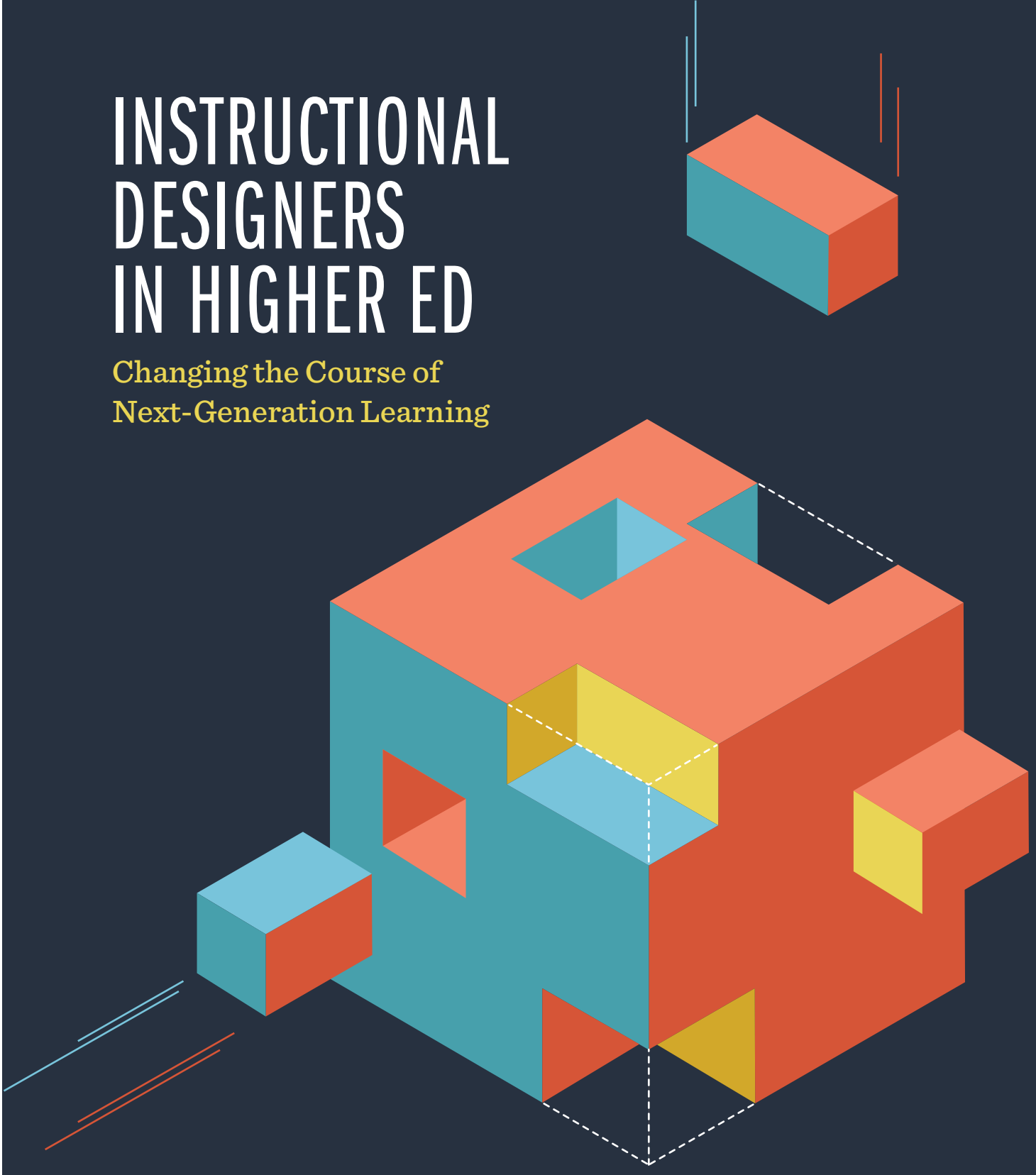
THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

# INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS IN HIGHER ED

## Changing the Course of Next-Generation Learning



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*Instructional Designers in Higher Ed: Changing the Course of Next-Generation Learning* is based on a survey conducted by Huron Consulting Group, Inc., was written by Julie Nicklin Rubley, and is sponsored by Pearson. The Chronicle is fully responsible for the report's editorial content.

# Executive Summary

Higher education is experiencing an increased demand for instructional designers who have the knowledge and skill set to help faculty members adopt new technologies and strategies in their teaching. The shift is being pushed, in part, by the growth of online learning and developments in technology.

Traditionally, instructional designers have been focused on creating online courses on campuses, but their role in other aspects of instruction is expanding. They now play a bigger part in consulting with faculty members on pedagogy and on course design—as well as how to determine the best ways to use educational technology in all kinds of courses.

Their involvement in course modifications can range from electronic grade books to pre-recorded lectures to clickers to discussion boards to massive online courses—and everything in between.

This report explores the various ways faculty and instructional designers are changing the classroom experience and redesigning courses to teach a new generation of students. It examines the dynamics among instructional designers, faculty members, and their institutions; the attitudes of faculty members about having instructional designers add new teaching methods and technology to their courses; the challenges instructional designers face in their efforts; and considerations for the future of instructional design in higher education.

**The work of the instructional designer has primarily been to help faculty create online courses. While instructional designers remain involved in creating online courses, their role in other aspects of higher education is expanding.**

# HIGHLIGHTS

A survey of instructional designers and faculty members, conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education in February 2016, shows how the efforts of these two groups to revamp courses and incorporate technology is playing out. Among the key findings of the survey:

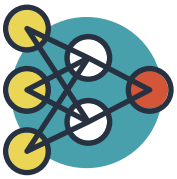
### USE OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS IS INCREASING

The Chronicle of Higher Education recently reported, colleges are increasingly using instructional designers to improve the quality of teaching, whether in online, in-person, or hybrid courses.

The majority of faculty members work with instructional designers on online courses and hybrid, or blended courses—those that involve a mix of face-to-face interactions and online work. The number of faculty members working with instructional designers on traditional, face-to-face courses is much smaller.

### THERE'S A WIDE RANGE OF TECHNOLOGY TOOLS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT LEARNING

Some technology tools, such as message boards and slide presentation software, already are in wide use in higher education. Other tools, such as video, pre-recorded lectures, and live broadcasting of lectures, are embraced more by instructional designers than by faculty members.



### TENSIONS EXIST AMONG INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS, FACULTY, AND UNIVERSITIES

There are some conflicting issues among instructional designers, faculty members, and universities. Some instructional designers say they believe they have the freedom to experiment with innovative new approaches, but fewer say they're recognized as experts on driving technological innovation.

### FACULTY EXPRESS UNCERTAINTY OVER BENEFITS OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN ON TEACHING

While faculty members might be adding technology to their courses, they aren't convinced that it's improving their teaching or making a difference with students.

### INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS FACE FRUSTRATION WITH FACULTY

Instructional designers complain that some faculty members don't meet deadlines, don't see the importance of adding a technological bent to lessons, and don't value the designers as educators.

### BOTH AGREE ON SOME PAYOFFS

While instructional designers are much quicker than faculty to cite the benefits of technology in education, they and faculty members do generally agree that technology that facilitates student interaction is among the most beneficial types.

# Introduction

The field of instructional design has its roots in World War II, when the U.S. military needed to train large numbers of people to carry out complex tasks for the war effort. After the war ended, business, industry, and schools adapted the model, using research on how people learn to train employees. Over time, more instructional design theorists emerged, and the discipline expanded and evolved.

Training for instructional designers in higher education varies. Some instructional designers have earned degrees in the field. Others, such as former school teachers, professors, or technical experts, developed their expertise through on-the-job training. It's unclear just how many instructional designers are employed by colleges, but those in the field say that the number is increasing.

The increased use of instructional designers to create online courses and transform traditional ones is being pushed, in part, by today's mobile revolution, with college students reliant on and proficient with smartphones, tablets, laptops, and other technology. In many cases, students have already become accustomed to using technology and varying modes of learning in their K-12 classes.

This new technology has forced higher education faculty members to examine their pedagogy, how they engage students, and how they use technology to teach.

"When students have devices in their pockets that can answer almost every question they have, they have expectations that when they get to college they will be using technologies in their courses that will bring them into the future," says Brenda Boyd, director of professional development and consulting for Quality Matters, a nonprofit organization that has developed standards for online education. "Professors can't just put their class notes online—that's not enough."

Technology alone isn't pushing the change, though. Incoming freshmen are less prepared than ever before. Students are coming from increasingly diverse backgrounds. A substantial number have learning differences, hearing or language impairments, and other disabilities. Colleges are scrambling to find ways to ensure student success, while trying to contain costs. That leads to a growing interest in trying new instructional methods.

# Role of Instructional Designers

Of the faculty respondents who say they teach online courses, nearly all (96 percent) have worked with an instructional designer.

Responses to The Chronicle's survey indicate professors at many institutions are working with instructional designers.

Not surprisingly, the largest number of collaborations center around fully online courses and those that involve an online component (Figure 1). Of the faculty respondents who say they teach online courses, nearly all (96 percent) have worked with an instructional designer. Of the faculty respondents who teach hybrid or blended courses, more than half (57 percent) worked with an instructional designer. Of those who teach traditional, face-to-face courses, a much lower number report working with instructional designers. Even still, it is worth noting that roughly one in three (37 percent) have done so (Figure 2).

FIGURE 1
**INVOLVEMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS IN ASSISTING FACULTY, BY COURSE TYPE**

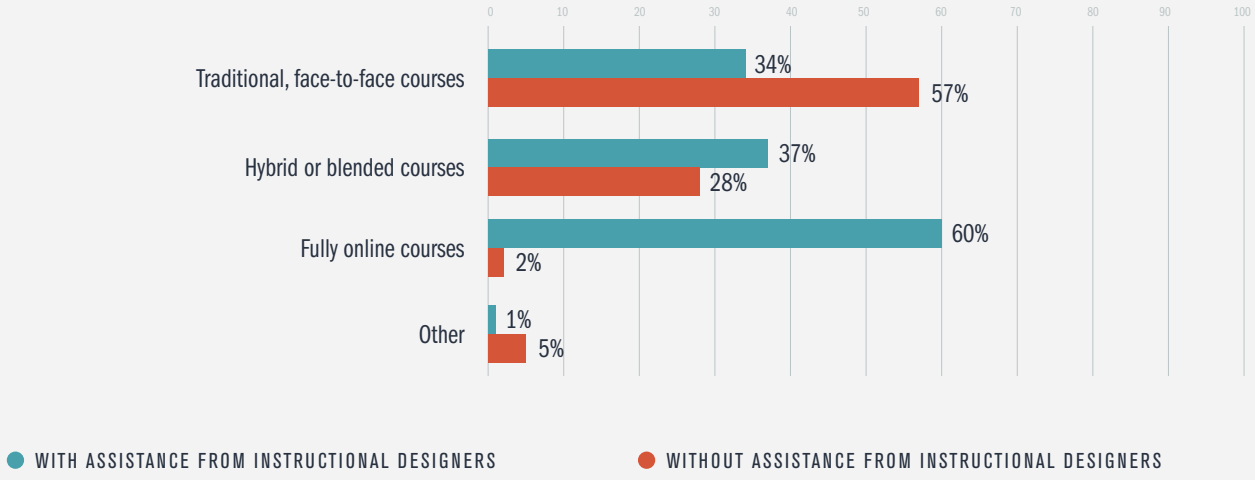
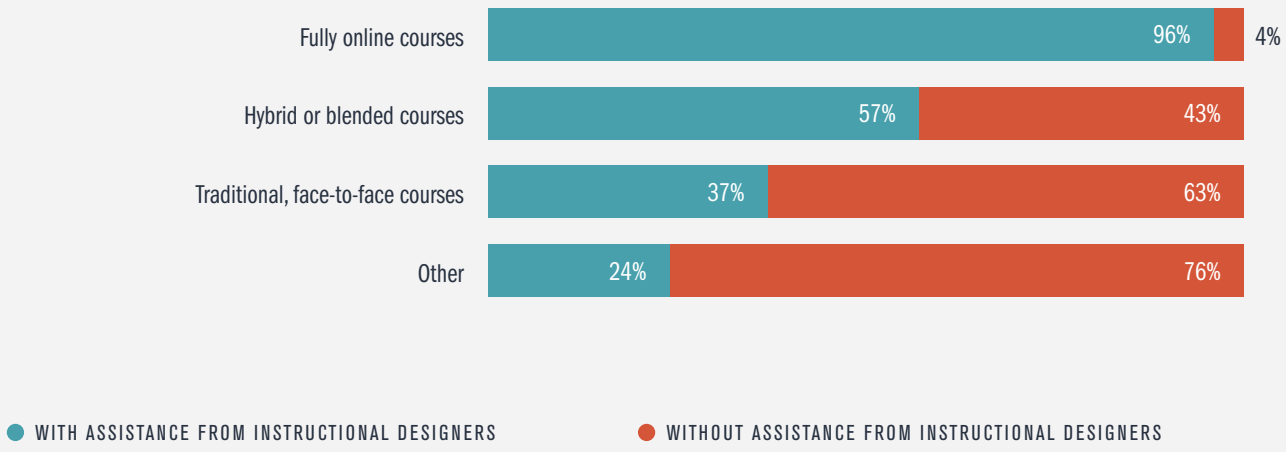


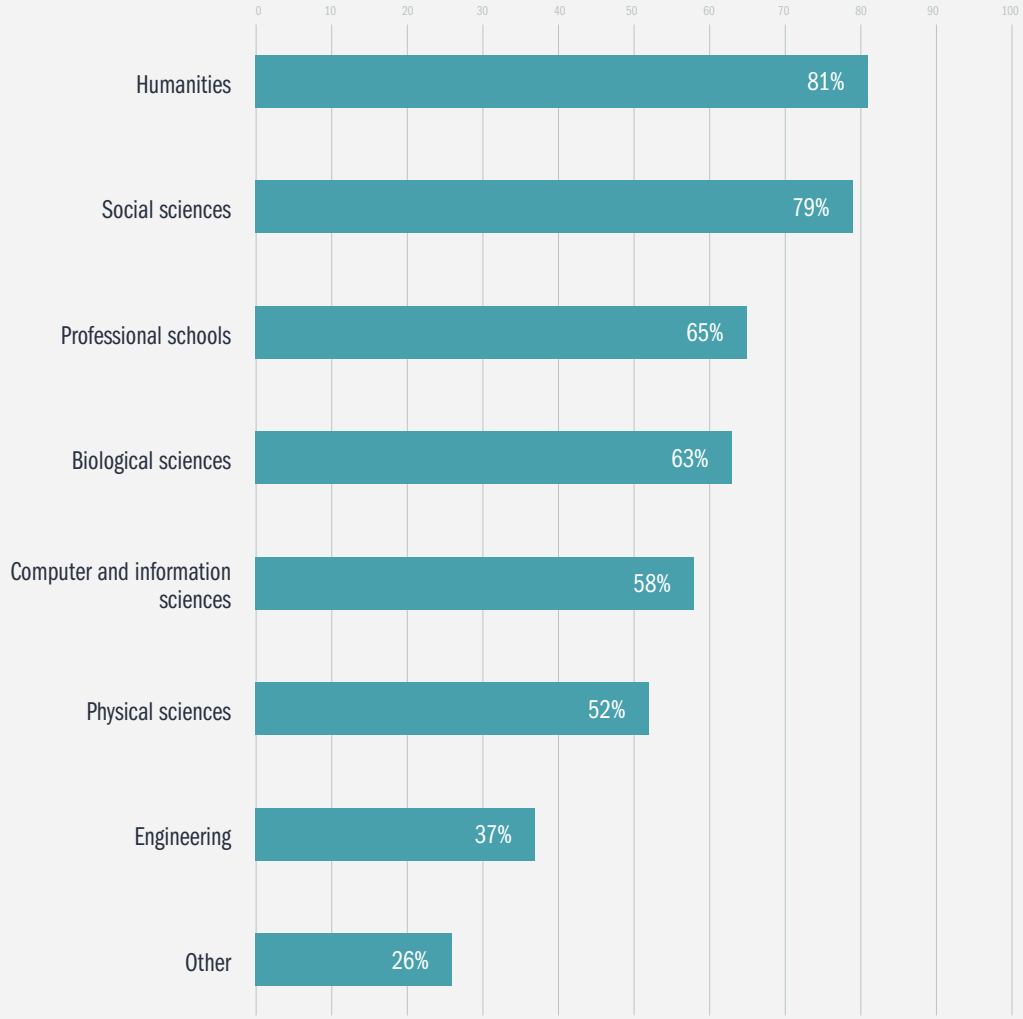

FIGURE 2
**PERCENT OF FACULTY WHO HAVE WORKED WITH AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER, BY COURSE TYPE**



Many of the instructional designers surveyed have worked with professors across a wide variety of disciplines. According to the survey, over half (53 percent) report they had helped design courses in five or more disciplines. However, the survey results suggest that the help of instructional designers is more common in the humanities and social sciences than in the STEM-related fields. Eighty-one percent of the instructional designers say they have worked in the humanities, and 79 percent have worked in the social sciences.

Smaller percentages have worked on courses in the biological sciences, computer and information services, physical sciences, and engineering (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
**LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS, BY ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE**

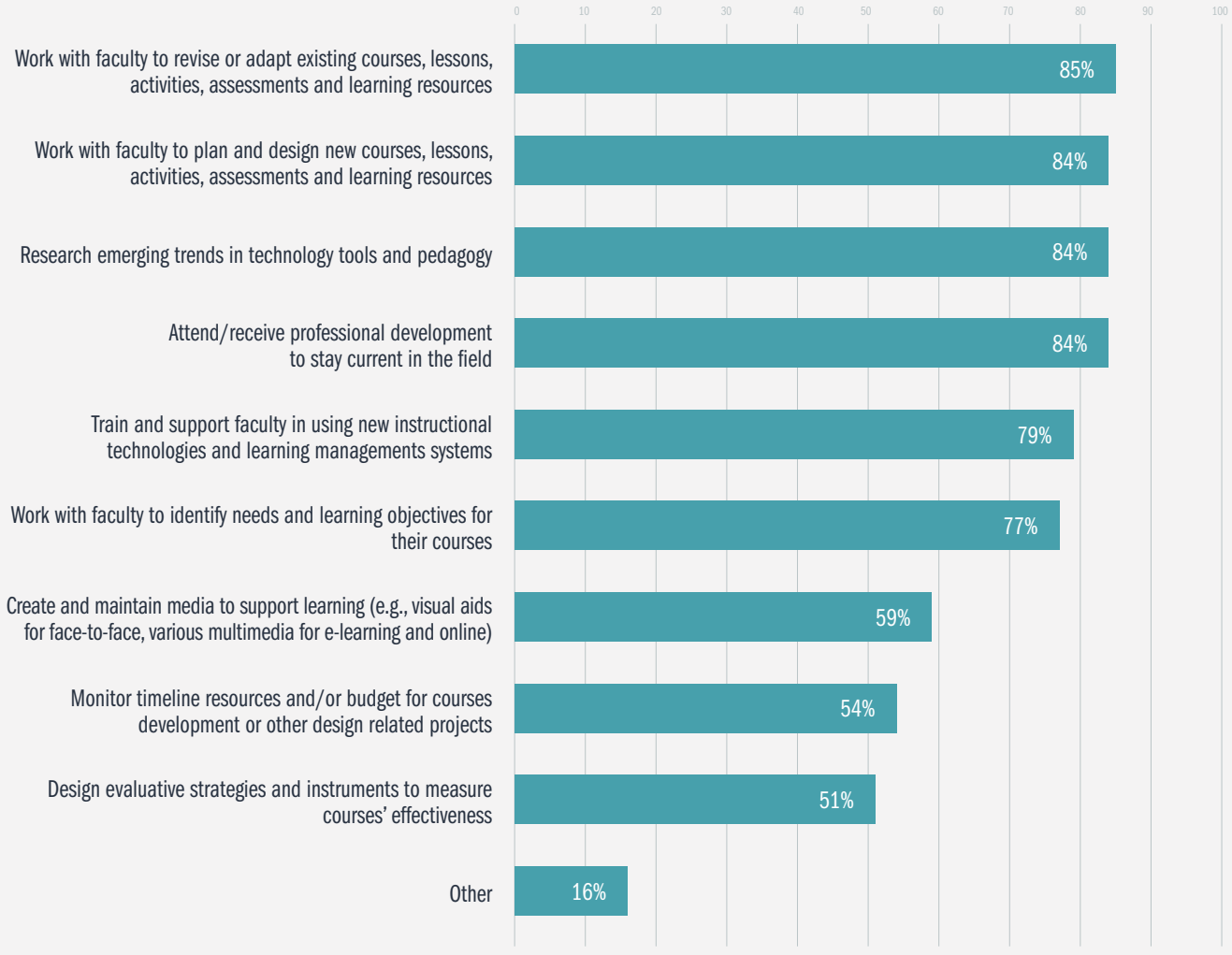


The humanities tend to offer more opportunities to create engaging online activities. "In the sciences, it's a little bit dryer," says MJ Bishop, director of the William E. Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation of the University System of Maryland. "Labs are hard to move into the virtual or online space." But that doesn't mean it's not happening.

In the survey, more than 80 percent of the instructional designers say that most frequently they help faculty members revise or adapt existing courses, lessons, activities, and assessments—or design new ones. More than 80 percent also say they research emerging trends in technology and pedagogy. Seventy-nine percent regularly train and support faculty members in using new technologies and learning management systems (Figure 4).

Instructional designers say the variety in their approaches is critical. "How you effectively use the technology really matters," says Mariann Hawken, an instructional technology specialist at the University of Maryland at Baltimore County. "If you are just doing it to deliver documents or a quiz, it's not really thinking about the craft of teaching."

FIGURE 4
**PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS**



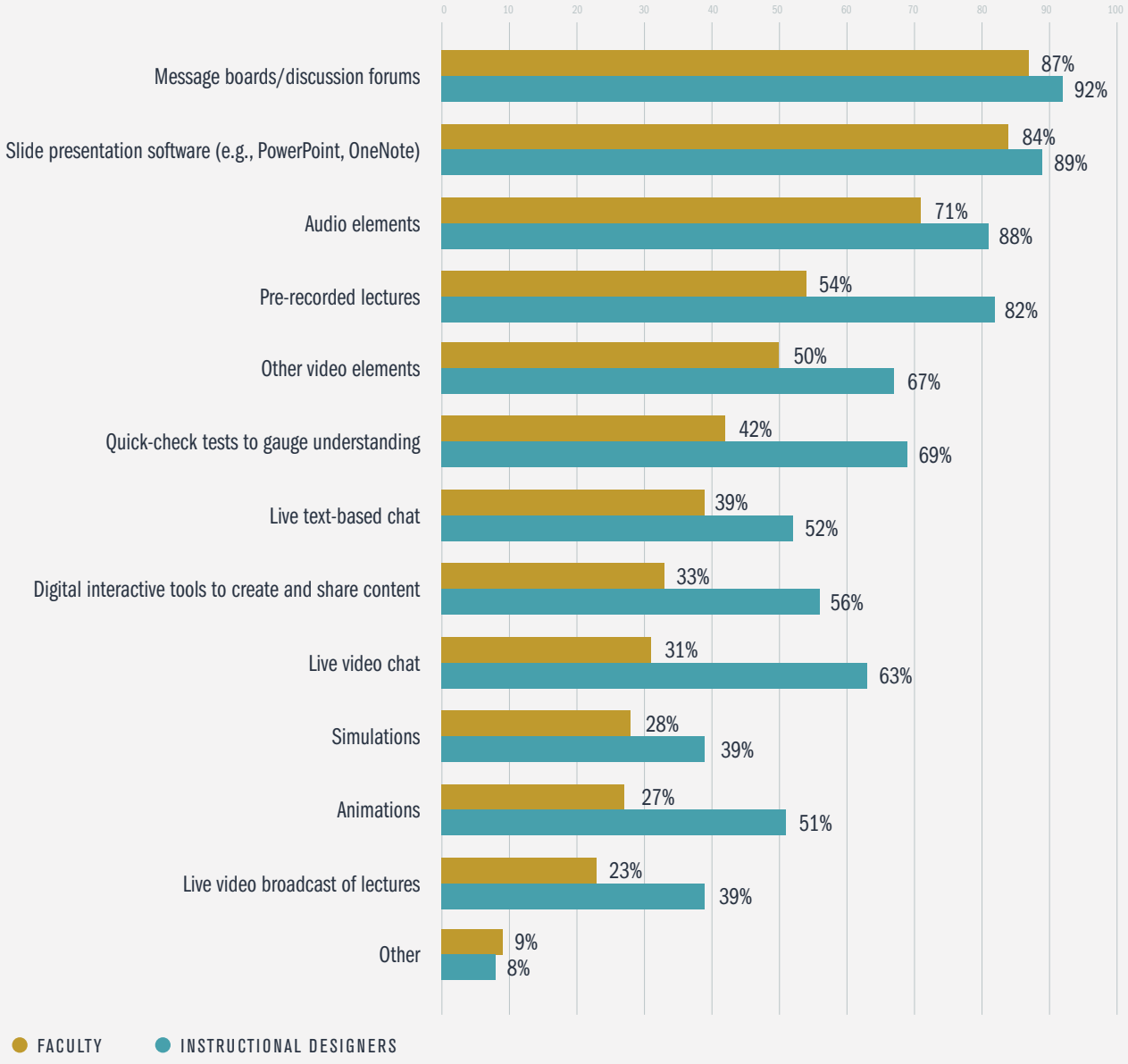
# Use of Technology to Support Learning

Instructional designers are more likely than faculty to have used a wide range of technological tools—which is not surprising, as the instructional designers likely designed many more courses or components of courses than the faculty members who work with them.

When asked about specific technology tools they've used in the classroom, faculty members and instructional designers alike reported widespread use of message boards, discussion forums, and slide presentation software (Figure 5).

But the two groups begin to diverge with other tools: 88 percent of the designers have used audio elements; while only 71 percent of faculty members have. A total of 82 percent of designers have used pre-recorded lectures while only 54 percent of faculty members have, and just over two-thirds of the designers have tried other video elements, but only half the faculty has done so. Designers (at 39 percent) are also more likely to use live video broadcast of lectures, while only 23 percent of the faculty has.

FIGURE 5
**TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS USED IN COURSES**



# A Triangulated Relationship

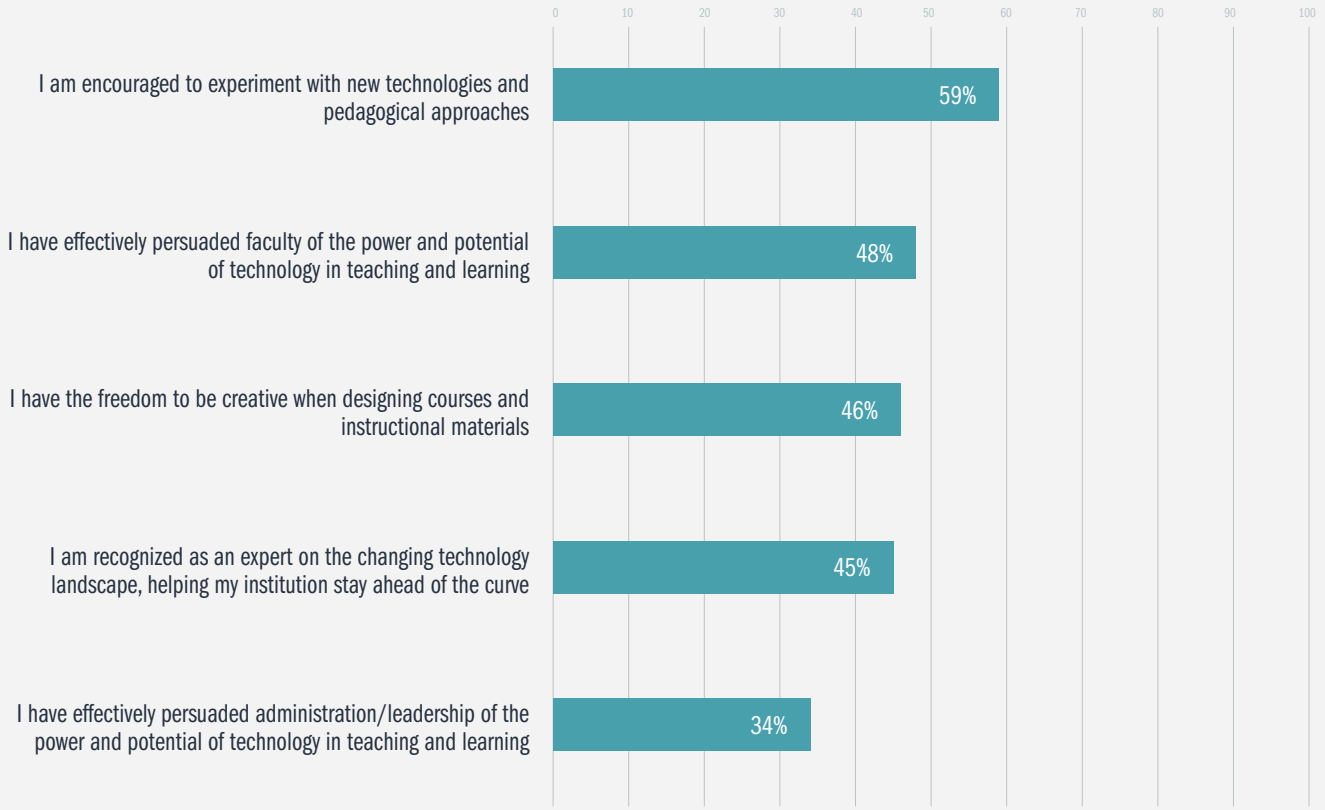
Colleges and universities will need to encourage instructional designers and faculty members to work together—and make clear that this cooperation is a campus priority.

The relationship among instructional designers and faculty members also involves the college or university—and the infrastructure it sets up, the atmosphere it creates, and the support it may or may not give.

Many instructional designers say they have the freedom to experiment with innovative new approaches in their work. Indeed, 59 percent agree that they feel "encouraged to experiment with new technologies and pedagogical approaches," and nearly half (48 percent) agree that they have "effectively persuaded faculty of the power and potential of technology in teaching and learning." (Figure 6).

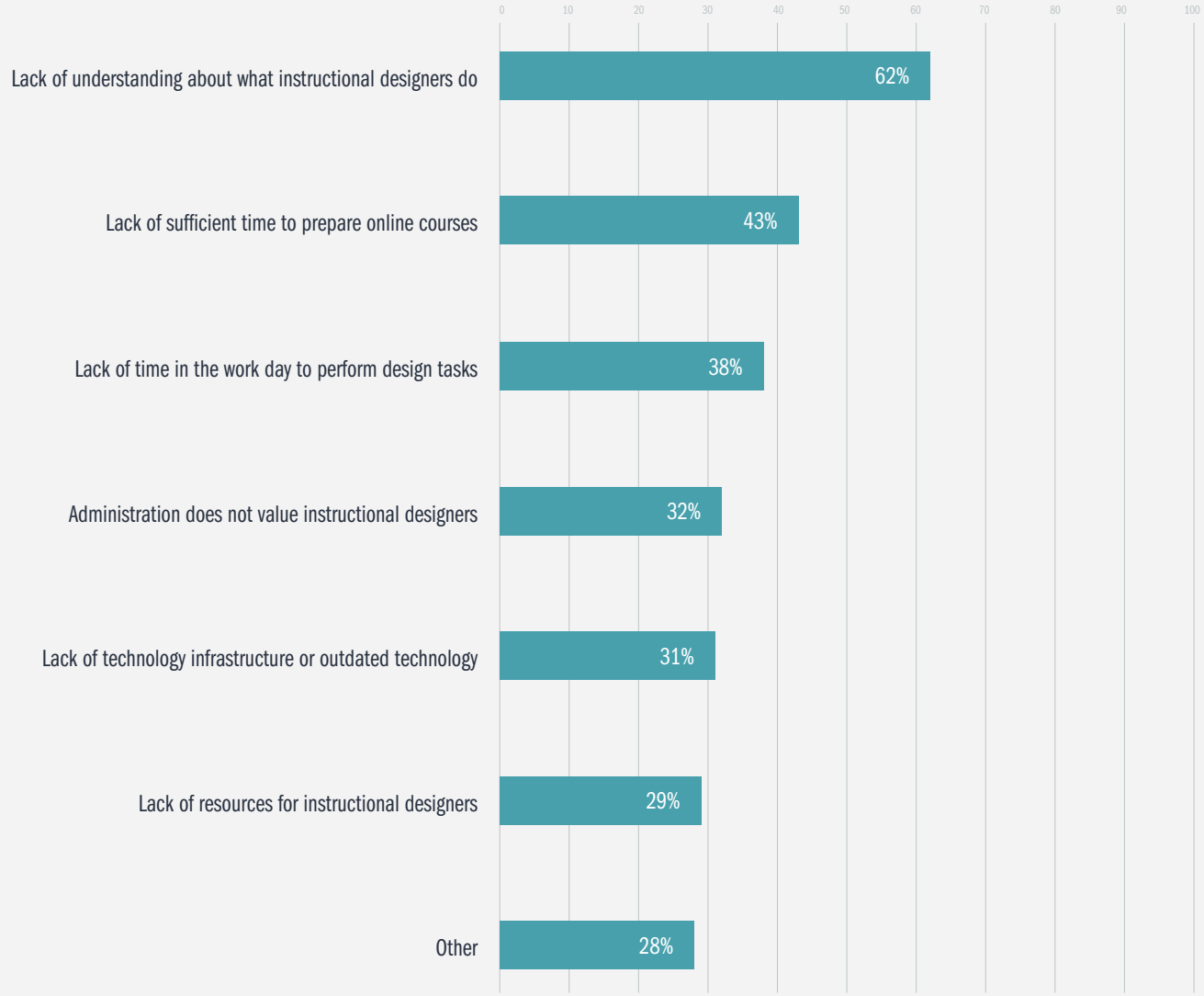
At the same time, instructional designers say they feel they're not getting the respect they need. Fewer—45 percent—say they're "recognized as an expert on the changing technology landscape." Even fewer, just 34 percent, say they have "effectively persuaded" their institution's leadership about the "power and potential of technology in teaching and learning" (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6
**THE SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITIES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS**



When asked to identify the top three challenges instructional designers face at their institutions, the majority (62 percent) say that others within their institutions don't understand what designers do; 43 percent say they don't have enough time to prepare online courses; and 38 percent say they don't have enough time in the workday to perform design tasks. They also report that the administration doesn't value them, and that there is a lack of both infrastructure and resources (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7
**CHALLENGES FACED BY INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS**



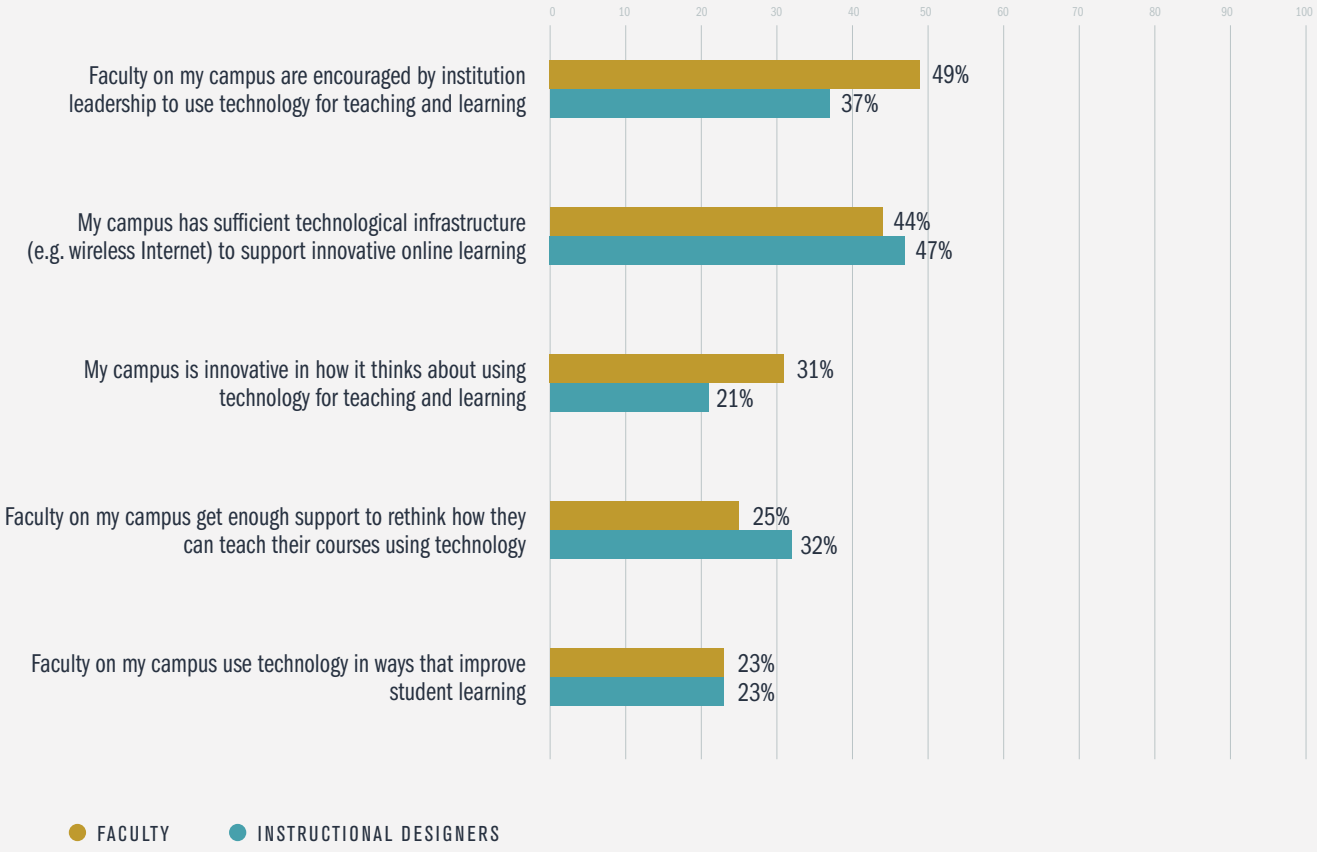
Bishop says it can be a tough job for instructional designers to push their agenda. She acknowledges that many people on campuses are confused about the role of instructional designers, and it doesn't help that there are "very few conclusive studies that demonstrate technology really makes a difference in learning outcomes."

"Given the heavy lift involved in adopting technologies—both in terms of actual costs and resources—it can be a difficult proposition to suggest that the benefits of educational technologies outweigh the costs," she says.

Like some instructional designers, faculty members are also mixed on the extent to which their campus is driving technological innovation. About half (49 percent) of faculty members surveyed say their university's leadership encourages them to use technology in their teaching. Yet, only one in four say they "get enough support" to rethink how they can teach their courses with technology (Figure 8).

Bishop says she's not surprised. "Administration tends to believe that it should be as easy as adopting a new textbook," she says. "Therefore, they tend to underestimate the support needed to use technology effectively."

FIGURE 8
**WHAT FACULTY AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS SAY ABOUT THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT LEARNING**



# Who Calls the Shots?

The nature of the working relationships between the instructional designers and the faculty members can be tricky.

The nature of the working relationships between the instructional designers and the faculty members can be tricky. Indeed, the survey shows that faculty members and instructional designers generally say they have a good relationship, with 67 percent of faculty members and 73 percent of instructional designers describing it as "collegial" (Figure 9). But both parties agree there's room for improvement (Figure 10).

FIGURE 9
**PERCENTAGE OF FACULTY AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS WHO DESCRIBE RELATIONSHIP AS COLLEGIAL**

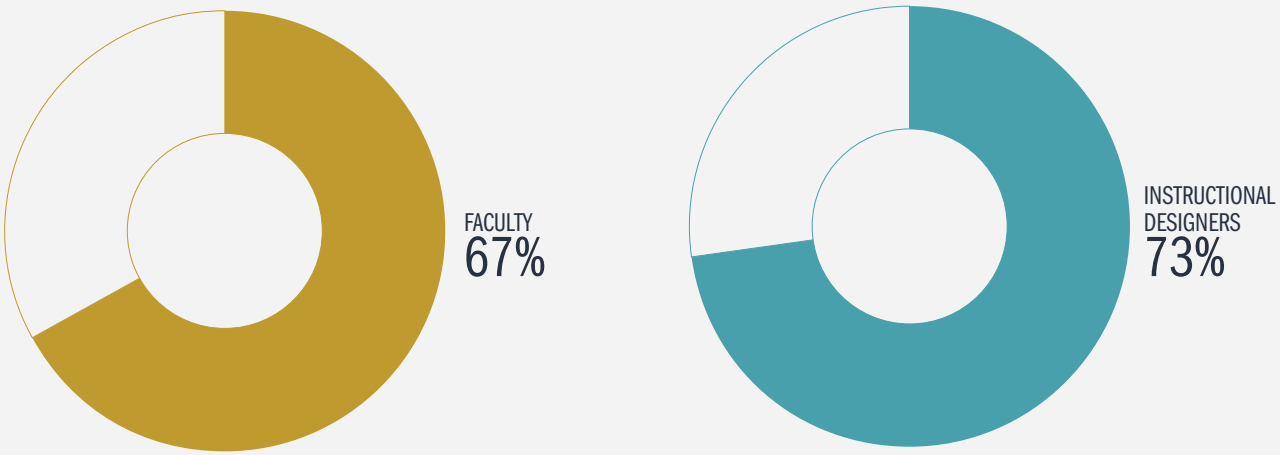
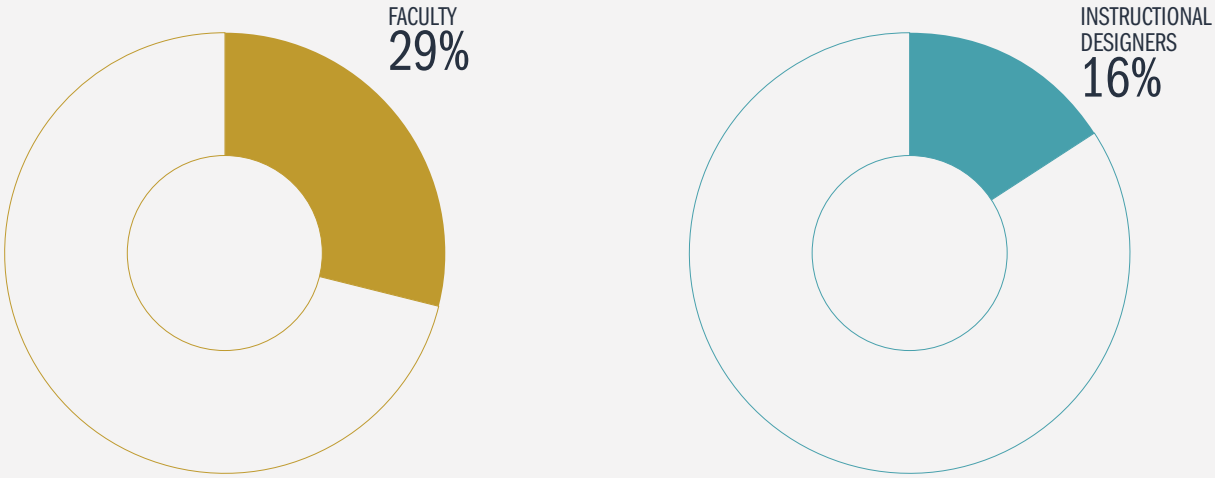


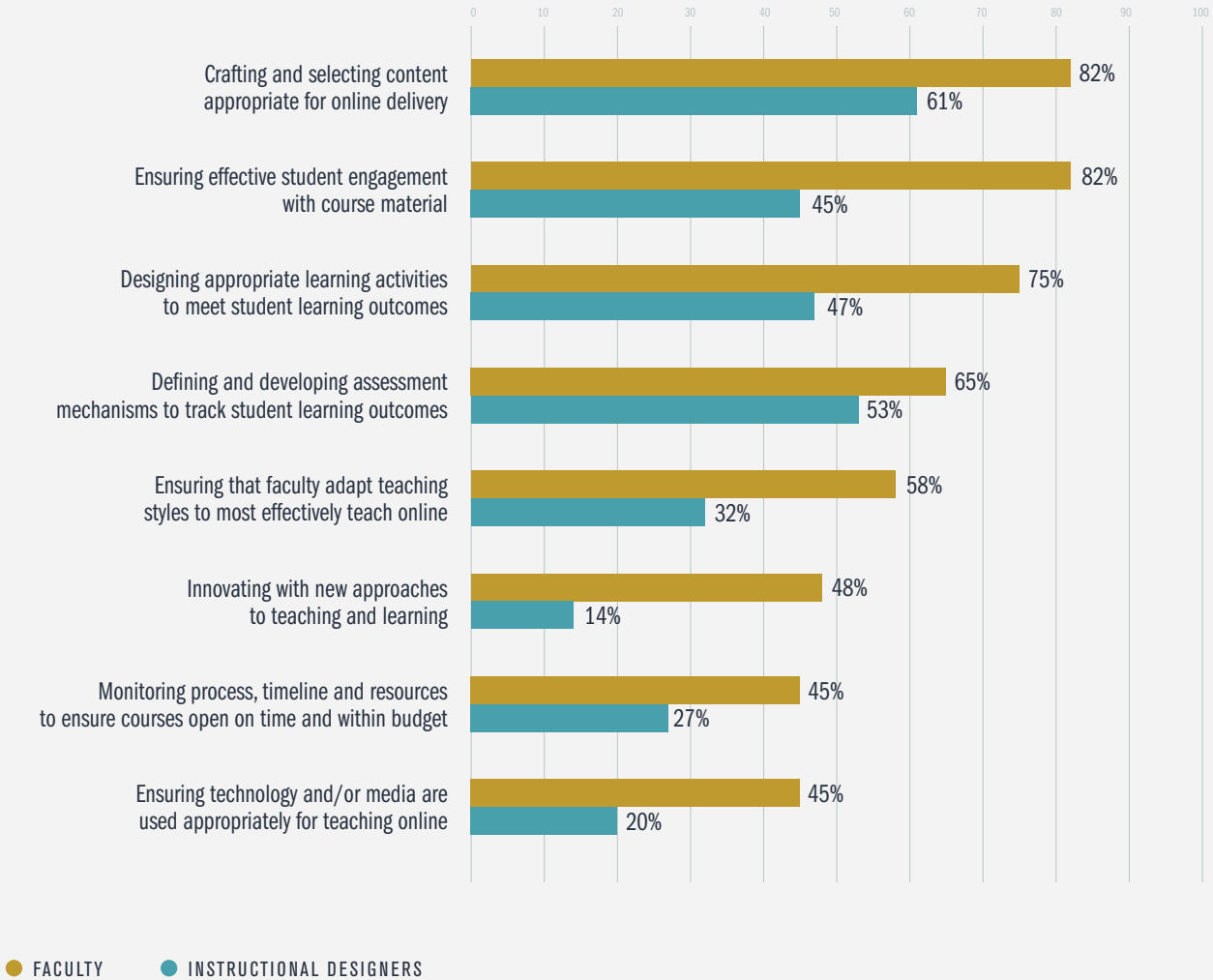

FIGURE 10
**PERCENTAGE WHO FIND FACULTY & INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS AGREE ON ROLES**



The survey's results, for example, show substantial disagreement between the two parties about who should be in charge of what when it comes to technology-enhanced learning. Eighty-two percent of the faculty members surveyed say they should have the primary responsibility of "crafting and selecting content appropriate for online delivery," but only 61 percent of the instructional designers agree. Eighty-two percent of the faculty members say that they should be in charge of "ensuring effective student engagement with course material," while only 45 percent of the instructional designers say that's the professors' job (Figure 11).

Observers say some of these differences of opinion might be growing pains. "We are seeing these tensions about scope of work and effectiveness of collaborations because instructional designers are now much more a part of the education landscape," says Deb Adair, executive director of Quality Matters.

FIGURE 11
**LEVEL OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN FACULTY AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FACULTY IN COURSE DEVELOPMENT**



# Faculty Attitudes Toward Instructional Designers Are Mixed

Most faculty question how much the process is helping them to be better teachers.

Faculty members come to the table with a unique set of priorities. They're focused on teaching, research, publishing, and other scholarly endeavors. They acknowledge some positive outcomes of working with instructional designers, but most question how much the process is helping them to be better teachers. The stakes are high. Negotiating a path forward is critical to defining the next generation of student learning.

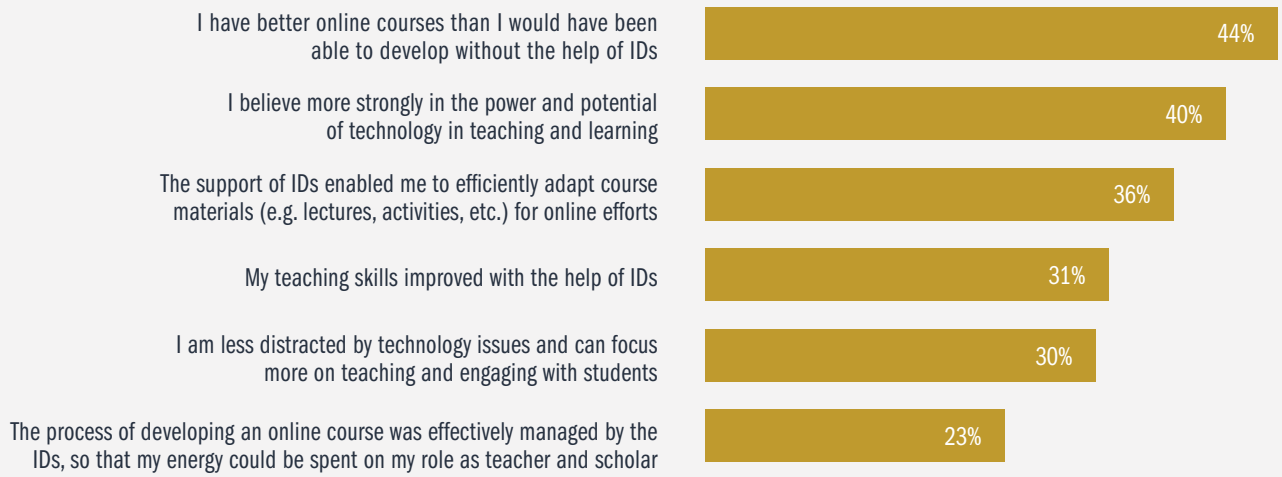
In the survey, less than half (44 percent) of the faculty members strongly agree that instructional designers have helped them develop better online courses than the professors could have done alone. Forty percent say that working with instructional designers has made them believe more strongly in the power and potential of technology in teaching and learning; 36 percent say the support of instructional designers has enabled them to efficiently adapt course materials, including lectures and activities, for online efforts (Figure 12).

Fewer, however, say that working with instructional designers has improved their teaching skills or freed them up to focus more on teaching, research, and scholarship. Only about one-third (31 percent) say their teaching skills improved; 30 percent say they are less distracted by technology issues and can focus more on teaching and engaging students; and only 23 percent say the process of developing an online course was effectively managed by the instructional designer so that the professor's time could be spent on their role as teacher and scholar (Figure 12).

Some faculty members acknowledge their counterparts can be naysayers about the new technologies and approaches. The division might sometimes break down by longevity—senior professors are less willing and newer hires more enthusiastic. But most often, it breaks down along priority lines—those engaged primarily in research might be slower to adopt technology than those whose main role is teaching.

"I think there are plenty of faculty members convinced that what worked 18 years ago will work until they retire," says Jonathan Rees, a professor of history at Colorado State University at Pueblo and a member of the National Council of the American Association of University Professors. "People are scared of technology because it's too much work, or what they're doing is fine already."

FIGURE 12
**FACULTY ATTITUDES ON WORKING WITH INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS**

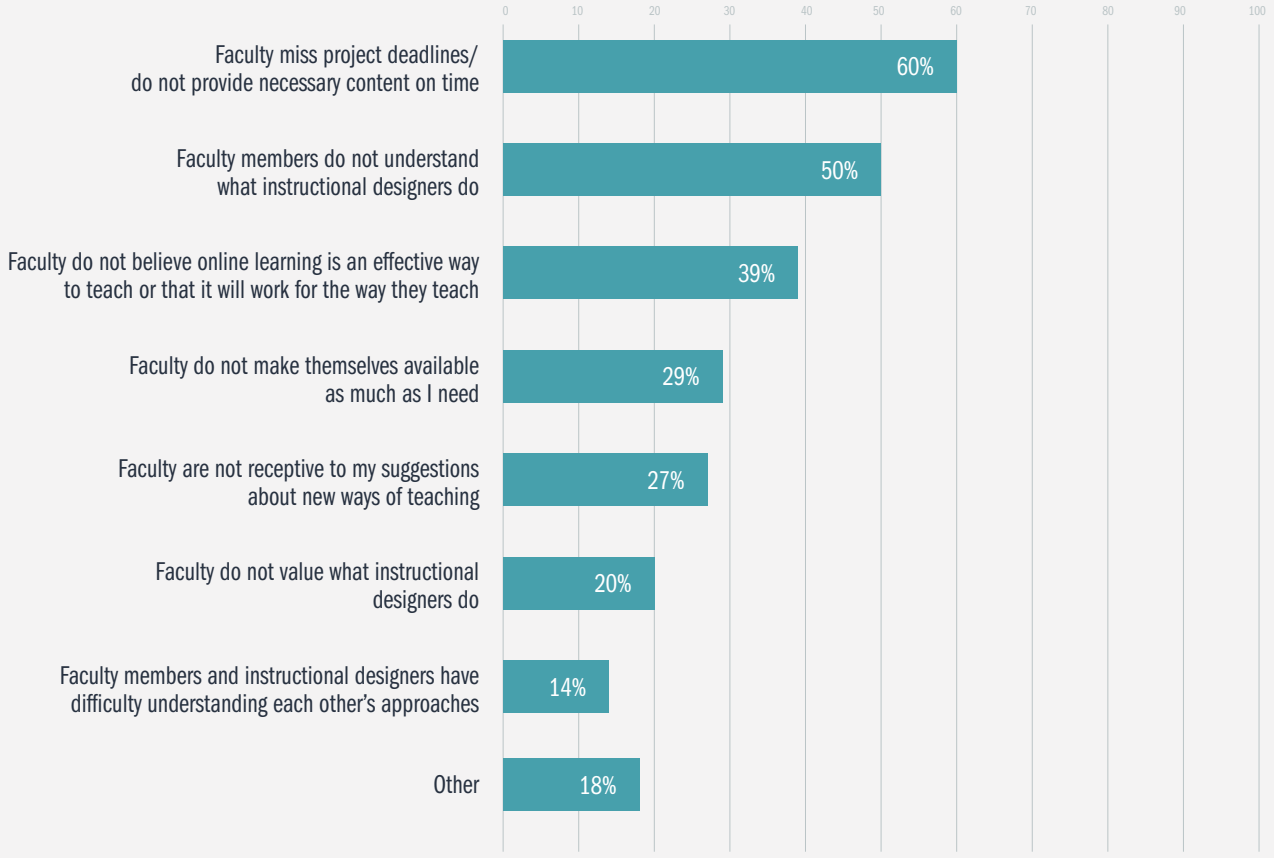


# Instructional Designers Cite Challenges in Dealing with Faculty

Tensions between designers and faculty members include differing expectations over role, and differing perceptions of the value of technology.

Instructional designers have their share of frustrations with faculty members. When asked to identify the top three challenges instructional designers face in working with faculty members, 60 percent say faculty miss project deadlines or don't provide the necessary content on time; 50 percent say professors don't understand what instructional designers do; and 39 percent say faculty do not believe in online learning as an effective way to teach (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13
**CHALLENGES FACED BY INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS IN WORKING WITH FACULTY**



Instructional designers also report their tensions with faculty members include reluctance to embrace new technologies, differing expectations about the role instructional designers play in execution, and a feeling that they are not recognized as learning experts (See responses below).

## SPECIFIC CHALLENGES MENTIONED BY INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS IN WORKING WITH FACULTY

### RELUCTANCE TO EMBRACE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Our university has many faculty members in key positions that are very hesitant to use technology, and thus advise their fellow faculty members to also not embrace technology.

Faculty tend to guard the course content and their current methods and are either afraid to try something different or ask for advice.

Often faculty is afraid of integrating technology due to their skill set.

### DIFFERING EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE ROLE IDS PLAY IN EXECUTION

Some faculty expect IDs to do the technical work for them—not just the instructional design and pedagogical support, but the actual grunt work of technical integration.

Faculty would like to give the content to the instructional designer to create the course materials. As an instructional designer, I would like to teach the faculty how to use the technology to create their own course materials.

### FEELING THAT THEY ARE NOT RECOGNIZED AS LEARNING EXPERTS

It seems many faculty do not value the input that instructional designers can provide regarding content delivery, clarifying outcomes, student engagement, incorporating Universal Design, etc. Faculty see themselves as content experts and falsely assume that means they are also content delivery experts.

Oftentimes instructional designers are seen as “tech people” by faculty. Expertise in teaching and learning is often not recognized—and so the expected role is just to answer technical questions and not contribute to the teaching and learning taking place in the course.

Many instructional designers say what's needed in dealing with faculty is education and diplomacy. They find they have to educate others about the expertise they offer, to explain what they're trying to do, why it's educationally sound, and how the timeline will work. At the same time, they have to be sensitive to the fact that they might sometimes be walking on what professors consider their turf.

"We are not just a tech-first group," says Desmond T. McCaffrey, associate director for instructional design and faculty development at the University of Connecticut. "It's a very personal process to work with a faculty member in a course and ask them to look at it with a critical eye and to deconstruct and reconstruct it."

Faculty members report that their tensions with instructional designers also include differing perceptions of the value of technology, lack of agreement over who is the pedagogy expert, and distrust arising from seeing them as administrators with different priorities (See responses below).

## SPECIFIC CHALLENGES MENTIONED BY FACULTY IN WORKING WITH INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS

### DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF TECHNOLOGY

Sometimes the instructional designers do not understand that learning comes first and technology is secondary; it is just a tool.

More often than not, IT prefers to let the technology tail wag the instructional dog. I teach graduate courses and rarely (if ever) use quizzes, for instance, but I've spent countless hours in faculty training sessions being taught how to use them.

The more time that I spend developing great technology for my courses, the *less* time I have to spend prepping the actual content of the course, preparing lessons, or reading the latest research.

### LACK OF AGREEMENT ABOUT WHO IS THE PEDAGOGY EXPERT

I've felt dismissed as an instructor by instructional designers who feel they have a better understanding of adult learning needs. As such, they've compromised my academic freedom as they've mandated specific elements be included in my course when they'd not honor my teaching intentions or style.

Most instructional designers don't get to teach often enough, but think they know more about teaching online than professors.

### DISTRUST ARISING FROM SEEING IDS AS ADMINISTRATORS WITH DIFFERENT PRIORITIES THAN FACULTY

Instructional designers often work for administrations that have specific agendas. Sometimes these short term agendas are not aligned with faculty or department learning objectives.

Usually the instructional designers are requested by the administration, which in general does not fully understand the classroom realities.

# Technology in Higher Ed: Differing Assessments of Value

Instructional designers and faculty members alike place more value on hybrid or blended courses than on courses taken only online.

Instructional designers are more likely than faculty members to say that online courses are as valuable or even more valuable than traditional, in-person courses. Half (50 percent) of the faculty surveyed say courses taken online have "less value" than traditional face-to-face classes. In contrast, 51 percent of instructional designers say online courses are of "equivalent value" to face-to-face courses—and 35 percent say they are of "more value" (Figure 14).

The survey suggests that instructional designers and faculty members alike place more value on hybrid or blended courses than on courses taken only online. But faculty members again express some doubt about whether this instructional method is as effective as traditional, face-to-face courses (Figure 15).

FIGURE 14
**ATTITUDES ON THE VALUE OF ONLINE COURSES**

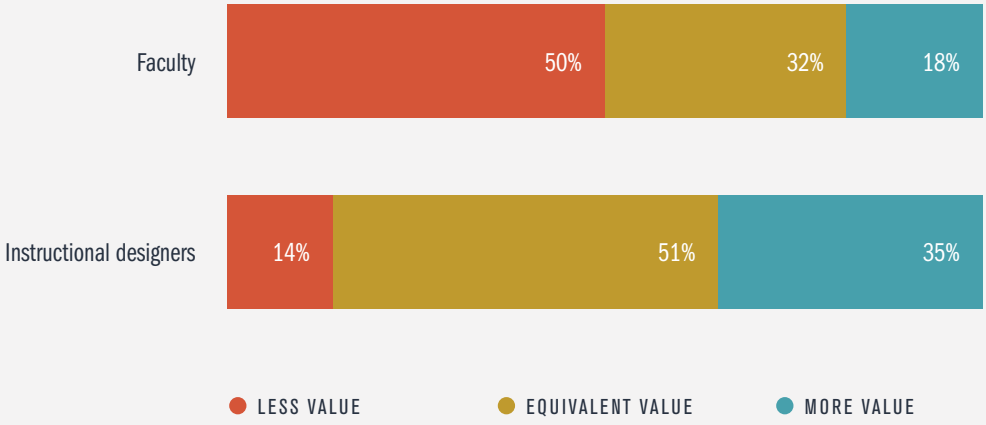
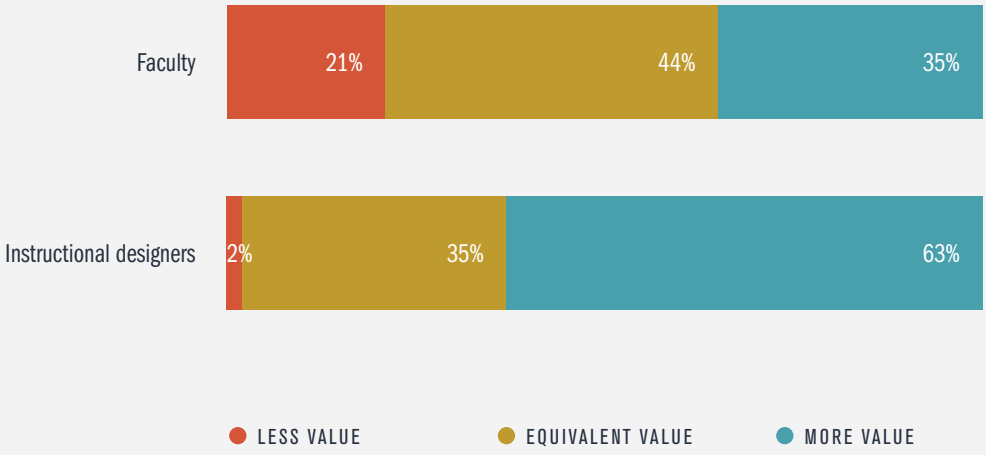
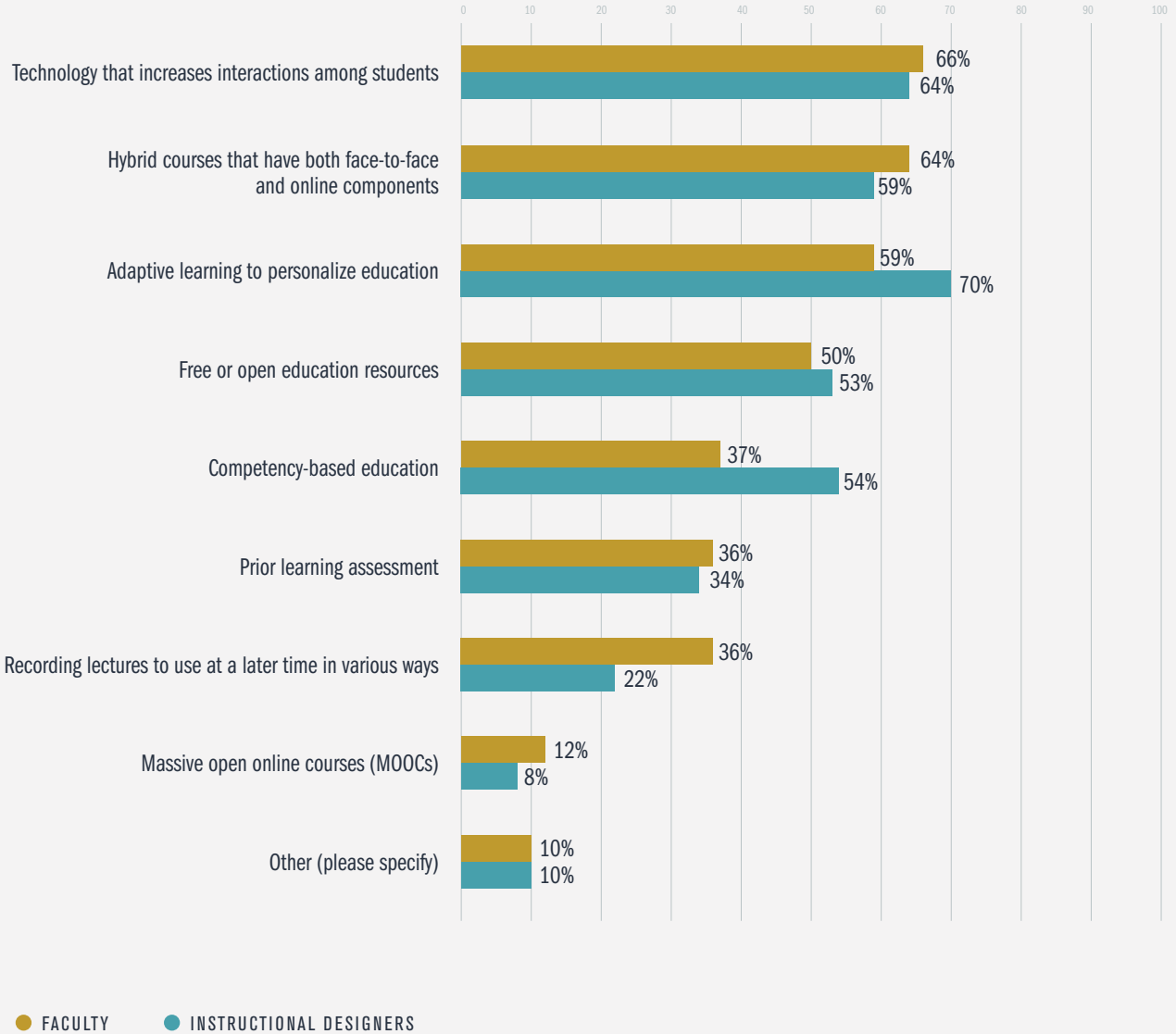



FIGURE 15
**ATTITUDES ON THE VALUE OF HYBRID OR BLENDED COURSES**



Faculty members and instructional designers generally agree about which technological innovations will have the most positive impact on the future of higher education. In The Chronicle's survey, 66 percent of faculty members say technology that increases interactions among students will have the most positive impact, and 64 percent of instructional designers agree. Sixty-four percent of faculty members say hybrid courses will have a positive impact, and 59 percent of instructional designers say the same (Figure 16).

FIGURE 16
**ATTITUDES ON WHICH TECHNOLOGIES WILL HAVE THE MOST POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**



# Conclusion

Instructional designers have the potential to help faculty members use new research-based methods of learning in their courses and to figure out how to best incorporate new technologies that are changing the ways society learns, interacts, communicates, and does business.

But before faculty members embrace instructional design, they have to see the payoffs for students, and frankly, for themselves, in how it could benefit them, their research, their teaching, and their scholarship. Faculty members want to be sure they are not adding technology just for technology's sake. Encouraging the adoption of technology will require a deliberate, thoughtful approach that doesn't complicate their jobs or infringe on their expertise. And they want to feel confident in the instructional designers' knowledge base.

Likewise, instructional designers need to have solid training and experience in the discipline and to stay current. They need to recognize and respond to the professors' needs, desires, and visions for their courses. And they have to be willing to think in innovative ways to solve problems.

Faculty, instructional designers, and administrators recognize that significant roadblocks to change must be addressed to meet the expectations of a new generation of students.

Colleges and universities will need to encourage instructional designers and faculty members to work together—and make clear that this cooperation is a campus priority. But the effort cannot be forced or mandated. It has to be supported by hiring instructional designers, giving them the resources they need to do their job, and recognizing their expertise. It also means encouraging professors to try new initiatives, recognizing their efforts, and giving them rewards, such as financial incentives.

"Top down mandates don't yield good results," says Bishop. "The better approach is when we can show faculty members that the technologies can make a difference."

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# Methodology

The results of the *Instructional Designers in Higher Ed: Changing the Course of Next-Generation Learning* are based on a survey of faculty members and instructional designers working at colleges and universities. Huron Consulting Group of Chicago conducted the online survey for The Chronicle. Of those invited, 294 faculty members and 179 instructional designers completed the survey. The data collection took place in January and February 2016.

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*Instructional Designers in Higher Ed: Changing the Course of Next-Generation Learning* is based on a survey conducted by Huron Consulting Group, Inc., was written by Julie Nicklin Rubley, and is sponsored by Pearson. The Chronicle is fully responsible for the report's editorial content. 

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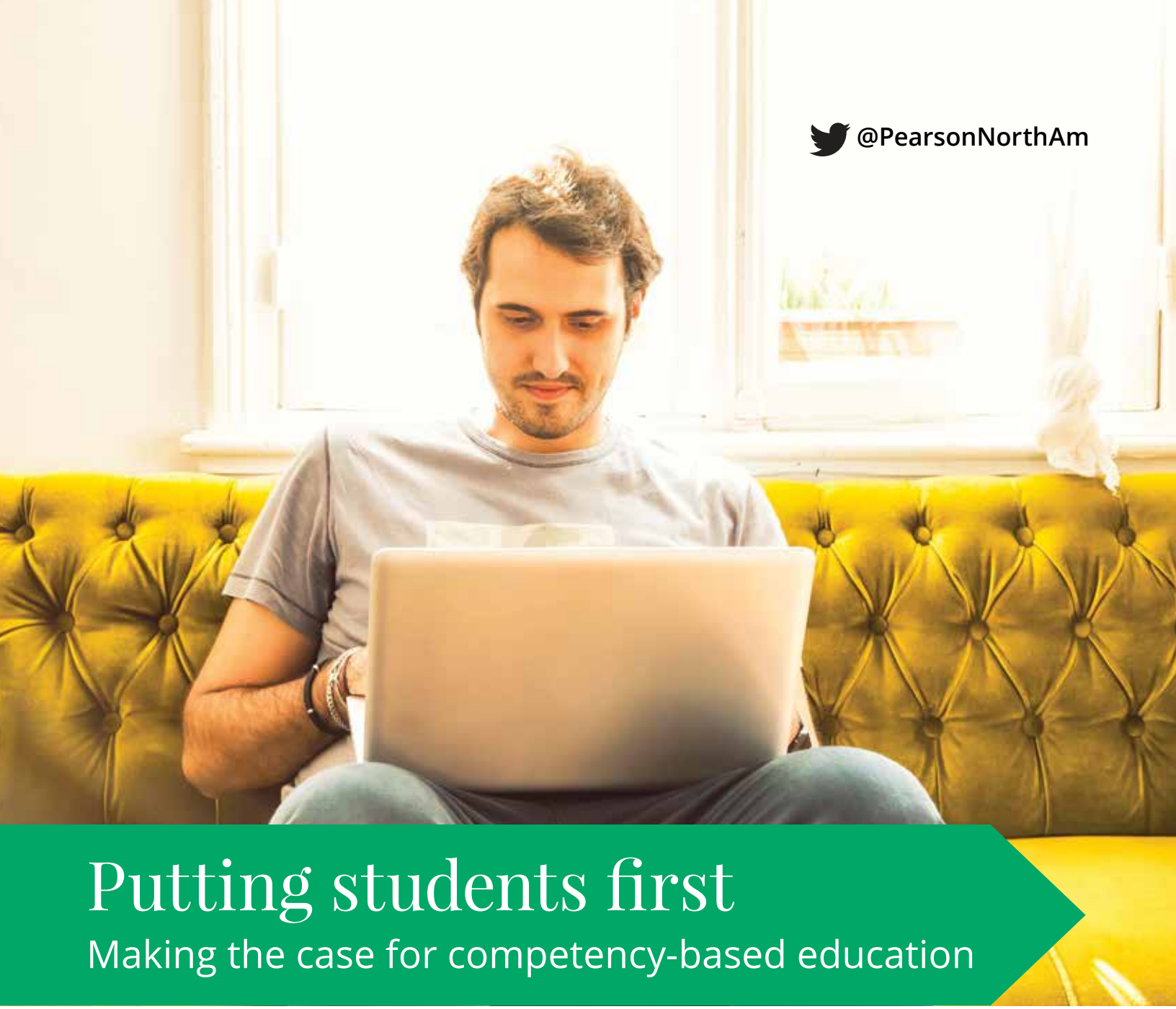

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