



Getting Started in an Educational Development Career: From Graduate Student or Postdoctoral Scholar to CTL Staff

Written by the POD Network Executive Committee in collaboration with the Graduate and Professional Student Development Committee

Over the past 15 years, there has been an [160% increase in the number of postings](#) for positions in [educational development](#) (ED) (Bartholomew, 2016), a field that enhances colleges and universities, often with a focus on teaching and learning-related activities. Given the robust job market in this area, how might a graduate student or postdoc explore this career path? Certainly, when most of us applied to graduate school, we were unaware of the wide range of possible careers available with the completion of a terminal degree, and the paths to an ED career are also quite variable (Handel, 2008; McDonald & Stockley, 2008).

Although it is possible to step directly into a leadership role within ED, as a graduate student or postdoc, starting at an entry-level position (e.g., Assistant Director, Instructional Consultant, or Instructional Designer) is most likely. Some qualifications for these positions are similar to those required for an academic job search. For example, for many Instructional Consultant or Assistant Director positions, a PhD is required or preferred. Just as teaching experience and effectiveness play an important role in most academic job searches (Bruff, 2007; Fleet et al., 2006; Meizlish & Kaplan, 2008), enthusiasm for teaching and postsecondary instructional experience—particularly as an instructor of record—are valued. In contrast, requirements for instructional designers—another entry-level position that focuses on instructional technology work, vary widely—with a master’s degree being the expected credential and possibly little or no required teaching experience. For all entry-level positions, many of the skills gained in graduate school—teaching, research, and communications—are competencies that can be transferred successfully into an ED career. For example, research skills, particularly as applied to assessment of student learning or scholarship of teaching and learning projects, are valued in ED searches.

While the ED and faculty job market do overlap in required credentials and skills, ED positions also require a unique skillset that merits some additional preparation. Key competencies needed to be successful in an entry-level ED position include the following (Chism, 2007; Dawson, Britnell & Hitchcock, 2010; Zakrajsek, 2010):

- Knowledge about group dynamics, information technology, higher education, and the literature on teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum development, active and engaged learning, inclusive teaching).

- Skills such as how to facilitate workshops, do research or program evaluation, engage in event planning and project management, teach in large and small groups, and communicate effectively with diverse academic audiences. Interpersonal capacities are particularly important, such as the ability to mentor and coach others, mediate conflicts, and facilitate group discussions and meetings.
- Attitudes such as patience, persistence, comfort with technology and collaborative work, and openness to feedback, reflective practice and interdisciplinarity.

How can those interested in ED develop these competencies and document them for an ED job search? Four steps are recommended:

1. Find the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) nearest to you. Informational interviews with staff help establish the range of ways centers can engage graduate students and postdocs and offer useful conversations for exploring an ED job search. Many centers also offer paid opportunities, such as internships and graduate teaching consultant programs (Dunbar, Schwartz, & Marincovich, 2012; Linder et al., 2011). While participating in a CTL's workshops and programs is helpful, serving as a facilitator or co-facilitator is more valuable experience in the ED job market.
2. Tailor your job search materials to ED searches, such as by highlighting the rationale for an ED search and ways in which you have developed skillsets in some of the competencies named above. It also is useful to develop an ED philosophy statement or portfolio. For a portfolio, important components include lists of workshops and programs developed, accompanied by evidence of effectiveness and how faculty or TAs' needs and interests were identified to shape the programs (Stanley, 2001). An ED philosophy statement and professional development plans are also valuable components of an ED portfolio. Albeit from a seasoned professional, Dezure (2002) offers a useful reflection on her ED portfolio and key elements she included. For initial development of a philosophy, Land (2003, included in Green & Huston, 2007) offers 12 "orientations" to ED work that serve as useful springboards for development of a personal philosophy.
3. Link into communities of practice, both online (e.g., the [POD Network discussion group](#)) and annual meetings, such as the POD Network Conference, Lilly Conferences and ISSOTL. The POD Network offers several travel grants to significantly offset the cost of travel to its annual conference for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. (Notification of these opportunities is typically distributed on the POD Network discussion group in early summer.) It also offers a mentoring program and several events for first-time attendees. Lilly Conferences regularly offer graduate students and postdocs grants that cover the registration fee.
4. Explore resources such as *The Guide to Faculty Development* (Gillespie & Robertson, 2007), *Practically Speaking* (Brinko, 2012) or [To Improve the Academy](#), which discuss approaches and proficiencies that educational developers employ in their work. Additionally, it is helpful to learn about trends in higher education through resources such as *Inside Higher Ed*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Change Magazine*.

This growing and rewarding field of educational development will advance largely due to interest from you and individuals like you. We look forward to working with you as a future educational developer.

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October 2016

Please cite as: POD Network Executive Committee & POD Network Graduate and Professional Student Development Committee. (2016, October). *Getting started in an educational development career: From graduate student or postdoctoral scholar to CTL staff*. Nederland, CO: POD Network.