

Chapter 3

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Beyond Access in Graduate Online Education

Tracy Balduzzi
Utica University, USA

ABSTRACT

Universal design for learning has become the most widely used framework for creating access to education for students of all abilities, especially in the kindergarten through 12th-grade school systems. Research and utilization have begun to get attention nationwide at the undergraduate level on higher education campuses. The current research on undergraduate education is promising, but there needs to be more examination of UDL at the graduate level, specifically in graduate online education. This case study will discuss revisions to a graduate online course that fit within the UDL guidelines. The author discusses teaching strategies implemented in their course and will support their effectiveness through confidential student evaluations and comments. One of the purposes of this case study is to provide a list of strategies that other instructors can quickly adopt in their courses. A second purpose is to provide support for more formal research into the utilization of UDL in graduate online education.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has been the most innovative approach for increasing access to education for all learners (Cumming & Rose, 2022). The impact of UDL is evident in research and supported by U.S. federal legislation, specifically the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and the revised Perkins Act in 2018, which both refer to UDL in their revisions. The UDL guidelines are

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-1269-8.ch003

regarded as best practices in supporting inclusion, equity, and access to education and have been widely adopted in U.S. educational institutions, most prominently in kindergarten through 12th grade schools (K-12). While UDL has begun to make significant strides in educational institutions at the undergraduate level, this article provides insight into the under-explored area of applying UDL principles in online graduate education. This chapter specifically examines UDL guidelines and how they can be used, beyond access, in graduate online education to create inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive.

Through observational data, this chapter will discuss in detail strategies that have been incorporated in a graduate online course that align with the UDL principles and the impact that it has had for students. After the explanation of all the strategies for each specific UDL principle, the author will use student feedback to show how the strategies and revisions have been received by the students. The purpose of this chapter is to provide anecdotal to provide a framework for implementing UDL in graduate courses to provide equitable and accessible learning experiences.

The following sections will provide readers with some background on the course and instructor followed by a discussion on each of the three UDL principles, multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression. The chapter will conclude with discussion on the challenges to UDL implementation and the limitations presented to the author.

BACKGROUND ON INSTRUCTOR AND COURSE INFORMATION

This chapter is authored by an adjunct lecturer of a fully online graduate course at a small university who has observed the reaction and results of course adaptations with the UDL concepts at the forefront over seven years. The author has taught this course about three times a year since the fall of 2017. The course is an 8-week online course with an average of 14.3 students in each section. Over the past six years, the author has adjusted the course shell, assignments, activities, and formal assessments to promote student access, comprehension, and application of learning outcomes.

Through preliminary data, observations, and student feedback, this instructor explains the teaching strategies adopted into the course using the UDL principles and guidelines. While this chapter primarily focuses on a healthcare administration program, the principles and framework can be adapted for use in various other courses and academic programs. By thoroughly examining one specific course, a framework can be developed to guide instructors in designing and delivering graduate-level online education that embraces the principles of UDL and, therefore, increases *all* learners' learning and course completion. These adjustments have resulted in positive end-of-course evaluations, demonstrating increased student

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/universal-design-for-learning-udl-beyond-access-in-graduate-online-education/342188

Related Content

Developing Musical Creativity Through Activity Theory in an Online Learning Environment

Chih-Feng Chien, Brent G. Walters, Ching-Yieh Lee and Ching-Jung Liao (2018). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design* (pp. 57-74). www.irma-international.org/article/developing-musical-creativity-through-activity-theory-in-an-online-learning-environment/201116

Cooperative Discussions for Critical Thinking: Protocols for the Pre-Service Classroom

Danielle E. Hartsfield, Nicole Maxwell, Jennie L. Jones and Danielle Hilaski (2021). *Research Anthology on Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Students* (pp. 712-735). www.irma-international.org/chapter/cooperative-discussions-for-critical-thinking/269915

Student Teachers' Lived Experiences of an ODeL Flipped Instructional Design

Micheal M. van Wyk (2020). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design* (pp. 14-31). www.irma-international.org/article/student-teachers-lived-experiences-of-an-odel-flipped-instructional-design/262185

Metacognition and Lifelong Learning: Building Transferable Skills in Adult Technical Education

Shelanda Ferrell Simmons and Derrick E. Robinson (2026). *General Education for Future-Ready Learning, Work, and Life* (pp. 119-144). www.irma-international.org/chapter/metacognition-and-lifelong-learning/408644

Equitable Higher Education Opportunities and TILT Strategies

Melissa Jordan (2022). *Integrating Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT): An Effective Tool for Providing Equitable Opportunity in Higher Education* (pp. 25-43). www.irma-international.org/chapter/equitable-higher-education-opportunities-and-tilt-strategies/306611