

Universal Design for Learning Video Transcripts

The following are transcripts for videos available at http://www.ryerson.ca/lt/resources/supporting_students/

Introduction to Universal Design for Learning

We are the Universal Design for Learning Co-chairs for Ryerson University. Universal Design for Learning, also known as UDL, is the design of instructional materials and activities that allow learning goals to be achieved by individuals with wide differences in their learning abilities.

This consideration in design assists students with learning barriers such as vision and hearing losses, learning disabilities, mental health issues, students who need English support, and students who need any form of accommodation.

When we incorporate principles of Universal Design into our classes, they actually assist all of our students. These principles are really just good teaching. And many of us have used these principles in our classes without even knowing that they are Universal Design principles.

So the university created a Universal Design for Learning Committee, which is a working group from the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which is the AODA initiative at the university. The mandate of the UDL working group was to make recommendations around faculty training. So the university remains in compliance with legislation surrounding the AODA.

The committee was tasked with coming up with a best practices report based on both literature and practices at other universities. This report was completed last year, and you can find it on the LTO website under Universal Design which is in the resources section of the website.

So the report makes many recommendations. And one of the recommendations was to create a website for faculty to use that would be assistive with ideas around teaching with Universal Design in mind which was completed. Also we made recommendations around faculty training. And to date we have offered several sessions at new faculty orientation and incorporated best practices into other LTO workshops.

Universal Design principles can really be categorized into three best practices. The first is representation. That means using a variety of methods to present content. That would be such as lectures and videos, texts, web resources for example. The second is expression. This is allowing your students to show their knowledge in a variety of ways. You could test them. You could give them assignments. You could have discussion boards or presentations or even group work projects. The third is engagement. This means using a variety of teaching methods in one's class. And these could include things such as case methods, debates, discussions, reflections or class activities and demonstrations.

So remember the principles of Universal Design are simply good teaching pedagogy and could be easily incorporated in your teaching to benefit all your students.

Syllabus

The syllabus is the first stop when you're integrating universal design learning principles into your course. It's the point at which you're first introducing students to the course, to the materials, resources, and target what's going to be assessed. And so ideally try to make it available to students in advance of the first day, have it available electronically, and if you can leave yourself enough time to share it with an accessible format production librarian, because this person can help you determine whether or not the material is accessible to

screen readers. The first day of class, review the syllabus with your students. Try to be open to ideas they may have or suggestions. And I'm just going to share with you something that I've tried recently that's been quite successful. I'll preface this by saying that as people know I think the syllabus is really difficult. It's difficult to convey to students, it's difficult for them to enter into, it's dense, it's often contractual. And primarily it's anxiety provoking. So this idea of mine tries to deal with all of those components, and I think with some success. I divide the class into groups. I make a game out of accessing and learning aspects of the syllabus. I ask each group to come up with 2 true facts, statements, from the syllabus, 1 false. And then they compete against one another. And they're scored on the board and so on. And it's very fun and it's very funny, and they seem to find it very memorable. And one can gain quite a lot of depth in the syllabus very quickly in a very dynamic and in fact kinetic way, which is another way of creating universal design.

Course Delivery

I'm going to talk about how to implement Universal Design for Learning into your course design. It turns out that Universal Design for Learning is just good teaching and many of the components of Universal Design for Learning we are already doing as faculty members. In this section, I would like to talk about four components of Universal Design for Learning. One, articulating your goals and objectives. Two, teaching concepts in more than one way. Three, using natural supports in your classroom to assist your students in learning and four, using a variety of methods to engage your students. So let's talk about each of those components. First, how might you articulate your goals and outcomes to your students? This is a very important aspect of Universal Design for Learning. In this way, we tell our students what they're going to learn prior to learning it. Each day at the beginning of a class, it's a good idea to have a class agenda. The agenda tells students not only what they will learn, but how it relates to the parts of the class that you've taught previously in previous days' lectures. One of the things that I like to do is to provide a short agenda to my students and this short agenda not only ties these concepts to previous concepts but tells the students that at the end of the lecture, these are the things that they will know. In this way, students are able to pick up the most important points of your lectures easily. Another thing that you would want to do in Universal Design for Learning is to teach concepts in more than one way. That way, we reinforce our most important classroom concepts to our students because they hear it more than once. You might tell the students of a discipline-based theory and then show them a demonstration of that theory. You might tell them a story about how that theory is related to practice. You could tell them about a research study involved in testing that theory. Or show them a short film clip about that theory. You may also have them take part in an activity that's based on that theory or have a discussion group about that theory. But teaching the concept in more than one way assists all of the students in your class because repetition helps memory, but it also maximally increases students' understanding and that helps students with learning challenges. The third thing, natural supports in the environment, are important. It is important to understand that a natural support is something that is already readily available in your classroom and you don't have to really do a lot of extra work to utilize it. One of the best natural supports is the students themselves. You can ask students to work in pairs to answer questions. You could have students edit each other's work and that will assist them in their writing. Or you can have students form study groups within your class to learn to assist each other in their studying skills. The outcome of this support is that the students learn how to help one another and at the same time, you create a social atmosphere in your classroom that makes students feel integrated. Diverse student groups really need this integration and that will assist them in their learning. The fourth aspect are activities that best engage our students. Engaging activities are a great part of Universal Design for Learning and there are many activities that you could do in your classroom that are super engaging but also increase the students' learning. Some great activities are case methods, discussion groups, demonstrations, student presentations, role playing and even debates. The common part of all these activities is that in order for a student to understand the activity, they will also have to understand the theory behind the activity. In addition, these activities apply theory rather than just having students listen to theory. This increases engagement and this increase in

engagement will help the diversity of students that are sitting in your classroom. Hence, this is Universal Design for Learning.

Student Resources

Ryerson University has numerous programs to support student learning. It is crucially important that the instructors take these resources known to students, encourage you to use and support students' self-advocacy. There are many on-campus student services from English-language support to Math Assistance Centre to Access Centre, which helps student with special learning needs. These programs provide a quality learning experience by supporting student success and retention. It ensures student makes a successful transition from various background to the university-level study and to learn career-readiness skills. Instructors are the front and foremost people that a student interact with in their day-to-day study so it is important that instructors take a moment in the class to highlight these services, raise awareness among students and guide them to make full use of these services to enhance their learning experience, to improve their academic performance and to learn soft skills. This service support of a student, but I find the instructor could benefit from this service, too. Take the English-language support program and the Writing Centre as an example. In the engineering programs, a small portion of our students are from overseas. The percentage is even higher at the graduate level. So the English-language program boost up student confidence so they can communicate freely and more efficiently with their peers and with instructors. The Writing Centre help our student to produce a report with more clarity so it definitely helps the student to improve their grades and as the instructor, I find that my teaching experience will be improved when the student take participating in those programs. In the past, before those programs are available, I used to spend a large amount of my time to advise my student how to write more clearly, how to construct and format a report. So this is a destruction because as a instructor in engineering discipline, I would like to discuss more on how to build the problem-solving skills, critical thinking and so on. So the language barrier skewed my interaction with students. Nowadays, I refer my student to the English support program to my student from the very beginning so when I give a consultation to my student, I focus our discussion only on the technical issues because I know that the language problem will be taken care of by professionals who are in a better position to advise my student. So with those distractions minimized, I find my student and I can have more quality interactions. So there are many other examples like this. For instance, Math Assistance Centre. It supports students in all programs with their math skills and math-related courses. In particular, the students in the early years benefit the most from this program. The requirement of math skills leaps from high school to university. Many student find the university-level math quite challenging, so this program helps them to cope with such challenge and since most drop-out happens in the early years, the Math Assistance program definitely help to increase student retention rate. So in your next lecture, please spend some time to highlight these services and if you think the student could benefit from such a program, encourage him to register for it. When student participate in this programs, both learning and teaching experience will be enhanced.

Student Assessment

So I'm going to talk about Universal Design and students assessment. The gold standard for Universal Design and student assessment is diversity, choice, and flexibility. First and foremost our assignments should be designed to meet the course goals. But as long as they do that they can take a diversity of formats. Allowing students to choose their method of assessment allows them to demonstrate their mastery of the course material but to the best of their ability while also giving them a sense of fairness and ownership of their own learning. So if, as professors, we can keep the process of assessment open in addition to giving students some agency over the types of assessments we can try to keep our deadlines flexible, allow for negotiation, and build opportunities for constructive feedback into the very assessment process. So to give you an example from my own teaching, in philosophy, the discipline I teach in, we often want our students to think deeply

rather than quickly. So in order to meet this goal I thought I would give my class a take home exam. Then one of my students approached me and said she was a single mom. So if she was trying to do an exam at home, she would actually have less time to think deeply than she would if she was in an exam setting. So in order to make a flexible assignment, what I did was I allowed all the students in the class the choice. Either they could take a take home exam, or they could they have an open book, in class exam. And this way they could choose for themselves whether they'd be able to think more deeply in the exam room or at home. So I met my goals, but I allowed the students some diverse choice.

Course Web Pages

I teach both studio and lecture courses and I find that the dynamics in the actual live environment versus putting things onto my blackboard course show is a completely different type of learning for students and one of the things I love about teaching is the variety of ways that people learn. So I will do anything from working drawings to PDFs of images, video clips. I even have people from industry doing webinars within our classroom and it's really interesting but also a challenge to then take that face-to-face learning and package it so that it's really communicating just as successfully for the variety of learning types on the blackboard show. You know I will supplement things with text if they're visual. Our students a lot of times are working with that kind of expectation in terms of their submissions but it's just I think a lot of faculty like myself are challenged by thinking about universal design as being something that's a huge amount of extra work on top of what they've already done in the classroom to make the online aspect of blackboard another type of learning opportunity. So, I'm really interested to understand what the library has to offer in terms of I guess making my job easier, make me more helpful as an instructor.

For sure. So the library has a whole expert team on making the online environment accessible on blackboard especially around the course readings and course materials like videos. So one thing we do is ensure that all students with print disabilities have access to course readings and their textbooks in an accessible PDF or Word file but we also offer support for faculty on what is an accessible PDF. So we're the place you can turn to if you're unsure if that PDF you're putting up on blackboard is accessible. We can help you with that. For videos that you might be posting on blackboard like a You Tube video or stream video, we can make sure it's captioned.

That's great.

Which is an important feature for all students that it's captioned.

So would I just email you? Would I call you? What kind of lead time are we talking about to get this kind of thing organized?

We do need a lead time for certain feature-length films, for really long copyrighted films. We could take up to 4 weeks to get those captioned. So there is some planning involved and we'll do everything, you know, to accommodate the professor and the student in that matter. For example, all the course readings that are now up on blackboard through the e-reserve no matter if there's a student in your class or not they're all accessible. We built that into the process so every course reading is accessible through the library.

That's great. Of course, there's diverse [phonetic] and accessibility website. I know that there's some other examples there as well.

Yep, there's some examples on what an accessible PDF or Word file is on the accessibility website and if you need to consult with somebody the access center is also there to help you guide through the process of accommodating a student in the online environment as well as in the classroom. That sounds great. Thank you.

Online Delivery

All the universal design for learning principles apply in the face-to-face classroom may be applied on line with particular emphasis on communicating effectively with students, providing clear expectations, and using interactive and engaging teaching strategies. For example, you may use technology tools like Voice Thread to create an interactive syllabus in which you can present your course content using video or audio. Students could also use the tools to post their comments and questions using video, audio, or text. Technology tools like Adobe Captivate and Camtasia are helpful in creating tutorials which could help students in navigating the course shell. For example, using Captivate I've included in all the LTO's, online training components, tutorials on how to post on the discussion board. Both adobe Captivate and Camtasia include features that could facilitate the addition of closed captioning within the project to ensure that you provide fully accessible videos and tutorials. Another tool that you could utilize in your online teaching is the discussion board. It will help in developing a learning community and promote students' engagement in the learning process. Through your frequent and engaging responses you could model effective feedback. You may also provide the students with clear expectations on the quality of the responses. For example, you could ask them to point out the differences and similarities in their responses, provide additional resources, or ask questions. Finally, when planning for the online course you want to include tools and strategies to enhance the accessibility and usability of the course for students with and without disabilities.

So if you're looking to provide universal design for learning in the online environment one of the keys to this is to provide clear expectations for your students from the very beginning. You should be providing your students from the beginning of the course with an idea of what they will be learning through providing the topics, themes, **et** cetera, and also what they'll be doing in the course. So providing them with a week to week breakdown of the learning activities in which they'll be engaged and the learning objectives that they should be aiming for from week to week. If at all possible, if you could have your online materials available ahead of your official course start date that's really helpful. In particular if your course outline can be available ahead of time, this is highly beneficial to students in particular who might be using assistive technology as they can take some time ahead of time to start making their way through the materials and get a sense of what the expectations are for the course. In the first week of your course it's great to give the students a chance to make their way through all of the different elements of your course site. You could put together a scavenger hunt, for example, that would allow the students to have to find perhaps particular facts in the syllabus for your course, you could have them look for the due date for a given assignment. If they're visiting all of the elements of your course site, ideally if there are any challenges for any one of your students in using the course site those challenges will be identified early and it makes it easier for everyone to have better outcomes throughout the course. It's important that your course materials be laid out consistently from week to week. This helps the students to spend more time actually actively working on their learning activities and less time searching for information and materials. If possible, it's great to have course materials laid out consistently from course to course as well. If your course has a pre or a post requisites and you're working along side your colleagues it's great if you can share your approaches so that students have some consistency of expectations between online courses. Another key universal design for learning element on line is the idea of laying out some recommended learning processes and work flow for the students so that they can plan out their work from week to week and perhaps have some regular learning activities rather than simple, summative activities, which don't allow them to use the tools in the online environment more regularly. In the same respect, it's great to have a balance between individual and group work, students will be using a

variety of tools in the online environment to communicate and to post their work, but it can be a bit more challenging to have group work in the online environment, sometimes, although it's a great strategy to have the students build a learning community. Finally, once you've got highly accessible and well designed materials of your own it's really important to remember that while on line learning allows you to easily link students out to a world of resources, it's great if you can make sure that those resources are as accessible as possible as well.