportunity for trust-building. When course development was accelerated, the partnerships were functional but shallow (Ryan & Beck, 2018). Compressed schedules often pushed faculty to view instructional designers primarily as project managers who could get the course online, rather than pedagogical collaborators (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Time pressures also produced innovative responses. A case study of a rapid development studio showed how intensive, iterative sprint cycles enabled teams to launch online courses quickly but also raised questions about sustainability and relational depth when development was compressed (Mei et al., 2021). Overall, when deadlines dominated the project, there was reduced opportunity for collaboration and communication (Maguire et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). This aligns with research showing that while experienced faculty may approximate instructional design approaches, novice faculty often lack the capacity to redesign effectively under time constraints (Kanjapongpaisal & Antee, 2021).

Faculty also reported difficulty investing time in extended design work. Heavy teaching loads left faculty reluctant to engage deeply in collaborative planning (Watson-Held, 2024). Instructional policies often set unrealistic expectations for course turnaround times, which creates frustration for both partners (Mueller et al., 2022). In an engineering context, it was found that limited time to translate face-to-face lectures into online courses resulted in uneven course quality, even with instructional designer support (Hsu, 2020). These findings show that while collaboration can be productive, it is often constrained by time, which may prevent partnerships from reaching their full potential. Role Theory frames these experiences as instances of role overload, in which competing professional demands exceed available capacity and reshape how individuals engage in collaborative relationships.

Power and Role Misalignment

Professional power, as conceptualized in the interprofessional collaboration literature, refers to the degree of influence, authority, and autonomy an individual perceives themselves to hold within a collaborative relationship (Ødegård, 2006). In the context of faculty-instructional designer partnerships, professional power is shaped by institutional hierarchies, disciplinary norms, and role definitions that determine who has decision-making authority over course content, pedagogy, and design (Halupa, 2019; Mueller et al., 2022; Xu & Morris, 2020). Imbalances in professional power, whether real or perceived, can create tension that undermines the collaborative process even when both parties are committed to a shared goal (Lubin & Reio, 2023).

Power and role misalignment emerged as pervasive themes, highlighting tensions around authority, academic freedom, and role boundaries. Several studies point to faculty perceptions of content ownership as a source of conflict (Halupa, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023). It was reported

that faculty viewed themselves as sole, pedagogical owners of disciplinary material, which caused tension when instructional designers attempted to contribute to pedagogy or assessment (Halupa, 2019). Instructional designers also experienced frustration when their input or suggestions were treated as subordinate to faculty authority (Lubin & Reio, 2023).

Instructional structures also reinforced misalignment. In some institutions, policies have positioned instructional designers as service providers, potentially limiting their influence on curricular decisions (Mueller et al., 2022). It was also noted that conflict was most pronounced when responsibilities were not clarified early, leaving both faculty and instructional designers unclear about authority (Drysdale, 2019). In some instances, institutional contracts and organizational charts reinforced hierarchies that constrained the instructional designer's ability to act as a true pedagogical partner (Mueller et al., 2022; Xu & Morris, 2020). Research on partnership models emphasized that successful collaboration depends on early role clarification and institutional support (Stefaniak, 2024; Xu & Stefaniak, 2020). Partnership models in online learning design revealed that when decision-making was shared, relationships were more collegial, while barriers such as unclear governance and faculty skepticism reinforced role misalignment (Rotar, 2024). Without clear role definitions and equitable authority, collaboration risks devolving into tension over ownership rather than a partnership built on complementary expertise. These dynamics align directly with Role Theory's constructs of role conflict and role ambiguity, in which incompatible or poorly defined expectations create structural strain within collaborative systems.

Recognition of Instructional Designer Expertise

Closely related to role misalignment was the theme of instructional designer expertise. Collaboration was more productive when faculty acknowledged instructional designers'

pedagogical and technical skills (Carliner, 2023; Drysdale, 2019; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019). It was found that cultures that legitimized the instructional designer's expertise enabled stronger partnerships across institutions (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Stefaniak, 2024). Course quality also benefited when faculty recognized instructional designers as partners in teaching and learning, not just technical implementers (Drysdale, 2021). It was also found that faculty skepticism often softened over time, as instructional designers had the opportunity to showcase their expertise and provide value to the faculty (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Similar tensions were noted in research on OPM-university business models. Ramani (2022b) found that instructional designers' backgrounds and skill sets were sometimes questioned in these partnerships, diminishing their legitimacy and reinforcing a service-provider framing. This mirrors findings in the broader literature that recognition of expertise is fragile and context dependent.

By contrast, several studies documented a lack of recognition. Faculty often framed designers as technicians rather than pedagogical contributors (Halupa, 2019), and systematic structures left instructional designers' expertise underutilized (Mueller et al., 2022). When instructional designers were marginalized in curricular decisions, they experienced frustration (Lubin & Reio, 2023), and even when collaboration was frequent, the recognition of design expertise could remain uneven (Watson-Held, 2024). In these cases, recognition of expertise is a crucial but fragile element of collaboration.

Relational Roles of Instructional Designers

Across the studies, instructional designers were described as occupying a wide range of relational roles that extended well beyond technical and pedagogical expertise. These roles shaped the interpersonal dynamics of collaboration and, in many cases, determined whether

partnerships were framed as transactional or collegial (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Maguire et al., 2021; Singleton et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). Several studies also highlighted how instructional designers act as brokers who negotiate between institutional expectations and open pedagogical practices. Morgan (2019) echoed this negotiation function, describing how instructional designers worked to balance intentional goals of open education with the operational realities of institutional systems. This positioned designers not only as technical or pedagogical experts, but also as agents who navigated tensions between values and structures.

One prominent relational role was that of the project manager, in which designers coordinated timelines, organized tasks, and ensured accountability among stakeholders. Maguire et al. (2021) emphasized that this managerial function often placed designers at the center of collaborative activity, as they worked to keep development work on track. Designers were also frequently cast as mediators of conflict, and disagreements over authority, workload, or course direction were often navigated by instructional designers, who worked to reframe conversations and maintain momentum (Watson-Held, 2024).

Another recurring role was that of a coach or mentor. Singleton et al. (2019) described how designers supported faculty in adopting universal design for learning strategies, guiding them through unfamiliar practices in ways that emphasized encouragement and partnership rather than enforcement. Similarly, Stephens et al. (2022) highlighted how designers enacted dual roles as both educators and adult learners, reinforcing the relational dimension of collaboration. Instructional designers often acted as facilitators of dialogue, structured conversations, and reflective debriefs that created space for both parties to voice concerns and negotiate authority (Brown & Green, 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Carliner, 2023; Chen & Carliner, 2021). These findings show that relational roles were flexible and situational, shifting

based on the needs of the project and the interpersonal context. More importantly, these roles were not peripheral but central to the success of collaboration. By mediating conflict, facilitating communication, mentoring, and managing processes, designers created the conditions that allowed collaborative work with faculty to move forward.

Respect and Collegiality

Respect and collegiality appeared as recurring themes in studies that portrayed strong collaborations (Drysdale, 2019; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Faculty were more likely to describe relationships as productive when they felt instructional designers treated them as disciplinary experts. Likewise, instructional designers reported greater satisfaction when treated as colleagues rather than service staff. Disciplinary collaborations further illustrated how mutual respect shaped design outcomes. Faculty and instructional designers emphasized that mutual respect and recognition of each other's expertise fostered a collegial atmosphere that supported both disciplinary rigor and pedagogical innovation (Richardson et al., 2019). Similarly, Kaplan and Shi (2023) described how collaboration in a philosophy course integrated disciplinary and pedagogical perspectives, illustrating how respect for multiple forms of expertise produced meaningful and engaging student learning experiences.

Pulcini & Taylor (2021) identified respect as the foundation of successful partnerships. It was found that structured partnerships reduced skepticism and encouraged collegiality (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Additionally, acknowledging designers as equals improved both communication and course outcomes (Drysdale, 2019). Ryan and Beck (2018) added that long-term collaboration fostered mutual respect as partners grew familiar with one another's strengths.

In contrast, Halupa (2019) and Lubin and Reio (2023) described cases where a lack of respect led to frustration and conflict. It was also noted that institutional hierarchies sometimes

undermined collegiality and reinforced the perception of designers as subordinate (Mueller et al., 2022). These findings suggest that respect is not only an interpersonal quality but also a structural one, and that it influences whether collaboration is framed as collegial or transactional.

Trust

Finally, trust emerged as one of the most critical factors in successful collaboration. It was often described as a prerequisite for risk-taking, open dialogue, and sustained partnership (Halupa, 2019; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Watson-Held, 2024). Faculty who trusted designers were more willing to adopt new pedagogical practices (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Trust frequently grew gradually through structured, ongoing partnerships (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Trust was not only a relational outcome but also a studied construct. For example, McDonald and Yanchar (2024) examined online course design partnerships and found that trust functioned as the critical condition for moving beyond compliance-driven exchanges toward authentic collaboration.

In cross-institutional contexts, this relational groundwork becomes particularly important when collaborators lack prior working relationships (Ryan & Beck, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). Reflective practices, such as debriefs, were shown to rebuild trust after conflict and keep collaborations moving forward (Brown & Green, 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Trust was not only a relational outcome but also a studied construct. A focused investigation of online course design explicitly examined how trust was built and maintained across the collaboration, confirming that without it, partnerships devolved into compliance-driven exchanges (McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021).

When trust was absent, collaboration faltered. Low-trust settings tended to magnify conflict (Watson-Held, 2024), and skepticism toward designers often prevented deeper engagement (Halupa, 2019). Teams with weaker trust defaulted to transactional rather than

collegial interactions (Maguire et al., 2021). Overall, the literature anchors trust as a cornerstone of collaboration and frames it as the condition upon which nearly all other aspects of partnership depend.

Occupational Conditions and Dimensions

The findings in the literature revealed a partnership that is both complementary and conflict-prone, shaped by uneven task distributions, imbalances in voice, and relational conditions such as trust, respect, and recognition of expertise. Rather than portraying collaboration as uniformly positive or negative, the literature situates it as a negotiated and evolving process.

Division of Labor and Fit

A consistent theme across studies was the asymmetry of roles. IDs were responsible for a broad array of tasks spanning pedagogy, technology, and project coordination, while faculty roles were largely clustered around content ownership and curricular authority. This distribution created space for complementary expertise but also introduced friction when pedagogical guidance was perceived as overstepping disciplinary authority (Halupa, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2020). At the same time, cases where roles were explicitly clarified early, such as through shared decision-making structures, saw smoother collaboration and stronger perceptions of “fit” (Drysedale, 2019; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). These findings suggest that fit is not merely a matter of personality but of aligning authority and responsibilities in ways that preserve both disciplinary expertise and design integrity.

The contrast between the broad, multifaceted responsibilities of instructional designers and the narrowly defined roles of faculty highlights one reason collaboration is often complex. Instructional designers are expected to serve simultaneously as pedagogical experts, technical

specialists, project coordinators, and other roles, while faculty primarily bring disciplinary content expertise. This uneven distribution of responsibilities, paired with a lack of clearly defined instructional designer tasks, means that instructional designers may frequently step into areas faculty see as their own roles. As a result, the partnership carries the potential to be highly complementary, but it also introduces friction when role boundaries are blurred or uneven.

Across these studies, the common thread was that unclear roles and imbalances in authority undermined collaboration (Drysdale, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Ramani, 2022b; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). Instead of being framed as partners, instructional designers were cast as support staff, and the resulting tension often made the design process less effective (Drysdale, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Richardson et al., 2019). These studies suggest that when responsibilities are poorly defined or when faculty resist acknowledging design expertise, the relationship frequently becomes strained and counterproductive.

Perspective and Voice

Scholars also highlighted a systematic imbalance in whose perspectives are represented. Instructional designers' voices, which accounted for the majority of studies, were far more frequently and richly included than faculty, often through surveys, reflective debriefs, or case studies (Magruder et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025a). Faculty voices, only present in less than half of the studies, were often fewer and less detailed, sometimes appearing primarily in relation to instructional designers' accounts rather than as independent contributions (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Stefaniak et al., 2025a). This imbalance shapes how collaboration is portrayed: it amplifies themes such as the undervaluing of design expertise while potentially underrepresenting faculty perceptions of authority, workload, and disciplinary priorities.

Addressing this imbalance will be critical for developing a more comprehensive understanding of partnership dynamics.

Taken together, the literature reveals an imbalance of perspective. Instructional designers are more frequently and more fully represented, whereas faculty voices appear less often and are sometimes framed primarily in relation to instructional designers' accounts rather than as independent contributions (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Richardson et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025a). This unevenness complicates our understanding of collaboration, as the dynamics of partnership are often described through the vantage point of designers rather than an equal consideration of both sides (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Rotar, 2024).

Relational Conditions

Collaboration was most often portrayed as a dynamic process that included both challenges and growth. More than half of the studies described mixed or evolving relationships, which implies that partnerships shift depending on context, workload, and institutional culture (Maguire et al., 2021; Rotar, 2024; Watson-Held, 2024). Across positive accounts, four relational conditions consistently emerged: trust, respect and collegiality, communication routines, and recognition of instructional design expertise. Trust enabled risk-taking and deeper engagement (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Respect and collegiality positioned instructional designers as equal partners rather than service staff (Drysdale, 2019; Ryan & Beck, 2018). Communication routines surfaced tensions early and fostered confidence (Brown & Green, 2022; Maguire et al., 2021). Finally, recognition of ID expertise, legitimized contributions, and improved course quality (Carliner, 2023; Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2019).

Where these qualities were absent, collaboration faltered. Low-trust settings magnified conflict (Watson-Held, 2024), compressed timelines forced transactional interactions (Pulcini &

Taylor, 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018), and institutional hierarchies reinforced faculty dominance at the expense of partnership (Mueller et al., 2022; Xu & Morris, 2020). Together, these studies suggest that positive relationships are not incidental but emerge from conditions that foster mutual, open communication and the acknowledgment of complementary expertise. When these qualities are present, faculty and designers describe their work as collegial and student-centered (Drysedale, 2019; McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Richardson et al., 2019). Taken together, these relational conditions reflect the degree to which role expectations have been successfully negotiated, a process that Role Theory identifies as central to effective collaboration within complex organizational environments (Lubin & Reio, 2023; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

Implications for Practice

Scholarship suggests several steps that can be taken to strengthen the faculty and instructional designer collaboration. A first step is to clarify roles early in the process, ideally through lightweight agreements that distinguish areas of content authority, pedagogical guidance, and shared responsibility (Drysedale, 2019; Halupa, 2019). Doing so could prevent misunderstandings that later escalate into role conflict. Institutions must also protect sufficient development time to help ensure that collaboration extends beyond logistical problem-solving into deeper pedagogical dialogue and intentional course design (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). Formalizing communication routines, such as sprint reviews, structured check-ins, or reflective debriefs, has likewise been shown to surface tensions before they escalate and strengthen relational trust (Brown & Green, 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021).

Another important practice is to legitimize instructional designers' expertise within institutional structures by inviting them to curriculum committees and faculty development initiatives, thereby affirming their role as pedagogical partners rather than ancillary staff (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). Finally, sustaining collaborative teams across multiple course development cycles allows trust and collegiality to compound over time rather than reset with each new project, a practice that several studies have found to be particularly effective in establishing long-term, productive partnerships (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). Collectively, these practices demonstrate how the industry can move collaboration from a transactional arrangement toward a collegial partnership that more fully leverages the expertise of both faculty and instructional designers.

Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Present Study

The literature on faculty–instructional designer collaboration reveals a partnership characterized by complementary expertise, structural ambiguity, and evolving relational dynamics (Drysdale, 2019; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak et al., 2025a). Studies consistently document themes such as role misalignment, trust, communication practices, recognition of expertise, and institutional constraints (Lubin & Reio, 2023; McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Ramani, 2022b; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). However, several critical gaps remain.

First, faculty perspectives remain underrepresented relative to instructional designer perspectives. Many studies foreground the experiences of instructional designers, particularly regarding professional identity and role legitimacy, while fewer studies center on faculty interpretations of collaboration (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Magruder et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025a; Xu & Morris, 2020). This imbalance limits a comprehensive

understanding of how collaboration is perceived by those who hold curricular authority and whose engagement is essential to course development. Yet this pattern is not incidental. Because faculty hold primary authority over curricular decisions and their engagement is essential to the success of collaborative course development, understanding collaboration from their perspective is both a methodological and a practical imperative (Halupa, 2019; Hsu, 2020; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). The present study responds directly to this gap by centering faculty perceptions as the primary unit of analysis.

Second, while prior research identifies relational themes, collaboration is rarely examined using integrated dimensional measurement alongside contextual analysis. Few studies systematically investigate how faculty perceive specific dimensions of collaboration while also exploring how institutional variables such as workload, research expectations, and access to design support influence those perceptions (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Mueller et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak, 2024). The absence of integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches restricts the ability to connect measurable constructs with lived experience.

Third, although role ambiguity and authority tension are frequently described, limited research explicitly applies Role Theory to examine how institutional and role expectations shape collaboration. Most accounts remain descriptive rather than theoretically grounded, leaving conceptual relationships underdeveloped. Prior research has noted the need for stronger theoretical grounding in instructional design scholarship, as studies often emphasize practice and description over theory development (Stefaniak et al., 2025a). Additionally, the mechanisms through which faculty and instructional designers are paired, as well as the impact of contextual fit, remain largely unexplored.

Given the continued expansion of online education and the institutional reliance on structured course development processes, understanding faculty perceptions of collaboration is essential (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Bowen, 2013; Rotar, 2024; Xu & Morris, 2020). The present study addresses these gaps by centering faculty perspectives, examining multiple dimensions of collaboration quantitatively, exploring faculty descriptions qualitatively, and investigating how institutional and role expectations relate to collaborative experience (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Mueller et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2019; Stefaniak, 2024). By integrating these approaches, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of faculty–instructional designer partnerships within higher education.

Chapter 3 - Methods

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. Guided by Role Theory and grounded in a concurrent mixed-methods design, this study integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of faculty interpretations of collaborative partnerships within institutional contexts.

The chapter begins by restating the research questions that guide the study and describing the rationale for employing a concurrent mixed-methods approach. It then details the research design, including participant selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and analytic strategies for both the quantitative and qualitative strands. Attention is given to how collaboration dimensions were operationalized and how contextual variables were incorporated into the analysis.

Finally, this chapter addresses procedures for ensuring rigor, including validity and reliability measures for the quantitative component and trustworthiness strategies for the qualitative component. Together, these elements establish the methodological foundation for examining how collaborative roles are enacted and perceived within higher-education course-development processes.

Research Questions

As institutions increasingly rely on structured collaboration between faculty and instructional designers to support online course development, understanding how faculty experience these partnerships becomes essential. This study centered on faculty interpretation of collaborative processes, recognizing that perceptions of role expectations, authority, and institutional support shape how collaboration is enacted in practice.

The aim of this study was to examine how faculty members perceive and describe their collaboration with instructional designers during online course development and to explore how institutional and contextual variables influence those perceptions.

To achieve this aim, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- [Quantitative] RQ1: What are faculty perceptions of the different dimensions of collaboration with instructional designers?
- [Qualitative] RQ2: How do faculty describe their collaborations with instructional designers during online course development?
- [Mixed method] RQ3: To what extent are faculty perceptions of collaboration associated with institutional and contextual variables such as teaching load, research expectations, and access to instructional design support?
- [Qualitative] RQ4: How do faculty describe the ways institutional and role expectations relate to their collaboration with instructional designers?

Researcher's Positionality

My professional experiences are closely connected to the phenomenon examined in this study. I have served as an instructional designer at multiple universities and currently lead an instructional design company focused on supporting online course development in higher education. In these roles, I have worked directly with faculty to design and redesign courses, navigating questions of authority, responsibility, and institutional expectations. I have witnessed both productive and strained collaborative partnerships and have developed a strong belief in the value of intentional, student-centered course design. Additionally, I have led an academic operations team in which I experienced first-hand the nuances of the relationship between the instructional designer and faculty member, and often needed to step in for conflict resolution. It

was within these various roles that I began to pay close attention to the complications of this collaborative relationship.

At the same time, I serve as an adjunct faculty member in an online university. In that capacity, I experience course design decisions from the perspective of an instructor operating within pre-established structures. This dual positioning, as both a design professional and a faculty member, provides insight into the complexity of collaborative dynamics but also introduces potential bias. I may be inclined to view structured collaboration as inherently beneficial or to interpret role ambiguity as a systemic issue rather than an individual one. I may also hold assumptions about the relationship between course design and student access, shaped by my own educational journey as a first-generation student.

Because this study centers on faculty perceptions of collaboration, it is particularly important that I remain attentive to how my professional identity could shape interpretation. Following Bloomberg (2023), I acknowledge that knowledge is socially constructed and that researcher positionality influences each stage of inquiry. Rather than attempting to bracket my experiences entirely, I engage in reflexive practice to ensure analytic rigor. Throughout the research process, I maintained a reflexive journal to document assumptions, decision-making processes, and emerging interpretations. I also relied on systematic coding procedures, clear audit trails, and alignment between data and claims to ensure findings are grounded in participant accounts.

My proximity to the phenomenon under study provides contextual understanding of the institutional structures and role negotiations embedded in online course development. Through intentional reflexivity and methodological transparency, I seek to balance that proximity with

disciplined analysis, allowing faculty voices to guide interpretation while acknowledging the perspectives I bring to the work.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Role Theory (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978), a sociological and organizational framework that explains how individuals function within systems of defined expectations. Role Theory posits that individuals occupy positions within social structures that carry associated responsibilities, behavioral norms, and authority boundaries. These expectations influence how individuals interpret their own responsibilities and how they interact with others in collaborative environments (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966). When role expectations are clear and mutually understood, collaboration is more likely to function effectively (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Conversely, when expectations are ambiguous, conflicting, or excessive, individuals may experience tension that disrupts communication and performance (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Central constructs within Role Theory include role clarity, role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload (Biddle, 1979). Role clarity refers to the extent to which individuals understand their responsibilities, decision-making authority, and performance expectations (Biddle, 1979). Role ambiguity occurs when expectations are unclear or inconsistently communicated (Biddle, 1979). Role conflict arises when incompatible expectations exist between individuals or within organizational systems (Biddle, 1979). Role overload (or role strain) refers to the stress that arises when demands exceed available time, resources, or capacity. (Biddle, 1979) These constructs provide a useful framework for examining collaboration within complex organizational environments such as higher education.

Within the context of online course development, faculty and instructional designers occupy distinct but interdependent roles (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). Faculty members traditionally hold curricular authority and responsibility for disciplinary integrity, course content, and student learning outcomes. Instructional designers contribute expertise in learning theory, course alignment, assessment design, accessibility standards, and instructional technology integration (Halupa, 2019; Magruder et al., 2019; Singleton et al., 2019). As institutions increasingly formalize online course development processes, these roles intersect within structured timelines, institutional mandates, and accountability frameworks (Mei et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018; Stefaniak, 2024).

Applying Role Theory to faculty–instructional designer collaboration allows for examination of how expectations are negotiated and enacted within these partnerships. Faculty perceptions of collaboration may be influenced by the degree of role clarity, the presence of authority tension, or the impact of institutional demands such as workload expectations and development timelines (Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak, 2024). When expectations are aligned and communication is effective, collaboration may be experienced as supportive and synergistic (Drysdale, 2019; McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Olesova & Campbell, 2019). When expectations are unclear or institutional pressures intensify role strain, collaboration may be experienced as constrained or transactional (Mueller et al., 2022; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Watson-Held, 2024).

Role Theory informed both strands of this mixed-methods study. Quantitatively, dimensions of collaboration and contextual variables reflect underlying role expectations and organizational influences. Qualitatively, the framework guided exploration of how faculty describe their experiences, interpret authority boundaries, and perceive the influence of

institutional structures on collaboration. By integrating Role Theory with concurrent quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study examined not only what faculty perceive about collaboration, but also how role and institutional expectations shape those perceptions within the evolving landscape of online education.

Research Design

This study employed a concurrent mixed methods design to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. A mixed-methods approach was selected intentionally to serve two complementary purposes. First, the quantitative strand was designed to identify measurable patterns across dimensions of collaboration and to examine relationships between those dimensions and contextual variables such as workload, institutional expectations, and access to instructional design support. Second, the qualitative strand was designed to amplify faculty voices by providing space for participants to describe their experiences in their own words, including how they interpret role expectations, authority, and institutional structures within collaborative processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The decision to integrate both strands was grounded in both methodological and substantive considerations. Methodologically, collaboration can be conceptualized as both a structured construct, composed of measurable dimensions such as communication, trust, and role clarity, and as a relational process shaped by context and interpretation (Biddle, 1979). Substantively, the literature review revealed a persistent imbalance in perspective, with instructional designer voices more frequently represented than faculty perspectives (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Lubin & Reio, 2023; Magruder et al., 2019; Morgan, 2019; Singleton et al., 2019; Stefaniak, 2024; Stefaniak et al., 2025a; Xu & Morris, 2020). Incorporating qualitative

interviews allowed this study to center faculty experience directly, rather than inferring perceptions solely from scaled survey responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In a concurrent design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected within the same general timeframe, analyzed independently, and then merged during interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the quantitative data primarily addressed Research Question 1 by identifying measurable patterns across dimensions of collaboration, and Research Question 3 by examining associations between those dimensions and institutional or contextual variables. The qualitative data addressed Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 by contributing additional depth to faculty perceptions of collaboration dimensions, exploring how faculty describe their collaborative experiences, and examining how role and institutional expectations shape those experiences. Integration occurred during interpretation, where statistical patterns were examined alongside thematic findings to develop a more comprehensive understanding of faculty perceptions of collaboration.

Selection of Participants

To examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers, participants were required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) currently serving as faculty at a higher education institution and (b) having participated in the development or redesign of at least one online course in collaboration with an instructional designer within the past five years. The five-year time frame was established to ensure participants' reflections were based on relatively recent collaborative experiences and institutional contexts.

Participation was voluntary. Faculty were recruited through professional networks and online outreach. Recruitment efforts included direct email invitations to faculty contacts, a public invitation posted on LinkedIn, and snowball sampling in which participating faculty shared the

study invitation with colleagues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). No incentives were offered for participation. The study included faculty from multiple higher education U.S. based institutions representing a range of institutional types, including public four-year institutions, private for-profit institutions, community colleges, and nonprofit institutions.

Quantitative Sample

A total of 97 faculty members responded to the survey. Of these responses, 63 were completed in full and met the inclusion criteria for analysis. Partial responses were removed to ensure consistency and reliability of quantitative results. The final quantitative sample ($n = 63$) included faculty from multiple institutions and varied institutional contexts. Participants represented a range of academic ranks, disciplines, and teaching responsibilities. Because the study focuses on collaborative experiences rather than institutional comparisons, diversity of institutional contexts was prioritized over proportional representation.

Qualitative Sample

At the conclusion of the survey, participants were invited to volunteer for a follow-up semi-structured interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). From those who indicated interest, 10 faculty members were selected for interviews through purposive sampling, guided by the goal of representing variation across institutional types and capturing a range of collaborative experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Selection was intentional: as participants expressed interest, they were categorized by institutional type to ensure representation across public four-year institutions, private for-profit institutions, community colleges, and nonprofit institutions. Despite targeted outreach efforts, including a minimum of three follow-up contacts to each prospective participant from a community college who had agreed to be interviewed, no community college faculty members responded to interview scheduling requests. As a result, the

qualitative sample does not include community college representation, which should be considered when interpreting the findings. It is important to note that community college faculty did participate in the quantitative survey strand; their absence is specific to the qualitative interview component. The final qualitative sample of ten interview participants consisted of four faculty from public four-year institutions, three from private for-profit institutions, and three from nonprofit institutions.

Follow-up emails were sent to all participants who indicated interest in being interviewed. Because data collection occurred concurrently, meaning interviews were scheduled as survey responses came in rather than after the survey closed, the institutional representation and recruitment process was monitored closely. Interviews were conducted until sufficient depth of description was achieved to address the research questions. The decision to interview ten participants was consistent with purposeful sampling guidelines for qualitative inquiry, which emphasize depth and information richness over sample size (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To protect confidentiality, all interview participants are identified using pseudonyms throughout this study. Table 4.7 provides a demographic overview of the ten interview participants, including faculty status, institutional type, academic discipline, years of teaching experience in higher education, and years of online teaching experience. Participants represented a range of faculty statuses and disciplines across public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions. All ten participants reported eight or more years of online teaching experience, reflecting a sample with substantial familiarity with online course development.

Instruments

Survey

The quantitative component of this study utilized the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model Questionnaire (PINCOM-Q), originally developed by Ødegård (2006) to assess perceptions of collaboration among professionals working across disciplinary boundaries (Ødegård, 2006). The instrument was adapted for the higher education context without altering the original item structure, with wording modified only to reflect collaboration between faculty and instructional designers during online course development.

The adapted PINCOM-Q consists of 48 Likert-scale items measuring dimensions of collaboration, including communication, trust and mutual respect, role clarity, leadership, and organizational support. Items are scored on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). Composite scores were calculated to represent overall perceptions of collaboration quality and domain-specific dimensions aligned with Role Theory constructs.

In addition to the PINCOM-Q items, the survey included demographic and contextual questions related to faculty status, institutional type, years of teaching experience, years of online teaching experience, timing and duration of collaboration, workload indicators, and whether collaboration was voluntary or assigned. These contextual variables were included to examine their relationships with perceptions of collaboration. The survey was administered electronically via Qualtrics. The complete survey instrument is provided in Appendix A.

Qualitative Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded with participant consent and automatically transcribed through Zoom's transcription function. The semi-structured format allowed all participants to respond to the same

core set of interview questions while providing flexibility for the researcher to ask follow-up questions as new ideas or relevant details emerged during the conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach ensured both consistency across interviews and space for participants to elaborate on experiences particular to their institutional contexts.

During each interview, a semi-structured protocol served as an anchor, while handwritten notes were also taken. These notes served two purposes: to capture key moments and direct quotes in real time, and to prompt follow-up questions that were not part of the original protocol but arose naturally from participant responses. Every participant received the same original set of interview questions, but follow-up probes varied based on individual participant responses. The interview protocol was developed to align with the study's research questions and conceptual framework. Questions explored faculty interpretations of their roles, expectations of instructional designers, communication dynamics, decision-making boundaries, workload influences, and institutional pressures affecting collaboration. Several questions explicitly probed Role Theory constructs, including role expectations, role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, and role fit. Participants were asked to describe moments when responsibilities were unclear, when goals conflicted, and when collaboration felt either successful or strained. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews with faculty who completed the survey and volunteered for follow-up participation. The interview protocol was developed to align with the study's research questions and conceptual framework. The complete interview protocol, including its alignment with the study's research questions and conceptual framework, is presented in Table 3.1. Questions explored faculty interpretations of their roles,

expectations of instructional designers, communication dynamics, decision-making boundaries, workload influences, and institutional pressures affecting collaboration.

Several interview questions explicitly probed Role Theory constructs, including role expectations, role ambiguity, role conflict, role strain, and role fit. Participants were asked to describe moments when responsibilities were unclear, when goals conflicted, and when collaboration felt either successful or strained. This alignment ensured that qualitative data would both expand upon and contextualize survey findings. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded with participant consent, and transcribed for analysis.

Table 3.1 Semi-Structured Interview Protocol with Research Question and Role Theory Alignments

#	Interview Question	RQ	Role Theory
			Construct
1	How would you describe the experience developing online courses and the role instructional designers played in that process?	RQ2	—
2	What facets do you consider as influential in determining the quality of interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty members and instructional designers during the development of an online course?	RQ1	—
3	Describe any expectations you had about working with an instructional designer before the collaboration began.	RQ2	<i>Role Expectations</i>
4	Were there any moments where responsibilities or decision-making boundaries between you and the instructional designer felt unclear?	RQ2	<i>Role Ambiguity</i>
5	How would you describe your responsibilities versus those of the instructional designer when developing online courses?	RQ2	<i>Role Clarity</i>

6	Can you describe any instances when your goals or expectations for the course conflicted with those of the instructional designer or the institution?	RQ4	<i>Role Conflict</i>
7	How did your existing workload, timelines, or institutional expectations influence your collaboration with the instructional designer?	RQ3, RQ4	<i>Role Overload</i>
8	Thinking about your overall experience, what elements do you believe most influenced whether the collaboration felt successful?	RQ2	—
9	Thinking about your overall experience, what elements do you believe most influenced whether the collaboration felt unsuccessful?	RQ2	—
10	Is there anything else about your experience collaborating with instructional designers that you think is important for this study?	—	—

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were exported from Qualtrics and analyzed using statistical software. Prior to analysis, data were screened for completeness and accuracy. Partial responses were removed, resulting in a final sample of 63 completed surveys. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize overall perceptions of collaboration across the twelve PINCOM-Q constructs and three domain-level scores. Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the PINCOM-Q scales using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients interpreted using the benchmarks established by George and Mallery (2003). Composite domain

scores were calculated by averaging the items within each domain consistent with the original instrument scoring procedures (Ødegård, 2006).

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine relationships among the three collaboration domains: individual, group, and organizational. Additionally, a series of one-way ANOVAs and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether faculty perceptions of collaboration differed by contextual factors such as teaching load, research expectations, and collaboration type. PINCOM-Q domain scores served as the dependent variables in each analysis. Group differences were examined across categories of each contextual variable, and effect sizes were calculated to assess the practical significance of any observed differences. Assumptions underlying the ANOVAs and t-tests were evaluated prior to analysis, including verification that no group cells contained fewer than five participants.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected as the analytic approach because it enabled the identification of patterns of meaning across participants' accounts in a way that was both systematic and interpretive (Bloomberg, 2023). A theme was understood as a recurring pattern that appeared across multiple participant interviews and captured something meaningful about faculty experiences of collaboration. Themes were not counted by frequency alone. A pattern was considered thematic when it represented a substantive idea that helped answer the research questions and captured a meaningful aspect of how faculty experienced collaboration (Saldaña, 2021). This distinction mattered in practice because faculty often described the same underlying experience using very different language. For example, one participant might describe feeling uncertain about who had final say over course content, while another described stepping back to let the instructional designer lead: two different expressions of the same underlying dynamic

around authority and decision-making. Both accounts contributed to the same theme, not because of shared vocabulary, but because they pointed to the same pattern of meaning.

A theme was therefore understood as a conceptual pattern rather than a linguistic one, and its inclusion in the final analysis was based on whether it illuminated something significant about the collaborative experience rather than simply how often a particular word or phrase appeared in the transcripts. Themes were identified through an iterative three-round coding process using an Excel-based coding spreadsheet, moving from more than 70 initial open codes to approximately 30 secondary codes, and finally to the seven themes presented in Chapter 4. Both deductive themes, those anticipated by the Role Theory framework, and inductive themes, those that emerged from participant language without being anticipated, were retained in the final analysis (Bloomberg, 2023; Saldaña, 2021).

Qualitative data were analyzed through an iterative process integrating coding and thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Bloomberg (2023) and Saldaña (2021). Coding involved systematically labeling units of meaning in the data, line by line, to identify patterns, concepts, and recurring ideas across participant accounts (Saldaña, 2021). Thematic analysis then organized those coded units into broader themes that captured the most significant and recurring patterns across the dataset, moving from descriptive labeling toward interpretive meaning-making (Bloomberg, 2023). This process was iterative rather than linear: codes were reviewed, collapsed, and refined across multiple rounds of engagement with the data until themes represented distinct, recurring patterns that could be meaningfully interpreted in relation to the research questions. The ten completed interviews produced 65 pages of transcript data. Prior to coding, each transcript was reviewed and lightly cleaned for accuracy. The approach to transcript cleaning was intentionally minimal; corrections were limited to fixing transcription

errors, adding words or phrases missed by the automated transcription, and correcting misheard terms. No filler words or false starts were removed, and no substantive edits were made to participant language. This approach was designed to preserve the integrity of participant accounts and ensure that coding was grounded in participants' own words rather than in researcher-edited versions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Following each interview, a two-part reflective process occurred. First, a 30-minute journaling session was conducted to document cumulative analytical observations. These were not simply reactions to the individual interview but rather notes on patterns beginning to emerge across interviews. For example, following the third interview, it was noted that multiple participants were independently describing the value of having a clearly outlined development process, despite this not being a direct interview question. These journal observations served as early signals of emerging themes and were revisited during formal analysis. Second, a memoing session was conducted to summarize key moments, notable quotes, and analytical observations specific to that interview. The memos were more structured in nature, capturing what I did not want to lose sight of when reviewing transcripts during coding. This process resulted in 16 pages of journal notes and 21 pages of typed analytical memos across the full interview set.

Qualitative data was analyzed using an Excel-based coding spreadsheet in which both interview transcripts and analytical memos were coded together. Each row of the spreadsheet represented one unit of meaning: a single quote, exchange, or discrete idea drawn from either a transcript or a memo (Saldaña, 2021). Each row was clearly labeled by source (e.g., Marcus Interview, Marcus Analytical Memo) so that the origin of each unit could be tracked throughout analysis. Analysis proceeded through three rounds of coding. In the first round, open coding was applied line by line across all data rows, yielding more than 70 initial codes. Because multiple

codes were often applicable to a single row, some rows carried between one and five code designations. In addition to the open coding column, a separate column was maintained to flag statements that aligned with constructs of Role Theory. This column was used selectively and served as a mechanism for noting when participant language mapped onto constructs such as role clarity, role ambiguity, role conflict, or role overload, even when those constructs were not explicitly named with exact verbiage by the participant.

In the second round of coding, the 70 initial codes were collapsed into approximately 30 secondary codes by grouping conceptually related codes and eliminating redundancy. In the third and final round, secondary codes were reviewed once more and refined into the seven themes presented in Chapter 4. Themes were retained when they represented distinct and recurring patterns across multiple participants. No theme was established based on a single participant's account.

Analysis proceeded through three rounds of coding. Initial open coding generated more than 70 first-cycle codes capturing discrete ideas across all transcripts and memos, including uncertainty about the instructional designer role, open communication improves collaboration, feeling constrained by timelines, institutional support for collaboration, and faculty resistance to design input. In the second round, conceptually related codes were grouped into approximately 30 pattern codes, including role clarity, trust development, workload tension, institutional constraints, and creative partnership. In the final round, pattern codes were refined into the seven themes presented in this study. The complete code progression across all three rounds is provided in Appendix E.

Qualitative Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive and deductive thematic approach informed by the study's conceptual framework. Interview transcripts were reviewed alongside analytic memos written after each interview. The memos were particularly useful because they preserved first-cycle interpretive insights related to collaboration quality, role definition, authority, workload, and organizational context. During the initial phase of coding, segments of text were labeled with descriptive and process-oriented codes, including role expectations, authority boundaries, communication practices, trust, personality fit, vendor constraints, workload, pacing, and institutional support.

After the first coding cycle, related codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories. These categories were then compared across participants to identify areas of convergence and divergence. Through this process, the analysis moved from descriptive coding to more interpretive theme development. Attention was paid to how faculty described role negotiation, the division of labor between content expertise and design expertise, and the extent to which organizational structures either supported or constrained collaboration. These recurring patterns were then refined into themes representing the major processes that shaped faculty experiences of collaboration with instructional designers.

Once the categories were established, they were examined in relation to the research questions and the Role Theory framework. This process resulted in seven themes. The analysis did not restrict the findings to an arbitrary number of themes; instead, the final themes were retained when they represented distinct and recurring patterns across participants. Several themes were conceptually linked, but they were maintained separately because participants consistently distinguished among them in their accounts.

To illustrate how the coding process progressed from raw interview data to final themes, the development of Theme 2 serves as a useful example. Early in the coding process, participant statements about communication were captured across seven or eight distinct first-cycle codes. These included statements about good and bad communication, written and timeline communication, and codes related to participants' hesitance to express needs. For instance, one participant stated, "Listening. Lots of communication... sometimes I can't even describe what I want" (Dale), which was initially coded as active listening and collaborative dialogue. Another participant noted, "Open communication and mutual respect... with those you can overcome 95% of challenges" (Diane), coded as mutual respect and relational trust. A third participant described the foundation of effective collaboration as "relationships... trust... open communication" (Marcus), which was coded as "relational trust" and "collaborative relationship".

Although these statements were initially captured as separate codes, it became clear during the second round of coding that participants consistently discussed communication, trust, and respect together rather than as isolated experiences. Separating these codes into distinct themes would have misrepresented how participants described their experiences, as they were telling us that these qualities were inseparable in practice. Some codes that initially appeared distinct, such as timeline communication and written communication, were absorbed into the broader theme because participants consistently described them as expressions of the same underlying condition: communication had a significant impact on collaboration.

The coding process also distinguished between deductive and inductive themes. Several themes emerged deductively, meaning they were anticipated by the Role Theory framework guiding the study. Clear Roles Support Successful Collaboration (Theme 1) and Authority and

Decision-Making Boundaries Remain Sites of Tension (Theme 3) reflect Role Theory constructs of role clarity, role ambiguity, and role conflict that were built into the interview protocol from the outset. Other themes emerged inductively from the data itself. The Strongest Collaborations Are Experienced as Creative Partnerships (Theme 7) was not anticipated by the framework and arose entirely from participant language describing their most meaningful collaborative experiences as generative, imaginative, and co-creative. Similarly, Structured Process and Project Management Reduce Uncertainty (Theme 4) emerged from participants independently and repeatedly emphasizing the value of having a clearly defined development process, despite this not being a direct interview question. This pattern was noted in the reflexive journal as early as the third interview, which allowed for targeted follow-up in subsequent conversations.

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Data integration occurred during interpretation using a merging approach consistent with a concurrent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetters et al., 2013).

Quantitative results were compared with qualitative themes to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and expansion. A joint display matrix was developed to organize quantitative findings alongside related qualitative excerpts. This process allowed for the examination of how statistical patterns corresponded to faculty members lived experiences. Integrated findings informed the development of overarching themes describing the conditions that shape faculty–instructional designer collaboration

Quantitative Validity and Reliability

Reliability of the PINCOM-Q scales was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha to determine internal consistency. Assumptions underlying the one-way ANOVAs and independent-samples t-tests were evaluated to ensure statistical appropriateness, including verification that no group

cells contained fewer than five participants. Removal of incomplete survey responses strengthened data integrity.

Qualitative Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established using the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was supported by the alignment between interview data and analytic claims, as well as by communicative validation embedded in the interview process itself (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As interviews progressed and patterns began to emerge, relevant themes were shared with subsequent participants to support or refute them. For example, observations about vendor relationships, offshore instructional designers, language barriers, and the role of shared content background between faculty and instructional designers formed early, and participants consistently confirmed and elaborated on these patterns. Additionally, an early pattern emerged regarding instructional designers sharing content background expertise with the faculty member. In subsequent interviews, this early pattern was brought up for discussion to either reinforce or dilute its strength. This process of checking emerging interpretations against participant responses across the data collection period strengthened confidence in the credibility of the findings.

Dependability was enhanced by maintaining a clear audit trail, including the Excel coding spreadsheet with source-labeled rows, documentation of coding decisions across three rounds of analysis, and 21 pages of typed analytical memos generated after each interview. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling maintained throughout data collection and analysis, documenting the researcher's assumptions, interpretive decisions, and emerging observations across the full interview set. Transferability was supported through a detailed description of participant context, institutional variation across public, private for-profit, and

nonprofit institution types, and transparent reporting of sampling decisions, including the absence of community college representation, allowing readers to assess the applicability of findings to their own contexts.

Ethical Considerations

This study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Survey responses were anonymous unless participants elected to provide contact information for private interviews. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely via the cloud and de-identified during analysis. Additionally, recordings were deleted from the cloud once the research was concluded.

Because the researcher owns an instructional design company, care was taken to ensure that no participants were current clients or employees of the researcher. Recruitment materials clarified that participation would not affect professional relationships or institutional standing.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was intentionally bounded by several decisions made during the design phase. Much of the existing literature on faculty-instructional designer collaboration has centered on the perspectives and experiences of instructional designers. To address one of several gaps identified in the literature, this study focused exclusively on faculty perspectives. This scope decision was not intended to diminish the instructional designer's role in the collaborative process, but rather to foreground a voice that has been less thoroughly examined in the research.

Participant selection was also deliberately bounded. The study was limited to faculty who had collaborated with an instructional designer within the past five years, ensuring that reflections were grounded in relatively recent experience rather than distant or reconstructed

memory. Purposeful sampling was used for the qualitative component to ensure representation across institutional types: public four-year, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Community college faculty were actively recruited but did not respond to interview scheduling requests, and their absence from the qualitative strand reflects a limitation of the recruitment process rather than an intentional exclusion. Additionally, the study examined collaboration specifically in the context of online course development and did not extend to hybrid or face-to-face course design contexts.

Finally, all interview participants are identified using pseudonyms throughout this study. This decision was made to protect participant confidentiality, encourage candid responses during interviews, and ensure that no individual faculty member or institution could be identified from the findings. The use of pseudonyms is consistent with ethical standards for qualitative research involving human participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2018).

Chapter 4 - Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study examining faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. The purpose of the study was to explore the factors that influence collaborative relationships between faculty and instructional designers and to better understand how these collaborations are experienced within higher education institutions.

Data for this study were collected using a concurrent mixed methods design. Quantitative data were gathered by administering the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model Questionnaire (PINCOM-Q), while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with faculty participants. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provided a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative experiences of faculty members working with instructional designers.

This chapter is organized into two primary sections corresponding to the quantitative and qualitative components of the study. The first section presents the quantitative findings derived from the survey data, including participant demographic characteristics, descriptive statistics for the PINCOM-Q constructs, and reliability analyses. These results provide an overview of faculty perceptions of collaboration across multiple dimensions of interprofessional interaction. The second section presents the qualitative findings from the faculty interviews. Through thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and analytic memos, several themes emerged, further illuminating how faculty experienced collaboration with instructional designers during course development.

Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative dynamics between faculty and instructional designers. The

chapter concludes with a summary of the results, which serve as the foundation for the interpretation and discussion presented in Chapter 5.

Quantitative Results

Quantitative Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. Responses to the survey instrument were compiled and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each construct measured by the PINCOM-Q instrument to identify patterns in faculty perceptions of collaborative work.

The PINCOM-Q instrument includes 48 items measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The instrument measures collaboration across twelve constructs representing key dimensions of interprofessional collaboration (Ødegård, 2006). These constructs are grouped into three broader domains representing different levels of collaborative interaction: individual factors, group factors, and organizational factors (Ødegård, 2006).

Construct scores were calculated by averaging responses to each group of survey items. Descriptive statistics were used to examine patterns in faculty perceptions across the twelve constructs. In addition, reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the instrument and its associated domains.

Description of the PINCOM-Q Instrument

The Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model Questionnaire (PINCOM-Q) was used to measure faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers. The instrument is based on the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model, which

conceptualizes collaboration as a multidimensional process shaped by factors at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Ødegård, 2006). This framework is especially appropriate for the present study because collaboration between faculty members and instructional designers is not simply an interpersonal exchange; it is also influenced by professional identities, team processes, institutional structures, and organizational priorities.

The PINCOM-Q includes 48 items organized into twelve constructs, with four items representing each construct (Ødegård, 2006). These twelve constructs are grouped into three domains. The individual domain includes motivation, role expectancy, personality style, and professional power. The group domain includes group leadership, coping, communication, and social support. The organizational domain includes organizational culture, organizational goals, organizational domain, and organizational environment. A visual representation of the PINCOM model and its domain structure is provided in Appendix D.

Within the individual domain, motivation refers to a faculty member's personal drive and engagement in the collaborative process (Ødegård, 2006). Role expectancy captures the degree to which each collaborator's responsibilities are clearly understood and consistent with others' expectations (Ødegård, 2006). Personality style reflects the openness and flexibility an individual brings to working across professional boundaries (Ødegård, 2006). Professional power refers to the degree of influence and autonomy that a faculty member perceives they have within the collaboration (Ødegård, 2006).

Within the group domain, group leadership captures perceptions of how effectively the collaborative team is directed and organized (Ødegård, 2006). Communication refers to the clarity and quality of information exchange among collaborators (Ødegård, 2006). Coping measures the group's capacity to manage conflict, challenges, and stress that arise during the

collaborative process (Ødegård, 2006). Social support reflects the degree to which collaborators feel professionally and personally supported by their teammates (Ødegård, 2006).

Within the organizational domain, organizational culture refers to the shared values, norms, and climate of the institution as they relate to supporting collaboration (Ødegård, 2006). Organizational aims capture whether institutional goals are clearly defined and mutually understood (Ødegård, 2006). Organizational domain refers to the clarity of roles and boundaries between different units or services involved in course development (Ødegård, 2006). Organizational environment reflects the external structures and resources that either facilitate or constrain collaborative work.

In the context of the present study, the individual domain captures personal attitudes toward collaboration, perceptions of role clarity, interpersonal style, and professional influence. The group domain captures the day-to-day collaborative experience, including how clearly collaborative work is coordinated, how effectively collaborators manage problems, how well information is exchanged, and how supported participants feel. The organizational domain captures the larger institutional context within which collaboration occurs, including institutional culture, the clarity of organizational aims, and the degree to which collaborative work is structurally supported.

Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). Consistent with the scoring procedures established by the original instrument developer, negatively worded items were not reverse coded prior to analysis (Ødegård, 2006). However, because the PINCOM-Q contains both positively and negatively worded items, construct scores cannot be interpreted uniformly by score magnitude alone. For positively worded items, higher scores reflect more positive perceptions of

collaboration. For negatively worded items, higher scores, reflecting disagreement with a negative statement, also indicate more positive perceptions of collaboration. Construct-level scores are therefore interpreted with item directionality in mind, rather than assuming a uniform relationship between score magnitude and collaboration quality.

Table 4.1 presents the item directionality for each of the twelve constructs. Constructs composed entirely or predominantly of negatively worded items, specifically Personality Style and Professional Power, require particular attention in interpretation, as their means reflect disagreement with negative statements rather than agreement with positive ones.

Table 4.1 Item Directionality by PINCOM-Q Construct

Construct	Survey Items	Item Directionality
Motivation	1-4	All positive
Role Expectancy	5-8	Mixed (1 of 4 negative)
Personality Style	9-12	Mostly negative (3 of 4 negative)
Professional Power	13-16	All negative
Group Leadership	17-20	Mixed (1 of 4 negative)
Coping	21-24	Mixed (1 of 4 negative)
Communication	25-28	All positive
Social Support	29-32	All positive
Organizational Culture	33-36	All positive
Organizational Goals	37-40	All positive
Organizational Domain	41-44	All positive
Organizational Environment	45-48	Mixed (1 of 4 negative)

Participant Characteristics

A total of 63 faculty members completed the survey examining perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. The demographic characteristics of the participants provide important context for interpreting the quantitative findings because they reflect the range of faculty roles, institutional environments, and professional experiences represented in the sample.

With respect to faculty status, the largest proportion of respondents identified as full-time, non-tenured faculty, accounting for 44.4% of the sample ($n = 28$). Adjunct or part-time faculty accounted for 28.6% of respondents ($n = 18$), while tenure or tenure-track faculty represented 20.6% of the sample ($n = 13$). The remaining 6.3% of respondents ($n = 4$) selected the “other” category. This distribution suggests that many participants held teaching-focused positions, and it is possible that faculty in these roles may have relied more directly on instructional design support while developing and revising online courses.

Participants represented several institutional types. Public four-year universities accounted for 47.6% of respondents ($n = 30$), while private four-year universities represented 33.3% of the sample ($n = 21$). Faculty from for-profit institutions accounted for 11.1% of respondents ($n = 7$), and community colleges represented 7.9% of the sample ($n = 5$). The predominance of respondents from four-year institutions reflects the expanding role of instructional design support in universities that have invested heavily in online learning initiatives and standardized course development processes.

Participants also reported substantial experience teaching in higher education. More than half of respondents, 54.0% ($n = 34$), reported sixteen or more years of teaching experience. Another 27.0% ($n = 17$) reported between eleven and fifteen years of experience, 12.7% ($n = 8$)

reported between six and ten years of experience, and 6.3% (n = 4) reported between zero and five years of experience. This pattern indicates that the sample was composed largely of experienced faculty members who had likely participated in multiple cycles of course development over their careers.

The participants also reported extensive online teaching experience. A large majority, 81.0% (n = 51), reported eight or more years of online teaching experience. Another 14.3% (n = 9) reported between four and seven years of experience teaching online courses. Only 3.2% (n = 2) reported one to three years of online teaching experience, and one participant (1.6%) reported no prior online teaching experience. These findings suggest that most respondents were highly familiar with online teaching and likely had prior exposure to online course development processes.

When asked about the timing of their most recent collaboration with an instructional designer, 57.1% of respondents (n = 36) reported collaborating within the last year. Another 25.4% (n = 16) reported collaborating one to two years ago, while 17.5% (n = 11) reported that their most recent collaboration occurred three or more years ago. The recency of collaboration among most respondents strengthens the relevance of the survey data, as the reported perceptions were generally based on recent professional experiences.

The nature of collaboration also varied across respondents. Approximately 42.9% of participants (n = 27) reported collaborations that were both assigned and voluntary. Another 31.7% (n = 20) reported collaborations that were assigned or required by administration, while 25.4% (n = 16) reported voluntarily seeking out instructional design support. This pattern suggests that collaboration between faculty and instructional designers occurs in multiple ways,

including through institutional mandates, personal initiative, and hybrid processes in which formal structures and faculty agency intersect.

Participants represented several academic disciplines. Education was the most frequently represented discipline, accounting for 33.3% of respondents ($n = 21$). Business and information technology represented 27.0% of respondents ($n = 17$), while health professions and social sciences/humanities each represented 17.5% of respondents ($n = 11$). STEM disciplines represented 4.8% of the sample ($n = 3$). The disciplinary breadth of the sample suggests that the findings are not limited to a single academic field and instead reflect a range of faculty experiences across different disciplinary contexts. Table 4.2 summarizes participant demographic characteristics across all categories.

Table 4.2 Survey Participant Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	n	%
Faculty Status		
Full-time non-tenured	28	44.4
Adjunct or part-time	18	28.6
Tenure or tenure-track	13	20.6
Other	4	6.3
Institutional Type		
Public four-year university	30	47.6
Private four-year university	21	33.3
For-profit institution	7	11.1
Community college	5	7.9
Years of Teaching Experience		
0–5 years	4	6.3

6–10 years	8	12.7
11–15 years	17	27.0
16 or more years	34	54.0
Years of Online Teaching Experience		
No prior online teaching experience	1	1.6
1–3 years	2	3.2
4–7 years	9	14.3
8 or more years	51	81.0
Recency of Most Recent Collaboration		
Within the last year	36	57.1
1–2 years ago	16	25.4
3 or more years ago	11	17.5
Nature of Collaboration		
Assigned or required by administration	20	31.7
Voluntary	16	25.4
Both assigned and voluntary	27	42.9
Academic Discipline		
Education	21	33.3
Business and information technology	17	27.0
Health professions	11	17.5
Social sciences/humanities	11	17.5
STEM	3	4.8

Descriptive Statistics for PINCOM-Q Constructs

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the twelve constructs measured by the PINCOM-Q instrument. Table 4.2 presents the means and standard deviations for each construct, organized by domain and listed in descending order of mean score. These statistics provide a descriptive overview of faculty response patterns across the collaboration dimensions measured in the survey. Among the twelve constructs, motivation received the highest mean score ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 0.83$). This finding indicates that faculty generally perceived collaboration with instructional designers as valuable and worthwhile. The high score for motivation suggests that faculty participants tended to approach collaborative course development with a generally favorable orientation and a recognition of the potential benefits of working with instructional designers.

Social support also received a relatively high score ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.16$), suggesting that faculty generally perceived instructional designers as supportive collaborators who provided assistance, encouragement, and guidance during the course development process. Group leadership received a mean score of 5.48 ($SD = 0.70$), indicating that collaborative teams were generally perceived as organized and effectively coordinated. Communication received a mean score of 5.24 ($SD = 1.34$), suggesting generally positive perceptions of information exchange and interaction between faculty and instructional designers.

Coping ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 0.75$) and role expectancy ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.95$) also reflected generally positive response patterns. These results suggest that collaborative teams were generally perceived as able to manage challenges and that role expectations, while not uniformly clear, were perceived somewhat positively overall.

Several constructs received comparatively lower scores. Organizational environment received a mean score of 5.11 (SD = 0.83), and organizational domain received a mean score of 5.32 (SD = 1.08), indicating moderately positive perceptions of the larger institutional context. However, organizational culture received a lower mean score (M = 4.38, SD = 1.08), suggesting more mixed perceptions regarding institutional attitudes and norms surrounding collaboration.

The lowest scoring constructs were personality style (M = 3.44, SD = 1.13), organizational goals (M = 3.53, SD = 1.17), and professional power (M = 3.94, SD = 1.59). Because personality style and professional power are composed primarily or entirely of negatively worded items, these lower scores reflect faculty disagreement with negative characterizations of instructional designer behavior rather than negative perceptions of collaboration. Organizational goals, by contrast, is composed of positively worded items, and its lower score does indicate a less positive perception, specifically that institutional direction for collaborative work was not always clearly experienced by faculty.

Construct-by-Construct Interpretation

In addition to the descriptive statistics, each construct was interpreted individually to provide a more thorough understanding of the quantitative results regarding faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers. The following subsections describe each construct in greater depth.

Motivation

Motivation refers to a faculty member's personal drive and engagement in the collaborative process (Ødegård, 2006). With the highest mean score in the dataset (M = 6.29, SD = 0.83), motivation emerged as a clear strength within the overall collaboration profile. This result suggests that faculty generally did not approach collaboration with instructional designers

as an unwanted obligation. Instead, the findings indicate that faculty tended to recognize the value of collaboration during online course development. In practical terms, this meant that faculty were generally receptive to collaboration and likely saw instructional designers as potentially valuable contributors to course development rather than as peripheral or unnecessary participants.

Role Expectancy

Role expectancy captures the degree to which each collaborator's responsibilities are clearly understood and consistent with what others expect (Ødegård, 2006). The mean score for this construct was 5.14 (SD = 0.95), indicating moderately positive perceptions of role clarity. This finding suggests that many participants perceived at least some degree of clarity regarding who was responsible for what during the course development process. At the same time, the score was not as high as those for motivation or social support, which indicates that role expectations may not have been uniformly clear across all collaborations. This result is especially important in light of the theoretical framework of the study, because role ambiguity is often a source of tension in interprofessional collaboration. The pattern observed here suggests that faculty often had a workable understanding of roles, but that role clarity may still be an area where inconsistency exists.

Personality Style

Personality style reflects the openness and flexibility an individual brings to working across professional boundaries (Ødegård, 2006). Personality style received a mean score of 3.44 (SD = 1.13), which was the lowest among the twelve constructs. As noted in Table 4.1, three of the four items comprising this construct are negatively worded, meaning that a lower score reflects disagreement with negative statements about instructional designer behavior. Interpreted

in light of item directionality, a mean of 3.44 suggests that faculty were leaning toward disagreeing that instructional designers acted in ways that made collaboration difficult, lacked openness, or needed greater behavioral insight. This is a moderately positive finding -- faculty did not strongly endorse negative characterizations of instructional designer interpersonal behavior. However, the score also did not approach strong disagreement, and the standard deviation of 1.13 indicates meaningful variation across participants. This suggests that while most faculty did not view instructional designer interpersonal behavior as a significant barrier, some participants did experience interpersonal challenges that influenced their collaborative experience.

Professional Power

Professional power refers to the degree of influence and autonomy a faculty member perceives themselves to have within the collaboration (Ødegård, 2006). Professional power received a mean score of 3.94 (SD = 1.59). As noted in Table 4.1, all four items comprising this construct are negatively worded, each describing scenarios in which instructional designers dominate, control, or silence faculty within the collaborative process. Interpreted in light of item directionality, a mean of 3.94 reflects faculty leaning toward disagreement with these negative characterizations, indicating that most faculty did not perceive instructional designers as dominating or inappropriately controlling the course development process. This is a positive finding that suggests faculty generally felt able to contribute their perspectives and retained meaningful influence within collaborative relationships. The comparatively large standard deviation of 1.59, however, indicates substantial variation in responses across participants, suggesting that while the overall pattern was positive, a meaningful subset of faculty did experience situations in which power dynamics felt less balanced. These cases, while not

representative of the majority, are important to acknowledge as they point to conditions under which collaboration can become strained.

Group Leadership

Group leadership captures perceptions of how effectively the collaborative team is directed and organized (Ødegård, 2006). Group leadership received a relatively high mean score ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 0.70$), indicating that the structure and coordination of collaborative work were generally viewed positively. This construct reflects perceptions of leadership, organization, and the extent to which collaborative work is guided effectively. The relatively small standard deviation suggests that these positive perceptions were fairly consistent across participants. This pattern indicates that faculty generally viewed collaborative course development as structured and coordinated rather than disorganized or unclear. In practice, this may mean that faculty experienced project management processes, timelines, or leadership roles as functional elements of the collaboration.

Coping

Coping measures the group's capacity to manage conflict, challenges, and stress that arise during the collaborative process (Ødegård, 2006). The coping construct received a mean score of 5.15 ($SD = 0.75$), suggesting generally positive perceptions of how collaborative teams managed problems and challenges. This construct reflects whether collaborators can work through difficulties and sustain progress when obstacles arise. The findings suggest that faculty generally viewed collaborative teams as capable of managing the practical and relational demands of course development. Because online course development often involves complex timelines, multiple stakeholders, and competing priorities, this result is important. It indicates that

collaboration was often experienced as resilient enough to handle challenges without being derailed.

Communication

Communication refers to the clarity and quality of information exchange among collaborators (Ødegård, 2006). Communication received a mean score of 5.24 (SD = 1.34), indicating generally positive perceptions of information exchange and interpersonal communication between faculty and instructional designers. Communication is one of the most central dimensions of effective collaboration, and the positive mean score suggests that faculty generally perceived communication processes as more effective than ineffective. At the same time, the somewhat larger standard deviation indicates that communication experiences were not entirely uniform across the sample. Some faculty likely experienced very strong communication, while others may have encountered more inconsistency. Even so, the overall pattern suggests that communication was more often a strength than a weakness within collaborative course development.

Social Support

Social support reflects the degree to which collaborators feel professionally and personally supported by their teammates (Ødegård, 2006). Social support received one of the highest mean scores in the dataset ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.16$). This construct reflects perceptions that collaborators provide help, encouragement, and responsiveness during collaborative work. The high score suggests that faculty generally experienced instructional designers as supportive collaborators rather than as distant or purely technical personnel. This is an important finding because it suggests that collaboration was often experienced as relationally supportive as well as functionally useful. When combined with the high motivation score, the strong result for social

support suggests that the collaborative relationship itself was often perceived as affirming and productive.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to the shared values, norms, and climate of the institution as they relate to supporting collaboration (Ødegård, 2006). Organizational culture received a mean score of 4.38 (SD = 1.08), indicating more mixed perceptions of the institutional attitudes, norms, and values surrounding collaboration. This score was lower than those for many of the group-level constructs, suggesting that faculty tended to perceive the immediate collaborative relationship more positively than the broader institutional culture in which that relationship occurred. In other words, faculty may have experienced collaboration with individual instructional designers as useful and supportive even when institutional culture did not fully reinforce or prioritize collaborative work. This distinction is important because it suggests that collaborative success may depend not only on the people involved but also on the environment within which collaboration is situated.

Organizational Goals

Organizational goals captures whether institutional goals are clearly defined and mutually understood (Ødegård, 2006). Organizational goals received a mean score of 3.53 (SD = 1.17), making it one of the lowest scoring constructs in the study. This construct reflects perceptions regarding the clarity and alignment of institutional goals related to collaboration. The low mean score suggests that faculty may not have consistently perceived institutional priorities, plans, or goals as well aligned with the actual realities of collaborative course development. This result suggests that collaboration may sometimes occur in the absence of strong institutional clarity regarding why collaboration is taking place or what organizational outcomes it is intended to

support. Such ambiguity may weaken the structural support available for collaboration, even when interpersonal relationships remain positive.

Organizational Domain

Organizational domain refers to the clarity of roles and boundaries between different units or services involved in course development (Ødegård, 2006). Organizational domain received a mean score of 5.32 ($SD = 1.08$), indicating moderately positive perceptions regarding the clarity of responsibilities and areas of work within the institution. This construct reflects whether the boundaries of professional work and institutional roles are reasonably understood. The result suggests that faculty generally perceived some degree of structural clarity in the institutional context of collaboration. This finding is notable because it stands in contrast to the lower score for organizational goals. Taken together, the results suggest that faculty may have perceived individual and departmental responsibilities as somewhat clearer than the broader institutional goals guiding collaborative activity.

Organizational Environment

Organizational environment reflects the external structures and resources that either facilitate or constrain collaborative work (Ødegård, 2006). Organizational environment received a mean score of 5.11 ($SD = 0.83$), indicating moderately positive perceptions of the broader institutional conditions supporting collaboration. This construct reflects the extent to which institutional conditions, policies, and contextual factors create an environment conducive to collaboration. The mean score suggests that faculty generally perceived the broader environment as more supportive than unsupportive, though not as strongly positive as the interpersonal and group-level dimensions. This result reinforces the broader pattern observed across the

organizational constructs: faculty tended to report more positive perceptions of direct collaboration than of the larger institutional context surrounding it.

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics for PINCOM-Q Constructs

Construct	Domain	M	SD
<i>Individual Domain</i>			
Motivation	Individual	6.29	0.83
Role Expectancy	Individual	5.14	0.95
Professional Power	Individual	3.94	1.59
Personality Style	Individual	3.44	1.13
<i>Group Domain</i>			
Social Support	Group	5.83	1.16
Group Leadership	Group	5.48	0.70
Communication	Group	5.24	1.34
Coping	Group	5.15	0.75
<i>Organizational Domain</i>			
Organizational Domain	Organizational	5.32	1.08
Organizational Environment	Organizational	5.11	0.83
Organizational Culture	Organizational	4.38	1.08
Organizational Goals	Organizational	3.53	1.17

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the PINCOM-Q instrument. Reliability coefficients were interpreted using the benchmarks established by George and Mallery (2003), wherein alpha values of .90 or above

indicate excellent reliability, values between .80 and .89 indicate good reliability, values between .70 and .79 indicate acceptable reliability, values between .60 and .69 indicate questionable reliability, and values below .60 indicate poor reliability. The overall instrument demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .94$), indicating that the set of items functioned as a strong, cohesive measure of perceptions of collaboration. Table 4.4 presents reliability coefficients for the overall instrument, the three domains, and the twelve constructs.

At the domain level, the group domain demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .91$), and the individual domain demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .88$). The organizational domain also demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .83$). These values indicate that the domain-level scales showed strong internal consistency and can be interpreted with confidence.

Construct-level reliability values varied more substantially. Professional power ($\alpha = .92$), social support ($\alpha = .92$), and communication ($\alpha = .90$) demonstrated excellent reliability. Personality style ($\alpha = .83$) demonstrated good reliability. Motivation ($\alpha = .79$), coping ($\alpha = .74$), and the organizational domain construct ($\alpha = .74$) demonstrated acceptable reliability.

Lower reliability values were observed for organizational culture ($\alpha = .63$), which demonstrated questionable reliability. Role expectancy ($\alpha = .59$), organizational environment ($\alpha = .58$), group leadership ($\alpha = .20$), and organizational goals ($\alpha = .12$) all demonstrated poor reliability. These low values are important to acknowledge because they suggest that those particular construct groupings may not have functioned as consistently in this sample as they did in the broader instrument. Consequently, those constructs should be interpreted with greater caution than constructs demonstrating stronger internal consistency.

Even with this variation at the construct level, the overall instrument and the three broader domains demonstrated good to excellent reliability, supporting the use of the survey to identify general collaboration patterns in this study.

Table 4.4 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for the PINCOM-Q Instrument, Domains, and Constructs

Level / Construct	α	Interpretation
Overall Instrument	.94	Excellent
<i>Individual Domain</i>		
Individual Domain (overall)	.88	Good
Professional Power	.92	Excellent
Personality Style	.83	Good
Motivation	.79	Acceptable
Role Expectancy	.59	Poor
<i>Group Domain</i>		
Group Domain (overall)	.91	Excellent
Social Support	.92	Excellent
Communication	.90	Excellent
Coping	.74	Acceptable
Group Leadership	.20	Poor
<i>Organizational Domain</i>		
Organizational Domain (overall)	.83	Good
Organizational Domain (construct)	.74	Acceptable
Organizational Culture	.63	Questionable
Organizational Environment	.58	Poor
Organizational Goals	.12	Poor

Domain-Level Findings

The twelve constructs were also aggregated into three collaboration domains representing the individual, group, and organizational dimensions of collaboration. Table 4.5 presents the mean and standard deviation for each domain.

The group domain received the highest overall mean score ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 0.90$), indicating generally positive perceptions of teamwork, communication, leadership, and support within collaborative course development teams. This finding suggests that faculty tended to view the immediate collaborative experience more positively than other aspects of collaboration. The relatively strong group-domain score reinforces the pattern already observed in the construct-level results, particularly the strong scores for social support, communication, and group leadership.

The individual domain received a mean score of 4.70 ($SD = 0.67$), indicating moderately positive perceptions of personal attitudes, role clarity, and professional interaction. This score is lower than that of the group domain, which suggests that faculty may have felt more positive about the group process itself than about individual-level dimensions such as interpersonal style or professional power, though it is important to note that the lower individual domain score is partly driven by personality style and professional power constructs composed of negatively worded items, which complicates direct comparison with the group domain.

The organizational domain received the lowest overall mean score ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.60$). Although this score still suggests more positive than negative overall perceptions, it was clearly lower than the group-domain score. This pattern suggests that faculty tended to experience collaboration with instructional designers more positively at the interpersonal and

team level than at the institutional level. In other words, faculty may have viewed the collaborative relationship itself as workable even when institutional structures and priorities were perceived less positively.

Table 4.5 Domain-Level Means and Standard Deviations for PINCOM-Q Domains

Domain	M	SD
Group	5.43	0.90
Individual	4.70	0.67
Organizational	4.58	0.60

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine relationships among the three collaboration domains. A strong positive relationship was observed between the individual and group domains ($r = .79$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that faculty who reported more positive individual attitudes toward collaboration also tended to report more positive experiences within collaborative teams. This is an important result because it suggests that personal and interpersonal dynamics are closely connected. Faculty who felt clearer about roles, more motivated, or less constrained by power dynamics also tended to experience stronger communication, support, and team functioning.

Moderate positive correlations were observed between the individual and organizational domains ($r = .42$, $p = .001$) and between the group and organizational domains ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that organizational structures and conditions are related to collaboration, but not as strongly as the direct interpersonal and team-based aspects of the collaborative experience. Taken together, the correlation results indicate that all three domains

are meaningfully connected, but that the strongest relationship in the quantitative findings occurred between individual and group factors.

Associations Between Collaboration Perceptions and Contextual Variables

To further address Research Question 3, a series of one-way ANOVAs and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether faculty perceptions of collaboration differed by teaching load, research expectations, and collaboration type. PINCOM-Q domain scores -- Individual, Group, and Organizational -- served as the dependent variables. Teaching load and collaboration type were examined using one-way ANOVAs, and research expectations were examined using independent-samples t-tests. No group cells contained fewer than five participants.

Descriptive statistics are presented alongside inferential test results to provide context for the magnitude of group differences. While the means and standard deviations illustrate how domain scores varied across groups, the ANOVA and t-test results indicate whether those differences were large enough to be considered statistically meaningful rather than attributable to chance variation in the sample.

Table 4.6 PINCOM-Q Domain Score Descriptive Statistics by Contextual Variable

Contextual Variable	n	Individual M (SD)	Group M (SD)	Organizational M (SD)
Teaching Load				
Fewer than 20	17	4.95 (0.93)	5.52 (0.74)	4.72 (0.70)
21-40	15	4.40 (0.91)	5.32 (0.99)	4.55 (0.75)
41-60	10	4.51 (0.93)	5.37 (0.83)	4.42 (0.95)
More than 60	21	4.79 (0.81)	5.48 (0.97)	4.57 (0.85)

Research Required				
No	43	4.67 (0.89)	5.41 (0.87)	4.55 (0.74)
Yes	20	4.78 (0.93)	5.50 (0.99)	4.65 (0.92)
Collaboration Type				
Voluntary	16	4.82 (1.06)	5.29 (0.98)	4.43 (1.01)
Assigned	20	4.67 (0.77)	5.49 (0.70)	4.63 (0.54)
Combination	27	4.66 (0.91)	5.48 (1.01)	4.63 (0.83)

Results indicated no statistically significant differences in Individual, Group, or Organizational domain scores by teaching load, $F(3, 59) = 1.17, p = .327, \eta^2 = .056$; $F(3, 59) = 0.21, p = .887, \eta^2 = .011$; and $F(3, 59) = 0.31, p = .821, \eta^2 = .015$, respectively. Likewise, no significant differences were found between faculty with and without required research on the Individual, Group, or Organizational domains, $t(61) = 0.48, p = .630, d = 0.13$; $t(61) = 0.35, p = .730, d = 0.09$; and $t(61) = -0.48, p = .634, d = -0.13$, respectively. Finally, collaboration type was not significantly associated with Individual, Group, or Organizational domain scores, $F(2, 60) = 0.18, p = .836, \eta^2 = .006$; $F(2, 60) = 0.83, p = .440, \eta^2 = .027$; and $F(2, 60) = 0.35, p = .705, \eta^2 = .012$, respectively. All effect sizes were small to trivial, and no post hoc Tukey tests were warranted because no omnibus ANOVA reached statistical significance.

These findings indicate that faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers were not significantly associated with teaching load, research expectations, or the nature of collaboration initiation. Across all three contextual variables, domain-level perceptions of collaboration remained relatively consistent, suggesting that the contextual factors examined

in this study did not systematically differentiate faculty experiences of collaboration with instructional designers.

Quantitative Findings Synthesis

Taken together, the quantitative findings indicate that faculty generally reported positive perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. The strongest patterns in the data were observed in the areas of motivation, social support, communication, and group leadership. These findings suggest that faculty often viewed collaboration as worthwhile and generally experienced collaborative work with instructional designers as supportive, organized, and productive.

At the same time, the findings also identify important areas of complexity. Lower scores for organizational culture and organizational goals, both composed of positively worded items, indicate that institutional norms and priorities surrounding collaboration were not always clearly or positively experienced by faculty. The lower scores for personality style and professional power require a different interpretation: because these constructs are composed primarily or entirely of negatively worded items, their lower means reflect faculty disagreement with negative characterizations of instructional designer behavior, which is a broadly positive pattern. The substantial variation in professional power scores ($SD = 1.59$), however, suggests that a meaningful subset of faculty did experience authority dynamics that felt less balanced. These lower-scoring areas are important because they point to structural and relational challenges that may exist even when faculty generally value collaboration.

A particularly meaningful pattern in the results is the contrast between the relatively strong group-domain score and the comparatively weaker organizational-domain score. This pattern suggests that faculty tended to experience the immediate collaborative relationship with

instructional designers more positively than the larger institutional context in which that collaboration occurred. In practical terms, faculty may perceive instructional designers themselves as helpful, supportive, and communicative even when institutional systems, priorities, or structures feel less coherent.

The correlation results reinforce this interpretation. The strongest association was between the individual and group domains, suggesting that faculty perceptions of collaboration are most strongly shaped by direct interactions between collaborators. Organizational conditions also matter, but the quantitative findings suggest that those conditions influence collaboration somewhat less directly than interpersonal and group-based factors.

Overall, the quantitative findings paint a picture of collaboration that is generally positive but not without tension. Faculty appeared to value collaboration with instructional designers and often experienced meaningful support during course development. However, the data also suggest that issues related to role clarity, professional influence, interpersonal dynamics, and institutional alignment remain important considerations. These quantitative patterns establish a strong foundation for the qualitative findings that follow, which provide deeper insight into how faculty interpret and make meaning of these collaborative experiences.

The quantitative results provide a broad overview of how faculty perceive collaboration with instructional designers across multiple dimensions of collaborative interaction. However, survey data alone cannot fully explain how faculty interpret these experiences or why certain aspects of collaboration are perceived more positively than others. The following section presents the qualitative findings derived from faculty interviews. These findings offer deeper insight into how faculty experienced collaboration during online course development and help explain the patterns observed in the quantitative data.

Qualitative Findings

This section presents the qualitative findings derived from ten 45-60 minute interviews with faculty members who had experience collaborating with instructional designers during online course development. Ten faculty participants were interviewed for the qualitative portion of the study. To protect confidentiality, participants are identified using pseudonyms. The qualitative strand was intended to deepen and contextualize the quantitative findings by examining how faculty described collaboration, how they understood their own roles and those of instructional designers, and how organizational structures shaped their collaborative experiences. Table 4.7 presents the demographic characteristics of the ten interview participants, including faculty status, institutional type, academic discipline, years of teaching experience in higher education, and years of online teaching experience. Participants represented a range of faculty statuses and disciplines across public four-year, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions. All ten participants reported eight or more years of online teaching experience, reflecting a sample with substantial familiarity with online course development.

Table 4.7 Demographic Characteristics of Qualitative Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Faculty Status	Institutional Type	Discipline	Years Teaching (HE)	Years Teaching Online
Adam	Full-time, non-tenured	Public four-year	Education	11-15 years	8+ years
Dale	Full-time tenure/tenure track	Public four-year	Education	16+ years	8+ years
Diane	Adjunct/part-time	Non-profit	Education	16+ years	8+ years

Fletcher	Full-time, non-tenured	Private, for-profit	Healthcare	16+ years	8+ years
Joel	Full-time, non-tenured	Public four-year	Healthcare	16+ years	8+ years
Lisa	Adjunct/part-time	Private, for-profit	Education	16+ years	8+ years
Marcus	Full-time, non-tenured	Public four-year	Education	16+ years	8+ years
Renata	Full-time, non-tenured	Private, for-profit	Business	16+ years	8+ years
Sarah	Full-time, non-tenured	Non-profit	Education	11-15 years	8+ years
Simone	Adjunct/part-time	Non-profit	Business	16+ years	8+ years

The qualitative section is organized in two parts. First, the thematic findings are presented through detailed narrative and illustrative quotations. Second, the section concludes with a synthesis showing how the qualitative findings help explain the patterns identified in the quantitative data. The qualitative findings presented here are based on interview transcripts and analytic memos. Analysis was informed by Role Theory, with particular attention to the constructs of role clarity, role ambiguity, role conflict, role strain, and role fit. Across the interviews, faculty generally described collaboration with instructional designers as potentially valuable and often highly beneficial to course quality. At the same time, they emphasized that positive collaboration did not happen automatically. Instead, the quality of collaboration depended on a set of interpersonal and organizational conditions, including clear role definitions,

mutual respect, strong communication, flexible process structures, adequate support, and alignment between instructional design practices and institutional realities.

Overview of Qualitative Findings

Across the interviews, faculty did not describe collaboration with instructional designers as uniformly positive or uniformly negative. Instead, they described it as a negotiated process shaped by both relational and structural conditions. Most participants believed that instructional designers improved the quality of online courses when collaboration worked well. They also described the relationship as one that could quickly become strained when roles were unclear, institutional constraints were rigid, or workload demands overwhelmed the process.

Seven distinct themes emerged from the interviews. Together, these themes show that the faculty–instructional designer relationship is most effective when roles are clearly negotiated, communication is strong, authority is managed collaboratively, and institutions provide structures that support rather than constrain the work. The themes are presented below with detailed interpretation and illustrative quotations. Table 4.8 provides an overview of the seven themes identified through thematic analysis, including a brief description of each theme, exemplar quotes, and the frequency with which it appeared across the ten participant interviews.

Table 4.8 Summary of Qualitative Themes and Frequency Across Participant Interviews

Theme	Description	Exemplar Quotes	Frequency
Theme 1: Clear Roles Support Successful Collaboration	Faculty described successful collaboration as dependent on a shared understanding of each party's responsibilities, with faculty as content experts and instructional designers as pedagogy and design specialists.	“Faculty are content experts. Instructional designers make that content engaging and accessible.” (Diane)	80%
		“Knowing each other’s role in the designing of the course. If you define that up front, it makes all the difference.” (Sarah)	
		“When you haven’t clearly established who’s leading in that	

		particular context, that can become challenging.” (Renata)	
Theme 2: Trust, Communication, and Mutual Respect Shape Collaboration Quality	Effective collaboration was characterized by open dialogue, active listening, and mutual respect. Faculty valued instructional designers who engaged enthusiastically and treated collaboration as a genuine joint effort.	“Listening. Lots of communication... sometimes it’s even hard for me to describe what I want them to do.” (Dale) “Open communication and mutual respect... with those two, and a good process, you can overcome 95% of challenges.” (Diane) “Getting to know how each other communicates and building trust early in the process really matters.” (Adam) “When instructional designers approach it as a partnership and respect the faculty member’s experience, the collaboration works much better.” (Adam)	80%
Theme 3: Authority and Decision-Making Boundaries Remain Sites of Tension	Collaboration became strained when boundaries between disciplinary authority and design expertise were unclear, leading to uncertainty about who held final decision-making responsibility.	“I felt like the instructional designers had total control, and that was very frustrating.” (Dale) “The biggest conflict was when the instructional designer felt like they were also the SME.” (Lisa)	70%
Theme 4: Structured Process and Project Management Reduce Uncertainty	Faculty valued instructional designers who organized the work through clear timelines, kickoff conversations, and project management practices that reduced uncertainty during course development.	“The work you do before you do the work is so essential and cannot be glossed over.” (Marcus) “The instructional designer is the person who keeps it on the rails.” (Renata) “When an instructional designer comes in with a clear plan and timeline, that’s reassuring.” (Joel)	70%
Theme 5: Institutional Structures Strongly Influence Collaboration	Collaboration quality was shaped not only by individual relationships but also by staffing models, vendor arrangements, leadership involvement, and	“Language barriers, vendor limitations, timeline pressures; all of those create tension.” (Adam) “Program leadership should be involved in kickoff meetings to	80%

	institutional policies that either supported or constrained the work.	clarify expectations and the vision.” (Diane)	
Theme 6: Workload, Pacing, and Time Pressure Affect Collaboration Quality	Competing professional responsibilities, mismatched pacing, and compressed timelines limited the depth and quality of collaborative engagement available to both faculty and instructional designers.	“My best courses required marination time. Space to step away and return with fresh ideas.” (Simone) “Faculty and instructional designers are both balancing a lot.” (Sarah)	80%
Theme 7: The Strongest Collaborations Are Experienced as Creative Partnerships	The most meaningful collaborations were described as energizing, idea-rich partnerships in which faculty and instructional designers contributed complementary expertise toward shared goals of improving course quality.	“Instructional designers are usually more creative and come up with things I hadn’t even thought of.” (Dale) “This is my idea. I don’t know how to make it come to life.” (Marcus)	70%

Theme 1: Clear Roles Support Successful Collaboration

The most consistent theme across interviews was the importance of role clarity. Faculty repeatedly described successful collaboration as dependent on a shared understanding of what faculty were responsible for and what instructional designers were responsible for. In nearly every interview, participants defined faculty as the content experts responsible for disciplinary knowledge, program alignment, course outcomes, and what students should learn. Instructional designers, in contrast, were described as experts in pedagogy, organization, learning experience design, accessibility, and technology integration.

Participants emphasized that when these boundaries were clear, collaboration felt complementary rather than competitive. Marcus explained that effective collaboration depended on mutual recognition of expertise, noting that “it allows each of us to be an expert in our own expertise,” allowing the faculty member to focus on content while the instructional designer translated ideas into engaging course experiences. Sarah likewise stressed that defining

responsibilities at the beginning of the project prevented confusion later, stating that “knowing each other's role in the designing of the course. If you define that up front, it makes all the difference”. Several other participants made similar points, describing clarity as the single best way to reduce frustration and prevent misunderstandings. As Diane put it, the division was straightforward in principle: “Faculty are content experts. Instructional designers make that content engaging and accessible”.

At the same time, participants made clear that role clarity could not be assumed. Several faculty members noted that early collaborations were awkward precisely because they had not previously worked with instructional designers and therefore did not fully understand the role. Simone described not knowing what an instructional designer was or who was leading early meetings, which made the process feel uncertain and awkward at first. Lisa similarly reflected that the instructional designer role had changed over time and that the lack of explicit discussion about responsibilities often created tension. These accounts suggest that collaboration can be improved when institutions treat role clarification as an intentional part of the process rather than as something collaborators are expected to infer on their own.

From a Role Theory perspective, this theme reflects the importance of role clarity and role fit. Faculty generally embraced collaboration when roles felt complementary and coherent. When those expectations were unclear, the risk of ambiguity and conflict increased.

Theme 2: Trust, Communication, and Mutual Respect Shape Collaboration Quality

A second major theme involved the relational conditions that made collaboration successful. Across interviews, faculty repeatedly described trust, communication, and mutual respect as the foundation of effective collaboration. Participants did not frame collaboration as merely a sequence of tasks. Instead, they described it as a relationship requiring openness,

listening, responsiveness, and a shared sense that both parties were genuinely working toward the same goal.

Marcus described successful collaboration as built on trust, open communication, and a sense of the work, reflecting that “It all comes down to relationships... trust... open communication... what’s my role, what’s your role?”. Dale similarly emphasized listening and back-and-forth exchange, noting that communication mattered because faculty often did not begin with a perfectly formed vision, acknowledging that “sometimes it’s even hard for me to describe what I want them to do”. In those moments, instructional designers who listened carefully and translated broad ideas into workable options were especially valued. Diane reinforced this pattern by arguing that “open communication and mutual respect... with those two, and a good process, you can overcome 95% of challenges.” This suggests that strong communication and mutual respect could overcome the vast majority of collaboration challenges.

Several participants also described emotional energy and enthusiasm as part of what made collaboration feel strong. Marcus explained that the best instructional designers matched faculty excitement and built on it. They captured this feeling as “There’s nothing like being super excited about something... and then them jumping in with, ‘I have a great idea.’”. Adam described the most effective instructional designers as those who framed recommendations as invitations rather than directives, appreciating when they would say “have you thought about...?”, which felt collaborative rather than prescriptive. Simone went even further, describing the ideal collaboration not merely as a professional working relationship but as something closer to a creative partnership, reflecting that “what worked best was when I had a true partner in my instructional designer... a creative partner”, marked by brainstorming, iteration, and shared excitement about the course.

These relational findings help explain why the quantitative results were strongest for constructs such as communication and social support. Faculty were not simply reporting that collaboration was functional. They were describing experiences of being heard, respected, and supported. This theme, therefore, reflects not only interpersonal quality but also role fit: collaboration worked best when the relationship reinforced, rather than threatened, each person's expertise and identity.

Theme 3: Authority and Decision-Making Boundaries Remain Sites of Tension

Although faculty often described collaboration positively, many also identified tension around authority and decision-making. This theme emerged most clearly when faculty felt that instructional designers exceeded their role, asserted control over course decisions, or blurred the line between supporting design and directing curriculum. In these accounts, the collaboration became strained not because faculty rejected design expertise, but because they experienced uncertainty or disagreement about who had final authority.

Dale described working in an environment where “faculty felt like the instructional designers had total control, and that was very frustrating,” particularly when design changes did not align with faculty vision for the course. Lisa similarly emphasized that conflict was most acute “when the ID felt like they were also the SME (subject matter expert),” noting that tension was especially pronounced in fields where instructional designers and faculty shared disciplinary backgrounds, making the boundaries between content and design authority harder to maintain. Joel pointed to a related dynamic, describing how inexperienced instructional designers sometimes defaulted to rigid proceduralism and noting that “inexperienced IDs cling to process because it's all they know”, which positioned accessibility or quality concerns as adversarial rather than collaborative suggestions.

Other participants described more subtle forms of authority tension. Renata explained that ambiguity about leadership in a given context could create anxiety, noting that “when you haven't clearly established who's leading in that particular context, that can become challenging,” particularly when disagreements arose over learning outcomes or course direction. Adam noted that role boundaries became especially fragile in third-party or offshore vendor situations, where decision-making could feel more imposed and less collaborative, suggesting that “if roles sometimes flip... those relationships need flexibility” to absorb the resulting uncertainty. These examples illustrate that authority tensions were not isolated incidents, but recurring possibilities whenever professional influence and final say had not been negotiated clearly.

From a Role Theory perspective, this theme reflects both role conflict and role ambiguity. Faculty generally expected instructional designers to contribute expertise in design and delivery, but not to override faculty authority over content and vision. When that boundary became unclear, collaboration became vulnerable to power struggles and conflict.

Theme 4: Structured Process and Project Management Reduce Uncertainty

A fourth theme was the importance of process structure. Many participants described strong collaboration as dependent on good project management, clear timelines, and kickoff conversations that established expectations early. In these accounts, collaboration improved when the process itself reduced uncertainty. Faculty valued instructional designers who could organize the work, anticipate logistical needs, and keep development moving without making the process feel bureaucratic.

Marcus emphasized that the work done before the actual development work—clarifying expectations, timelines, and workflow—was “so essential and cannot be glossed over.” Diane similarly described thriving in structured timelines, noting that collaboration worked best when

development began with a comprehensive design document and clear administrative involvement, explaining that “we start with a course design document” as the anchor for everything that followed. Joel described the reassurance that came when instructional designers entered the process already prepared, noting that “when an ID comes in with a clear plan, that's reassuring,” because that clarity reduced faculty anxiety about deadlines and expectations before development had even begun.

Participants also linked process structure to their evaluation of the instructional designer role itself. Several described instructional designers as project managers whose primary function was to keep the course on track, with Renata capturing this directly by describing the instructional designer as “the person who keeps it on the rails.” Renata repeatedly used process language to explain the instructional designer's role, emphasizing that clarity before work began prevented later frustration. Fletcher similarly valued instructional designers who could help faculty understand what was pedagogically and technically possible while keeping the project within a workable structure, describing “clear structure and role definition” as central to successful collaboration. This theme helps explain why group leadership was one of the stronger constructs in the quantitative data. Faculty valued instructional designers not only for their creativity or technical knowledge, but also for reducing uncertainty and coordinating the process in ways that made course development more manageable.

Theme 5: Institutional Structures Strongly Influence Collaboration

A fifth theme concerned the broader institutional context surrounding collaboration. Participants repeatedly noted that the quality of collaboration was not determined solely by the faculty member and the instructional designer. Instead, institutional structures such as staffing

models, leadership expectations, budget constraints, vendor arrangements, and policy limitations strongly influenced whether collaboration felt flexible, productive, and creative.

Several participants contrasted in-house instructional designers with vendor-based or offshore models. Simone described in-house collaboration as more organic and more invested in long-term organizational goals, observing that “in-house felt more organic... when paying an outside firm, timelines and deliverables become the focus,” which shifts the work away from genuine partnership and toward task completion. Fletcher similarly explained that in-house instructional designers were more flexible and responsive, drawing a direct contrast by noting that while embedded designers engaged meaningfully with faculty, “external vendors mostly checked boxes.” Adam reinforced this pattern, describing how structural constraints compounded one another in vendor arrangements, noting that “language barriers, vendor limitations, timeline pressures — all of those create tension,” particularly when scope limitations or communication barriers reduced the flexibility needed for iterative course design.

Institutional support was also discussed in terms of leadership and workload structures. Diane argued that leadership involvement at the outset was essential, stating that “program leadership should be involved in kickoff meetings to clarify expectations” and reduce ambiguity before development work began. Marcus emphasized the difficulty of planning under institutional conditions that offered little predictability, noting that “everyone's busy... if you didn't know when something was going to be dropped back on you, it's hard to plan around,” a dynamic that created role strain even when collaborative relationships were otherwise strong. Sarah added another layer to this institutional tension, describing situations in which faculty arrived with strong creative vision only to find that “the faculty may have a great idea, but it doesn't fit into the institution's parameters or scope,” suggesting that institutional boundaries

could constrain collaboration regardless of the quality of the interpersonal relationship. These accounts suggest that institutions can either support role clarity and collaboration or exacerbate role strain and ambiguity through their structures.

This theme aligns closely with the weaker organizational scores in the quantitative findings. Faculty often viewed the interpersonal collaboration itself positively, but their experiences were constrained or shaped by institutional priorities, employment models, and organizational rules that made collaboration easier or harder to sustain.

Theme 6: Workload, Pacing, and Time Pressure Affect Collaboration Quality

A sixth theme centered on workload, pacing, and time pressure. Faculty repeatedly described collaboration as shaped by the practical realities of competing responsibilities. Even participants who valued collaboration and respected instructional designers noted that course development could become rushed, fragmented, or exhausting when faculty workload, instructional designer backlog, or a mismatch in pacing entered the process.

Simone described the joy being “sucked” out of course development when weekly deliverables left no room for creativity or reflection, arguing that “my best courses required marination time — space to step away and return with fresh ideas,” a condition that compressed timelines and rigid deliverable structures made nearly impossible. Diane argued that course development required dedicated space away from normal teaching obligations if faculty were going to do high-quality, innovative design work, noting the practical consequence when that space was absent — that “when SMEs don't respond, everything stalls” — suggesting that workload pressure affected not only individual faculty but the entire collaborative timeline. Sarah likewise explained that competing demands were a shared reality on both sides of the collaboration, observing that “that happens all the time... faculty and IDs are both balancing a

lot,” which affected the extent to which collaboration could be synchronous, flexible, and genuinely iterative.

Pacing mismatch was another important issue. Renata described herself as a rapid content developer, noting that “I’m one who moves very quickly... pacing matters,” and explaining that collaboration worked best when instructional designers were flexible enough to match her speed rather than adding unnecessary procedural delays. Lisa preferred flexibility in timelines but viewed structure and accountability as equally essential, arguing that “there has to be commitment to a timeline, meeting cadence, and follow-through” to keep collaborative work moving productively. Joel captured the anxiety that timeline uncertainty created from the faculty perspective, admitting that “as the SME, I’m nervous about time,” and emphasizing that instructional designers who provided clear structure helped reduce that anxiety rather than compound it.

These accounts reflect role strain in a very direct way. Faculty and instructional designers were often expected to collaborate while also fulfilling multiple competing obligations, which shaped their relationship in restrictive ways. Under those conditions, the quality of collaboration depended not only on goodwill and expertise but also on whether time and pacing allowed each person to fully inhabit the role expected of them.

Theme 7: The Strongest Collaborations Are Experienced as Creative Partnerships

The final theme captures the most positive form of collaboration described in the interviews: collaboration as creative partnership. Many participants described the best instructional designer relationships not simply as supportive or organized, but as energizing, idea-rich, and genuinely collaborative in a way that improved course quality beyond what either person might have created alone.

Marcus described loving the moment when an instructional designer could take a broad idea and help make it real, capturing the faculty experience of arriving at collaboration with vision but not always execution — “this is my idea — I don’t know how to make it come to life” — and finding in the instructional designer a creative partner who could bridge that gap. Simone described her best collaborative experience as a true partnership in the fullest sense, reflecting that “I had a true partner in my instructional designer... we brainstormed back and forth,” an iterative and generative process that felt fundamentally different from the transactional exchanges other participants had described. Dale similarly emphasized that the strongest instructional designers expanded what was possible, noting that “instructional designers are usually more creative and come up with things I hadn’t even thought of,” suggesting that the most valued collaborations were those in which the instructional designer contributed not just technical execution but genuine creative insight.

This creative partnership theme also appeared when participants discussed concrete improvements to course quality. Diane described course development with instructional designer support as transformative, arguing that “courses developed with ID support are more engaging, better scaffolded, and better aligned to outcomes,” particularly in areas such as assessment design and alignment, where instructional design expertise added the most value. Lisa recounted a capstone course collaboration in which the instructional designer mastered a complex tool and turned it into a usable experience for students, reflecting simply that “that was incredibly helpful” — an understated response that nonetheless captured the significance of having a partner who could take on technical challenges that would otherwise have fallen to the faculty member alone. These comments suggest that the strongest collaborations did not merely make course development easier. They made courses better.

This theme helps explain why motivation was the strongest construct in the quantitative data. Faculty were not simply tolerating collaboration. Many of them were describing it as one of the most intellectually and professionally rewarding parts of online course development when the conditions were right.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings reveal a detailed and nuanced picture of faculty–instructional designer collaboration. Faculty generally valued collaboration and often described it as beneficial to course quality, especially when instructional designers contributed pedagogical expertise, organizational support, and creative partnership. However, collaboration was not experienced as automatically effective. It was shaped by the conditions under which roles were negotiated and enacted.

Across the interviews, faculty repeatedly emphasized the importance of role clarity, trust, communication, and mutual respect. At the same time, they identified authority tension, workload pressure, vendor arrangements, and institutional constraints as recurring sources of strain. The contrast between highly positive descriptions of interpersonal collaboration and more mixed descriptions of organizational conditions mirrors the quantitative profile observed earlier in the chapter. In both strands of the study, collaboration was strongest at the level of direct interaction and weaker at the level of institutional alignment.

Taken together, the qualitative findings suggest that successful faculty–instructional designer collaboration depends on more than goodwill or technical competence. It depends on clearly negotiated roles, strong communication, realistic workload structures, flexible process design, and institutional conditions that support rather than constrain the partnership. These

findings provide an important interpretive bridge between the quantitative results and the mixed-methods discussion that follows.

Integrated Findings Across Quantitative and Qualitative Data

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers, the quantitative and qualitative findings were examined together. The quantitative results provided an overview of collaboration perceptions using the PINCOM-Q instrument, while the qualitative interviews offered deeper insight into faculty experiences and the processes that shaped those perceptions. Considering the two strands of data together allowed the identification of patterns supported across both datasets.

When the findings were examined collectively, several integrated findings emerged, reflecting common patterns across the survey results and interview data. These integrated findings described how faculty experienced collaboration with instructional designers during online course development and highlighted the conditions that appeared to shape those experiences. The integrated findings presented below combine evidence from both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study and provide a descriptive synthesis of the findings.

Together, these findings provide a descriptive overview of how faculty experienced collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. To further illustrate the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, a joint display was developed that aligns the integrated findings with supporting evidence from both datasets. Joint displays are commonly used in mixed-methods research to visually demonstrate how different forms of data contribute to the same analytical conclusions. Table 4.9 presents the integrated findings alongside the quantitative PINCOM-Q results and qualitative interview evidence that support each finding.

Table 4.9 Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Integrated Finding	Quantitative Evidence (PINCOM-Q Findings)	Qualitative Evidence (Interview Findings)
Collaboration between faculty and instructional designers is generally viewed positively	Participants reported relatively strong scores in domains associated with motivation, communication, and social support, suggesting that faculty generally perceive collaborative work with instructional designers as worthwhile and beneficial.	Interview participants frequently described instructional designers as valuable collaborators who contribute expertise in pedagogy, course structure, accessibility, and educational technology. Several participants noted that collaboration improved the quality and organization of online courses.
Role clarity supports effective collaboration	Responses within the professional power domain demonstrated variability, suggesting differences in how participants perceived authority and influence within collaborative relationships.	Faculty emphasized that collaboration worked best when roles were clearly defined. Participants described faculty as responsible for disciplinary expertise and instructional designers as specialists in pedagogy, course design, and learning technologies.
Communication and mutual respect facilitate collaboration	Constructs related to communication and social support received relatively strong scores, indicating that participants generally perceived collaborative interactions as communicative and supportive.	Participants frequently described successful collaborations as involving open communication, active listening, and constructive feedback. Instructional designers who asked questions and engaged in dialogue were described as particularly effective collaborators.

Authority and decision-making boundaries may create tension	Variability within the professional power construct suggested that perceptions of influence within collaborative relationships differed among participants.	Some faculty described situations in which authority over course design decisions was unclear. Participants noted that tension could arise when expectations regarding decision-making authority were not clearly established.
Institutional context influences collaboration experiences	Constructs associated with organizational factors showed greater variability compared to interpersonal constructs, indicating differences in how participants experienced organizational support for collaboration.	Interview participants described institutional timelines, staffing models, vendor relationships, and administrative expectations as factors that shaped how collaboration unfolded during course development.
Workload and time constraints shape collaborative course development	Variation in constructs related to efficiency and organizational processes suggested differences in how participants experienced the pace and structure of collaboration.	Faculty described course development as occurring alongside multiple professional responsibilities. Participants noted that workload demands and compressed timelines sometimes limited opportunities for iterative design collaboration.

Integrated Finding 1: Collaboration Between Faculty and Instructional Designers Is Generally Viewed Positively

Across both the quantitative and qualitative data, faculty generally described collaboration with instructional designers as a positive and valuable aspect of online course development. The quantitative findings indicated relatively strong scores in several PINCOM-Q domains associated with collaboration quality, particularly those related to motivation, communication, and social support. Motivation received the highest mean score among all

twelve PINCOM-Q constructs ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 0.83$), and social support followed closely ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.16$), suggesting that faculty not only valued collaboration but also experienced instructional designers as genuinely supportive partners in the course development process. These results suggest that participants generally perceived collaboration with instructional designers as worthwhile and beneficial within the course development process.

The qualitative interviews provided additional context that helps illustrate how these positive perceptions were experienced by faculty members. Participants frequently described instructional designers as collaborators who contributed specialized expertise that complemented faculty disciplinary knowledge. In particular, faculty noted that instructional designers often brought expertise in learning design, course organization, accessibility, and educational technologies that strengthened the structure and delivery of online courses. Diane described courses developed with instructional design support as more engaging, better scaffolded, and better aligned to outcomes, while Lisa recounted a capstone course collaboration in which the instructional designer mastered a complex technical tool and transformed it into a usable student experience, reflecting simply that “that was incredibly helpful”.

Several participants emphasized that instructional designers played an important role in helping translate disciplinary content into effective learning experiences for students. Faculty described situations in which instructional designers helped refine course structure, recommend new instructional strategies, or introduce technological tools that enhanced student engagement. These experiences contributed to the perception that collaboration with instructional designers could improve the overall quality of online courses.

Taken together, the findings from both data strands suggest that faculty generally viewed collaboration with instructional designers as a constructive and beneficial partnership in the online course development process.

Integrated Finding 2: Role Clarity Is Central to Effective Collaboration

Another pattern that emerged across both datasets involved the importance of clearly defined roles within collaborative course development. Within the quantitative findings, responses associated with professional power and influence demonstrated some variability among participants. While many participants reported positive collaboration experiences, the distribution of responses suggested that perceptions of authority and responsibility within collaborative relationships were not always consistent across participants. The professional power construct received a mean score of 3.94 (SD = 1.59). Because all four items in this construct are negatively worded, this score reflects faculty leaning toward disagreement with negative characterizations of instructional designer dominance and control -- a broadly positive pattern. However, the comparatively large standard deviation suggests substantial variation across participants, indicating that while most faculty did not experience authority dynamics as problematic, a meaningful subset did encounter situations where power dynamics felt less balanced.

The qualitative findings provided further insight into how faculty understood the division of responsibilities within collaborative course design. Interview participants frequently described the collaboration as most effective when the roles of faculty and instructional designers were clearly defined at the outset of the course development process. Faculty generally viewed themselves as responsible for disciplinary expertise, course content, and learning outcomes, while instructional designers were described as specialists in pedagogy, course structure,

accessibility, and instructional technology. Marcus described the ideal arrangement as one where “it allows each of us to be an expert in our own expertise,” while Sarah stressed that “knowing each other's role in the designing of the course — if you define that up front, it makes all the difference.” Fletcher similarly described role clarity as evolving over time, noting that “everyone knows a little bit more of what their role is now — that has evolved”. Participants emphasized that establishing these role boundaries early in the collaboration helped reduce confusion and allowed each collaborator to contribute their expertise more effectively. When responsibilities were clearly articulated, the collaboration was often described as complementary rather than competitive. In contrast, when roles were not clearly discussed, faculty reported that uncertainty regarding responsibilities could create confusion during the course development process.

These findings from both the quantitative and qualitative strands indicated that role clarity was important in shaping faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers.

Integrated Finding 3: Communication and Mutual Respect Support Collaborative Relationships

Communication emerged as another theme supported across both strands of data. Within the quantitative findings, constructs associated with communication and social support received relatively strong scores compared to several other PINCOM-Q domains. Communication received a mean score of 5.24 (SD = 1.34) and social support received a mean score of 5.83 (SD = 1.16), both among the stronger constructs in the dataset, indicating that faculty generally experienced the interpersonal dimensions of collaboration as positive. These results indicated that participants generally perceived collaborative interactions with instructional designers as communicative and supportive.

The qualitative interviews provided further detail regarding how communication influenced collaboration experiences. Faculty frequently described successful collaborations as those characterized by open dialogue, active listening, and mutual respect between collaborators. Participants emphasized that instructional designers who asked thoughtful questions, listened carefully to faculty ideas, and offered constructive feedback contributed positively to the collaborative process. Diane captured this directly, arguing that “open communication and mutual respect — with those two, and a good process, you can overcome 95% of challenges”. Marcus similarly described the relational foundation of effective collaboration as one built on “relationships... trust... open communication,” while Dale emphasized that listening mattered especially when faculty did not begin with a clear vision, acknowledging that “sometimes it's even hard for me to describe what I want them to do”.

Faculty also described communication as an ongoing process throughout course development rather than a single conversation at the beginning of the project. Participants noted that regular discussions allowed collaborators to refine ideas, address challenges, and adapt course design decisions as the project progressed. Through these interactions, communication helped facilitate shared understanding and supported the development of productive working relationships.

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that communication and mutual respect were central components of effective collaboration between faculty and instructional designers.

Integrated Finding 4: Authority and Decision-Making Boundaries Can Create Tension

Although many participants described collaboration positively, both the quantitative and qualitative findings also reflected variation related to authority and influence within collaborative relationships. Within the quantitative results, responses related to professional power demonstrated greater variability compared to several other PINCOM-Q constructs. When interpreted in light of item directionality, the quantitative findings related to professional power and personality style require careful reading. Professional power received a mean score of 3.94 ($SD = 1.59$) and personality style received the lowest mean overall ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.13$). Because both constructs are composed entirely or predominantly of negatively worded items, these scores reflect faculty leaning toward disagreement with negative characterizations of instructional designer behavior -- indicating that most faculty did not perceive instructional designers as dominating, controlling, or creating interpersonal barriers. This is largely a positive pattern. However, the large standard deviation for professional power ($SD = 1.59$) indicates meaningful variation across participants, suggesting that while the overall pattern was positive, a meaningful subset of faculty did experience authority dynamics that felt less balanced. The qualitative findings help explain this variation.

The qualitative interviews provided examples of how these dynamics were experienced by faculty. Some participants described situations in which the boundaries between disciplinary expertise and instructional design expertise became unclear. In these situations, participants sometimes reported uncertainty regarding who held final authority over course design decisions.

Faculty generally expected to retain responsibility for disciplinary content and the overall direction of the course, while instructional designers were expected to contribute expertise

related to pedagogy and course design. When these expectations were not clearly discussed, participants reported that disagreements could arise regarding design decisions or instructional approaches. These situations were not described as common across all collaborations, but they were identified as moments in which tension could emerge. Dale described working in an environment where “faculty felt like the instructional designers had total control, and that was very frustrating,” while Lisa identified the sharpest conflicts as occurring “when the ID felt like they were also the SME”. Renata added that ambiguity about leadership within a given context could create anxiety, noting that “when you haven't clearly established who's leading in that particular context, that can become challenging”/

Across both strands of data, these findings suggested that collaboration was shaped not only by shared goals but also by how collaborators negotiated authority and decision-making responsibilities. These findings both confirm and extend prior literature on professional power in interprofessional collaboration. While previous research has documented power imbalances primarily from the instructional designer's perspective, describing how designers were positioned as service providers subordinate to faculty authority (Halupa, 2019; Mueller et al., 2022), the present study found that faculty themselves also experienced uncertainty around professional power. This suggests that power dynamics in faculty-instructional designer collaboration are not simply a matter of faculty dominance, but rather a shared ambiguity about authority that affects both parties.

Integrated Finding 5: Institutional Structures Influence Collaboration Experiences

Institutional context also emerged as a factor influencing collaboration across both datasets. Within the quantitative results, constructs associated with organizational factors demonstrated somewhat greater variation compared to interpersonal constructs such as

communication and motivation. The organizational domain received the lowest overall mean score of the three domains ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.60$), compared to the group domain ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 0.90$), a pattern suggesting that faculty consistently rated the institutional context of collaboration less favorably than the direct interpersonal experience. These results indicated that organizational conditions may have influenced collaboration experiences differently across participants.

The qualitative interviews provided additional detail regarding how institutional structures shaped collaboration. Participants frequently described course development timelines, institutional policies, staffing models, and vendor relationships as factors that influenced how collaboration unfolded. In some cases, participants indicated that institutional expectations regarding course development timelines limited the amount of time available for iterative collaboration.

Participants also described differences between collaborations with in-house instructional designers and those involving external vendors. Some faculty reported that in-house collaborations allowed for more flexibility and ongoing communication, while vendor-based collaborations were sometimes perceived as more structured or procedural. Simone described in-house collaboration as “more organic,” observing that “when paying an outside firm, timelines and deliverables become the focus,” while Fletcher drew a direct contrast by noting that while embedded designers engaged meaningfully with faculty, “external vendors mostly checked boxes.” Adam reinforced this, describing how “language barriers, vendor limitations, timeline pressures — all of those create tension” within vendor-based arrangements.

Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings suggested that collaboration experiences were shaped not only by the individuals involved but also by the broader organizational context in which course development occurred.

Integrated Finding 6: Workload and Time Constraints Affect Collaborative Course Development

A final theme that emerged across both strands of data involved the influence of workload and time constraints on collaboration. Within the quantitative findings, constructs related to efficiency and organizational processes showed variability in responses, suggesting differences in how participants experienced the pace and structure of collaborative work. The organizational goals construct received one of the lowest mean scores in the dataset ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.17$), suggesting that faculty may not have consistently perceived institutional priorities as well aligned with the practical realities of collaborative course development — a pattern that likely contributed to the workload and pacing tensions faculty described.

Interview participants frequently described course development as occurring alongside multiple professional responsibilities, including teaching, research, and administrative duties. Faculty noted that these competing responsibilities sometimes affected the amount of time available for collaborative planning and design discussions. In addition, participants observed that instructional designers often supported multiple course development projects simultaneously, which could influence scheduling and communication patterns. Simone described the joy being 'sucked' out of course development when weekly deliverables left no room for reflection, arguing that “my best courses required marination time — space to step away and return with fresh ideas”. Renata noted that “I’m one who moves very quickly... pacing

matters,” while Joel captured the faculty anxiety that timeline uncertainty produced, admitting that “as the SME, I'm nervous about time”.

Participants indicated that when sufficient time was available for collaboration, faculty and instructional designers were better able to engage in iterative design discussions and explore multiple approaches to course development. In contrast, when timelines were compressed, collaboration sometimes focused more heavily on completing required tasks within the available timeframe. Across both the quantitative and qualitative findings, workload and pacing emerged as factors that shaped how collaborative course development was experienced by faculty.

Research Question Synthesis

The findings presented in this chapter collectively address each of the four research questions guiding this study. The following synthesis summarizes how the quantitative and qualitative results respond to each question.

Research Question 1 asked about faculty perceptions of the different dimensions of collaboration with instructional designers. The quantitative findings indicated that faculty generally held positive perceptions across the twelve PINCOM-Q constructs, with particular strength in motivation, social support, communication, and group leadership. The high scores for motivation and social support are especially meaningful within the context of this study because they suggest that faculty did not approach collaboration as an obligation to be managed but as a relationship they valued. Faculty perceived instructional designers as supportive partners who contributed meaningfully to course development, which aligns with the study's broader argument that collaboration quality depends in part on relational investment. The strong scores for communication and group leadership further indicate that the day-to-day mechanics of

collaboration, how information was exchanged, and how the work was coordinated, were generally functioning well.

The scores for personality style and professional power require interpretation in light of item directionality. Because both constructs are composed primarily or entirely of negatively worded items, their lower mean scores reflect faculty disagreement with negative characterizations of instructional designer behavior rather than negative perceptions of collaboration. This is a broadly positive pattern, though the substantial variation in professional power scores ($SD = 1.59$) suggests that some faculty did experience authority dynamics that felt less equitable. Lower scores for organizational culture and organizational goals reflect constructs composed of positively worded items and therefore do indicate areas of less positive perception - specifically that institutional direction and cultural support for collaboration were not always clearly experienced by faculty. The low score for organizational goals in particular suggests that faculty often did not perceive clear institutional direction guiding collaborative work, which may have left collaboration dependent on the goodwill of individual participants rather than on structural support. Together, these findings indicate that faculty perceptions of collaboration were multidimensional and varied meaningfully across individual, group, and organizational levels.

Research Question 2 asked how faculty describe their collaborations with instructional designers during online course development. The qualitative findings provided rich description of how faculty experienced collaboration in practice. Faculty described collaboration as a negotiated process shaped by role clarity, trust, communication, and mutual respect. The strongest collaborations were characterized as creative partnerships in which both parties contributed complementary expertise. The accounts of creative partnership are important because

they go beyond describing collaboration as merely functional. Faculty in these accounts were describing experiences that improved course quality in ways they could not have achieved alone, which reinforces the study's central claim that effective collaboration is not simply about process compliance but about genuine intellectual partnership. Faculty also described collaboration as vulnerable to strain when roles were unclear, authority was contested, or workload demands limited the time and space available for meaningful engagement. These accounts of strain were not anomalies; they were recurring patterns that suggest structural and relational conditions must both be present for collaboration to reach its potential.

Research Question 3 examined the extent to which faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers were associated with institutional and contextual variables including teaching load, research expectations, and access to instructional design support. To address this question directly, a series of one-way ANOVAs and independent-samples t-tests were conducted comparing PINCOM-Q domain scores across levels of teaching load, research expectations, and collaboration type. Results indicated no statistically significant associations between faculty perceptions and any of the three contextual variables examined, with all effect sizes falling in the small to trivial range. Across teaching load categories, research requirement status, and collaboration initiation type, Individual, Group, and Organizational domain scores remained relatively consistent, suggesting that these contextual factors did not systematically differentiate how faculty experienced collaboration with instructional designers.

Interpreted through Role Theory, this pattern suggests that faculty perceptions of collaboration may be shaped less by measurable contextual conditions than by the relational and structural dynamics that unfold within the collaborative process itself; dynamics that the domain-level correlation results confirm are most strongly tied to individual and group factors rather than

organizational ones. The qualitative findings add important nuance to this interpretation. Although only one of the ten interview participants reported having required research within their role, workload emerged as a prominent theme across nearly all interviews. Faculty consistently described time pressure, competing responsibilities, and pacing demands as factors that shaped their collaborative experiences regardless of their formal contextual circumstances. This suggests that workload as a lived experience of collaboration is more pervasive and less bounded by formal role definitions than the survey variables were able to capture and points to a limitation of the quantitative measurement approach that future research could address through more sensitive operationalizations of workload and institutional context.

Research Question 4 asked how faculty describe the ways institutional and role expectations relate to their collaboration with instructional designers. The qualitative findings addressed this question directly. Faculty described institutional structures including staffing models, vendor arrangements, development timelines, and leadership involvement as significant factors shaping collaboration quality. The contrast between in-house and vendor-based collaboration was particularly instructive in this regard. Faculty who worked with in-house instructional designers described relationships characterized by flexibility, shared investment, and ongoing communication. Faculty who worked within vendor or offshore models described collaboration that felt procedural, constrained, and oriented toward deliverables rather than course quality. This distinction suggests that institutional decisions about how instructional design support is structured have direct consequences for the faculty experience of collaboration. Role expectations were central to nearly every account. Faculty consistently described collaboration as most effective when role boundaries were explicitly negotiated and institutional structures reinforced rather than constrained the partnership. When institutions failed to clarify

roles or communicate expectations, faculty described filling that void with assumptions that sometimes led to confusion or conflict. These findings suggest that institutions bear significant responsibility for creating the conditions under which effective collaboration can occur.

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study examining faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development. The quantitative results from the PINCOM-Q survey provided an overview of collaboration across several domains of interprofessional collaboration, while the qualitative interviews offered additional insight into faculty experiences and perspectives.

The quantitative findings indicated that faculty generally held positive perceptions of collaboration, with the strongest scores observed in motivation, social support, communication, and group leadership. These results suggest that faculty valued collaboration and often experienced the direct interpersonal relationship with instructional designers as supportive and productive. At the same time, lower scores for organizational culture and organizational goals -- both positively worded constructs -- revealed that institutional norms and direction for collaboration were not always clearly experienced by faculty. Lower scores for personality style and professional power reflect faculty disagreement with negatively worded items describing problematic instructional designer behavior, which is broadly positive, though variation in professional power scores suggests some faculty did experience authority dynamics that felt less equitable.

The qualitative findings deepened this picture considerably. Faculty described collaboration as a negotiated process that depended on clear role definition, mutual respect, strong communication, structured process management, and institutional conditions that

supported rather than constrained the work. Seven themes emerged from the interviews, collectively illustrating that the quality of collaboration was shaped by both relational and organizational factors operating simultaneously. The most meaningful collaborations were described as creative partnerships in which faculty and instructional designers contributed complementary expertise toward a shared goal of improving course quality.

When the quantitative and qualitative findings were examined together, six integrated findings emerged, supported across both datasets. These integrated findings reinforced a consistent pattern: faculty tended to experience collaboration most positively at the level of direct interpersonal interaction and less positively at the level of institutional structure and organizational alignment. This distinction between the relational and institutional dimensions of collaboration is one of the study's most important findings.

The synthesis of research questions demonstrated that the findings collectively address all four research questions, revealing that faculty perceptions of collaboration were multidimensional, context-dependent, and shaped by both the people involved and the institutions in which collaboration occurred. Chapter 5 interprets these findings in relation to Role Theory and the existing literature, discusses implications for institutional practice and policy, and offers recommendations for strengthening faculty–instructional designer partnerships in online higher education.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Introduction

The expansion of online and hybrid learning across higher education has fundamentally changed how courses are developed (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Bowen, 2013). Where course design was historically an individual faculty member's responsibility, many institutions now rely on collaborative development models involving instructional designers, educational technologists, and other learning support professionals (Ryan & Beck, 2018; Xu & Morris, 2020). Within these models, instructional designers frequently work alongside faculty to translate disciplinary expertise into structured learning experiences that incorporate pedagogical best practices, accessibility standards, and digital learning technologies (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Singleton et al., 2019). As a result, collaboration between faculty and instructional designers has become a central component of online course development across many institutions (Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

Despite the growing prevalence of these collaborative models, the dynamics of faculty–instructional designer partnerships remain complex. Faculty and instructional designers enter the course development process with different professional backgrounds, different areas of expertise, and different institutional expectations (Halupa, 2019; Magruder et al., 2019). Faculty typically hold disciplinary authority and responsibility for course content, while instructional designers contribute expertise in pedagogy, course structure, and learning technologies (Bennett & Albrecht, 2021; Xu & Morris, 2020). Although these roles are often complementary, the boundaries between them are not always clearly defined (Mueller et al., 2022; Watson-Held, 2024). As institutions increasingly rely on collaborative course development processes, understanding how faculty perceive these partnerships becomes critical for strengthening

collaboration and improving online learning environments (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019).

The purpose of this study was to examine faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development in higher education. Using a mixed-methods design, the study integrated quantitative survey data collected through the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model Questionnaire (PINCOM-Q) with qualitative interview data from faculty members who had collaborated with instructional designers in the development of online courses. This design allowed the study to examine both measurable patterns in collaboration perceptions and the lived experiences through which faculty interpret these collaborative relationships.

The findings presented in Chapter 4 indicated that faculty generally perceived collaboration with instructional designers positively. Faculty participants frequently described instructional designers as valuable partners who contributed pedagogical expertise, helped organize course structures, and supported the effective integration of technology into teaching. At the same time, the findings also revealed that collaboration experiences were shaped by several contextual and relational factors, including role clarity, communication practices, authority boundaries, institutional structures, and workload conditions. These factors influenced how faculty interpreted the role of instructional designers and how collaborative relationships developed during the course design process.

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret these findings and situate them within the broader context of existing scholarship and theory. Drawing on Role Theory as the theoretical framework for the study, this chapter examines how professional role expectations shape collaboration between faculty and instructional designers (Biddle, 1979). The chapter begins

with a discussion of the key findings of the study in relation to the research questions. It then interprets the findings through the lens of Role Theory and connects them to the literature on instructional design collaboration and online course development. The chapter concludes by identifying implications for practice, outlining the contributions of the study to the field, discussing limitations, and proposing directions for future research.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that faculty–instructional designer collaboration is best understood not simply as a support relationship but as a process of professional role negotiation. As online course development increasingly involves multiple professionals with different forms of expertise, collaboration requires faculty and instructional designers to interpret, negotiate, and enact their roles within evolving institutional contexts. Understanding how these role dynamics shape collaboration provides important insight into how institutions can strengthen partnerships that support effective online teaching and learning.

Research Question Synthesis

The findings of this study collectively address each of the four research questions guiding the investigation. The following synthesis summarizes how the quantitative and qualitative results, interpreted together through the lens of Role Theory, respond to each question.

Research Question 1 asked: "What are faculty perceptions of the different dimensions of collaboration with instructional designers?" The quantitative findings from the PINCOM-Q indicated that faculty generally held positive perceptions across the twelve constructs, with the strongest scores observed in motivation, social support, communication, and group leadership. These results suggest that faculty approached collaboration with a favorable orientation and often experienced the direct interpersonal relationship with instructional designers as supportive and productive. The scores for personality style and professional power require interpretation in light

of item directionality. Because both constructs are composed primarily or entirely of negatively worded items, their lower mean scores reflect faculty disagreement with negative characterizations of instructional designer behavior rather than negative perceptions of collaboration. This is a broadly positive pattern, though the substantial variation in professional power scores ($SD = 1.59$) suggests that some faculty did experience authority dynamics that felt less equitable. Lower scores for organizational culture and organizational goals reflect constructs composed of positively worded items and therefore do indicate areas of less positive perception, specifically that institutional direction and cultural support for collaboration were not always clearly experienced by faculty.

Research Question 2 asked: "How do faculty describe their collaborations with instructional designers during online course development?" The qualitative findings provided rich description of how faculty experienced collaboration in practice. Faculty described collaboration as a negotiated process shaped by role clarity, trust, communication, and mutual respect. The most meaningful collaborations were those in which faculty and instructional designers functioned as creative partners who contributed complementary expertise toward shared course development goals. Faculty also described collaboration as vulnerable to strain when roles were unclear, authority was contested, or workload demands limited the time available for meaningful engagement. These accounts reinforce the chapter's central argument that collaboration is best understood as an evolving professional practice rather than a fixed transactional process and reflect the Role Theory constructs of role negotiation and role fit as central to how faculty interpreted their collaborative experiences.

Research Question 3 examined the extent to which faculty perceptions of collaboration were shaped by contextual factors, including teaching load, research expectations, and

collaboration type. The statistical analyses conducted, one-way ANOVAs and independent-samples t-tests comparing PINCOM-Q domain scores across each contextual variable, yielded no significant associations. This finding is itself meaningful. It suggests that faculty perceptions of collaboration quality were not systematically determined by the structural conditions under which collaboration occurred, but rather by the relational and interpersonal dynamics that developed within those conditions. Interpreted through Role Theory, this points to the primacy of role negotiation and interpersonal fit over institutional circumstance; faculty who experienced clear roles, open communication, and mutual respect reported positive collaboration regardless of their teaching load or whether collaboration was assigned or voluntary.

The qualitative data deepens this interpretation considerably. Workload emerged as a recurring theme across nearly all ten interviews despite only one participant reporting formally required research. This disconnect between the survey variable and the lived experience suggests that workload is not adequately captured by a binary measure of research requirement. Faculty described time pressure and competing obligations as ambient conditions of their professional lives rather than discrete variables, present across contexts and shaping collaboration in ways that a survey item cannot fully detect. Future research would benefit from more nuanced measurement of workload that accounts for its experiential rather than purely structural dimensions.

Research Question 4 asked: "How do faculty describe the ways institutional and role expectations relate to their collaboration with instructional designers?" The qualitative findings addressed this question directly. Faculty described institutional structures, including staffing models, vendor arrangements, development timelines, and leadership involvement, as significant factors shaping collaboration quality. These descriptions connect to the Role Theory constructs

of role overload and role ambiguity, reinforcing the argument that institutions bear meaningful responsibility for creating the conditions under which effective collaboration can occur. When institutions fail to communicate role expectations or structure development processes that support sustained collaboration, faculty and instructional designers are left to negotiate those conditions independently. The findings suggest that institutions which treat collaboration as an institutional priority rather than an individual responsibility are better positioned to foster the kinds of partnerships that improve online course quality.

Interpreting the Findings Through Role Theory

Role Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of faculty–instructional designer collaboration because it emphasizes how individuals interpret and enact expectations associated with professional roles (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Within organizational contexts, roles function as sets of expectations that define how individuals should behave, what responsibilities they should fulfill, and how they should interact with others (Biddle, 1979). When roles are clearly defined and mutually understood, collaboration tends to function more smoothly because participants understand how their responsibilities complement those of others (Biddle, 1979). When expectations are unclear or overlapping, however, individuals may experience role ambiguity, role conflict, or role overload (Biddle, 1979).

The findings of this study illustrate how these role dynamics shape collaboration between faculty and instructional designers during online course development. Although faculty generally reported positive experiences working with instructional designers, the effectiveness of collaboration appeared to depend heavily on how professional roles were defined and negotiated within the course design process. While previous studies have frequently emphasized barriers

and tensions within faculty–instructional designer collaboration (Mueller et al., 2022; Rotar, 2024), faculty participants in the present study generally described their collaborations as positive and professionally supportive, suggesting that collaborative partnerships may function more smoothly than some prior literature has suggested when role expectations and communication practices are clearly established. Across both quantitative and qualitative findings, role clarity emerged as one of the most important conditions supporting productive collaboration. Prior research on faculty–instructional designer partnerships similarly identifies role clarity as a key factor influencing collaboration quality (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). Studies suggest that when faculty and instructional designers share a clear understanding of their responsibilities, collaboration is more likely to be experienced as supportive and productive (Drysdale, 2019). The findings of the present study extend this literature by demonstrating that role clarity influences not only task coordination but also how faculty interpret the legitimacy of instructional design expertise within the course development process.

Faculty participants frequently described instructional designers as individuals who brought valuable expertise to the course development process. Prior research similarly characterizes instructional designers as professionals who contribute expertise in pedagogy, instructional strategies, and educational technology within collaborative course development processes (Magruder et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025b; Xu & Morris, 2020). Survey results from the PINCOM-Q indicated relatively strong ratings in domains associated with communication and collaborative interaction, suggesting that many faculty viewed instructional designers as supportive partners. Interview participants similarly described instructional designers as professionals who helped them organize course content, identify pedagogical

strategies, and incorporate digital learning tools in ways that improved the overall structure of their courses. These descriptions align with prior research indicating that instructional designers frequently function as pedagogical consultants who assist faculty in translating disciplinary expertise into structured learning experiences appropriate for online environments (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Halupa, 2019). In many cases, faculty emphasized that instructional designers helped them think differently about how to design learning experiences for online environments. The findings of the present study extend this literature by illustrating how faculty themselves interpret this expertise as complementary to disciplinary knowledge, suggesting that instructional designers are not viewed merely as technical support personnel but as collaborative partners in the course design process.

These findings suggested that faculty often perceived instructional designers as collaborators who provided expertise that complemented disciplinary knowledge. Prior research on faculty–instructional designer partnerships similarly emphasizes the complementary nature of these professional roles, with faculty contributing disciplinary expertise while instructional designers provide expertise in pedagogy, course alignment, and instructional technology integration (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Halupa, 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). From a Role Theory perspective, this complementary relationship reflects the development of differentiated professional roles within course development teams (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Faculty contribute disciplinary expertise and knowledge of course content, while instructional designers contribute expertise in pedagogy, course design, and educational technology. Research on instructional design practice consistently identifies these differentiated forms of expertise as central to collaborative course development processes (Magruder et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025b). When these roles are clearly defined and mutually respected, collaboration allows each

professional to contribute their expertise in ways that enhance the overall course design process. The findings of the present study extend this literature by demonstrating how faculty interpret this division of expertise within collaborative course development. Rather than viewing instructional designers as peripheral support staff, many participants described them as partners who contributed specialized knowledge that strengthened course design decisions.

At the same time, the findings also indicate that collaboration is not always straightforward. Faculty participants occasionally described moments in which the boundaries between disciplinary expertise and instructional design expertise became less clear. Prior research on faculty–instructional designer partnerships similarly identifies moments of tension that emerge when pedagogical recommendations intersect with faculty authority over course content and teaching strategies (Mueller et al., 2022; Rotar, 2024). These moments often occurred when instructional design recommendations intersected with faculty authority over course content or teaching strategies. Although these situations did not necessarily produce conflict, they often required collaborators to negotiate how decisions would be made and whose expertise would guide particular aspects of the course design process.

Role Theory describes these situations as instances of role negotiation (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966). When individuals from different professional backgrounds collaborate, they must determine how authority and responsibility will be distributed within the group. Organizational research grounded in Role Theory suggests that such negotiations are common when individuals with distinct professional roles collaborate within shared projects (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In the context of faculty–instructional designer collaboration, this negotiation often involves balancing faculty authority over disciplinary content with instructional design expertise related to pedagogy and course structure. Previous studies have noted that successful

partnerships often depend on recognizing both forms of expertise while maintaining clear boundaries regarding decision-making authority (Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). The findings of this study suggest that successful collaboration depends not only on recognizing the value of instructional design expertise but also on establishing shared expectations regarding how that expertise will be integrated into the course development process. In this way, the present study extends prior literature by illustrating how faculty themselves describe navigating these authority dynamics within collaborative course development rather than experiencing them solely as sources of conflict.

Another important theme emerging from the findings relates to the role of communication in facilitating collaboration. Faculty participants repeatedly emphasized that effective collaboration depended on open dialogue, mutual respect, and ongoing conversation about course design decisions. Prior research on faculty–instructional designer partnerships similarly identifies communication as a central factor influencing the success of collaborative course development (Richardson et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). Instructional designers who asked thoughtful questions, listened carefully to faculty perspectives, and framed recommendations as collaborative suggestions were often described as particularly effective partners. Relationship-centered instructional design models emphasize similar communication practices, highlighting dialogue, inquiry, and shared decision-making as key mechanisms for building productive collaboration between faculty and instructional designers (Drysdale, 2019). These communication practices appeared to play an important role in helping collaborators clarify expectations and negotiate their respective roles within the course development process.

From the perspective of Role Theory, communication serves as a mechanism through which individuals interpret and negotiate role expectations (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas,

1966). Through conversation and interaction, collaborators can develop a shared understanding of their responsibilities and align their expectations regarding how work will be distributed. Organizational research grounded in Role Theory suggests that communication plays a critical role in reducing role ambiguity and supporting the development of shared role expectations within collaborative work environments (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The findings of this study suggest that when communication is open and collaborative, faculty and instructional designers are better able to negotiate their roles and develop productive working relationships. These findings extend prior literature by illustrating how faculty interpret communication practices as signals of professional respect and partnership, suggesting that dialogue not only supports coordination of tasks but also shapes how faculty perceive the legitimacy of instructional design expertise within collaborative course development.

Institutional structures also influenced how faculty interpreted their collaborations with instructional designers. Participants described differences in collaboration experiences depending on how instructional design services were organized within their institutions. Prior research similarly suggests that the organizational placement of instructional design services can significantly shape how faculty and instructional designers interact during course development (Ryan & Beck, 2018; Stefaniak, 2024). Faculty who worked with internal instructional design teams often described more flexible and relational collaborations, while those who worked with centralized course development units or external vendors sometimes experienced more structured and procedural interactions. Studies examining partnership models in online course design have also noted that centralized course development structures often rely on standardized processes and timelines, while embedded instructional designers may develop more relational and iterative collaborations with faculty (Rotar, 2024). These differences suggest that institutional policies

and organizational arrangements shape how professional roles were defined and enacted within course development teams.

From a Role Theory perspective, organizational structures play an important role in shaping role expectations (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Institutions that clearly define the responsibilities of faculty and instructional designers may make it easier for collaborators to understand how their roles relate to one another. Conversely, when institutional expectations are unclear, individuals may experience greater uncertainty regarding how collaboration should function, a condition often described by Role Theory as role ambiguity (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). The findings of this study suggest that institutional context plays an important role in shaping how faculty interpret the role of instructional designers and how collaborative relationships develop. These findings extend prior research by illustrating how faculty perceptions of instructional designers are influenced not only by interpersonal collaboration but also by the organizational structures within which course development occurs.

Finally, workload expectations and time constraints emerged as important factors influencing collaboration. Faculty participants frequently described course development as occurring alongside numerous professional responsibilities, including teaching, research, and administrative duties. Prior research on online course development similarly identifies competing professional responsibilities and limited development timelines as barriers to sustained collaboration between faculty and instructional designers (Mei et al., 2021; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Instructional designers were similarly described as supporting multiple course development projects simultaneously. Studies examining instructional design practice in higher education have also noted that designers often manage large course development caseloads across multiple programs, which can limit opportunities for extended collaboration with

individual faculty members (Stefaniak, 2024; Stefaniak et al., 2025b). These conditions sometimes limited opportunities for extended collaboration and iterative course design discussions. From the perspective of Role Theory, such conditions can create role overload when individuals struggle to fulfill multiple role expectations simultaneously. (Biddle, 1979; Kahn et al., 1964). Role overload occurs when individuals lack the time or resources necessary to meet competing professional expectations, often resulting in strain within collaborative work environments (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Taken together, these findings suggest that faculty–instructional designer collaboration operates within a complex set of professional and organizational dynamics. Prior scholarship on instructional design partnerships similarly emphasizes that successful collaboration depends on the alignment of professional roles, effective communication, and supportive institutional structures (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019). While faculty generally viewed collaboration positively, the success of these partnerships depended heavily on how professional roles were defined, communicated, and supported within institutional contexts. The findings of the present study extend this literature by demonstrating how faculty interpret these conditions within their own collaborative experiences, highlighting the ways in which role expectations, communication practices, organizational structures, and workload pressures collectively shape the quality of faculty–instructional designer partnerships. Understanding these dynamics is essential for institutions seeking to strengthen collaborative course development and improve the quality of online learning environments.

Communication and Relational Trust in Collaborative Course Development

While role clarity provided an important structural foundation for collaboration, the findings of this study also suggest that communication played a critical role in shaping how

faculty and instructional designers interpreted their collaborative relationships. Faculty participants consistently described successful collaborations as those characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and ongoing dialogue about course design decisions. Prior research on faculty–instructional designer partnerships similarly identifies communication as a central factor influencing the quality of collaborative relationships (Richardson et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). These communication practices appeared to help collaborators align their expectations and navigate the complexities of collaborative course development. Relationship-centered instructional design models also emphasize the importance of dialogue, shared decision-making, and mutual respect in fostering productive collaboration between faculty and instructional designers (Drysdale, 2019).

Participants frequently emphasized that instructional designers who approached collaboration as a conversation rather than a directive process were more likely to be perceived as effective partners. Faculty described appreciating instructional designers who asked questions about course goals, learning outcomes, and disciplinary priorities before making design recommendations. These findings align with research suggesting that instructional designers who engage faculty through inquiry and collaborative dialogue are more likely to build trust and establish productive working relationships (McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Richardson et al., 2019). This approach allowed instructional designers to demonstrate respect for faculty expertise while still contributing their own pedagogical knowledge. In contrast, when recommendations were presented in ways that appeared prescriptive or disconnected from disciplinary context, faculty were more likely to perceive the collaboration as less effective. The findings of this study extend prior literature by illustrating how faculty interpret communication practices as indicators of professional respect and partnership, suggesting that collaborative dialogue not only supports

course design decisions but also shapes how faculty perceive the legitimacy of instructional design expertise.

These findings reinforce existing research on interprofessional collaboration, which consistently identifies communication and relational trust as key factors influencing collaborative outcomes. Prior research on faculty–instructional designer partnerships similarly highlights the importance of communication and trust in shaping successful collaborative relationships (Richardson et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). In many professional contexts, effective collaboration depends not only on the distribution of expertise but also on the development of relationships that allow participants to exchange ideas openly and negotiate differences constructively (McDonald & Yanchar, 2024). Within the context of online course development, communication serves as the mechanism through which faculty and instructional designers translate their respective areas of expertise into shared design decisions. While prior research has emphasized communication as a mechanism for coordinating course development activities (Drysdale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019), the findings of this study suggest that faculty may also interpret communication practices as indicators of professional respect and professional partnership within collaborative relationships. Relationship-centered instructional design models likewise emphasize the importance of dialogue and shared decision-making in facilitating collaborative course design processes (Drysdale, 2019).

From the perspective of Role Theory, communication also functions as the process through which individuals negotiate and clarify role expectations (Biddle, 1979; Biddle & Thomas, 1966). When collaborators communicate openly about their goals, responsibilities, and constraints, they are able to develop a shared understanding of how their roles relate to one another. Organizational research grounded in Role Theory suggests that such communication

processes help reduce role ambiguity and support the alignment of expectations within collaborative work environments (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This shared understanding reduces role ambiguity and allows collaborators to coordinate their contributions more effectively. The findings of this study suggest that communication practices that emphasize dialogue, inquiry, and mutual respect may be particularly important in helping faculty and instructional designers navigate the complex role dynamics associated with collaborative course design. In this way, the present study extends prior literature by illustrating how faculty interpret communication not only as a coordination mechanism but also as a signal of professional respect and partnership within collaborative course development.

Negotiating Authority and Professional Expertise

Although faculty generally described collaboration with instructional designers as positive, the findings also reveal that collaborative course development sometimes involves subtle negotiations related to authority and professional expertise. These negotiations often emerged when instructional design recommendations intersected with faculty decisions about course content, instructional strategies, or assessment design. Prior research on faculty–instructional designer partnerships similarly identifies tensions that may arise when pedagogical recommendations intersect with faculty authority over course content and teaching approaches (Mueller et al., 2022; Rotar, 2024).

Faculty participants frequently emphasized that they viewed themselves as the primary authority over disciplinary content and the intellectual direction of their courses. This emphasis on faculty authority reflects longstanding norms within higher education in which faculty maintain primary responsibility for curricular decisions and academic content (Bowen, 2013; Halupa, 2019). At the same time, they acknowledged that instructional designers often possessed

specialized expertise related to online pedagogy, accessibility standards, and digital learning technologies. Research on instructional design practice consistently identifies these areas as core components of instructional designer expertise within course development teams (Magruder et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). This dual structure of authority created situations in which faculty and instructional designers needed to determine how pedagogical recommendations would be incorporated into course design decisions. For many participants, these negotiations were not experienced as conflict but rather as part of the collaborative process. While prior research has sometimes characterized authority differences between faculty and instructional designers as sources of conflict or professional tension (Mueller et al., 2022; Ramani, 2022b), the findings of the present study suggest that faculty often interpret these dynamics as part of the normal process of negotiating expertise within collaborative course development. Faculty described appreciating instructional designers who framed their recommendations as suggestions supported by pedagogical reasoning rather than as directives. Research on instructional design practice consistently identifies these areas as core components of instructional designer expertise within course development teams (Magruder et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). In these cases, instructional designers were perceived as partners who contributed valuable insight without challenging faculty ownership of course content. The findings of the present study extend this literature by illustrating how faculty interpret these negotiations of expertise within collaborative course development, suggesting that authority dynamics are often navigated through professional dialogue rather than experienced as overt conflict.

Role Theory provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics because it highlights how professionals interpret and negotiate the boundaries of their roles within collaborative environments (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978). When individuals from different

professional backgrounds work together, they must determine how authority and responsibility will be distributed across the team. Role Theory suggests that such role negotiations are common in organizational settings where multiple professional identities intersect and where expectations must be clarified through interaction and shared experience (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). In the case of faculty–instructional designer collaboration, this negotiation often centers on balancing disciplinary authority with pedagogical expertise. Prior research on collaborative course development similarly describes the partnership as one that requires balancing faculty ownership of content with instructional designers’ pedagogical and technological expertise (Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

The findings of this study suggest that successful collaborations are those in which faculty and instructional designers are able to acknowledge and respect each other's expertise while maintaining clear boundaries regarding decision-making authority. This observation aligns with previous research indicating that productive faculty–instructional designer relationships are often characterized by mutual recognition of complementary expertise and clearly negotiated responsibilities (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2019). When these boundaries are understood and mutually respected, collaboration can function as a complementary partnership rather than a competition for authority. The findings of this study extend prior literature by demonstrating how faculty themselves interpret these boundaries and by illustrating how role expectations are actively negotiated within the day-to-day practices of collaborative course development.

Institutional Context and Organizational Structures

Another important insight emerging from the findings is the role of institutional context in shaping faculty perceptions of collaboration. Faculty participants described collaboration experiences that varied significantly depending on how instructional design services were

organized within their institutions. Some participants worked with instructional designers who were embedded within academic departments, while others collaborated with centralized instructional design units or external course development vendors. Previous research has similarly noted that instructional design services may be organized through a variety of institutional models, including centralized design units, distributed or embedded instructional designers, and externally supported development teams (Rotar, 2024; Xu & Morris, 2020).

These structural arrangements appeared to influence not only how collaboration occurred but also how faculty interpreted the role of instructional designers within the course development process. Faculty who worked with embedded instructional designers often described relationships that developed over time through repeated collaboration. These ongoing interactions allowed faculty and instructional designers to develop familiarity with each other's working styles and disciplinary contexts, which in turn facilitated more flexible and relational collaborations. Studies examining instructional design teams have similarly suggested that ongoing interaction and familiarity between faculty and designers can strengthen collaborative relationships and improve course development outcomes (Drysdale, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019).

In contrast, faculty who worked with centralized design units or external vendors sometimes described more structured and mandated collaboration processes. These arrangements often involved predefined course development timelines, standardized design templates, or formal project management structures. Research examining institutional course development models has likewise documented the use of structured design frameworks and project management processes intended to coordinate large-scale online course development (Mei et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). While these systems sometimes helped streamline course

development, they also occasionally limited opportunities for organic dialogue or iterative design conversations.

From a Role Theory perspective, organizational structures play a significant role in shaping how professional roles are defined and enacted within institutions (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Institutional policies, reporting structures, and course development models all influence how faculty and instructional designers interpret their responsibilities and authority within collaborative projects. Organizational research grounded in Role Theory suggests that clearly articulated structures and expectations help reduce role ambiguity and support more effective coordination among professionals working in interdependent roles (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). When institutions clearly articulate expectations for collaboration, individuals may find it easier to understand how their roles fit within the broader course development process.

The findings of this study suggest that institutional leaders should carefully consider how course development structures influence collaborative relationships. Institutions that support flexible communication, adequate development timelines, and clear role expectations may be better positioned to foster productive faculty–instructional designer partnerships. By illustrating how faculty interpret these organizational arrangements, the present study extends existing literature by demonstrating how institutional structures shape not only the logistics of course development but also the relational dynamics of collaboration between faculty and instructional designers.

Workload, Time Constraints, and Role Overload

In addition to relational and organizational factors, participants frequently identified workload pressures and time constraints as challenges affecting collaborative course development. Faculty described course design as occurring alongside numerous professional

responsibilities, including teaching, research, service commitments, and administrative duties. These competing responsibilities reflect broader patterns within higher education in which faculty balance multiple institutional expectations related to teaching, scholarship, and service (Bowen, 2013; Halupa, 2019). Instructional designers were similarly described as supporting multiple course development projects simultaneously, often working with faculty across several academic units. Research on instructional design practice similarly notes that designers frequently manage large caseloads and support course development across multiple programs or departments (Stefaniak, 2024; Stefaniak et al., 2025b).

These workload pressures sometimes limited the amount of time collaborators could devote to extended design conversations or iterative course revisions. Faculty participants occasionally noted that compressed development timelines made it difficult to fully explore pedagogical alternatives or experiment with innovative course design approaches. Studies examining structured course development initiatives have similarly documented the influence of compressed timelines and project management structures on the course design process (Mei et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). Instead, course development sometimes became focused on meeting immediate deadlines rather than engaging in deeper pedagogical reflection.

Role Theory provides a useful framework for understanding these experiences through the concept of role overload. Role overload occurs when individuals are expected to fulfill multiple role obligations simultaneously but lack the time or resources necessary to meet those expectations effectively (Biddle, 1979; Kahn et al., 1964). In the context of collaborative course development, both faculty and instructional designers may experience role overload as they attempt to balance course design responsibilities with other professional obligations. Organizational research grounded in Role Theory suggests that such conditions can contribute to

role strain when individuals experience difficulty meeting competing expectations within complex institutional environments (Biddle & Thomas, 1966).

The findings of this study suggest that institutions seeking to strengthen collaborative course development should consider how course development timelines and workload expectations influence the ability of faculty and instructional designers to engage in meaningful collaboration. Providing sufficient development time and institutional support may help reduce role overload and allow collaborators to engage more fully in the course design process.

Organizational research grounded in Role Theory suggests that such conditions can contribute to role strain when individuals experience difficulty meeting competing expectations within complex institutional environments (Biddle & Thomas, 1966).

Collaboration as an Evolving Professional Practice

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that faculty–instructional designer collaboration represents an evolving professional relationship within higher education. Scholars have increasingly described collaborative course development as a growing institutional model for designing online learning experiences that integrate disciplinary expertise with instructional design practice (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Rotar, 2024; Xu & Morris, 2020). As institutions continue to expand online and hybrid learning opportunities, course development increasingly requires the integration of multiple forms of expertise. Faculty contribute disciplinary knowledge and academic leadership, while instructional designers contribute pedagogical insight and technological expertise (Magruder et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025b). Effective course development therefore depends on the ability of these professionals to collaborate in ways that leverage their complementary strengths.

However, this collaboration does not occur automatically. Instead, it requires ongoing negotiation of roles, expectations, and authority within institutional contexts that are themselves evolving. Role Theory suggests that such negotiation processes are inherent to collaborative work environments where professionals from different domains must interpret and align expectations regarding authority and responsibility (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978). The findings of this study indicate that collaboration functions most effectively when institutions support clear role expectations, open communication, and organizational structures that allow faculty and instructional designers to work together as partners. These findings reinforce prior research emphasizing the importance of role clarity, communication, and institutional support in sustaining productive faculty–instructional designer relationships (Drysedale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). Understanding collaboration as a process of role negotiation rather than a fixed support relationship provides a useful perspective for interpreting the evolving role of instructional design within higher education. The present study contributes to the existing literature by centering faculty perspectives on these collaborative dynamics and by illustrating how role expectations, institutional structures, and communication practices shape faculty interpretations of collaboration with instructional designers. As online learning continues to grow, institutions may increasingly recognize instructional designers not only as technical support staff but as educational partners who contribute meaningfully to the development of effective learning environments (Carliner, 2023). By examining collaboration through the lens of Role Theory and integrating quantitative and qualitative perspectives, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how faculty–instructional designer partnerships function within contemporary online course development.

Although previous research has often focused on the efficiency and coordination benefits of particular course development models (Mei et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018), the findings of the present study suggest that faculty perceptions of collaboration may be influenced as much by relational dynamics and communication practices as by the structural design of course development systems.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest several concrete recommendations for the individuals and institutions most directly involved in faculty–instructional designer collaboration during online course development. These recommendations are organized by audience and are grounded in the patterns identified across both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study.

Recommendations for Institutional Leaders and Administrators

Institutions play a foundational role in shaping the conditions under which faculty–instructional designer collaboration occurs (Rotar, 2024; Xu & Morris, 2020). The findings of this study suggest that institutional structures, policies, and organizational priorities significantly influence whether collaboration is experienced as productive or constrained. Institutional leaders and administrators should therefore consider the following recommendations.

First, institutions should establish clear and documented frameworks for faculty–instructional designer collaboration. Prior research has similarly recommended that institutions develop clearer collaborative structures to reduce role ambiguity and support productive partnerships between faculty and instructional designers (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2019). Studies examining collaborative course development have consistently found that unclear expectations regarding authority, responsibilities, and decision-making boundaries can undermine effective collaboration (Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024). These frameworks for

collaboration should articulate the respective responsibilities of faculty and instructional designers within the course development process, identify decision-making boundaries, and communicate expectations to all participants before development work begins. When role expectations are established at the institutional level rather than left to individual negotiation, faculty and instructional designers are better positioned to enter collaborative relationships with shared understanding. Consistent with these recommendations in the literature, faculty participants in the present study frequently emphasized that collaboration functioned most effectively when the roles of instructional designers and faculty were clearly communicated before course development began.

Second, institutions should evaluate whether their instructional design service model, whether embedded, centralized, or vendor-based, provides sufficient flexibility to support meaningful faculty collaboration. Scholars examining institutional models for instructional design services have noted that the organizational placement of instructional designers can significantly influence how collaboration with faculty unfolds (Drysdale, 2021; Xu & Morris, 2020). Rotar (2024), for example, describes how different partnership models shape communication patterns, authority structures, and collaborative decision-making within online course development. The findings of this study suggest that when vendor relationships are structured primarily around rigid deliverables, budgets that restrict full course development support, or scope limitations, opportunities for creative and iterative course design may be reduced.

Prior research on large-scale course development initiatives has similarly warned that highly standardized or tightly managed development processes may limit opportunities for iterative design and collaborative dialogue between faculty and instructional designers (Mei et

al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). Institutional leaders should therefore ensure that vendor contracts and partnership agreements account for the relational dimensions of collaboration, including adequate communication time, flexibility in project scope, and attention to practical constraints such as time zone differences that may affect the ability of faculty and instructional designers to engage in sustained dialogue. Building on these observations in the literature, the findings of the present study further suggest that institutional leaders should evaluate not only the efficiency of course development systems but also the degree to which those systems allow faculty and instructional designers to engage in meaningful collaborative interaction. Regardless of the model employed, institutions should prioritize structures that allow faculty and instructional designers the space to collaborate creatively rather than simply complete required tasks within a prescribed process.

Third, institutions should address workload expectations and course development timelines as structural conditions that directly affect collaboration quality. Previous research has similarly highlighted the influence of workload pressures and development timelines on the course design process (Ryan & Beck, 2018; Stefaniak, 2024). Studies examining instructional design practice have noted that both faculty and instructional designers frequently manage multiple professional responsibilities simultaneously, which can constrain opportunities for extended collaborative engagement (Stefaniak et al., 2025). Faculty and instructional designers in this study frequently described compressed timelines and competing professional responsibilities as barriers to meaningful engagement. Institutions that allocate dedicated development time, provide course releases or workload adjustments during intensive development periods, and set realistic timelines for collaborative course design are likely to see stronger collaborative outcomes. Consistent with these recommendations, faculty participants in

the present study frequently emphasized that meaningful collaboration required sufficient time for discussion, reflection, and iterative course design.

Finally, institutional leaders should ensure that the purpose and scope of instructional design support is communicated clearly to faculty. Prior research has similarly emphasized the importance of faculty orientation to instructional design services in fostering productive collaboration. For example, Richardson et al. (2019) found that faculty who understood the pedagogical role of instructional designers were more likely to develop collaborative and trusting working relationships. The findings suggest that faculty who understood the role of instructional designers before entering collaboration were better prepared to engage productively. Onboarding processes, faculty development programming, and departmental orientation to instructional design services can help establish shared expectations and reduce the ambiguity that often undermines early collaborative efforts. Building on these findings, the present study suggests that institutions should approach faculty orientation to instructional design not only as a technical introduction to available services but also as an opportunity to establish shared expectations regarding collaboration and professional roles.

Recommendations for Instructional Designers and Instructional Design Teams

Instructional designers occupy a central position in the collaborative course development process and have significant influence over how collaborative relationships develop and are sustained (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Xu & Morris, 2020). The findings of this study suggest several recommendations for instructional designers and the teams within which they work.

First, instructional designers should prioritize role clarification at the outset of every collaborative engagement. Prior research has similarly emphasized that early role negotiation and expectation-setting are critical for effective faculty–instructional designer partnerships

(Drysdale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). Faculty in this study consistently described early conversations about responsibilities, decision-making boundaries, and workflow expectations as essential to productive collaboration. Instructional designers who initiate these conversations proactively — rather than waiting for ambiguity to create friction — are more likely to establish collaborative relationships built on shared understanding and mutual respect. Consistent with these earlier recommendations, the findings of the present study suggest that proactive role clarification can help reduce role ambiguity and create a foundation for more collaborative course development.

Second, instructional designers should approach collaboration as a dialogic process rather than a directive one. Studies examining faculty–instructional designer partnerships have similarly found that collaborative dialogue and mutual consultation strengthen working relationships and improve course design outcomes (Richardson et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). Faculty described the most effective instructional designers as those who asked questions, listened carefully, and framed pedagogical recommendations as suggestions grounded in evidence rather than as requirements imposed by process or policy. This approach demonstrates respect for faculty disciplinary expertise while still contributing the pedagogical and design knowledge that instructional designers are positioned to offer. Building on these findings in the literature, the present study further suggests that instructional designers who frame their expertise through collaborative dialogue may be more likely to foster relationships characterized by trust and professional partnership.

Third, instructional design teams should invest in professional development focused on communication practices, relationship building, and navigating authority dynamics within collaborative contexts. Scholars examining instructional design practice have increasingly noted

that successful collaboration requires not only technical design expertise but also interpersonal and facilitation skills (McDonald, 2023; Stefaniak, 2024). The findings of this study suggest that interpersonal skills and relational awareness are as important to collaboration quality as technical design expertise. Teams that cultivate these competencies alongside instructional design knowledge may be better prepared to build the kinds of partnerships faculty described as most effective. These findings align with broader calls within the instructional design literature to expand professional preparation beyond technical competencies to include collaboration and communication skills necessary for working with faculty partners (Stefaniak et al., 2025b).

Finally, instructional design units should consider how team structures, caseloads, and project management practices affect the quality of individual collaborative relationships. Research examining instructional design work in higher education has documented the significant caseloads many designers manage across programs and departments, often limiting the amount of time available for sustained collaboration with individual faculty members (Kenny et al., 2005; Stefaniak, 2024). When instructional designers are managing too many simultaneous projects, opportunities for sustained dialogue and iterative design are reduced. Departments that advocate for manageable caseloads and sufficient time per project are better positioned to support the kind of relational collaboration that faculty in this study described as most valuable. Consistent with these findings, the present study suggests that institutional leaders and instructional design units should consider how workload distribution affects the ability of instructional designers to cultivate meaningful collaborative partnerships with faculty.

Recommendations for Faculty

While institutional structures and instructional design practices play important roles in shaping collaboration, faculty also have meaningful agency in how collaborative relationships

develop and function (Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). The findings of this study suggest several recommendations directed at faculty members who engage in collaborative online course development.

First, faculty should approach collaboration with instructional designers as a professional partnership rather than a service transaction. Prior research has similarly emphasized the importance of faculty recognizing instructional designers as pedagogical partners rather than technical support staff (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Xu & Morris, 2020). Faculty in this study who described collaboration most positively were those who engaged with instructional designers as creative partners contributing complementary expertise. Entering collaborative relationships with openness to pedagogical input, willingness to discuss course design decisions, and recognition of instructional design expertise as distinct from but equal to disciplinary knowledge can significantly strengthen the collaborative experience. Consistent with these findings in the literature, the present study further suggests that faculty who approach collaboration as a partnership are more likely to experience productive and collegial course development relationships.

Second, faculty should invest time in early role clarification conversations. Scholars examining faculty–instructional designer partnerships have consistently recommended early discussions of roles and expectations as a strategy for reducing ambiguity and preventing misunderstandings during course development (Drysdale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). While institutions bear responsibility for establishing overarching frameworks, faculty can contribute to productive collaboration by discussing their own expectations, working styles, and course goals at the outset of the development process. Participants in this study consistently identified early clarity as one of the most important predictors of collaborative success. These findings reinforce

earlier recommendations in the literature suggesting that explicit role negotiation early in the collaboration process helps establish shared expectations and strengthens working relationships.

Third, faculty should communicate proactively about workload constraints, timeline pressures, and competing responsibilities that may affect their availability during the course development process. Research on collaborative course development has noted that faculty frequently balance course design responsibilities with teaching, research, and service commitments, making transparent communication about workload an important component of effective collaboration (Bowen, 2013; Halupa, 2019). Instructional designers who understand the full professional context in which faculty are operating are better positioned to structure collaborative processes that are realistic and sustainable. Transparency about constraints is not a sign of disengagement, but instead a condition for effective partnership. Consistent with these observations, the findings of this study suggest that open communication about workload conditions can help instructional designers and faculty develop more realistic timelines and collaborative expectations.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have several important implications for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen collaboration between faculty and instructional designers in the development of online courses. As collaborative course design becomes increasingly central to online and hybrid education, institutions must consider how organizational structures, professional roles, and communication practices influence the effectiveness of these partnerships (Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak, 2024). The results of this study suggest that institutions should approach faculty–instructional designer collaboration not simply as a

logistical process for building courses, but as a professional partnership that requires clear expectations, institutional support, and intentional communication.

One of the most significant implications of the study relates to the importance of role clarity in collaborative course development. Prior research has similarly emphasized the importance of clearly defined responsibilities in faculty–instructional designer partnerships, with several scholars recommending that institutions articulate collaborative roles to reduce ambiguity and improve coordination (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2019). Across both quantitative and qualitative findings, faculty consistently emphasized that collaboration was most effective when the responsibilities of faculty and instructional designers were clearly defined (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Halupa, 2019). When faculty understood the pedagogical role of instructional designers and instructional designers respected faculty authority over disciplinary content, collaboration tended to function as a complementary partnership (Drysdale, 2019; McDonald & Yanchar, 2024). Conversely, when expectations were unclear, faculty described uncertainty regarding decision-making authority and the appropriate scope of instructional design input (Mueller et al., 2022; Watson-Held, 2024).

Institutions seeking to strengthen collaborative course development may therefore benefit from establishing clearer frameworks for faculty–instructional designer collaboration (Drysdale, 2019; Ryan & Beck, 2018). These frameworks might include articulated course development models, orientation processes that introduce faculty to the role of instructional designers, and written guidelines that clarify responsibilities within course development teams. By establishing shared expectations early in the design process, institutions can reduce role ambiguity and support more effective collaboration (Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

A second implication relates to the role of communication in shaping collaborative relationships. Communication has long been identified as a central component of effective faculty–instructional designer collaboration, with studies suggesting that ongoing dialogue supports mutual understanding and strengthens professional trust between collaborators (Richardson et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). Faculty participants repeatedly emphasized that successful collaborations were characterized by open dialogue and mutual respect (Richardson et al., 2019; Watson-Held, 2024). Instructional designers who engaged faculty in conversations about course goals, learning outcomes, and disciplinary priorities were more likely to be perceived as collaborative partners (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Drysdale, 2019). These communication practices allowed faculty and instructional designers to develop shared understandings of course design decisions and align their expectations regarding the course development process (Richardson et al., 2019; Rotar, 2024).

Institutions may therefore benefit from creating structures that support sustained communication throughout the course development process (Pulcini & Taylor, 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). Regular design meetings, collaborative planning tools, and opportunities for iterative feedback can help ensure that course design decisions are developed through dialogue rather than imposed through rigid procedures (Mei et al., 2021; Ryan & Beck, 2018). Such practices may also support the development of relational trust between faculty and instructional designers, which the findings of this study suggest is a key factor influencing collaboration experiences (McDonald & Yanchar, 2024; Richardson et al., 2019).

A third implication relates to institutional structures and the organization of instructional design services. Previous research has similarly examined how the organizational placement of instructional design services influences collaborative dynamics, noting that institutional models

such as centralized design units, embedded designers, or vendor-supported development can shape how faculty and designers interact during course development (Rotar, 2024; Xu & Morris, 2020). Faculty in this study described collaboration experiences that varied depending on whether instructional designers were embedded within academic units, located within centralized instructional design offices, or working through vendor-based course development models. These structural arrangements influenced not only how collaboration occurred but also how faculty interpreted the role of instructional designers within the course development process (Stefaniak, 2024; Rotar, 2024).

Institutions should therefore consider how the organizational placement of instructional design services affects collaborative relationships. Embedded instructional designers may have greater opportunities to develop ongoing relationships with faculty and gain familiarity with disciplinary contexts, while centralized instructional design teams may offer broader institutional coordination and resource sharing (Ryan & Beck, 2018; Xu & Morris, 2020). Each model offers advantages and challenges, but institutions should ensure that course development structures allow sufficient flexibility for meaningful collaboration and communication (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019).

Finally, the findings of this study highlight the importance of addressing workload expectations and development timelines within collaborative course design. Scholars examining course development processes have similarly noted that compressed timelines and competing professional responsibilities can limit opportunities for meaningful collaboration between faculty and instructional designers (Mei et al., 2021; Stefaniak, 2024). Faculty participants frequently noted that meaningful collaboration requires time for discussion, reflection, and iterative design. When course development timelines were compressed or when faculty and instructional

designers were managing multiple competing responsibilities, opportunities for deeper collaboration were sometimes limited (Mei et al., 2021; Pulcini & Taylor, 2021). Institutions seeking to strengthen collaborative course design should therefore consider allocating sufficient development time and institutional support to allow faculty and instructional designers to engage fully in the design process.

Taken together, these implications suggest that strengthening faculty–instructional designer collaboration requires attention not only to individual professional practices but also to the institutional structures that shape how collaboration occurs (Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak, 2024). Institutions that provide clear role expectations, support open communication, and allocate sufficient time for course development may be better positioned to foster collaborative partnerships that enhance the quality of online learning environments (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Richardson et al., 2019). These implications are grounded in the study's central purpose of understanding how faculty perceive collaboration with instructional designers, and they reflect the consistent finding across both data strands that collaboration quality is shaped by conditions that institutions have the power and responsibility to address.

Contributions to the Field

This study contributes to the literature on instructional design collaboration and online course development in several important ways. First, the study provides empirical evidence regarding faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers through the use of a mixed-methods research design. While previous research has frequently examined instructional design practices or described collaborative course development models, fewer studies have explored faculty perspectives on these collaborations using both quantitative and qualitative data. Previous scholarship has frequently examined instructional designers' professional identity,

design practices, or institutional roles (Stefaniak et al., 2025a; Xu & Morris, 2020), while comparatively fewer studies have centered faculty interpretations of collaborative course development. By integrating survey data from the PINCOM-Q instrument with qualitative interview findings, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how faculty experience collaboration with instructional designers and extends prior research that has primarily relied on single-method or instructional designer-focused perspectives (Chen & Carliner, 2021).

Second, this study contributes to the literature by applying Role Theory as a framework for interpreting faculty–instructional designer collaboration. Although collaboration between faculty and instructional designers has been widely discussed in the literature on online learning, the role dynamics underlying these relationships have received less theoretical attention. By examining collaboration through the lens of role expectations, role clarity, role negotiation, and role overload, this study offers a theoretical perspective that helps explain why some collaborations are experienced as productive partnerships while others present challenges related to authority, communication, or organizational context. By applying Role Theory to these collaborative relationships, this study extends existing research by offering a theoretical framework that explains how role expectations, authority boundaries, and workload conditions shape collaboration experiences (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Third, the study contributes to the understanding of how institutional context shapes collaborative course development. Previous research has noted that institutional policies, course development models, and organizational placement of instructional design services influence collaboration processes (Rotar, 2024; Stefaniak, 2024). The findings suggest that organizational structures, course development models, and workload expectations all influence how faculty

interpret the role of instructional designers within collaborative projects. These insights highlight the importance of examining collaboration not only as an interpersonal process but also as an institutional practice shaped by broader organizational conditions (Xu & Morris, 2020).

Finally, this study contributes to the growing recognition of instructional designers as educational partners within higher education. As institutions continue to expand online learning opportunities, the role of instructional designers is evolving from that of technical support specialists toward that of pedagogical collaborators who contribute meaningfully to course design (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Magruder et al., 2019). These findings reinforce growing calls within the instructional design literature to recognize instructional designers as collaborative partners in teaching and learning rather than solely as technical support providers (Stefaniak et al., 2025a; Xu & Morris, 2020).

By documenting faculty perceptions of these collaborations, this study provides insight into how instructional design expertise is integrated into the teaching and learning processes within higher education. Taken together, these contributions directly advance the study's purpose of examining faculty perceptions of collaboration with instructional designers during online course development, providing a foundation of empirical and theoretical knowledge that can inform how institutions approach collaborative course design in the future.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the quantitative sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across different institutional contexts. Although the survey results provide useful insight into patterns of faculty perceptions, larger samples would allow for more robust statistical analysis and greater confidence in the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, of the 97

faculty members who began the survey, only 63 completed it fully and met inclusion criteria for analysis. The 34 incomplete responses were removed to ensure consistency and reliability of the quantitative results. The relatively high rate of non-completion may reflect the length and density of the survey instrument, which could have discouraged some participants from finishing.

Second, the qualitative component of the study only included one rounds of interviews. While the interviews provided rich insight into faculty experiences with instructional designer collaboration, the perspectives represented in the study may not capture the full diversity of faculty experiences across disciplines, institutional types, or course development models. Future research involving larger and more diverse participant samples could provide additional insight into how collaboration is experienced across different academic contexts.

Another limitation relates to the focus on faculty perceptions of collaboration. While faculty perspectives are essential for understanding how collaboration is experienced within course development processes, the study did not include instructional designer perspectives. Instructional designers may interpret collaborative relationships differently, particularly with respect to role expectations, communication practices, and institutional constraints. Including both faculty and instructional designer perspectives in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of collaborative course development dynamics.

Finally, the study was conducted within a specific context of online course development. Although the findings provide valuable insight into collaborative design processes in online learning environments, collaboration between faculty and instructional designers may function differently in other contexts such as hybrid learning initiatives, curriculum redesign projects, or institutional teaching innovation programs.

Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several directions for future research on faculty–instructional designer collaboration. One important area for future investigation involves examining collaboration from multiple professional perspectives. While this study focused primarily on faculty perceptions, future research could incorporate the perspectives of instructional designers to explore how both groups interpret their collaborative relationships. Such studies may reveal additional insights into how role expectations are negotiated and how collaboration can be strengthened within course development teams.

Future research could also examine collaboration across a broader range of institutional contexts. Higher education institutions vary widely in how they organize instructional design services, structure course development processes, and support online learning initiatives. Comparative studies examining collaboration across institutional types, including community colleges, research universities, and private institutions, could provide additional insight into how organizational structures influence collaborative practices.

Another promising direction for future research involves longitudinal studies of collaborative course development. Rather than examining collaboration at a single point in time, longitudinal research could explore how faculty–instructional designer partnerships evolve across multiple course development cycles. Such research could provide insight into how collaborative relationships develop over time and how repeated collaboration influences trust, communication, and role negotiation.

Future research could also investigate professional power dynamics in faculty–instructional designer collaboration more directly. The present study found that professional power received one of the lowest mean scores in the dataset and demonstrated substantial

variability across participants, suggesting that perceptions of authority and influence within collaborative relationships are inconsistent and context-dependent. Studies that examine how institutional policies, staffing models, and role structures shape professional power dynamics could provide more targeted guidance for institutions seeking to build more equitable collaborative partnerships between faculty and instructional designers.

Finally, future research could explore how collaboration influences instructional outcomes. While the present study focused on faculty perceptions of collaboration, additional studies could examine how collaborative course development affects course design quality, student engagement, and learning outcomes. Understanding these connections could provide further evidence for the value of collaborative instructional design practices within higher education.

Conclusion

The expansion of online learning in higher education has transformed the way courses are developed and delivered (Singleton et al., 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2025a). Increasingly, institutions rely on collaborative models in which faculty and instructional designers work together to design courses that integrate disciplinary expertise with effective pedagogical practices and digital learning technologies (Richardson et al., 2019; Xu & Morris, 2020). As these collaborations become more common, understanding how faculty perceive and experience these partnerships becomes increasingly important (Chen & Carliner, 2021; Lubin & Reio, 2023).

The findings of this study suggest that faculty generally view collaboration with instructional designers as a valuable aspect of the course development process. Faculty frequently described instructional designers as partners who contributed expertise in pedagogy,

course structure, and educational technology. At the same time, the study also revealed that collaboration is shaped by a complex set of professional and organizational factors, including role clarity, communication practices, authority boundaries, institutional structures, and workload expectations.

Interpreting these findings through the lens of Role Theory highlights the importance of professional role expectations in shaping collaborative relationships. Faculty–instructional designer collaboration requires individuals from different professional backgrounds to negotiate responsibilities, authority, and expertise within evolving institutional contexts. When roles are clearly defined and communication is open, collaboration can function as a complementary partnership that enhances course design and supports effective online learning environments.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how faculty perceive collaboration with instructional designers and highlights the importance of role negotiation within collaborative course design. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data through a mixed-methods design was essential to achieving this understanding, as it allowed the study to capture both measurable patterns in collaboration perceptions and the lived experiences through which faculty interpret these collaborative relationships. By recognizing collaboration as a professional partnership shaped by institutional context and role expectations, higher education institutions can better support the development of effective learning environments that meet the evolving needs of students in digital and hybrid educational settings.

The findings of this study carry implications that extend beyond the mechanics of course development. Higher education has made significant progress in expanding access to online learning, particularly for nontraditional students, working adults, and those who have historically been underserved by in-person educational structures. Yet access alone does not guarantee

equitable learning experiences. When collaboration between faculty and instructional designers is poorly defined, institutionally unsupported, or constrained by competing workload demands, the courses that students enter are less likely to reflect the intentional design that diverse learners require. The present study demonstrates that the conditions shaping collaborative course development, including role clarity, communication practices, institutional structures, and organizational support, are not peripheral concerns but institutional responsibilities. Institutions that treat collaboration as a logistical convenience rather than a pedagogical priority risk producing online courses that replicate the same structural ambiguities that have long disadvantaged students who depend most on clarity, accessibility, and intentional design. Strengthening faculty–instructional designer partnerships is therefore not simply a matter of improving professional relationships; it is a matter of institutional commitment to ensuring that expanded access translates into genuinely equitable learning opportunities.

As higher education continues to expand online and hybrid learning opportunities, collaboration between faculty and instructional designers will remain an essential component of course development. Institutions that recognize the importance of these partnerships and provide structures that support clear roles, open communication, and adequate development time may be better positioned to foster collaborative environments that benefit both faculty and students.

References

- Allen, I.E., & Seaman, J. (2014). *Grade change: Tracking online education in the United States, 2013*. Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group, LLC.
- Bawa, P., & Watson, S. (2017). The chameleon characteristics: A phenomenological study of instructional designer, faculty, and administrator perceptions of collaborative instructional design environments. *Qualitative Report*, 22(9).
- Bennett, L., & Albrecht, A. (2021). Analyzing the instructional designer role: A new framework to improve efficacy and dynamic partnerships. *Distance Learning*, 18(4), 7–18.
- Biddle, B. J. (1979). *Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors*. Academic Press.
- Biddle, B. J., & Thomas, E. J. (Eds.). (1966). *Role theory: Concepts and research*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bloomberg, L. D. (2023). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end*. SAGE.
- Bowen, W. (2013). *Higher education in the digital age*. Princeton University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400847204>
- Brown, A. H., & Green, T. D. (2022). *The essentials of instructional design: Connecting fundamental principles with process and practice* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Carliner, S. (2023). Response to Lubin and Reio, “From the standpoint of instructional designers: critically investigating the coordination of ID contributions to collaborative online course

- development.” *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development*, 35(3), 141–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19394225231203652>
- Chatterjee, R., Juvalé, D., & Jaramillo Cherrez, N. (2023). What the debriefs unfold: A multicase study of the experiences of higher education faculty in designing and teaching their asynchronous online courses. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 24(1), 25–92.
- Chen, Y., & Carliner, S. (2021). A special SME: an integrative literature review of the relationship between instructional designers and faculty in the design of online courses for higher education. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 33(4), 471–495. <https://doi.org/10.1002/piq.21339>
- Cox, S., & Scunthorpe, R.T. (2003). How do instructional design professionals spend their time? *TechTrends*, 47(3), 45–47.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Drysdale, J. (2019). The collaborative mapping model: Relationship-centered instructional design for higher education. *Online Learning*, 23(3), 56. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i3.2058>
- Drysdale, J. (2021). The story is in the structure: A multi-case study of instructional design teams. *Online Learning*, 25(3), 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v25i3.2877>
- Fetters, M. D., Curry, L. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving integration in mixed methods designs—Principles and practices. *Health Services Research*, 2134–2156.

- George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Halupa, C. (2019). Differentiation of roles: Instructional designers and faculty in the creation of online courses. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 8(1), 55.
<https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v8n1p55>
- Hsu, H.-C. K. (2020). Developing online engineering courses: A resource kit for collaboration between faculty and instructional designers. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(1), 49–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520905773>
- Kanjanapongpaisal, P. G., & Antee, A. (2021). University teachers' design work: implications for an urgent shift to digital. *Educational Technology Research & Development*, 69(1), 273–276. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09881-3>
- Kaplan, J., & Shi, T. (2023). Many lenses with one focus: Making philosophy learning meaningful through collaborative design. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2023.13.1.30>
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations* (2nd ed.). Wiley.
- Kenny, R.F., Zang, Z., Schwier, R.A., & Campbell, K. (2005). A review of what instructional designers do: Questions answered and questions not asked. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, 31(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.21432/T2JW2P>
- Laurillard, D., Kennedy, E., Charlton, P., Wild, J., & Dimakopoulos, D. (2018). Using technology to develop teachers as designers of TEL: Evaluating the learning designer.

British Journal of Educational Technology, 49(6), 1044–1058.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12697>

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Lubin, L., & Reio, T. G. (2023). From the standpoint of instructional designers: Critically investigating the coordination of ID contributions to collaborative online course development. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development*, 35(3), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19394225231202308>

Magruder, O., Arnold, D. A., Moore, S., & Edwards, M. (2019). *What is an ID? A survey study*. *Online Learning* (Newburyport, Mass.), 23(3), 137–160. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i3.1546>

McDonald, J. K. (2023). The everydayness of instructional design and the pursuit of quality in online courses. *Online Learning*, 27(2), 137–169. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v27i2.3470>

McDonald, J. K., & Yanchar, S. C. (2024). Understanding trust in online course design. *TechTrends*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-024-00940-7>

Mei, B., May, L., Heap, R., Ellis, D., Tickner, S., Thornley, J., Denton, J., & Durham, R. (2021). Rapid development studio: An intensive, iterative approach to designing online learning. *SAGE Open*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211047574>

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

- Morgan, T. (2019). Instructional designers and open education practices: Negotiating the gap between intentional and operational agency. *Open Praxis*, 11(4), 369.
<https://doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.11.4.1011>
- Mueller, C. M., Richardson, J., Watson, S. L., & Watson, W. (2022). Instructional designers' perceptions & experiences of collaborative conflict with faculty. *TechTrends*, 66(4), 578–589. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-022-00694-0>
- Olesova, L., & Campbell, S. (2019). The Impact of the Cooperative Mentorship Model on Faculty Preparedness to Develop Online Courses. *Online Learning*, 23(4), 192–213.
<https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i4.2089>
- Ødegård, A. (2006). Exploring perceptions of interprofessional collaboration in child mental health care. *International Journal of Integrated Care*, 6, e25.
- Pulcini, E., & Taylor, K. (2021). Sustaining collaborative design partnerships in higher education: Lessons from ongoing faculty–designer teams. *IGI Global*. (pp. 219-242).
- Ramani, S. (2022a). A learning mindset needed from faculty in online program management and university partnership business model. *Electronic Journal of E-Learning*, 20(2), 134-150.
<https://doi.org/10.34190/ejel.20.2.2063>
- Ramani, S. (2022b). Background and skill set of instructional designers questioned in the OPM-university business model. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 34(1), 25.

- Richardson, J. C., Ashby, I., Alshammari, A. N., Cheng, Z., Johnson, B. S., Krause, T. S., Lee, D., Randolph, A. E., & Wang, H. (2019). Faculty and instructional designers on building successful collaborative relationships. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 67(4), 855–880. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-018-9636-4>
- Rotar, O. (2024). Partnership models in online learning design and the barriers for successful collaboration. *Research & Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*, 19, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.58459/rptel.2024.19010>
- Ryan, S. M., & Beck, D. E. (2018). Use of an Education Specialist Team that Collaborates with Faculty Members to Efficiently and Continuously Develop an Innovative Pharmacy Curriculum Across Multiple Campuses. *TechTrends*, 62(3), 230–238. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-018-0274-9>
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Sanga, M. W. (2021). Operationalizing faculty development online: Analyzing the impact of a purposefully designed online faculty development course. *Distance Learning*, 18(3), 57–65.
- Sanga, M. W., & Brogdon, S. L. (2021). Designing for distance learning: Analyzing the process of redesigning online courses using the three pillars method. *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design*, 11(2), 62–72. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJOPCD.2021040105>
- Singleton, K. J., Evmenova, A., Kinas Jerome, M., & Clark, K. (2019). Integrating UDL strategies into the online course development process: Instructional designers’

perspectives. *Online Learning* (Newburyport, Mass.), 23(1), 206.

<https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i1.1407>

Slagter van Tryon, McDonald, J., & Hirumi, A. (2018). Preparing the next generation of instructional designers: a cross-institution faculty collaboration. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 30(1), 125–153. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-018-9167-3>

Stefaniak, J. (2024). Examination of systemic factors that impact instructional designers' practices in higher education. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 72(6), 3139–3158. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-024-10388-4>

Stefaniak, J. E., Cha, E. E., Yang, F., Gilstrap, S., & Yang, L. (2025a). A comprehensive review of instructional designer research and approaches in learning design. *Educational Technology Research & Development*, 73(4), 2057–2079. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-025-10501-1>

Stefaniak, J., E Cha, E., Yang, F., & Gilstrap, S. (2025b). An exploration of instructional design tasks performed by designers in higher education. *TechTrends: Linking Research and Practice to Improve Learning*, 69(2), 362–371. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-025-01041-9>

Stephens, M. L., Lowney, J., Ybarra, C. M., & Stephens, S. (2022). Adult learning facilitators in any setting, instructional designers' roles as the adult learner and educator, and their perceived knowledge construction when preparing graduate faculty for teaching online: An interpretive study. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development*, 34(1), 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20319>

Watson-Held, H. (2024). Promoting positive instructional designer and faculty relationships in the online environment: A case study. *The Journal of Educators Online*, 21(1).

<https://doi.org/10.9743/JEO.2024.21.1.1>

Xu, H., & Morris, L. V. (2020). Instructional designers' roles in higher education: Past, present, and future directions. *Online Learning*, 24(3), 227–251.

Xu, M. & Stefaniak, J., (2020). An examination of the systemic reach of instructional design models: A systematic review. *TechTrends*, 64(5), 710–719.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-020-00539-8>

Appendix A - Questionnaire

Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model Questionnaire

I. Demographic Information:

Faculty Status:

- Full-time tenure/tenure track
- Full time, non-tenured
- Adjunct/part-time
- Other (please specify: ____)

Institutional Type:

- Public four-year university
- Private four-year university
- Community college
- For-profit institution
- Other (please specify: _____)

Discipline or Academic Department: ____

Year of Teaching Experience in Higher Education

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16+ years

Years of Experience Teaching online

- None
- 1-3 years
- 4-7 years

- 8+ years

When did the most recent collaboration with an instructional designer occur?

- Within the last year
- 1-2 years ago
- 3 or more years ago

Nature of the Collaboration

- Voluntary (I sought out the instructional designer)
- Assigned or required by administration
- Combination of both

Duration of the collaboration:

- Less than 4 weeks
- 1-2 months
- 3-4 months
- More than 4 months

Average number of students taught per term:

- Fewer than 20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- More than 60

Do you have required research attached to your job duties?

- Yes
- No

II. PINCOM-Q

Think about collaboration activities with faculty members and consider claims presented below.

- 1=strongly agree
- 2=agree
- 3=somewhat agree
- 4=neither agree nor disagree (neutral)
- 5=somewhat disagree
- 6=disagree
- 7=strongly disagree

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I find collaboration with instructional designers to develop online courses valuable.							
2	I use my creativity and imagination when I collaborate with instructional designers to develop online courses.							
3	It is important to be personally engaged when working in interprofessional collaboration projects with instructional designers to develop online courses.							
4	I experience personal growth when I work in interprofessional collaboration projects to develop online courses.							
5	I always have clear goals when I work in interprofessional collaboration projects to develop online courses.							
6	I experience that instructional designers have expectations that are contradictory to mine when we collaborate to develop online courses.							
7	Our roles are clearly defined when instructional designers and I interprofessionally collaborate to develop online courses							
8	My area of responsibility is clearly defined when I collaborate with instructional designers to develop online courses.							
9	Some instructional designers act in ways that make interprofessional collaboration to develop online courses difficult.							

10	If some instructional designers had greater insight in their behavior, interprofessional collaboration to develop online courses would be easier							
11	Some instructional designers lack openness to participate much in interprofessional collaboration projects							
12	I experience that interprofessional collaboration calls for openness of mind							
13	Some instructional designers dominate the course development meetings with their professional viewpoints							
14	Some instructional designers define and control the process of developing online courses in interprofessional collaboration projects							
15	Sometimes, I am not able to present my perspectives because some instructional designers consider themselves as high status professionals and talk all the time							
16	Interprofessional collaboration to develop online courses does not work because instructional designers dominate the course development meetings							
17	I experience that effective interprofessional collaboration projects to develop online course have a clear and defined project leader or manager							
18	It is important that a collaboration project manager arranges the work in ways that help reach the collaboration goals to develop online courses							
19	A collaboration project manager seldom influences what other individuals in the interprofessional collaboration projects do							
20	I trust that a collaboration manager engages the interest of individuals in the collaboration projects							
21	In most cases, defined problems are solved in the							

	inter-professional collaboration projects							
22	There are seldom collaboration problems when instructional designers and I develop online courses.							
23	In most of the interprofessional collaboration projects I participate in, we agree about priorities							
24	Instructional designers and faculty members in interprofessional collaboration projects are often frustrated with each other							
25	I get relevant feedback from instructional designers on my contributions in the interprofessional collaboration projects I participate in							
26	In the interprofessional collaboration projects I participate in, exchange of information is never a problem							
27	There is always good communication in our interprofessional collaboration projects I participate in.							
28	instructional designers and I are good at exchanging information with each other about how we work collaboratively to develop online courses.							
29	I experience that I can get help and support from the instructional designers in the interprofessional collaboration projects I participate in							
30	I find that instructional designers in the interprofessional collaboration projects I participate in, are willing to listen to me if I have problems							
31	I find that I am appreciated by instructional designers in the interprofessional collaboration projects I participate in							
32	In most cases, instructional designers understand what I am trying to express and/or report.							
33	Interprofessional collaboration is highly valued in my institution							
34	Professionals in interprofessional collaboration							

	projects are strongly influenced by the culture of the unit and department they belong to							
35	The organizations are characterized by the wish to work interprofessionally							
36	We (the employees) at my institution are encouraged to promote new ways of working in interprofessional collaboration projects.							
37	At my institution, interprofessional collaboration exists because the institution has decided that faculty members and instructional designers should collaborate							
38	Interprofessional collaboration is well described in the institutions plans							
39	I am familiar with the plans of the other departments							
40	The other departments or groups have definite and clear aims regarding interprofessional collaboration							
41	Institutional policies and accreditation requirements relevant to online course design are relatively well known by all the professionals in interprofessional groups							
42	Faculty and instructional designers each know their area of responsibility in the course design process.							
43	Faculty and instructional designers understand each other's roles.							
44	Faculty and instructional designers need to communicate clearly about their respective responsibilities.							
45	The needs of students are central to how faculty and instructional designers collaborate when developing online courses.							
46	Collaboration between faculty and instructional designers exists because institutions have recognized its importance for quality online education.							
47	Collaboration between faculty and instructional designers exists because students benefit from well-designed online learning experiences.							

48	Collaboration between faculty and instructional designers can be challenging because each brings different professional priorities and perspectives.							
----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

III. Interviews invite:

Would you be willing to participate in a Zoom interview to share more information on your experience with developing online courses in partnership with instructional designers?

If yes, please provide your email address and phone number where you can be reached for or further contact.

- Name:
- Email:
- Phone number:

Appendix B - Semi Structured Interview Guide

1. How would you describe the experience developing online courses and the role instructional designers played in that process?
2. What facets do you consider as influential in determining the quality of interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty members and instructional designers during the development of an online course?
3. Describe any expectations you had about working with an instructional designer before the collaboration began?
4. Were there any moments where responsibilities or decision-making boundaries between you and the instructional designer felt unclear?
5. How would you describe your responsibilities versus those of the instructional designers when developing online courses?
6. Can you describe any instances when your goals or expectations for the course conflicted with those of the instructional designer or the institution?
7. How did your existing workload, timelines, or institutional expectations influence your collaboration with the instructional designer?
8. Thinking about your overall experience, what elements do you believe most influenced whether the collaboration felt successful?
9. Thinking about your overall experience, what elements do you believe most influenced whether the collaboration felt unsuccessful?
10. Is there anything else about your experience collaborating with instructional designers that you think is important for this study?

Appendix C - IRB Approval



TO: Ambyr Rios
Curriculum and Instruction

Proposal Number: IRB-13419

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 12/15/2025

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Faculty-Instructional Designer Partnerships in Higher Education."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 45 CFR §104(d), category: Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.

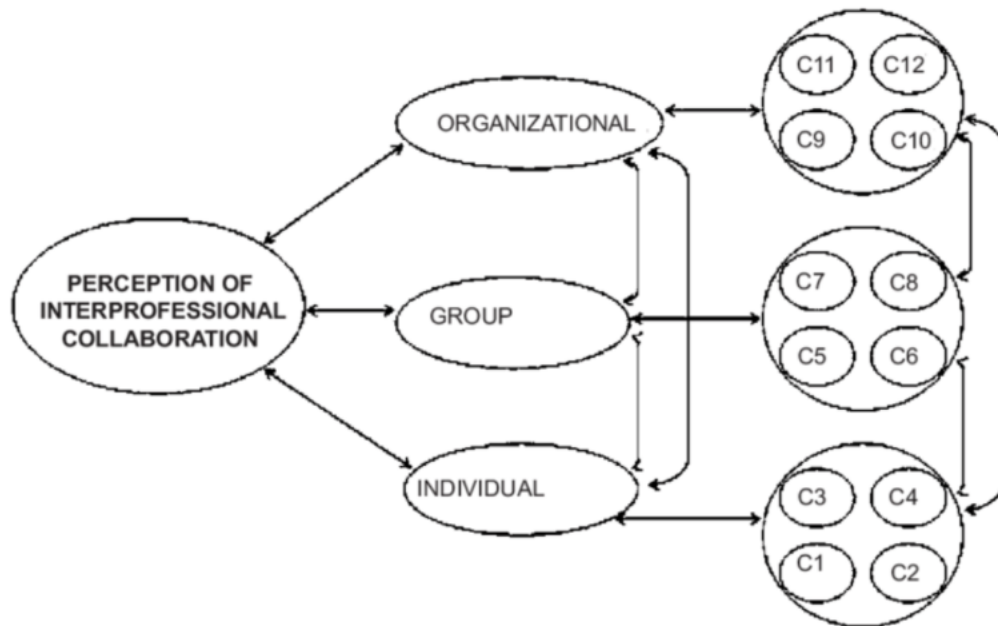
Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 12/15/2025 3:12 PM ET

Figure 5.1 IRB Approval

Appendix D - The PINCOM Model Figure



C1=motivation, C2=role expectancy, C3=personality style, C4=professional power, C5=group leadership, C6=coping, C7=communication, C8=social support, C9=organizational culture, C10=organizational goal, C11=organizational domain and C12=organizational environment

The Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model (PINCOM).

Figure 5.2 Appendix D - The PINCOM Model Figure

Appendix E - Progression of Qualitative Codes From Initial Coding to Final Themes

Initial Codes	Second Round	Final Theme
Uncertainty about instructional designer role Negative experience, unclear roles Positive experience, clear roles Confusion about roles Defining responsibilities early Confusion about division of labor Faculty responsible for content expertise Instructional designer responsible for course structure Instructional designer organizes content Separating content and design expertise Instructional designer translates ideas into course activities Faculty learning what instructional designers do Role expectations evolving over time	Role Clarity Division of labor Complementary expertise Role Negotiation	Clear roles support successful collaboration

Clarifying who leads what part of the process Initial meetings clarify responsibilities		
Open communication improves collaboration Active listening from instructional designer Feeling heard in the design process Instructional designer respects faculty expertise Faculty respect instructional designer expertise Collaborative brainstorming conversations Back-and-forth idea exchange Positive interpersonal relationship with designer Instructional designer enthusiasm energizes process Trust built through repeated collaboration Instructional designer framing suggestions positively Comfort asking questions during design Constructive feedback from instructional designer	Trust development Collaborative communication Mutual respect and professionalism Interpersonal collaboration quality	Trust, Communication, and Mutual Respect Shape Collaboration Quality

Shared goal of student success		
Instructional designer perceived as having too much control Faculty authority over course content challenged Unclear who makes final decisions Instructional designer acting like subject matter expert Disagreements about course learning outcomes Process used to enforce decisions Accessibility requirements creating tension Faculty feeling evaluated rather than supported Uncertainty about leadership during meetings Conflict over course vision Boundary tension between design advice and control	Role conflict Authority ambiguity Role overlap Decision boundary negotiation Perceived loss of disciplinary authority Process enforcement as authority	Authority and Decision-Making Boundaries Remain Sites of Tension
Kickoff meetings establish expectations Planning conversations before course development Course design document	Structured development process ID as project manager Workflow clarity	Structured Process and Project Management Reduce Uncertainty

guides development Instructional designer creates development timeline Milestones help track course progress Instructional designer coordinating workflow Clear plan reduces faculty anxiety Instructional designer keeping project on schedule Structured process keeps development moving Process helps manage complexity of course design	Process coordination Early planning Design documentation to guide Timeline coordination	
Leadership involvement clarifies expectations Institutional policies shaping course design decisions Staffing limitations affecting design support Institutional scope limits course changes Organizational expectations influencing collaboration Institutional communication structures affecting workflow Institutional priorities shaping course design timelines Program requirements	Institutional structure shape collaboration Institutional constraints Leadership influence on collaboration Policy affect course development Institutional support	Institutional Structures Strongly Influence Collaboration

guiding course structure Institutional constraints limiting design options		
Faculty balancing teaching and course development Instructional designer supporting multiple projects Waiting on SME deliverables Waiting on instructional designer feedback Compressed development timelines Scheduling meetings around busy workloads Faculty needing time to reflect on course design Development pace creating stress Timeline pressure reducing creativity Difficulty coordinating schedules Time constraints affecting collaboration quality	Competing priorities Pacing mismatch Workload pressure Scheduling constraints Time constraints	Workload, Pacing, and Time Pressure Affect Collaboration Quality
Instructional designer helps bring ideas to life Brainstorming course ideas together Instructional designer	Creative co-design Collaborative innovation Partnership relationship Shared ownership of course	The Strongest Collaborations Are Experienced as Creative Partnerships

suggesting new approaches Collaborative design discussions Instructional designer expanding course possibilities Creative exchange between faculty and designer Shared excitement about course development Instructional designer improving course engagement Instructional designer enhancing course alignment Pride in collaboratively designed course	development Creative exchange Instructional design enhancing course quality	
--	--	--