The Importance of Universal Design in Teaching

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# The Importance of Universal Design in Teaching

**Maria Pena**  
Associate Director, Disability Resource Center

## Utilizing UD principles in curriculum to engage diverse learners in course curriculum; for accessibility; compliance; and to enhance learning for all UNLV students

### What need does your practice address?

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences. Some examples are:

1. A professor who uploads their lecture notes every week for the entire semester on Web Campus, so that all students have the information to prepare for exams in advance, rather than trying to recruit a note taker for one DRC student.
2. A UNLV Faculty Member audio recording their lectures and uploading them as MP3s on their website for students who need to listen to the lecture repeatedly to learn the material (auditory learners).

The inclusion of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into the curriculum improves Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for all students. UDL also can create a learning environment that is in compliance with Federal laws regarding reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. When Professors are proactive with UDL, it ultimately saves time, effort, and spares them from having to go back and redo curriculum or classroom practices for accessibility issues, and/or be a respondent to an OCR complaint, or litigation.

## Research shows UDP application benefits all college students

**Utilizing the research from Sheryl Burgstahler, Thomas Tobin, Nancy Evans, And the CAST (The Center for Applied Special Technology), methodology and practice outcomes will be explored.**

According to Fischer and Bedell (2006) Research has shown that the application of UDL enhances and improves SLOs, student engagement and interest where there is “Learner Variability” among students.

Researchers have examined how UDL can be applied to:

- Teacher-developed lessons and curricula (Browder, Mims, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Lee, 2008; Dymond et al., 2006; King-Sears et al., 2015)
- Positive academic outcomes and engagement
- standards-based lessons for inclusive classroom settings (Meo, 2008)

## Resources for Faculty

**At UNLV:**

- The Disability Resource Center – Maria Pena, Associate Director
- For Alternative Media, Assistive Technology – Andrew Luiz Assistive Technology/Disability Specialist
- From a Faculty Perspective:
  - Dr. Erika Abad - Assistant Professor in Residence - Interdisciplinary, Gender, and Ethnic Studies
- Universal Design online courses – captioning, audio descriptions, website compliance – Philip Voorhees, Technology Accessibility Coordinator
- Accessibility Resources Team
  - The Office of Accessibility Resources
  - Online – The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) – CAST.org
  - Information on using UDP for syllabi, curriculum instruction, and assistive technology.

**WebAIM – Accessibility Technology Training – webaim.org**

**The Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) – AHEAD.org**

**Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Association of North America (RESNA) – RESNA.org**

## How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

Use the resources indicated in the resources section, starting with your UNLV colleagues. Please ask your colleagues should you have any UDL questions and concerns. Faculty Members (and their departments) can:

- **Select course reading materials for their classes, that can be converted into or are available in alternative formats (audio, digital, and/or large print formats).** For assistance, contact Andrew Luiz at the DRC.
  
  Ext. 50852 – Andrew.Luiz@unlv.edu

- **For online classes, check the accessibility of the website, to make sure all materials and mixed media can be accessed with captioning, optical character recognition software, and the ability to print webpages, which can benefit all learning modalities.** Consult with Philip Voorhees in evaluation of your online materials.
  
  Ext. 54512 - Philip.Voorhees@unlv.edu

- Web searches using “Universal Design for Learning in higher education” will show, for example, a Google Scholar search a plethora of research methodology and access solutions for professors to use and how to apply the UDL techniques in their curriculum as well as in the classroom.

## Trainings on Campus, online and off Campus

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