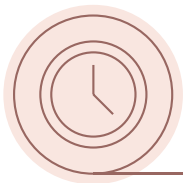


Anticipating and Addressing Challenges in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Implementation for Success

As with any efforts to support student learning, it is necessary to reflect on potential challenges associated with the UDL approach and its context-sensitive implementation.

Here are some points to consider.



Taking a UDL approach requires initial investment of time and labour to reconfigure module design and teaching practices. Colleagues note that time is required to adopt a UDL approach, which includes developing 'new habits and processes in course design and teaching' (Centre for Teaching Excellence, Boston College, 2024). While research shows that this initial investment leads to pay-off later, it can be off-putting for some faculty. Further, this initial time invested does not completely obviate the need for unexpected ongoing adjustments and attunement to student needs throughout the module.



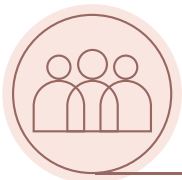
Ideally, UDL as part of inclusive education needs a 'whole of institution' approach. Securing such a lived commitment across all campus units and departments may require a cultural shift which could be a lengthy process requiring both urgency and persistence. Given the many calls on staff and students' time and attention, it may be difficult to maintain the necessary focus on UDL and related approaches over the timeframe needed to effect long-lasting change.



In addition to the adoption of UDL principles and guidelines in one's practice, investigating the impact of such changes is necessary to evaluate if the changes are having a positive impact on student learning. Researching one's practice takes time and support, both of which may be at a premium in many higher education institutions.



Faculty and disability rights advocates wonder if UDL will do away with accommodation that some students will always need to ensure equity. Specifically, regarding Universal Design, some critical disability theorists argue that 'Attention to cultural representations of disability has been largely missing from Universal Design discourse ... Proponents often treat Universal Design as a de facto good, untouched by broader social and political forces, and neutral toward disability. Critical disability theory, by contrast, offers historical and theoretical tools for examining the persistence of ableism in contemporary Universal Design discourses' (Hamraie, 2016, p. 288). Drawing on Hamraie (2016), colleagues in the Centre for Teaching Excellence in Boston College note that 'the emphasis on universal benefit can sometimes obscure the particular needs and experiences of disabled people that UDL was originally intended to benefit' (2024).



Due to a perceived focus on disability UDL can become a 'them and us' approach where some feel taking a UDL approach is solely the responsibility of those working in disability and access on a campus. However, UDL is intersectional and is about all students. Understood as part of inclusive education, UDL aims to reduce barriers to learning in consideration of race, culture, sexual orientation, disability, age, gender, marital status, religion or being a member of the traveller community.



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