

What Does the Research Tell us about Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?

UDL exists at the intersection of EDI, social justice and accessibility. In a world where potential is left unreached because of the barriers created by systems and society, we must examine our teaching methods, tools, and materials to guarantee that they reduce bias based on identity, race, culture, language, gender, disability or class that inevitably leads to limiting access, participation, engagement and success. UDL is an approach that was designed to address and reduce inequities by removing barriers to all students (Chardin and Novak, 2020). This ensures that every student has genuine and captivating chances to learn and succeed. Aligned with research in the fields of cognitive neuroscience and learning theories, UDL is an approach to the design and delivery of our classes that ensures accessibility, support, challenge and meaningful participation for the diversity of students in our classrooms. As neuroscience contributes more to our understanding of learning and diversity, we can create more inclusive learning environments by proactively addressing the varied capabilities, identities, and learning strengths and needs of all students (Myer, Rose and Gordon, 2014).



How does it help improve student outcomes?

The research into the impact of UDL on student outcomes is ongoing. Flood and Banks note that 'although empirical studies specifically focusing on the impact of UDL on student outcomes are limited, those available indicate UDL's potential to improve student outcomes. Increased student engagement, participation and outcomes are noted across a number of large- and small-scale research studies' (Flood and Banks, 2021, p. 3). For instance, in Davies et al.'s study (2013) students reported that UDL intervention strategies increased their understanding of concepts in postsecondary courses, while Dean et al. (2017) established that engaging students using accessible instructional methods has a positive impact on their learning, especially in large class settings (La, Dyjur and Bair, 2018). As with other approaches, colleagues who use UDL may want to enquire into UDL's effectiveness for their setting and may choose to partner with students on this work as students are ideally placed to comment on the positive impact or otherwise of UDL on their learning.



How does it benefit educators?

A systematic meta-analysis of UDL literature from 2015-2021 on the effectiveness of UDL showed that, in addition to benefiting students, taking a UDL approach has a positive impact on university and school teachers (Almeqdad et al., 2023). For example, University of Southern Maine's STEM faculty members' participation in a five-year UDL professional development programme resulted in a positive impact on their teaching experience, as evidenced by their increased engagement and commitment to improving student learning. It also had a positive impact on their professional relationships with peers (Langley-Turnbaugh, Blair and Whitney, 2013).

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