



UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT IN PRACTICE

WHAT IS IT?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework of instructional approaches that recognizes and accommodates varied learning preferences. UDL is integrated into regular instructional planning to make diversity the norm. UDL considers the needs of all students and promotes a respectful classroom climate where all students can freely engage and participate in the course. In contrast to accommodation (a largely reactive measure), UDL represents a *proactive* approach to teaching which seeks to create learning environments and events that are *a priori* and intentionally designed from the grounds up to maximize access for all students of *all* abilities.

Although not an exhaustive list, the three core principles of UDL include: 1) multiple means of representation by presenting course content to students in different ways to accommodate their unique learning preferences; 2) multiple means of expression by allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of course content in more than just one way; and 3) multiple means of engagement by allowing students to engage with course material in a variety of ways.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The motivation behind UDL is to help identify and eliminate as many barriers as possible to access to education for all students. In doing so, the aim of UDL is to support and enhance participation and inclusion in the classroom. Although UDL is often associated with supporting students with disabilities in the classroom, the benefit of implementing the principles of UDL into one's course design is that it supports the learning experience for all students by providing students with multiple modes of engagement and a variety of methods of assessment. By designing courses and assignments with the principles of UDL in mind, instructors can make tangible steps toward creating a learning atmosphere where all students are supported, and all of their learning needs can be met.

HOW CAN INSTRUCTORS IMPLEMENT UDL IN THE CLASSROOM?

Instructors can implement the principles of UDL in a variety of ways. For example:.

1. **Incorporate active learning and peer learning strategies in the classroom.** Although traditional lectures are one method of conveying course content to students, giving students opportunities to engage with their colleagues allows them to demonstrate their knowledge of course content.
2. **Check-in with all students periodically throughout the course to determine if your approach to UDL meets their needs.** For instance, you could ask students to fill out an anonymous questionnaire or survey at the midpoint of your course and see if there are any further ways that you can support their learning in the classroom.
3. **Offer a variety of resources and modes of presentation to suit your students' learning needs.** Students learn in different ways; there is no one-size-fits-all approach to learning. Thus, when preparing lectures or seminars, provide students with visuals and other methods to convey course content to ensure most students are accommodated.

4. **Ensure that the resources you use in your course are accessible to all students.** For example, if you plan on using video clips in your teaching, make use of subtitles and/or transcripts so students can engage with this material in ways that best suit their learning needs. Similarly, ensure that your Power Point slides or other written materials are prepared with a font that is accessible (e.g., Arial, Calibri). Also consider using an accessibility checklist as you prepare your course (e.g., <https://enact.sonoma.edu/c.php?g=789377&p=5650629>).
5. **Provide students with flexibility in terms of deadlines and mode of assessment.** For example, to avoid a stressful midterm period or an end of term crunch, consider re-evaluating your assessment and assignments and offer scaffolded activities that students can complete throughout the term. Furthermore, consider written assignments and other substitutes so that students can demonstrate their understanding in a variety of ways.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Internal)

Blended and Online Learning Design (BOLD), Teaching Commons & Learning Technology Services, York University. (n.d.). "Provide content in a variety of ways." [https://www.yorku.ca/bold/provide-content-in-a-variety-of-ways/#:~:text=Universal%20Design%20for%20Learning%20\(UDL,for%20Exceptional%20Children%2C%202005\).](https://www.yorku.ca/bold/provide-content-in-a-variety-of-ways/#:~:text=Universal%20Design%20for%20Learning%20(UDL,for%20Exceptional%20Children%2C%202005).)

York University Libraries. (n.d.). "Library accessibility services." <https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/ask-services/accessibility-services/>

York University Teaching Commons. (n.d.). "Inclusive course design". <https://www.yorku.ca/teachingcommons/course-design/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (External)

Explore in 15-30 Minutes

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). (2018). "Universal Design for Learning guidelines version 2.2." Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Cornell University Center for Teaching and Learning. "Universal Design for Learning". <https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/designing-your-course/universal-design-learning>

Durham College. (n.d.). "Universal Instructional Design versus Universal Design for Learning".
<http://cafe.durhamcollege.ca/index.php/curriculum-development/universal-design-for-learning/udi-vs-uid>

Niagara College Canada, Centre for Academic Excellence. (n.d.). "Creating inclusive and supportive online courses" <https://www.niagaracollege.ca/cae/eddev/teaching-resources/online-teaching/deliver/inclusive-supportive-courses/>

Ontario's Universities Accessible Campus. (n.d.). "Teaching students with physical disabilities".
<http://www.accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/teaching-tips/teaching-students-with-physical-disabilities/>

Explore in 30-60 minutes

Silver, P., Bourke, A., & Strehorn, K. C. (1998). Universal Instruction Design in higher education: An approach for inclusion. *Equity & Excellence In Education*, 31(2), 47-51.

Walters, S. (2010). Toward an accessible pedagogy: Dis/ability, multimodality, and Universal Design in the technical communication classroom. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 19(4), 427-454.

Explore in 60+ minutes

Behling, K. T. & Tobin, T. J. (2018). *Reach everyone, teach everyone: Universal design for learning in higher education*. West Virginia University Press.

Bracken, S. & Novak, K. (Eds). (2019). *Transforming higher education through universal design for learning: An international perspective*. Routledge.

Burgstahler, S., & Cory, R. (2010). *Universal design in higher education: From principles to practice*. Cambridge, UK: Harvard Education Press.

Rose, D., Meyer, A. & Hitchcock, C. (2005). *The universally designed classroom – Accessible curriculum and digital technologies*. Cambridge, UK: Harvard Education Press.

Would you like to learn more?

Contact us at Teaching Commons for additional resources, handouts, applications, courses, workshops, examples, advice, assistance, one-on-one consulting, and everything else related to teaching and learning. We are happy and eager to assist you!



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1050 Victor Phillip Dahdaleh (formerly TEL) Building, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3



416.736.2100 ext. 55754



Created by [Andrew Molas](#) & [Katharina Pabst](#) & [Robert D. Winkler](#)

[Yelin Su](#)

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