UDL: Good Teaching Practices

Introduction

Although Universal Design for Learning (UDL) originated in architectural design, the overall concept has been adopted by a number of sectors including education. UDL principles benefit all students, and particularly those who face accessibility, learning and language difficulties, by facilitating equal opportunities to learn.

The application of UDL principles and concepts within a classroom is not specifically defined and is left to the discretion of the faculty member to interpret and implement. In many cases, implementation of UDL may simply involve minor “tweaks” to course materials and classroom activities. It is not designed to be a one-size-fits-all solution. UDL encourages a flexible approach to learning which places the student at the centre of the learning process while identifying and employing good teaching practices which benefit all students.

UDL identifies and builds upon three key networks for learning:

- **Recognition Networks**: The "what" of learning
  - How learners gather facts and categorize what they see, hear, and read
- **Affective Networks**: The "why" of learning
  - How learners are engaged and stay motivated
  - How learners are challenged, excited, or interested
- **Strategic Networks**: The "how" of learning
  - How learners plan and perform tasks
  - How learners organize and express their ideas

( Source: National Center on Universal Design for Learning, [http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl](http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl) )
Select from these classroom practices to enhance students’ opportunities to learn:

Provide a clearly defined course plan for students

For each lesson, post a clearly defined plan for students to review prior to the actual class. The course plan should contain the following:

- Lesson learning objectives (linked to program and course outcomes)
- Topics which will be addressed
- Required reading/viewing (textbook pages, online content, videos, etc.)
- Graded items to be submitted (quizzes, labs, etc., including due dates)
- Optional or supplementary resources

Release materials early

Releasing materials early provides students with a greater opportunity to take ownership of their learning activities, allocate time as needed and arrange for any accommodations they may require (e.g. transcribing, etc.). Students also gain the opportunity to work through the materials as many times as needed prior to actually addressing the material in class. Students should be given the opportunity and encouragement to work ahead if doing so helps them to build familiarity and develop a better understanding of the concepts and materials in the course.

Present material in multiple formats

In addition to classroom lectures and supporting PowerPoints, consider providing additional handouts, summaries, glossary sheets and videos which employ different formats and perspectives to highlight key points. Links to online videos (e.g. YouTube) as well as links to additional online information and activities help to round out student learning and improve understanding. In addition, consider providing a range of practice materials (such as practice quizzes, practice labs, scenarios, etc.) for each lesson to give students an opportunity to work with the new information and gauge their understanding of the material and concepts.

Create accessible materials

In addition to the above, materials should be presented in an accessible format. Although much can be said about accessibility and design, it is important to consider the needs of all students when creating lesson materials as some students may be employing screen readers and programs like Read & Write Gold to access the materials. In the case of videos, it may be appropriate to provide closed captioning or a transcript for the video. Programs like Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Office packages such as Word and PowerPoint incorporate built-in features for creating and testing accessible documents.
Learning activities

When planning learning activities such as discussions, group activities, etc. it is important to ensure that the planned activities are appropriate and accessible for all students in the class. When planning the nature and structure of an activity, take into consideration any hearing, verbal, and processing challenges students may experience. Doing so will provide all students with an equal opportunity to participate in the learning activity. Demographics and cultural differences should also be considered.

Extended time for graded activities

Where applicable, consider extending times for graded activities. This would give all students additional time/opportunity to complete a quiz, lab assignment or exam.

- Provide graded activities online, where appropriate
- Post notification of graded activities well in advance of the actual date when the quiz/activity will become available
- Consider allowing students the opportunity to log in and complete the quiz/activity at a time and place of their choosing within an allocated time period. For example, rather than assigning an in-class quiz, allow students to complete the quiz online during a prescribed timeframe, e.g. between 8am Monday and 11:59pm Friday
- If you provide additional time for students to complete the graded activities, it is important to hold firm on due dates

Keep content, assignments and questions clear and concise

When creating materials, assignments and test questions, ensure that all information, instructions and questions are clear and concise. Materials that are wordy, unclear or ambiguous are a problem for all students but are particularly troublesome for students who may experience reading difficulties or cognitive challenges when processing unclear instructions.

Flexible assignments

Assignment flexibility encourages greater student engagement while also giving students the opportunity to present and showcase their knowledge and understanding in a fashion and format they are comfortable with.

- Consider providing greater flexibility and options with regard to assignments and projects
- Where appropriate provide students with the opportunity to select their own assignment topic and method of presentation as long as it meets the course criteria, outcomes, rubric and time allotted
- Consider providing students with the option of working alone or in groups
UDL References

Helpful websites

- CAST website
- UDL center

PDF downloads

- Publication – Universal Instructional Design University of Toronto Scarborough
- Analyzing a college course that adheres to the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework
- Curriculum Transformation and Disability: Implementing Universal Design in Higher Education
- Historical, Theoretical, and Foundational Principles of Universal Instructional Design in Higher Education
- Pedagogy and Student Services for institutional transformation: Implementing Universal Design in Higher Education
- Universal Design for Instruction in Postsecondary Education: A Systematic Review of Empirically Based Articles
- Universal Design for Instruction a new paradigm for adult instruction in postsecondary education