

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Older courses – many times designed by local players with little design experience and few qualifications – have become outdated and even less safe in some cases.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 100 designers with a wide range of experience, dedicated to excellence in course design for players of all skill levels.

There is no formal certification or state licensing program for course designers. So, beware of anyone indicating they have such credentials. No colleges yet have a curriculum for disc golf course design. The closest relevant degree is in landscape architecture. But even those programs aren't known to directly address disc golf issues. Here are several questions a land owner/developer should ask a potential course designer to determine whether they have the necessary skills and experience to design and develop appropriate courses to meet the needs of their project and their community.

1. **PDGA Course Development Guidelines** – Designer openly supports designing disc golf courses following the PDGA guidelines available here: www.pdga.com/course-development
2. **Courses Designed Resume** – The designer should provide a list of courses developed indicating their level of design involvement with each project. Most designers have fulltime jobs and have honed their design skills over several years working part-time on a few local courses. The growing group of designers who develop courses as a primary part of their professional activities will likely have their design resumes on a website.
3. **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?
4. **Training & Education** – Has the designer studied under and/or worked with more experienced designers to learn the craft? Does designer have much experience with landscape architecture projects, possibly a degree, to assist with your 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?

5. **References** – Contact those who hired the designer for their projects. Contact basket 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
6. **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>
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 pros feel they can design courses even without relevant design experience. These volunteers should definitely 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. Safety and liability concerns for your course layout in addition to lack of design experience are important reasons to avoid placing local players, scouts, or high school students in charge of the project. Scouts are a great resource for building course amenities like tee signs, benches and information boards, just not doing the course design.

Actual design fees range from 10-20% of the true total cost of a course development project. The true total cost includes the estimated labor cost of local volunteers and public workers, who are usually involved building Park & Recreation courses, even if their wages aren't specifically considered part of the project cost by the supervising authority. If the designer's quote is more than 20% of the project cost, it's usually because they will have additional costs such as non-local travel expenses, or they are quoting additional services not part of the basic design such as more comprehensive site mapping, supervising or actually performing tree clearing, or providing business operations training.

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



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