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Graduate Assistant Experience at the Institute - An Interview with Amie Tope

June 18, 2018 | By Amie Tope
Instructional Design
Teaching Effectiveness

Amie Tope, 2018 graduate of Franklin University's Master of Science in Instructional Design & Learning Technology (IDLT) program, recently sat down for an interview with the IDLT program chair, Dr. Yi Yang. Amie not only graduated with a 4.0 GPA and gave a speech at the Winter 2018 Commencement—she also accepted a job offer before she graduated from the program! During this interview, she talks about her experience working as a graduate assistant for the International Institute for Innovative Instruction (the Institute), and offers suggestions for future graduate assistants.

Yi Yang (YY): Please tell us how you started your graduate assistantship (GA) at the Institute.

Amie Tope (AT): Before I began my journey with Franklin, I was lost in life, unsure of what direction I was headed. After inquiring about the IDLT degree, the admissions advisor showed me the available GA position; without her guidance, I would have never known about that opportunity. Two years later, I not only have a master's degree—I have a career, a job, a clear direction, and a happiness in my life that I did not have prior. I credit my success and my happiness to Franklin University and everything it gave me along the way!

YY: How would you describe your GA experience at the Institute?

AT: The GA position was excellent because I worked with leaders in the education industry. These leaders enlightened me on the processes that Franklin implements to ensure their curriculum is measurable, effective, and abreast of the current trends and theories. Furthermore, the Institute designs and develops educational content for other universities, businesses, and organizations; being able to observe and aid in these processes enriched my knowledge of what I sought to become when I began my journey with Franklin University—an instructional designer. The experiences I encountered during my assistantship greatly enhanced my skills as a student and a professional. Combined, these experiences rapidly molded and propelled me into a practitioner with a job before I had even graduated.

YY: What type of projects did you work on as a GA? How did those projects benefit your studies and career?

AT: Some projects I worked on as a GA included redesigning courses, conducting data and thematic analyses, compiling research reports, assisting in the facilitation of an interactive workshop, and being a student representative in the Academic Technology Committee. All of my experiences helped me become proficient at multiple skills—Excel, SharePoint, Outlook, Learning Management Systems, Skype for Business, Adobe Connect, public speaking, and project management, to name a few. Many of these skills have already transferred to my current job. Aside from adopting versatile skill sets, I was enveloped in a network of people who supported me intellectually, professionally, and personally. Working with people who believed in me, who showed me opportunities that I couldn't see, and who encouraged me to open doors I had previously been afraid of is the most invaluable reward that came from my assistantship at the Institute.

YY: Would you please tell us about the IDLT program you just completed? By the way, congratulations on such a big achievement!

AT: The program prepared me extremely well for a career in the educational field. The areas I studied included theories of instructional design, various models and principles of instructional design, human performance improvement, educational technology, evaluation, operating a learning management system, and how to strategically design a unit of study based on a needs analysis. Moreover, the program is entirely online, which was relevant to the needs of myself and others in the program, for reasons such as work/life balance, and experiencing the essence of what it was we were studying—curriculum design and eLearning.

The program also prepares students for the real world by focusing assignments and projects on realistic and relevant case studies. The capstone experience, where I was able to work with real clients to design a training course, was the perfect transition into my career. I even had the flexibility to turn my capstone experience into a paid internship, where I still had a chance to work full-time. We also created or improved our LinkedIn profiles and digital portfolios to share with employers.

YY: What advice would you give to a future graduate assistant?

AT: The advice I would give to a future graduate assistant, not only at the Institute, but also at programs everywhere, is:

- *Don't be afraid of uncomfortable situations*– They are how you grow as a professional. The more you practice (e.g., speaking, working with tools, asserting opinions, etc.) the more familiar you will become with these skills.
- *Put hard work into every task you're assigned*– Even the small tasks, because they will build integrity amongst your superiors, who will come to trust you to help them with important work.
- *Remember that it's okay to be frustrated sometimes*–I remember the first week I was a GA, I was not proficient at Excel and became frustrated very quickly; however, within a few weeks I was pretty good at it!
- *Don't be afraid to ask questions* – That is how you learn and grow. Based on my experiences, colleagues are always happy to help!

The International Institute for Innovative Instruction always welcomes talent to join our collaborative team or enroll in our master's and doctoral instructional design programs! Please visit the [academic programs page](#) for details.

About the Author

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Dr.