

The Amazing Story of VISSTA – Virginia Institute for Social Services



Twenty two individuals in the VISSTA program through the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) are responsible for creating training for the entire state's department of social services – from the Commission of Social Services to 121 local departments. That's really the main constituency, the target audience – all the social service workers at those 121 local agencies. All those programs within there – elder abuse, child abuse, food stamps, the welfare program, domestic violence, everything. Any program that they have, VISSTA trains their workers. It's an enormous feat, especially since most of the trainers don't have an official training background.

DSA Workshops Help Bridge the GAP

Training departments across the country find themselves faced with a similar personnel dilemma: plenty of subject matter experts and writers but hardly any instructional designers. To bridge the gap between content expertise and curriculum development, managers are sending employees to workshops delivered

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by Darryl Sink & Associates, Inc. (DSA). Designing Instruction for Web-Based Training, The Criterion Referenced Testing Workshop, and The Instructional Developer Workshop – DSA's classes provided a systematic approach for all aspects of the instructional design process. Upon completion of multiple classes, participants can even apply and test for professional certification.

“People here are really interested in getting the training, the professional development, and it makes our funder (VCU) happy with us,” said Dr. Anne Kisor, Director of VISSTA. “We're able to say we're training (our developers) and that our people are certified.”

In addition to the professional certification, VISSTA has also been thrilled with DSA's willingness to personalize training examples so participants can directly relate to the material. Jane Sink, DSA's VP of marketing, and each of the DSA presenters strive to ensure each client's particular needs are met.

Upon completion of DSA's workshops, participants are prepared to tackle even the trickiest instructional design tasks. “Everyone wants to have web training, but it's not always the best fit,” Dr. Kisor. “It's been helpful that everyone has that basic knowledge; they're able to help educate about the pros and cons about moving to web.”

Standardized Training for Many Different Audiences

One thing that's interesting is that we're trying to come up with standardized training for a target population all across the state of Virginia. Urban vs. rural. Regional. We dip into Appalachia. In the north, up by Washington, it's a mid-Atlantic state. Those people are northerners, and then the Tidewater area has the influence of the huge military installation there. “We've learned to balance standardized training with creative approaches so the presentation material and activities are flexible enough to work for a variety of different kind of people,” said Dr. Kisor. “The instructional design training has been very helpful with that. That's our biggest challenge – how to make this work statewide.”