Becoming a New Faculty Developer

[00:00:00] **April Tallant:** I'm April Talent at Western Carolina University in North Carolina, and I'm the senior educational developer with Culture Faculty Commons.

[00:00:09] **Yianna Vovides:** My name is Yana Vid. I am director for learning, design and research at the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship. It's Georgetown University, Washington DC.

[00:00:22] So the first question is how did you arrive at this place of being a, an educational developer? What was your journey like?

[00:00:34] Wow. It is a very broad question, but

[00:00:36] I think it's a fun one if I'm looking back over the last 20 years. Bear with me.

[00:00:42] For me, I was, I. Wanting to apply and learn more about instructional design and technology in higher education. And I was at the time getting my PhD and I came across a position at George Washington University on instructional designer and I decided to apply and it was. Great. 10 years. I was part of gws Center for Teaching and Learning it.

[00:01:21] It was called at the Time, center for Instructional Design and Development. So I had a very applied nature to the work. We, I joined at a time when the university was going through a. An l m s change from Prometheus to Blackboard at the time. And I was there to support faculty in teaching and learning with technology.

[00:01:47] And a lot of the work we initially did I wanna say the first couple of years were really focused on understanding faculty needs, being able to design workshops and different experiences for them to support them in this new experience that they needed to get comfortable with and be able to share with their students.

[00:02:11] So the technology gave I think an opportunity to. Get faculty involvement also in the process. So it wasn't just about I'm the expert, I'm gonna tell you what you should and shouldn't do. It was much more of a collaborative approach. We offered town halls round table discussions the different kinds of formats that really value faculty voice and approach to each person's.

[00:02:43] Way of teaching and also student voices. At the time we thought it would be a good way to bring both voices together. So we did some focus groups with Both faculty and students. And I think the reason it was also very successful is because the university itself decided to make this transition from one system to another.

[00:03:08] So even though it wasn't required, that's, that faculty came to workshops or training or be involved in any way they did, they were because they saw that, okay, this is going to make my life. Easier. It's gonna make my students' life easier, and why not jump on board and be able to learn how to do them.

[00:03:32] Better in, in using technology. So the tech side was certainly what drew people in many instances, but I think once they were there, they realized that the conversation wasn't about the technology only. Like the tool, it was about how they use it and how they think about their teaching. Long story to say that basically I came to educational development with a discipline. Expertise in instructional design. I finished my PhD. I did my own research obviously as part of that, but I had the opportunity to work at the same time, which I think has helped me tremendously in, in actually developing as an educational developer.

[00:04:23] And I think what I've contributed back is not just the expertise in, in my field, but the kinds of things that are harder to describe when it comes to educational development. For example, just listening to. Faculty and just, having a conversation and, identifying new things that potentially could help students support the online learning side of the work, which hadn't started at the time.

[00:04:56] And work really working very closely [00:05:00] one-on-one with people and meeting them where they were at and growing with them. Too. Which is what I really appreciated about the whole experience. So I continued that on to Georgetown and I've never stopped learning. And that's the best part of educational development is that you always have something new to learn.

[00:05:21] Yeah, I can really appreciate you sharing your experience because I have only been in this role for four months now. As a, an educational developer and. One of the main reasons that I, I made the switch, the career switch really was to continue my growth and continue learning. So I find that very refreshing to hear that's a big part of the job with, and I really also appreciate What you said about working with students.

[00:05:54] Because for the last 20 years I've been student facing and so this job with faculty development or educational development I'm faculty facing, so that was also a big s but I love the fact that you when you were adopting a new l m s that you spoke with students to get their viewpoint.

[00:06:15] I think that's really important in our work. To try to bring those partners in. I'm very interested in that, students as partners and how to make that a big part of faculty development. I appreciate that aspect actually, of what you just said because One of the reasons we started this new program at Georgetown Learning Design Technology, it's a graduate program, but it came out of our center for teaching.

[00:06:41] It came out of the need that we saw that we needed to. Understand student voices more, work with them more so that we would be able to also support them in applying as they were in grad school, to be doing more applied innovation work. And I think that work happens. At centers all the time because it is the, I think Centers for Teaching can be thought of as incubators for innovation and changing how we approach different things.

[00:07:17] And we wanted to make sure that our students as they go into the workforce and become educational developers, instructional designers, what, whatever that field is, that they have that experience. Working with faculty and actually partnering with them because the most, I think the projects that I've been on that I really.

[00:07:41] Think were the most successful were the projects that was because of partnerships. It was because of true collaboration. It wasn't because, okay, you go do this thing, I go do this thing and then we bring it all together. It was let's think through together what this means what the implications are, and In the program, we started a few initiatives to provide students the opportunity to connect with faculty.

[00:08:10] So we, we have project-based approaches and that's something that I truly recommend to other faculty as well to. Put students in a very, with, to connect them with the real clients, let's say. To take them outside of this is just for our own learning, but to really say what you're creating here is something that somebody else will apply and will influence other people beyond.

[00:08:45] The class. So students as partners is I think a critical piece. I try to also design a course with some of our students as partners that worked. But I think, it's setting expectations also in that collaboration. That's the hard part. I

think it's But and I don't know if you've had in your four months, but also before then it's how do you manage that setting of expectations?

[00:09:12] Have the expectations been set? Or are they changing, evolving?

[00:09:18] If you can let talk a little bit more about that'd be great. Sure. Yeah, I think. I am still getting settled, but in academia things are very cyclical, so I know, being here for 20 years at this institution, I know certain things will always come back around. So I'm already aware of some of those programs that are established here in the center and I'm.

[00:09:44] One of three really. We have a director and then I'm the senior educational developer. And then we have just hired, started today another educational developer. So there's three of us that work exclusively [00:10:00] on, on this. And then we have a research specialist and an administrative assistant. So depending on where you are, that's a fairly small a pretty small.

[00:10:11] Office, just depending on the size of your school, but we're heavily involved in new faculty orientation, and we are, we also do a Summer Institute of Teaching and Learning. So those are two old faithful programs that I know will do. And I'm like you. I had this thought. I attended the pod conference and I learned all this.

[00:10:36] Stuff and I, all of it exciting, and I just, I looked at my director over dinner. I was like there's just so many things that we could do. Like, how do you know what to say yes to? And because it's you're right, the resources are finite and we can't say yes to everyone. And I'm worried about the day when I have to say no, because being on campus for 20 years, I already have relationships with a lot of these people.

[00:11:07] And so it would be really hard for me to say no. So yeah, I don't know that I, I've not. Crossed that bridge yet, but I do think it's something to talk about because We want to help, we naturally wanna help everyone, but I just, I don't understand exactly how, what that's gonna look like on top of the expectations that are already set out with our regular programs that so many already people expect, administration expects others on campus expect us to do.

[00:11:44] So how about you? How do you grapple with that? So when I first started my adventure in higher ed I was the only instructional designer at gw. I had, in fact, the position was very new. There was a w a person before me who left and then the position opened up. But there was only one instructional designer and I.

[00:12:13] Had the luxury of, to a large degree, setting expectations, because we were brought in, there were several of us who were hired at the time, not as instructional designers, but as technology specialists and so forth, because the effort was focused on the l m s transition. I think when two years later when things were smooth we were like what's next?

[00:12:40] What are you doing? The work doesn't end. I think that's one because you do create relationships. You do, I identify projects with with people that may That are very dear to their heart and that they want to explore more. And because you also bring expertise, it's a, it becomes a thing, it becomes a project.

[00:13:04] It becomes something to try. And I think when the volume, when we started our online programs and the work really When really increased the volume, we started hiring more people. I, I think for me, my journey, when you're by yourself, you check in with obviously your supervisor or whoever is in charge making sure that you're aligning the work and the effort you're putting to the university plan and strategy.

[00:13:41] And then I think after that, when things get a little bit messy in terms of well, what is the strategy now? Because we've moved on, as time change, as time moves on and as priorities change, I. So does the work. And I think for me, that's why I never got bored. And I always thought this is the best job ever because I will never feel that I'm bored, there's always something to do and doing it also is helping others. But I, to be very honest with you, I don't know, I think. I'm like you. I don't think I say no. I think now as I'm getting, 20 years later, let's say I still have a hard time saying no because I. I think the nature of the work is what I love.

[00:14:40] So I love the new ideas that faculty bring. I love the excitement that they have. I love seeing something through and making a difference for their own context. I had the luxury to, to have a growing team. So the university, both [00:15:00] GW and Georgetown have really invested in people who bring this type of expertise.

[00:15:08] Georgetown, its center for, our Center for teaching is over 20 years old, so there's a lot of. Investment there from faculty, from administration, and there's, it's an integrated center, so we, I don't have to do everything. I think that's the difference. I didn't have to say no, because I don't have to say, I don't have to be the only one doing something, and I think that came over time.

[00:15:38] At the beginning, it was I needed to do everything myself because that's what my mindset was. But then I realized, oh no, the only way that I can

contribute is more. To contribute across things and to bring others in. I think that enabled for more collaboration, but it also enabled us to not say no too much.

[00:16:03] But when you're limited in, in your capacity to. To really expand the different programming efforts, one way that we expanded was to reach out to faculty and to give them the opportunity to lead in different spaces. I tended. Things along the lines of faculty learning communities.

[00:16:24] How do we create, how do we establish programs around that? I took faculty with me to a conference so that they would see the value of faculty learning communities and because at the end of the day, it was up to them to move it forward if they wanted to. So I became more of a facilitator and a convener, coalescing, I'm more of a, Trying to manage change in it by enabling others to do more.

[00:16:55] And I think that helped resources have to be there also for that. Do you remember the first program that you developed and what that was like? Oh man. I think the first program was our, we did a summer institute and we did a training around the very first, when I started it was all about the transition from Prometheus to Blackboard.

[00:17:23] So it was very tech heavy digital tool digital learning heavy, but it was, it had It was a very robust faculty development training program where they could, faculty could go through a series of courses if they wanted to, or training courses and really feel they mastered a lot of the what they needed to learn but they could also jump in and out of it.

[00:17:51] So it was designing a very flexible Program that could meet actually needs across full-time faculty, part-time faculty. Because that was another concern we had at the time is how do you ensure that the resources you're providing, the services you're providing are available to everyone. Whether people take advantage of them or not, that's a different story, but at least the access to them.

[00:18:20] Should be available to everyone. And so we had evening office hours, we had, we did weekend workshops. Accommodating different schedules was one of the big things. So I think that was one of the, Main, the initial ones, I put in place A U D L. I worked on a U D L grant with a few faculty to apply U D L principles in their courses.

[00:18:48] I loved. Also working with faculty to establish the, and very first faculty learning community at gw when I was there. And that was the trip. I was, I remember most because I went with three senior faculty and a couple of my staff team members to a workshop with three. Stay workshop for them to learn about what this was all about.

[00:19:16] And then supported them in putting it together. And then after the first year they knew what to do. I didn't have to do much. So that I think is one of the, Best programs and when you establish something and you see it take off. Another one was teaching day. We did a one day between the fall and spring, so for the winter break where it was light low impact on staffing in terms of.

[00:19:49] There wasn't a lot of training workshops. It was a keynote discussion and then a poster session. And every year, now I think it's still going on. [00:20:00] So things like that, that are meaningful. But yeah those I think being comfortable not being seen is. Part of what makes a good educational developer, cuz if one wants a lot of visibility and recognition about the work that One is doing, then this is not a position because we're, we tend to be behind the scenes, right?

[00:20:30] So the, a lot of, we, we support, we help others be recognized. And I think it, it does take a certain, being a, appreciating that aspect of who we are to make it be meaningful.

[00:20:49] My lawn. Somebody's mowing the lawn outside. That's okay. I can't hear it. So what about you though? Did you, have you thought of that aspect of, because as a faculty member, You are front facing, you are it, you, whether it is with your students and working collaboratively or with peers, there is a space that you own.

[00:21:16] As a faculty developer, have you thought about that. Different space that you occupy now versus when you were one of the people attending workshops and other events. Yes. And I definitely have been a fan of our center here at Coulter, faculty Commons here at Western Carolina University for, since I got here.

[00:21:41] I went to the first summer institute just when I landed on campus. So I've collaborated with the educational developers over the years. I. Don't know that I necessarily thought about the behind the scenes work, as you mentioned. That's interesting to think about. I definitely thought about the difference between working with faculty versus students.

[00:22:08] I remember, my, my background is nutrition and my master's is in health sciences and my PhDs in community health And so I remember applying for a PhD program and it said what do you think you're gonna end up doing? And I remember writing the essay saying I would love to develop curriculum.

[00:22:30] I love to imagine, but I didn't know that was a job. When I wrote that and that's very discipline specific, nutrition, community health, and that's where I was for so many years. And I just think it's really interesting that I've come full circle back to. I found out what, that was actually a job and how lucky are we that we found it.

[00:22:57] So that I feel, I feel like that's the right place for me right now. And I, in my previous job, I was out in front all the time and I'm definitely ready to be behind the curtain for a little while. It's fascinating that you said that because I was in doing my masters in grad school, I was in communications and I was doing, international development work and thinking about how can I contribute to the world and make it better, when you're in your twenties, I, that's and then I took a instructional design as a course and I'm like, oh my God, this is how I can make.

[00:23:41] Things better because I, it gave me that opportunity to connect, communications, connect all my thinking into creating something that could help others. So I just, yeah, I can certainly understand the, being excited about the curriculum design experiences that you. You're doing now and yeah.

[00:24:05] Full circle, but some, it's a good full circle. Absolutely.