The eLearning Coach Podcast # 62
Starting an Instructional Design Career in Higher Education
A conversation with Peter Shea

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Connie: Hello, learning people. Welcome to episode 62. In this session, I speak with Peter Shea about what it's like to be an instructional designer in an academic environment. Peter runs an excellent Facebook group for instructional designers and education with 7,000 members, and that's where I first met him. Peter is an instructional designer, teacher, editor, and writer. He has spent several years as director of professional development in higher education. He is co-editor of a forthcoming book on technology for learning and assessment. As always, you can find the show notes and download a transcript at theelearningcoach.com/podcasts/62. Here's our conversation.

Connie: Hi, Peter. Welcome to The eLearning Coach podcast.

Peter: Hi, Connie.

Connie: Can you explain a little bit about what you do in higher education?

Peter: I work at my college as part of an auxiliary member of the learning design team for our online courses. I also do run our professional development program, which involves a lot of online courses and modules in design, so my area in the past few years has been instructional design but with an eye towards not only helping instructors but also helping fellow professionals get better at what they do.

Connie: I really wanted to clarify and explore the instructional designer role in higher education with you because I think people don't know enough about this role, and also I come across people who can't decide or aren't sure where they would fit in better, doing learning design in higher education or doing learning and development in a workplace environment. I thought this podcast could help people differentiate and perhaps decide, and perhaps they want to be able to do both at different times in their careers. So, what are some of the typical roles that instructional designers play in higher ed?

Peter: The primary role of instructional designers has been to help support online course design, because obviously, that's a field that many instructors had no formal training of, it wasn't emphasized in their professional training when they were in graduate school, and so

they rely upon the instructional designers to help support their effective course designs and tell them about most effective teaching practices in an online environment. It's interesting because instructional designers have been around in the nonacademic space for many decades but they're only recent traveled into academia. I've compared them to the immigrant laborer who were brought into the country, to the United States to build the railroad and then just stayed, and I think instructional designers are often treated like an immigrant class in higher education. They're those curious people on the side. They're nice, they're helpful, they speak a strange language. We're not fit neatly into the traditional model, and there's a reason for that, because we're actually here to help bring about the next model, and I think there's a dawning awareness of that.

Connie: How is it different to work in higher ed versus in the workplace?

Peter: My sense is the difference is that it's driven by the cultural values of different communities. In the workplace, there's a chance that you might be given a greater number of interesting tools to build online learning because in academia, the chief learning focuses on the instructor, so the instructor wants you to help them organize their content.

Wherein business, often there is no instructor. There is a subject matter expert but there is no instructor, so you have to build something that's really independent for the learner, and I think the relationship dynamic is different between the business subject matter expert instructional designer and instructional designer in higher education. In higher education, it's a very class stratified environment.

One of the things I always advise instructional designers who are going to work in education is be very mindful of how they develop the relationship with the faculty member, because that will make or break your success, and so before you even begin the design, you probably want to work on the relationship with the instructor first and build a rapport.

Connie: Is that one of the biggest challenges in working in higher ed? Do the faculty, are they not that interested in having instructional designers help them with their courses or do they not understand it?

Peter: I don't think it's uniform. There's really no, I can't say blanket. They don't understand. There are some faculty who are really eager to be helped. Others are very independent and there's a third category, like "I didn't want to do this" but they're saying I have to do it. There are different subgroups within the faculty phase, and you have to know which one you're dealing with and adjust your responses accordingly. I think you always, no matter who you're

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working with, whichever group, you always have to stress the ownership of the course in the end belongs to the faculty member, and therefore, no matter how impassioned you are about certain approaches or principles, you have to remember not to try to be taking over the class from them, and again, it varies from college and university. Some colleges have very strict rules about course design, and they tell the instructional designers, you have a checklist, if they don't make the checklist, they don't get to teach online. Others strongly encourage the faculty to follow best practices, but don't get in their face.

Connie: The instruction designer role is not only for online courses, is it?

Peter: No, it's not for only online courses, but in higher education, it's predominantly online. It's a running joke in my instructional design and education is that we can do a lot more than just working online courses, and sometimes when we have really good faculty partners, the light bulb goes off and the faculty says "You know what? This thing you showed me, I could actually use it in my face to face class," and that's when instruction designer goes "Yes, yes, you can." We would love to do more classroom support. That's a very traditional sphere and the space is guarded very jealously. I don't think many faculty members have a sense of proprietary ownership over their virtual space as much as they do their traditional classroom. So, the traditional classroom is really their domain and I think they're more reluctant to invite people in, where the online thing is an auxiliary to their real teaching.

Peter: That attitude can influence how much instructional design can impact face to face class. Sometimes you can do a workshop. Structural designers I know do workshops for faculty, and rather than work with individual faculty, introduce them to practices and ideas and then step back and hope that the seeds will take root somewhere, because it's very dangerous to comment on a faculty member's teaching. That's not your area. You can say "These are really good ideas." We can't say "Your course would really benefit." That would be very dangerous, and you can wind up alienating a faculty member, and again, diplomacy is one of the key skills required of an instructional designer in education.

Connie: Very good input. Is there a difference between working in a community college as far as the instructional design role goes versus working in a university?

Peter: Again, depending upon the university. Universities tend to have more resources, and community colleges, people who work in community colleges become really smart at being resourceful with very little, now more than ever. I'd like to say that I miss the days when they told us to do more with less. Now we do more with nothing, but our students need it, our faculty need it, and we do the best I can so we're very, very resourceful about stretching our

resources to the best we can. Sometimes, particularly if you're like me and you live in an area where there are a lot of wealthy private universities, you kind of look longingly at the resources they have, but the resources alone won't change things.

Peter: I had a colleague who did faculty development at MIT, and one day I said to him, "I am so jealous. You have all these wonderful toys you can share with faculty," and he looked at me and he said, "Big chalk." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, I could talk about all these big, all these wonderful technologies, and a faculty member will smile indulgently and say 'Really?' All I need is a really big piece of colored chalk to write on the board so they can see what I'm running. That's all I need. Thank you. That's it." You can have the resources, but if the mindset isn't responsive to it, and that's really one of the biggest challenges. The cultural mindset in the higher education really has not embraced structural design and evidence-based learning practices. It's still very traditional bound and it's a real challenge to introduce change. Past few months, I've been hopeful that there will be some permanent change as consequence of this crisis. I'm waiting to see.

Connie: I did see an interesting post from someone in your Facebook, Instructional Designers in Education group. It was about a week after everyone was in lockdown mode and she wrote "Just like that [snaps] everyone understands what I do." So, funny.

Peter: I used to joke that I spent years trying to explain to my parents what I did, and they never quite got it. Now they realize the importance. We become education's first responders. People have begun to lately appreciate what we can do, and I'm hoping that going forward, they'll remember who was with them in the trenches and that'll give us some valuable social capital to work with. Again, we'll see.

Connie: Is it possible to explain a typical day of someone who's an instructional designer in higher education or is it just too varied to make it generic? I'm just wondering like what some of the tasks are that they do and some of the roles that they might play.

Peter: There are a couple of hats they wear. One of them is to work with a variety of individual faculty members on the course design, and right now, it's crunch time, it is just insane. People are now being told... Before they were bringing on a few courses every semester in a very organized way, and now it's like you're putting the whole college online and you have this much time. I had a colleague email me today, he says, "I've just been told I need to online 300 more classes," and please bear in mind that in many colleges, there's one instructional designer, because before it's like, "Why would we need more? We just need one person to help out with a couple." It was one of the reasons why you're seeing in groups like mine, people posting on

behalf of the college and university's contract work for instructional designers over the next two months to help bring classes online.

Peter: A lot of universities are saying "We don't want nor do we have the money to bring in another full time position right now because of the financial impact of COVID, but we can and should contract out to instructional designers with some experience to help us build our programs." So, there's that and of course, there's the workshops I mentioned. In quieter time, you can do the workshops where you can present ideas and say "Research says this works more. If you're having this trouble, try this," so you can be a presenter at the college in a professional development sense, and sometimes people see us as IT. The LMS isn't working. Now a lot of us have an instructional technology expertise. We're not necessarily LMS managers, some of us are and they have no problem with that. Others are not so as much. So, there's a blurring between the instructional technologist role and the instructional designer role, and in many colleges, what they're asking for when they say instructional designer is really a hybrid of those two roles. A little bit of this, a little bit of that.

Connie: That's fairly common in the workplace training world too. In workplace L&D, I see advertisements. They're looking for people who have visual design, high level of technology, learning management system, instruction design, and a cognitive psychology background, but yeah, some of these ads are like for super people.

Peter: Yeah, of course, the punchline is when you look at what they're willing to pay.

Connie: That's one of the questions I wanted to ask. How do you think salaries compare between higher ed and workplace learning and development?

Peter: I'm a little rusty on the comparison in terms of what's being offered to the market. There are so many factors. The different regions of the country will obviously pay different. The size of the company, a lot of places they'll offer you like 45, and then a couple of years ago, I saw a community college that offered 90, and I was like, "What?" I thought there must be a typo there. That's very much an anomaly. That is not the standard pay for an instructional designer in higher education. It's based upon region. Generally, I would say in higher education, it can range between 45 and 75 depending on the region, the size of the institution, your years of experience, so there's a lot of range there, but generally there's a lot of grumbling as there are among other educators that their paycheck doesn't equal the amount of effort and expertise that's required with them.

Connie: The people I know who were in higher ed have explained to me that although their salaries were lower, the benefits were great. College tuition was getting partially paid for, they had many weeks off for vacation, so I think that anyone who's listening has to weigh all of the benefits, and it also depends how much you want to be in an academic universe too.

Peter: Right, and again, my own choices reflect that. I spent a brief time in the corporate world 15 years ago in order to broaden my expertise, because I think it's good for an instructional designer. Wherever they prefer to be, they should spend some time in both areas so they can have that flexibility because you never know where the job opportunities are going to be, and you don't want to be too nailed down to one area or the other, but I was drawn back to higher education for the role of the institution, I was drawn to its mission. I liked working with faculty, I liked the sense of security frankly that came from working from an institution as opposed to private company where, as I'm sure you know, when a crunch happens, L&D people so then become nonessential workers. I've obviously made my choice a long time ago and I haven't regretted it. I mean there are times when I certainly grumble, but I do prefer working in the higher ed. I don't mind the idea of doing contract work with companies.

Peter: Years ago, I had a mentor who was a professor of psychology and practice as a psychologist in the evening, and he says that's the best way. You want a little bit of the security of an institution, but you want the private income. That's the model you want to go for. That's what I tell people. I say "Listen. If you're not happy with your paycheck and you're a good time manager, when you're done with your day job, you should set aside 20 hours a week to do contract work. That will give you the extra bump that will give the experience working with corporate clients, but you have the security of your day job."

Connie: One thing I would like to point out to listeners is that working in adult learning in an organization is not only corporate because you can find many mission driven companies, you can also find associations, organizations, and institutions, like the Department of Education Government.

Peter: Exactly.

Connie: There are so many different slots that you can get into that maybe perhaps will more fit your personal philosophy and values. That's one of the beautiful things about this field.

Peter: I think one of the challenges is that, particularly in higher education, as an instructional designer, you know what you're capable of, you know what you can build, but in the past, higher education wasn't very ambitious in terms of what they were asking instructional

designers to do. Aviation engineers are saying "Can you help us with this model airplane?" The answer is "Yes, I can, but I can actually build an actual airplane, and I'll be waiting here when you want to build because I can do that," and so there's the concern that some of your professional ability might atrophy if you're in an environment that's very unambitious in terms of what, and that's always something I've struggled with because I've seen over the years instructional designers that I work with and sometimes mentored move into these wonderful positions and I'm envious because they're doing really cool and they're really building their professional muscles. Looking at what I'm being asked to do, I'm going...

Peter: For example, when the COVID broke out, again, my fulltime vision right now is management, and I felt like I was in a desk position while all my colleagues were actually going out to the battlefield. I was like kind of envious watching them over the ramparts. So, I do support it, I do have a role now at my college while I do support the online course development happily, but again, one of the things that worries me going back to that job description that you mentioned is that there are people who could do that but their current jobs are not asking them to do that, and so when the moment arrives, they're not ready because they're not in a position where they've been challenged enough. One of the things that I recommend to instructional designers is to imagine that you're working at your perfect workplace where they give you all the challenging projects you want and then build a portfolio based upon what you think they should be asking you for. That way, it's there to show to people.

Connie: That makes me actually want to get a little bit more specific. When you are asked to put a course online in a typical higher ed situation, does that mean that it's a course that you would do in something like Blackboard which I consider more like distance learning where there are assignments, a video recorded lecture, or when you're asked to put something online, are you creating eLearning?

Peter: A lot of the times I'm asked to help organize the content, so I'm like the interior designer, like put it over there, don't clutter the space, cognitive load, and then people will ask you for basic help about things like discussion forums, setting them up the best questions, and then while you work with what you consider as lower level things, you can then use that opportunity to point them towards something that they might find interesting. I point out short sims has all the time to people and say, "Have you ever thought about trying a short sim to help give students a real grasp by applying this skill or idea?" So, this is really interesting. It's not really on my thing, but that's the opportunity to inject the idea. It gives them a kind of glimpse of that greater world of eLearning, and one area where I've been very active in this is in the open educational resource base. A lot of open educational resources are very 20th century. Linear.

Peter: A lot of what we are is being made by people over 40, obviously, and I've said, "Why isn't there more interactive, open education resources?" One I learned is our native's in a digital environment. There are very few interesting digital tools out there. A lot of its well-intentioned stuff. Handouts, PowerPoints, assignments. It's like a digital thrift shop. It's all free, but you still want to take it home with you anyway.

Connie: I am bound to point out that we really can't make judgments about how techie people are by age. Just a little aside.

Peter: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound ageist.

Connie: Or youngest. What I mean is some young people aren't as adept and technical at technologies as we think they are.

Peter: I concede that point.

Connie: Now let's go on. I just don't want to get bombarded by my friends.

Peter: No, and I apologize to your friends. I said, and if you have any animus direct it entirely towards me. Connie was in no way associated with this type of this content at all.

Connie: Email him.

Peter: Email me, and in fact, just today someone was making a remark in the Facebook group about frustrations of sometimes working with instructors, and someone jumped on that. "You shouldn't criticize." I said, "You have to give people a space to vent." That's one of the things this forum is for, and because we need, we need our own teachers' lounge. I started out as education teacher. Teachers on their clothes and the griping begins. As long as it doesn't get to a terminal level, it's okay, you got to have lots of people blow off steam.

Peter: The point that I should have really been making is that the conception of educational resource that is dominant in the OER world right now is unwittingly shaped by an older model, what we would think of is educational media, and we really need to flip that and say "Okay, we've done enough of that 20th century stuff, now let's be really creative." This is a space where instructional designers going to really begin to show people what they're really capable of. Build really interesting evidence-based interactive tools if you can, and then put them in a space and then have people have the wow effect.

Connie: Let me ask you something because there are people who probably are not familiar with what you mean by a short sim. Can you just give one quick example of that?

Peter: Whenever I have these conversations, I suddenly geek out too much and I'm dropping all these terms. It's a short simulation. It's an interactive tool which allows a learner to go through a scenario and make a series of choices and get immediate feedback, the consequences of those choices. It's tool that is based upon the very traditional use of simulation as a learning and training tool, and simulations have a long history in learning, but outside of academia, they haven't been used except in healthcare education. They haven't been used very excessively, and I've been trying for years to move simulations into traditional academic topics. Years ago, I was working in a college of medicine and I was next to a simulation lab, and it was so powerful, and the students had to make a reservation to get into it. I thought, "Wow, a learning space where students are going to make a reservation to get into, how cool is that?"

Peter: In the evening, I was teaching basic writing, and I thought there's got to be some way to take this modality and to share with my students, so I started creating what I called rhetorical simulations or rhet sims, which are a series of assignments where here's a prompt, but I don't want you to write anything. Here are potential three opening paragraphs. Click on the one you think is best, and then it brings you to more paragraphs. Click on an exit, and then it generates a text and a text to code.

So, your text is 5.1, hers 5.2. Now talk about why your version is better than hers. You talked to the hammer while you ever think about your rhetorical reasoning. Good idea. I think there are a lot of interesting approaches to learning that are getting more, have gotten more traction in the nonacademic space, but academia tends to think of itself as a place where all true learning education occur, so it doesn't occur to them to look beyond their walls for innovative ideas, and that's why it's important for our instructional designers and education to commingle with the colleagues in other fields because the exposed to things that are just going to open up to new horizons.

Connie: Yes, I agree.

Peter: I have a general principle that the most interesting learning technologies always take place in fields where people are making existential decisions. Where there are life and death issues, that's when people really will invest in the most potent learning tools, like simulation.

Connie: That's interesting. My professor taught me parachute packers need to get 100% on their tests. Anyway, the type of simulations that you're talking about is something that I see in

workplace training a lot, and we might call it case studies with scenarios and branching and consequences. It's an opportunity for learners or participants to make decisions, to get the consequences of their decisions, and to get a place to practice in a safe environment. It's just wonderful.

Peter: Right. I often say to people, if you can imagine you have a choice between two different airlines or you have a choice between the airline, this airline has a special approach. It allows you to choose your pilot for the plane. Pilot A went to Harvard and attended a hundred brilliant lectures on aviation. Pilot number two went to a far less distinguished school and spent 100 hours in a flight simulator. Who do you want flying your plane?

Connie: Exactly. What are some of the benefits that you see for someone who works in instruction design in higher education?

Peter: I think the benefits, the sense of being tied to an educational enterprise, it's going to impact a lot of people. It isn't constrained to one simple organizational drive and not disparaging especially in corporate world, but I think sometimes you do a lot of work but it's often around a narrow focus based upon the business objective of that company or that organization, so if you're lucky enough to work in a college university and you're working with people and all these different disciplines, you get exposed to knowledge. Some of the pleasure you might've experienced when you were in college return to you because you're encountering, you're sitting with the professors and hearing what they've learned, and you're just learning all these interesting things. So, in a sense, you get to be a perpetual college student which I think is the dream of many, many people.

Peter: The other thing is, I think you quickly grasp, but you have a role as an essential change agent. Higher education really needs to evolve in some very important ways, and you can be a key player in that, and Michael Feldstein's resilience network is about trying to really help education get where it needs to be by finally making people aware of the principles of learning science. It's very bizarre. In academia, we often treat research around learning as optional. You can read it if you want to, or maybe not, just keep doing what you always want to do, which is very bizarre, and we really can't afford that model anymore because it's really self-indulgent and it's not getting our students where they need to be, and our students have enough to have grapple with as it is, so we really need, we really have to have an awareness that there are things that work better than other approaches, and we should use them consistently and thoughtfully, and try also to get as much real time data about our students as possible and use that to inform our design.

Connie: That brings me to a few questions. How do you think that instruction designers in higher ed can do a better job?

Peter: I think one thing that they should be doing right now is taking a very good look at learning analytics, which is still a field in its infancy, but I think they should be informed about it as much as possible and look carefully. Any tools that are introduced at their college university which gather data and then begin to understand how that data can be extracted and used to inform more effective learning designs and then advocate to the faculty about how to use data to be better at what they do. I think if you approach it in the right way, a lot of faculty will buy into it. I think there are a lot of people who realize that there needs to be a change, and if the tools are relatively easy to use, then I think they can partner with their designer to make a much more potent learning experience.

Peter: I think faculty have never seen this before, it's new to them, but if you get it in front of them and present it in a way, I think there'll be adoption. Some will hold out, but others won't. There's been a lot of complaints obviously about the current emergency remote teaching. On the other hand, because the faculty are now looking at their students and the student's living spaces, and they're often seeing them one to one, they're forging a different sort of connection with them. They're seeing their student the way they never saw them before, and I think that can lead to a deeper connection with our student and can motivate faculty to do things differently.

Peter: There's always just an idea that somehow being in a physical classroom creates a special bond. I don't think that's true at all. When you have a group of people, they're like a mob, but in a Zoom room, they're face to face. It's not like you can hide behind a chair, they're all there, and you can emphasize the opportunity for one to one conversations, so now your virtual office is your living space and your student's chair is now their living space, so you have two people communicating in their most personal spaces, and I think that dynamic is going to inform faculty-student communication and perhaps lead to some interesting changes in terms of how faculty see students. Particularly students, when they see the background, they realize their students have a lot of challenges the faculty may not be aware of.

Connie: That's a good point. That is one of the advantages of this Zoom environment that we're in. When you were talking about analytics, I wanted to mention that you have a LinkedIn group that curates content about analytics. Can you just tell everyone the name of that?

Peter: Yes. It's called Data-informed Learning Design. It was originally called Data Driven Instructional Design, but a colleague of mine said, "Peter, the data never drives. It should

inform," so I changed that. Then I realized too that the field is moving more away from instructional design to learning design because I see learning design as more focusing on the learner rather than the instructor, because a lot of what we do is an instructor-less environment, so really, we want to focus primarily on the learner and the learner's needs and the instructional role can certainly play a part, but the focus has to be on the learner. Data Informed Learning Design is about bringing people together who are aware of the potential of these tools to extract interesting data and use them to inform and create far more powerful learning tools than we've ever had before.

Connie: That's exciting.

Peter: It is. I think we're at the Nickelodeon stage of our ed tech development. We have a lot of interesting cookie little things that we play around with them, we're doing the rotoscope thing, but we're right on the brink of really creating tools that can be massively impactful, I mean really in a way that nothing has before but required to make that leap that was made a hundred years ago between the concept of moving pictures and cinema. This is a conceptual leap that we have to make. But when you see the right tool and you go, "Aha," and then you think, "Why didn't we have this before?" Because we had blinders on, we didn't realize the possibilities.

Connie: What's one way that you think that delving into learning analytics and bringing it into higher ed can be a benefit to faculty and students.

Peter: I think if it's done correctly and you're looking at the right sort of data as opposed to check in, check out, it can really give you a sense of where the individual students are struggling, and I'll give you an example. I think one of the cutting-edge areas of learning technology has been in cybersecurity. Again, this is because it's getting it wrong is so painful, there's been a lot of investment in making high quality cybersecurity awareness training. One of the more interesting ones that I've seen is a friend and colleague of mine Bora Aytun who does Mavi Interactive and he has a cyber security training which it collects data on how long the user struggles with a particular problem.

Peter: To me, that's interesting data point because if a problem is solved easily, then either the instructional element was really good or it wasn't a serious problem, but if you see a student or user struggle with a problem for a long time, there could be a number of explanations. Maybe they just checked in, checked out, but this possibility if you see a pattern among a number of students and you think "There is an area that I need to give particular focus to," so I'm not going to revamp my instructional approach to address that concept or that skill because I can see, as I didn't see before, where the problems were, which can then lead to better instruction.

Peter: A lot of assessment is like a snapshot in time, one moment, and a new one is like an echocardiogram where you're seeing patterns over time and then you're saying "Okay, there's a lot of struggling here, so this person needs that, and hey, five other people have the same issue. What can I conclude from that?" Because again, courses are led by experts, and they have an expert blindness, they don't always realize the things they struggle with. These tools can remind people of the things that novices have trouble with.

Connie: It's so hard to put yourself into the shoes of another. How can people prepare and find jobs in higher ed learning design?

Peter: There are a couple of good sites. The Chronicle Vitae job site is a good place. Also higheredjobs.com is good if you're looking specifically for jobs in instructional design in higher ed. The other is to join social media platforms like the ones that I run, and there are others as well, but people frequently post job postings that they hear about and they want to share them with their colleagues, and also, if it's at a place where they work, they want to put it out in a place where they know there are a lot of qualified people, because they want to bring in good colleagues, and in social media, you've had the opportunity to connect and talk with people so you get a sense of who they are and the dynamic and so you say "I really like to work with this person," so you can help onboard them.

Peter: One of the things that motivated me to create the forums was the instructional designers in education really needed a community of practice because they're often solitary people at their institutions. It's not like they're faculty or administrators or IT who have at least colleagues around them doing the same work and who can share ideas. They're often the one person there and it can be a very isolating experience, so they really had a need to talk with other people in their field, compare experiences and share ideas, and I think that has probably been the most important thing that the group that I created and others like it can contribute, particularly instructional designers, like I said before, are a particularly lonely crowd.

Connie: Also, how can they prepare themselves for this role?

Peter: First of all, think about talking with people who are in the field already and say "What do you wish you had known when you got in this field?" They can say, "Well, I wish I had known this, this and this. What do you think I need to know right now and for the next five years?" "This is coming up, so start burnish like analytics, start showing something, putting on your resume, do a volunteer, anything, but somehow get it on your CV, get something in your portfolio." These are the kind of things that I think will catch people's attention. So, be very proactive in terms of figuring out what the next thing is and be prepared to help, because

you're being hired to help people solve their problems and having samples of your work. Obviously you're going to have a CV or resume, but people are more relieved when they actually see what you're able to do, so build a good portfolio and deploy it well, and again, on a site who often share examples of good portfolios that people can model on.

Connie: I've seen that, yeah. Do most of the people who work in learning design in higher ed have graduate degrees in the field?

Peter: I think that most of them right now have equivalent of master's degrees. There's a lot of talk right now about whether or not people who are really ambitious should go on for the PhD. Does the PhD really add value to the instructional design work? So, there's mixed thoughts. Some say it makes it easier when you sit down with a faculty member to be speaking as a peer. "I'm a PhD, you're a PhD. Let's have a PhD conversation." Others think it can draw too much into the theoretical side of things. Again, I very much love the university where I got my instructional design certification, but I could go back now and critique what they didn't teach me that they really should have, like how to talk to faculty without offending them. Really important because you're going to inadvertently do that no matter how well intentioned you are.

Peter: The issue is I would say don't rely upon your college to show you where the next thing is because again, colleges and universities tend to be very conservative and slow to adopt new practices. So, if you really want to be an innovator, follow innovative people. See what they're talking about, see what they're interested in, and develop something on the side. Don't wait for your day job to give you a project that builds the skill. You really form a craft on your own because some of the interesting work is being done outside the university and it's our job to kind of bring it in.

Connie: That's really interesting and it's really true for workplace L&D also. Frequently, we have to look outside and bring something in. I have one final question, Peter. Where do you see instruction design slash learning design going in the post COVID-19 era?

Peter: I am hoping, I think there's a general shared recognition that online courses, which again are the heart of what instructional designers do in higher education, are no longer an auxiliary part of education. They're part of the core modality. So, going forward, if you want to teach in higher education, you better figure out how to teach in an online course, which may give it more political heft going forward, which then might give more voice to the instructional designers. I'm hoping the instructional designers will get a seat at the table, because too often we're not consulted. We're just informed about decisions that we could've contributed to,

which involved mistakes that could have been avoided if they had drawn upon our expertise, but they didn't, so I would say to people going forward, as an instructional designer, act like an instructional designer, think like a chief learning officer. Be strategic, and don't be afraid to step up and give your opinion.

Peter: They may say no to you but at least you have the satisfaction of saying "I spoke my piece, I informed them, I let the deciders make it, but I'm not going to simply wait on the side and be reactive. I'm going to say this is good practice, this is not good practice. Which would you prefer to do?" So, I'm hoping in the post COVID-19 era, we are seen as an essential part of the new model, that we're actually citizens of higher education and we can contribute greatly to how it evolves in the next couple of years, and where it can go right now is a big question Mark. I don't want to be part of the older community because I think there are so many practices that really need to pass into the history books. I want to be a part of the next generation that brings fresh blood to the whole enterprise and really revitalizes it.

Connie: That's a great closing statement. Thank you so much for your time.

Peter: Thanks, Connie. It was fun.

Connie: Great talking to you.

Peter: And you as well.

Connie: That wraps up another episode. I wonder how many of you listeners are now intrigued by the challenges and benefits of working in higher education. One way or the other, it's always good to better understand what's going on in other areas of learning design. You can find the show notes with links to resources and a transcript at theelearningcoach.com/podcasts/62. Please take care and I'll talk to you next time.