Basics of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Workshop

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<u>Workshop facilitators</u>:
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Dr. Margaret Fink: Okay, so I just want to welcome everyone again, and to start us off with a couple of access invitations. Please make yourself comfortable wherever you are. A lot of you have your cameras off. That's totally fine and great. If you would like to turn your camera on feel free to do whatever you need to do, even on camera, like have something to drink, have a snack, whatever you need to do to be comfortable.

We have the auto caption turned on in the Zoom, so if you haven't used that before in the past years of the, uh, a lot of us using Zoom, you can turn them on by clicking the CC button at the bottom of your Zoom and selecting show caption. and then in terms of chiming in, I think I'm fine being interrupted at any point, and Kate is nodding. We both feel this way. So, feel free to just unmute and say something. You're also welcome to pop something in the chat, or you can use the raise hand function and we'll call on you.

So, how is it coming through for everyone? Can we make any adjustments before we keep going? All is good in the chat. Thanks for confirming, Kathy. Okay, Kate, do you want to say hello and introduce yourself?

[00:01:12] **Prof. Kate Floros:** Sure. Hi, everyone. Hi, Charianne. Hi, Lauren. My name is Kate Floros; I'm a Clinical Associate Professor of Political Science in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. I am co-facilitating this workshop with Margaret because I am working on a Digital Accessibility for Educators certificate through the UIS ION program that's available to all UIC faculty and staff, at a reduced rate as well. Um, and so I took, I took a course on universal design, and it has come up in multiple courses that I've taken with them. I also have the First-at-LAS, uh, Faculty Fellowship and spent a good bit of the summer reworking my intro class to incorporate more aspects of universal design into that class.

So, I'm definitely still learning. I am definitely still experimenting, and I think I could probably learn as much from you folks as you might from me. So, thank you for joining us.

[00:02:21] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Yeah, this is Margaret speaking again. I will just briefly introduce myself. So, my name is Margaret Fink. I use she, her pronouns. I'm the director of the Disability Cultural Center here at UIC. Among other things, we are invested in building community around disability experience and anti-ableism. So, this feels very much in that vein, and, uh, we're also interested in just thinking about disability issues as social justice issues, which is kind of how we're going to be framing what we're doing here today a bit, too.

And my relationship to UDL is... when I was a graduate student instructor where I went to grad school, um, there was no conversation whatsoever about accessibility, accessible teaching. And so, another grad student and I, both of us are disabled; we put together this big resource packet and did a lot of, you know, research and also just learning from disability communities about accessible practices.

So, my interest in accessible teaching kind of goes back a long way. It's been very informally developed, over time, but it's been interesting to learn about UDL as a framework, um, for talking about that. So, I'm excited.

The Plan

[00:03:40] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** So, plan for today, we'll talk a little bit about the value of UDL. We'll share with you some basics of UDL, and then we'll get a little more practical, just some thoughts from our experiences. And then we'll have some time for Q& A before also taking some time to try redesigning some common teaching experiences together.

Why UDL?

[00:04:08] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Okay, why UDL?

[00:04:11] **Prof. Kate Floros:** Okay, so this is Kate again. On the screen is a visualization to help see the difference between accommodation and accessibility. So, the first, uh, this is a tri-panel, and the first image on the left is a representation of equality. All three people are standing on a box to look over a fence at a soccer match. However, one viewer is too short, even with the box to see over the fence, and so while they are all given the same tools, they don't all have the same access.

The second image in the middle, represents accommodation. The tallest viewer has no box because they're tall enough to see over the fence without it. The person of middle height has 1 box, and the shortest person has 2 boxes. So, all can see over the fence, but the number of boxes is determined by the individuals and their specific needs, and should they leave and others come, those might not be the accommodations that the next people need.

So, the 3rd image on the right represents accessibility. So, the solid wood barrier from the first 2 panels has been replaced with a chain link fence. No one is standing on boxes, but they can all see the soccer match. And maybe what's more important is that it doesn't matter who approaches this viewing spot from now on, everyone will be able to watch the game without needing to ask for any accommodation. And so, what we're talking about here is accessibility for the most part.

Accommodation to Accessibility

[00:06:02] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Okay. So, um, this is Margaret speaking again. So, as Kate was explaining to us, the accommodations is a type, you could think of it as a type

of offering accessibility, and it's the kind that more of a case by case, legally guaranteed right that students are entitled to under the ADA, and so that's something that the DRC at UIC works to facilitate. And so one way you can have accommodations as part of accessibility is to build it into how you're thinking about accessibility more deeply and more from the start.

That's what we're hoping to talk about today. It's also possible to just sort of be teaching in an inaccessible way and kind of slap on the LOA, the Letter of Accommodation, and like, you know, case by case basis. So that's what we're moving away from. And some of the benefits, I imagine we're all here because we're already convinced that this could be beneficial, but some of the concerns that tend to come up for instructors is feeling like, working on LOA, there's a lot of quote unquote extra work, and so one of the benefits of trying to build accessibility into how you teach in a more fundamental way is your teaching practice will need fewer of the case by case solutions to make sure all of our students are accessing our courses.

And for students, the big benefit of trying to build accessibility in, and not just waiting for a letter of accommodation, is it just cuts out so much access labor for students. Like, all of this need to kind of get in touch with you, make arrangements; it's just sort of already in place. Um, and that can mean a more seamless experience for participation.

[00:07:58] **Prof. Kate Floros:** This is Kate again. I just want to add that there are so many of our students with undiagnosed, learning impediments, and they wouldn't have an LOA to begin with. And so by increasing the accessibility of our class, just in general, folks who don't have an official accommodation will still be helped.

And hopefully, as we'll show, as we go through, that even students without any kind of limitation can still benefit from a lot of the practices that we're going to suggest.

[00:08:32] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Yeah,

Design

[00:08:34] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** This is Margaret speaking. Okay, so we are switching gears now to share with you just an overview of some UDL approaches to accessibility. So 1st major premise of our work, if we're working on UDL, is that class material, course schedules, assignments and methods of instruction are *designed*, so they can be redesigned. And then also just noticing how these designs are assuming that students work a certain way, or like, they have certain bodily and mental abilities, and they definitely favor these sort of imagined, typical students.

Mode of approach

[00:09:16] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** And then this is, um, this is some thinking that comes from a wonderful book, if you're interested in a deeper dive, called *Academic Ableism*, by J. Dolmage, D O L M A G E. I'll put it in the chat in a minute. Um, but so universal

design comes from architecture. The universal part is again, an acknowledgement that our design practices have been biased. And design, this is important, design emphasizes how we're really talking about a way of thinking and a mode of approach and something that's a process. So, one thing we want to highlight. is that we are not talking about a static checklist that's going to make everything perfect. It's a lot more about this iterative process of figuring out what's going to work for more people that you're interacting with, and building it in as much as you can.

UDL Principle #1: Engagement

[00:10:17] **Prof. Kate Floros:** Okay, so, Universal Design for Learning. There are a lot of, uh, resources available online for this approach. Um, they are linked in the handout that we are going to reference. And that, Margaret's going to take care of while I'm talking. This is Kate, by the way. And the practices or the ideas fall under 3 general principles, and basically the key of all of these principles is flexibility and choice.

Okay, so what do we mean by that? So the 1st is, the 1st principle is to provide multiple means of engagement. We've all been in class where students look like they would rather be doing anything else than be sitting in our class. but then there are other students who are on the edge of their seat, like, can't wait to be part of the conversation.

Right? And so, helping students to understand why this course is relevant and important for them is something that we can do with a few simple steps. So, do as much as possible to make the content relevant to their lives. Be explicit about the goals you have for the course.

I have a Gen Ed Intro to International Relations course, and, you know, I have students who have no interest in a career in international relations. So I tell them, I want you at the end of this class to be able to see something on the news and be able to understand what's happening, right? And if we accomplish that, then you have learned good skills in this class, right?

So, be explicit about what you want them to get out of the class. Another thing is to link your learning objectives to the material and to your assessments so that they know, like, oh, this is what I'm supposed to be getting out of this. So, again, the key is to create course and class environments that make students want to learn, know what they'll learn and be excited enough to persist when they struggle.

Okay, so that's 1: engagement, multiple means of engaging them in the material.

UDL Principle #2: Representation

[00:12:36] **Prof. Kate Floros:** The 2nd principle is about multiple means of representation, and I could have a commentary about why I think this is more confusing than it needs to be, but it's basically how students take in information. So, I

don't know, um, necessarily what every, what types of courses everyone teaches, but, you know, the traditional lecture format of the sage on the stage, just up there talking and maybe there are PowerPoints that have too many words on it, or, you know, whatever. And there is a, there's a role for lecture and PowerPoints and whatever.

But maybe if there's a video that will help illustrate a point, make that video accessible to your students so that they are getting it another way or, um, you know, there's the text that they're reading. Right? So, different ways for them to get the information. But this also includes looking at things like alternatives for auditory and visual information.

So, it's including alt text in all of your images, captions and transcripts for all of your videos, changeable font sizes so that folks with vision needs can make your information larger. Right? And again, this isn't just about people who have disabilities in these areas.

I have ADHD and I love reading the captions because it helps me focus. Right? So, I don't need it because I can't hear. I need it because it helps me focus. Right? Transcripts are really good if students have to go back and access that information over and over if they can search through a transcript instead of having to listen to the whole thing again. Right? That can help all students.

All right, so again, present information in various formats, just pay attention to your language in the sense of, we use a lot of discipline-specific language and students might not know what that is. So, just make sure we're defining terms. Also, people who aren't English language speakers of their 1st language may not understand colloquialisms. And link new information to what they already know. And I'm sure as professors, many of us are doing a lot of this stuff already. Right? And it's just a matter of being conscious and intentional about doing this.

So, for example, I have an, an assignment where I have a written assignment, but I also am making videos about the assignment so that if students don't understand this part of the written assignment, they can go find the video where I'm explaining it in more detail. Right? So that's just an example. And I have a lot more videos to do.

UDL Principle #3: Action & Expression

[00:15:38] **Prof. Kate Floros:** Okay, and the 3rd, so we've got multiple means of engagement, multiple means of perception. The third principle is multiple means of expression. So, allowing students to have different ways of demonstrating what they have learned. This can include, you know, making sure that there all, are alternatives that are compliant with, or that work with assistive technology.

A big one might be varying assessment types. So, if every assignment is a multiple choice test, students who don't do well on multiple choice tests may struggle, but if you have some multiple choice tests and some short writing and some something else, or at least have more than just multiple choice in your exam, then students with different

cognitive abilities will not be shut out of 1 type of assessment. Grading rubrics are a huge thing. CATE has, upcoming workshops on, creating grading rubrics. So, I would strongly encourage if you're not already doing that to think about, about adding that. And my new favorite, oh, I'm sorry, building in options to redo assignments.

So, a lot of the times we say, like, okay, you turn it and you get a grade move on. If there's any way to build in letting them rewrite it, or keep taking the quiz until they get all the answers right, things like that, will, will help them in their learning, but also will help keep their engagement high because, you know, if I didn't do well on that paper, why should I keep trying? I might not, I might not, I'm not going to pass this class or whatever. And my new favorite one is, um, support planning and strategy development. This is not something that I really thought about before, but in my class this semester for the first time, I'm offering a bonus, just a 5 point bonus onto their assignment, where if they create a plan, and then as they execute the plan, like, take notes about how they did and then tell me about it after, at the end of the assignment, then I'll give them bonus points if they do that exercise.

And, you know, already students are saying, like, yeah, I really didn't expect that it would take as long as it did. And now that I'm thinking about it, I'm going to do it better next time and whatever. And that's just a really simple thing at the end of a, you know, that students can learn how to plan to get things done.

So those are the, all three of these principles have a lot more going on with them, but that's just, um, just a little taste.

Advice & Tips

[00:18:36] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Hey, thank you. This is Margaret. I really love that, Kate, because it's also kind of, from the way I am thinking about it is, it encourages students to think about what they need, like, in an active way, and then hopefully learn more about it, because one of the ways that I've kind of noticed um, ableism can show up is if you're playing your part as a student in a course that, you know, may be really traditional, whatever it may be, and you're not adapting, that's kind of on you. I don't know if this thought is making any sense, but I think there is a certain, like, skill set around adapting to a situation and knowing how to do that well for yourself. That kind of a situation would encourage students to develop. So, thank you for sharing that.

This is advice and tips. Right. So, um, we are very close to being done with our part of sharing our thoughts, and then very excited to hear what you all think, what your questions are.

+1 Thinking

[00:19:41] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Okay, so our first major tip that we discussed when we were getting together and preparing for this is that UDL, especially if you are kind of thinking of UDL as like this checklist for perfection when it comes to accessibility, can

get really overwhelming. Um, so we really encourage everyone to embrace a plus one mentality.

Think of it not as a total knock it down and rebuild, but something more like a fixed or upper where you were renovating bit by bit, how typical teaching goes, to make it more accessible. And this is another spot where feedback loop, meaning if you do a survey mid-semester, or if you do a survey at the end of the semester of your own to find out what was working for students, what was not working as well, and any suggestions for change.

You can throw a question on there about how is accessibility going or take some information that you're getting from the other questions to just make one by one adjustment that will make your overall course, uh, more accessible. And just quick image description. We have a picture of a bungalow with, like, some wooden slats on it that are kind of topping it up as it's being worked on.

[00:21:04] **Prof. Kate Floros:** And if I can just add, and this is a struggle for me, is that you will make mistakes. Not everything you try will work, or you may think what you're doing is, like, the most amazing thing since sliced bread, and the students may not agree. So, first of all, learn what you can from the feedback you get from, you know, how, how things turned out. Forgive yourself for making the mistake, or doing something wrong or badly, or whatever, and then, try something else.

And I think, for me, at least, and I think a lot of academics, like, we want to be perfect. We want to get it right. But this is 1 of those things where there is no, like, this is exactly how you do it. And so it's going to, you're going to make mistakes and that's okay.

Learn from LOAs

[00:21:57] **Prof. Kate Floros:** Oh, sorry, and this is Kate by the way. So, our 2nd tip is to learn from the letters of accommodations that you do get, right? And, you know, if you've been teaching long enough, you'll notice that a lot of the same accommodations come up over and over and over again. And so, think about building those into your class, right? So, if you have a student who is requesting class recordings, think about recording all of your classes and posting them on Blackboard for everyone.

So I do that. I use lecture capture and the students can access it through Blackboard. Not only is this good for whatever reason the student with the accommodation needed it, but if a student had to miss class 'cause they were sick, they have the access to the exact same information that the students got in class.

Alternate formats for PDFs. And if you need to send documents to the DRC to get them made into an accessible format for a student, ask for a copy and then have that be what you present to the rest of the class, and many other, many other tips you can take from LOAs.

High Impact Practices

[00:23:10] **Prof. Kate Floros:** Another tip would be to include some practices that are really going to benefit a wide range of students, including things like, posting electronic copies of the slides and materials before class. Again, I, everything I do is from personal experience, so sorry for all the personal stories, but, this is something I had to come to over a long time, right?

First, it was, if I give it to them, then they won't come to class, or they won't pay attention, or they won't whatever. And then people were like, we need something, and so I would, like, put the title of the slide and any definitions, and I would leave the bullet points, but they had to fill it in. I called it my stripped down PowerPoints. And then I just realized, if they're busy writing down what's on the slide, they're not listening to what I'm saying, and what I'm saying is a lot more than what's on the slide. So, if I give them the slide, now they can take notes on what I'm saying. And so now I present all of my slides in advance.

Also, things about, uh, that have time limits. Think about ways to remove those time limits or extend those time limits for those who need a little bit more time to process.

[00:24:30] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Yeah, this is Margaret. This is just like, so many different accessibility issues come out of being time-bounded, so it's really helpful to think about whether you really need it to be time-bounded, or if you can make it so it's fine if you don't finish, if we're talking about a class activity, or, if it's an assessment of some kind, is there a way to just not have the time pressure be part of the assessment?

There's a couple of links on the handout we keep referring to, and we'll share at the end, and I believe was shared in an email that Charitianne sent out yesterday. Okay, so next.

Course Policies

[00:25:08] **Prof. Kate Floros:** Can I, since I, since I'm controlling the PowerPoint; this is Kate, I'm going to just go back for 1 second. Yeah, when we were, when I was talking about, including the accommodations into policies. We also want to think about our course policies, right? And so, things about time limits and things like that are something we should do. So, you know, maybe we give students multiple assignments, and they can drop their lowest grade. Or I have added, I do have an attendance policy because I want them to show up for class, but they can miss so many classes before it hurts their grade, right? So that they don't feel they have to come when they're sick, they don't have to feel like they have to come if they are having a bad day or whatever the case may be.

And for the time, one of the things I'm trying this semester, I don't think Charitianne agrees with me that it's a good practice. I don't know, we may have had this conversation, but there's a due date. If they turn it in within the week after the due date, they get full credit. After that week, it's only worth 90%. So, yes, it has resulted in

the due date just moving back a week, but I also don't have 800 requests for extensions. Okay. Sorry.

Slide Format

[00:26:25] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Yeah, you know, this is, um, I'm just going to read the question that came into the chat. Thank you for that. Sarah is asking if there's a particular format that is better for posting slides. "I often post a link to Google Slides, but wonder if those are not as accessible as PowerPoint." That is such a great question, and, I'm not actually a technical expert about slides, but in terms of what I've learned from other disabled people is that Google Slides and PowerPoint both work well, but the thing to know is that when you start messing around with the template of the different slide arrangements, that's when the slides can become funky, or like if you add things to the slides, which I definitely do on a regular basis, that can become a little funky in terms of how screen readers read slides.

If anyone in the room is more of an expert on this, please chime in, um, but my understanding is that there's a thing called reading order, and so there's like... a way that the screen reader will move through the document, and if this, if this reading order is messed up, it will kind of not make sense. So it'll just be jumping around to different parts of the slide in a way that doesn't make sense in terms of order, and part of what you are maintaining when you maintain that sort of, like, pop up template arrangement of a slide in both Google Slides and in PowerPoint, you're maintaining that reading order, and you're not messing with it. So that's a reason to kind of avoid those kinds of adaptations to a slide template.

CATE advertisement

[00:28:15] **Prof. Kate Floros:** And, I'll just go ahead quickly for one second. Next week, next Tuesday, CATE, and I will be chiming in every once in a while as well, um, is going to, uh, have a workshop on making your course materials accessible and, uh, if you can make it, I strongly encourage you to attend that.

PDF (In)Accessibility

[00:28:37] **Prof. Kate Floros:** I also want to say, this is more for student note taking than accessibility because PDFs are notoriously difficult to make accessible, but I post PowerPoint slides and then I also, okay, you know how, when you go to print a PDF, you could print, like, the 3 slides with the lines. I do that as a PDF. Like, I print to PDF, so the PDF itself, it's hard to make accessible, but what that does is for students who have tablets, they can upload, or they can open the PDF and they have the lines that they can take the notes to right on their tablet.

So, I have it up in 2 different ways, so they can just type notes into the notes section of the PDF, or if they have a tablet, they can take handwritten notes in the lines on the PDF. So that's another potential hack.

[00:29:35] **Dr. Margaret Fink:** Option choices. These are the principles and just giving people a lot of ways to engage with things. But, yes, so we are not going to do a deep dive into accessible document in this session, but just a heads up and good to know Word docs and HTML tend to work the best for screen readers.

Um, PDFs are really problematic, really frequently. I actually was really excited because I was invited to a PDF remediation workshop. This was like two or three years ago, and I went, and I really swear that the person leading the workshop spent almost the entire time explaining why PDFs are so terrible, rather than like how to remediate them.

So, it's just a thing. Um, it's good to be aware of until or whenever, until you do these kind of deep dive workshops that I think Kate has been doing where you learn to edit the reading order, and you learn to tag different portions of the PDF. Until then, it can be really helpful to just understand that these other formats can be much more readable, and it's helpful to understand that if you start from an accessible Word document, or an accessible PowerPoint and then make a PDF out of that, you're going to be in a much better shape.

[00:30:57] **Prof. Kate Floros:** That is definitely true. And, both Word and PowerPoint, and I think Google Slides, have an accessibility checker, and it can frequently tell you what is actually wrong and give you tips about how to fix it. So, I would definitely look at that and maybe you can't figure out absolutely everything, but it will, it will give you a place to go.