DESIGNING ACCESSIBLE COURSES

Applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to Minimize Barriers to Student Learning

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Today You Will Learn

- Two key questions that you can ask yourself to increase the accessibility of your courses.

- Several UDL strategies that will make your course more equitable <u>and</u> engaging.

- A process for identifying potential barriers to learning in your course materials and instruction.

- How to apply the UDL process to some of your own assumptions about accessible course design.

Order of Topics

I. What is UDL and why should I care?

II. Processes for Applying UDL Principles

III. UDL Strategies, Techniques, and Examples

Definition of UDL

A framework of research-supported of strategies and techniques

that aim to include as many learners (of varying preferences and abilities) as possible;

by creating with accessibility in mind, and reducing barriers to learning,

while maintaining the integrity and content of the course.

UDL supports established academic standards. It does not promote a watered-down curriculum!

(Adapted from the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008)

Image (above): Slinky toy, to represent the conept of "flexibility"

Benefits of UDL for Students

1) Students are more engaged, especially those who are struggling with the material, both overtly and covertly.

2) Students with diverse learning needs experience fewer barriers to the course material.

3) Students need fewer individual accommodations, based on natural variations in learning style, language barriers, disability, etc.

4) Students become more autonomous learners when they can customize and adjust materials for their own needs.

5) Students can become more accepting, aware, and open about their individual differences.

6) Students are given more choices in the learning process, so they are more likely to feel like they are part of something important.

Benefits of UDL for Instructors

1) It can increase the validity of your assessments
UDL facilitates the removal of confounding variables, so that you can
measure what you originally set out to measure.

2) It saves you time and effort
UDL builds in flexibility and supports that reduce the need for
individual, after-the-fact adaptations to the course.

3) It keeps the focus on your course objectives
UDL allows you to challenge students during the learning process,
without creating new barriers to the content.

4) It makes class more interesting for you too!
UDL provides many ways for students to demonstrate what they have
learned, both to you and their peers.

UDL Domains and Course Design

When designing a course, the selection of methods, materials, and assessments to use in a course should be flexible and provide multiple means for the 3 main UDL domains:

1) **Representation:** the ways in which the course content is delivered by the instructor, and received by the student
    Ex: print, illustration, tactile/kinesthetic, audio, digital

2) **Engagement:** the subjective elements of the teaching-learning process, including "classroom" dynamics
    Ex: collaboration, autonomy, personal value, feedback

3) **Assessment**: the actions and expressions through which learning can be measured
    Ex: recall, recognition, demonstration, presentation

Removing Barriers in Course Design

Some UDL applications work best for preventing barriers at the outset, while others can be used to remove barriers that already exist. Existing barriers often develop from the assumptions that we all tend to make when planning and providing instruction.

By asking yourself, "What assumptions am I making?", you can identify and remove barriers to course content.
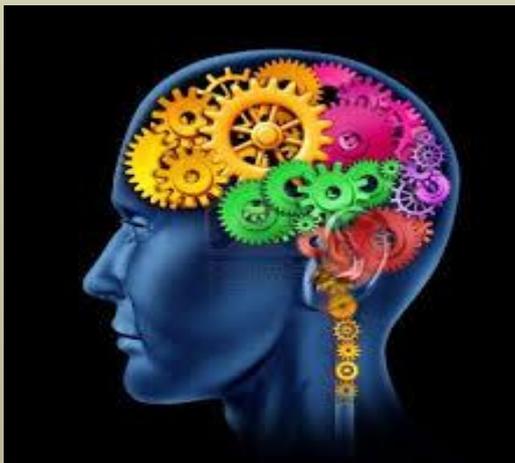
Image (left): Illustration of a human head with gears in it, to represent the thinking process

ACTIVITY: Examining Our Assumptions

Q: What assumptions are being made in the following course activities?

- During a lecture on voting rights in the United States?
- During a studio session on lighting?
- When you give students oral instructions during class about an assignment?
- When you show a movie in class?
- During a class debate?

UDL Approaches to Representation

- Vary the proportion of new material covered; leave time to ensure that essential components of the course are repeated.

- Post digital copies of your presentations and handouts online (e.g., Blackboard).

- Incorporate different techniques into your classes

- Give oral descriptions of any visuals, use closed captioning when possible

- Make video recordings of your lectures and post them online, so that students can break down the whole lecture into manageable parts.

ACTIVITY: UDL Domains- Engagement

Q: What do you think is going on with this student?
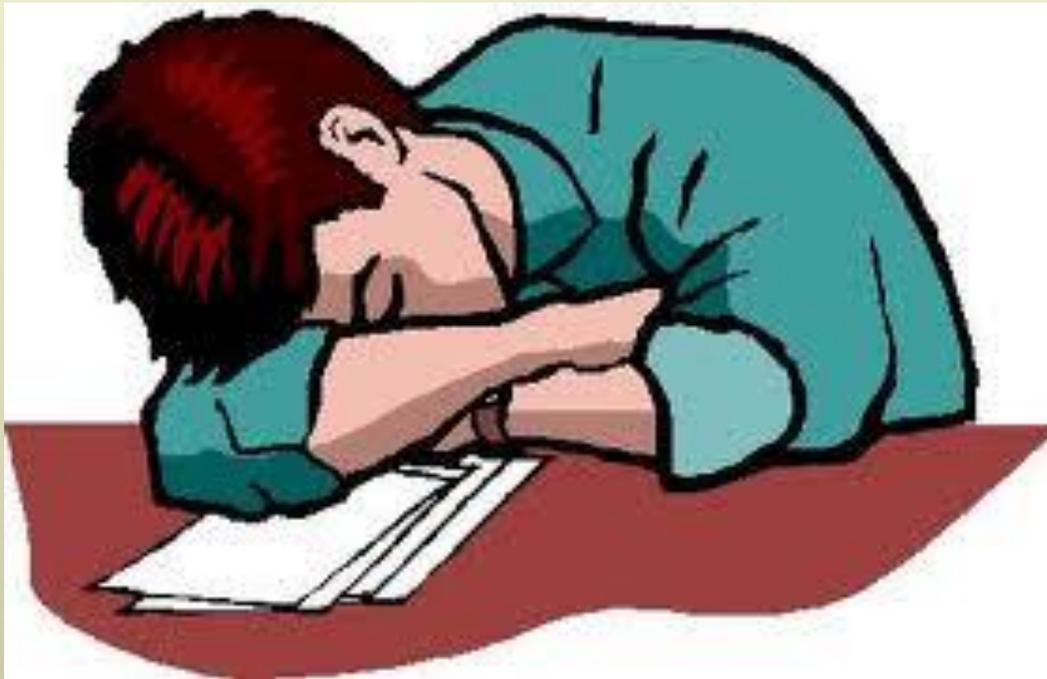
Image (left): A student with his head in his arms, and slumped over the desk. Image used for activity.

The only true assumption that we can make of all students is that they're all different.

UDL Approaches to Engagement

- Announce that you will be calling on students and allow a little time for processing.

- Queue students to speak so that they know when they'll be expected to share with the class.

- Give students choices whenever possible

- Use technology creatively:

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZokqjjIy77Y

UDL Approaches to Assessment

- Math or science formulas can be provided to students during quizzes, in the beginning of the semester. T(his support would be gradually taken away, as students become more familiar with the subject-matter and the quiz format.)

- For group projects, students can be allowed to assess one another (using a rubric), to count as a portion of their grade for the project.

- Exams can be offered in a printed and computer-based format.

ACTIVITY: UDL Domain- Assessment

The application of UDL to course design goes beyond varying your methods and means. It is also critical to apply when formatting course materials.

Directions: Turn to 1-2 people near you and agree to form a partnership, for this activity. The instructor will read a scenario aloud and pose a question to everyone. Then, each partner will discuss their ideas about the answer, taking turns to exchange ideas. Only 1 partner needs to record the answers that are generated.

UDL Applications so far today?

- What types of things did we do today that reflect UDL principles? Did you see any specific UDL applications in the structure of this seminar?

Image (right): An instructor noticing a student who is raising their hand.

Online Resources

- CAST UDL Site- http://www.cast.org/udl

- UDLCenter.org

- www.washington.edu/doit/TeamN/presen_universal.html

- FLconsortiumudl.net/content