Choosing the Best Course Designer for your Project

Once you’ve provided the property, nothing will impact the experience of your players more than the course design. Make sure it’s the best you can afford. This is a guide to help land owners and park supervisors choose the appropriate designer to develop safe, challenging and enjoyable courses for their community.

Disc golf has come a long way since the 70s, when many courses used trees and light poles for targets. Older courses – many times designed by local players with little design experience and few qualifications – have become outdated and even less safe in some cases. As disc technology, park operations experience and player expectations have advanced through the years, the art and science of course design have also advanced. In the past 10 years, the PDGA has been systematically developing course design guidelines in cooperation with the Disc Golf Course Designers (DGCD) group. The DGCD is an independent group of 150 designers with a wide range of experience, dedicated to excellence in course design for players of all skill levels.

Here are several questions a land owner/developer should ask course designers to determine whether they have the necessary skills and experience to design and develop appropriate courses to meet the needs of your project and community. There are no formal certification or state licensing programs for course designers. No colleges are known to have a disc golf course design curriculum. Some designers do have landscape architecture degrees to help get good installation. But landscape architecture curriculum rarely addresses disc golf design processes and standards. There’s nothing like experience and a solid track record with satisfied clients to help select your designer.

1. **References** – Try a web search to either find experienced designers who might be available to work in your area or simply to see if potential designers in your area have a website. That should provide information on their experience and completed designs. Contact those who hired the designer. Talk with target manufacturers who may have worked with designers in your area. Contact PDGA HQ for information on their experiences with designers in your area at: 706-261-6342

2. **Specific Experience for your Project** – Does the designer have experience with your type of course development project? Is your project a public or private development, a multi-course complex, or a property with alternating seasonal use like downhill or cross-country skiing? Does the designer have experience developing courses on your type of terrain such as dealing with erosion issues on steep hills, identifying appropriate trees for clearing and saving on heavily wooded parcels, or designing safely on sites with several bodies of water?

3. **Courses Designed Resume** – The designer should provide a list of courses developed indicating their level of design involvement with each project. All but a few course designers have other full or part-time employment and have honed their design skills over the years working part-time on several regional courses. The small but growing group of designers who develop courses as a primary part of their professional activities will likely have their design resumes on a website.

4. **PDGA Course Development Guidelines** – Designer openly supports designing disc golf courses following the PDGA guidelines available here: [www.pdfa.com/course-development](http://www.pdfa.com/course-development)
5. **DGCD Membership and Level** – People may join the Disc Golf Course Designers group by paying dues. They automatically receive the basic title of Designer. However, DGCD Members who have significantly more design experience earn the higher levels of Senior Designer and then Master Designer (noted on their member cards). However, even relatively new Designers are at least exposed to the current advances for developing good courses. Here’s the web site for the DGCD group: [http://www.discgolfcoursedesigners.org/discgolfwiki](http://www.discgolfcoursedesigners.org/discgolfwiki)

6. **Training & Education** – Has the designer studied under and/or worked with more experienced designers to learn the craft? Does designer have much experience with landscaping or partners who can assist with property development issues? Or how about having business experience or education to provide guidance for helping set up your “for profit” disc golf operation if that’s the direction you want to go? Does designer have experience teaching disc throwing skills in a class environment or with national education programs such as EDGE for children?

7. **Technology Expertise** – Does designer own and use state-of-the-art equipment and processes such as laser rangefinders for distance measurement, GPS system if mapping the base site is needed, or topographical software and related graphics programs to produce professional maps and scorecards?

8. **Years as a PDGA Member** – Indicates the designer has more likely been exposed to and possibly participated in the evolution of the current PDGA course development guidelines.

Design expectations and requirements have advanced to the point where land stewards run the risk of making a poor choice by placing inexperienced local player volunteers in charge of their course design. Some local players believe they can design a good course even without relevant design experience. These volunteers should be encouraged to work with a hired professional designer to provide design feedback and especially to test each draft of a course layout as it evolves. Interference and liability concerns for your course layout in addition to lack of design experience are important reasons to avoid placing local players, scouts and high school students in charge of a project. Scouts are a resource for building course amenities like tee signs, benches and information boards, just not leading the course design.

The fees a professional designer may charge can vary widely, depending on the experience and skills of the designer, and any other value he or she may bring to the project. The specific fee for design may be just a portion of the work and assistance the designer may be qualified to provide for your project. As examples, some designers could bid on preparing the formal proposal, base site mapping, supervising or actually doing the required foliage clearing for fairways, installing course equipment, perhaps a maintenance guide, future phase two development plan, business planning and possibly future marketing for a pay-for-play facility which might even include teaching your staff ways to run leagues and tournaments. Consider seeking alternate bids for any elements of your project to help determine you are getting the best value for your budget.

*Good luck with your course project. Contact the PDGA 706-261-6342 for additional information.*

August 1, 2016