Reaching Out to All

A set of guidelines and resources for a Universal Design for Learning approach to learning, teaching and assessment in Higher Education

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Technological University of the Shannon

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FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Contents

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Introduction

Higher education works with a diverse population. All students are welcomed into the learning community, coming from a variety of backgrounds, creating a diverse learning community. While many will move through their learning programmes with ease, others may encounter difficulties along the way.

Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) has chosen to use the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to underpin the curricula and approach to learning, teaching and assessment in the University. The MA in Academic Practice and associated modules or Special Purpose Awards (SPAs) were designed to address key themes, including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and student engagement. All accredited CPID offerings are underpinned by the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). In particular, the Certificate in Inclusive Practice in Learning, Teaching and Assessment aims to provide participants with the prerequisite skills and knowledge to enhance the learning experience of the student population through the creation and implementation of an inclusive learning environment to meet the diverse needs of the learning community.

One of the value statements of the TUS Strategic Plan 2023-2026 is inclusivity, demonstrating commitment to embracing "diversity as a key strength where everyone is included and has an equal opportunity to progress and achieve" (Technological University of the Shannon, 2023, p.18). This is further supported by the University's commitment to implementing "...an inclusive approach to curriculum design which is based on the principles of UDL, including learning, teaching and assessment approaches, will help to create a more inclusive and accessible learning environment" (Technological University of the Shannon, 2022, p.14).

With funding for a learning enhancement project from the National Forum for Learning and Teaching Enhancement, this guide and associated resources have been developed to support all staff to understand and apply the principles of UDL to create and deliver a more inclusive curriculum and approach to learning and teaching.

Diversity and Inclusion

Educational institutions reflect a diverse population, made up of many groups from within the community. Higher education serves not only school leavers, but also those who choose to engage in education and retraining at other times in their life. Globalisation has meant that international students are more able to avail of opportunities to study abroad. Mature students, students from different socio-economic backgrounds, distance and online learners, parents of young children, commuters, and students with disabilities, additional learning needs, and learning difficulties may also be represented in a learning community, each bringing with them unique additional learning needs.

Thomas and May (2010) suggest that a diverse community reflects different educational backgrounds, experiences and approaches to learning, life experiences, personal characteristics and circumstances, and cultural backgrounds. As a result, the needs of the community will be wide and varied.

Diversity requires that the education provided must be accessible to any student. The diverse community means that due care must be taken to develop and deliver a curriculum that allows for the success of all students in the community. According to Morgan and Houghton (2011, p.6):

An inclusive curriculum design approach is one that takes into account students' educational, cultural and social background and experience as well as the presence of any physical or sensory impairment and their mental well-being. It enables higher education institutions (HEI) to embed quality enhancement processes that ensure an anticipatory response to equality in learning and teaching.

An inclusive approach recognises the diversity of the learning group and aims to create a learning environment that allows all to participate to their fullest, with the chance of success. This approach is supported by the Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2018 (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, n.d.) which requires any institution enrolling a student to support them in achieving their academic endeavours.

An inclusive curriculum and learning environment demand new approaches. This is recognised in the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.4) which states "...higher education needs to change over the coming decades to meet new economic, social and cultural challenges". An inclusive learning environment is also in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, n.d.).

One approach that allows the development of an inclusive curriculum is the strategy of developing curricula and learning and teaching approaches underpinned by the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

What is UDL?

In tandem with the growth in the disability rights movement in the US and federal laws around accessibility, Universal Design originated in the area of architecture. Buildings were designed which were readily accessible to all members of the public without the need for special adaptation, removing the need for individual accommodations (Rose et al., 2006). This concept has been transferred to the learning environment, based on the premise that accessibility can be facilitated in the planning and development of curriculum design, allowing the needs of a diverse learning group to be met without the requirement of individual learning adaptations (Rose et al., 2006).

Often, learning experiences are designed as one size fits all, catering to the typical student in a group. UDL, on the other hand, applies the principles of Universal Design, and aims to reach many different learners through "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (Center for Universal Design, 2008, cited by UNC Charlotte, n.d.). Put simply, curriculum design starts with consideration of, and planning for the potential needs of the student cohort rather than making individual accommodations for students during the implementation of the course.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework applied in education promoting accessibility to learning for all, creating an inclusive learning environment. While recognising that learners' needs are varied, asking a lecturer to support multiple individual needs may not always be effective or possible. The UDL framework focuses on changing the way a class is managed and content presented rather than making specific accommodations for particular learning needs, resulting in effective and inclusive education for all (CAST, 2021). UDL recognises that people approach learning in different ways, and in an inclusive learning environment it is important to find a way to reach each learner.

Principles of UDL

CAST (2021) have created guidelines for the implementation of UDL based on three main principles, summarised in Figure 1, that should be considered in creating an inclusive curriculum.
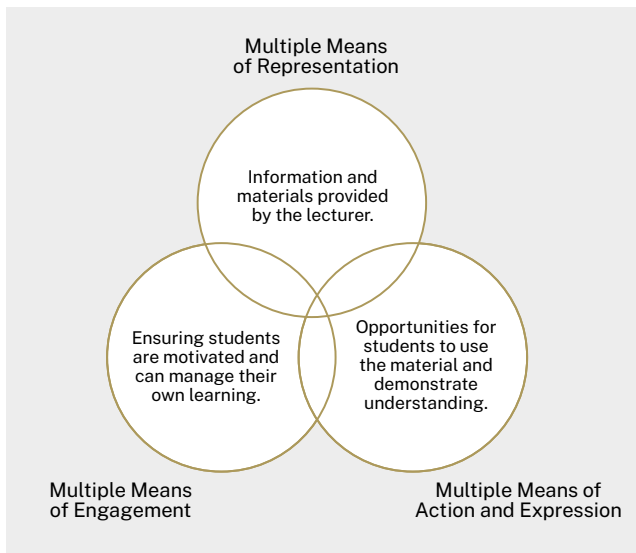

Figure 1: Application of Multiple Means of Representation, Action and Expression, and Engagement devised by McMahon & O'Donoghue.

Multiple Means of Representation

Learners perceive and comprehend information differently, and to create an inclusive classroom, it is vital to offer the content of a class in various formats. Central to this principle is the need to teach students how to engage with material in a meaningful way that enhances individual learning. Information can be shared in a number of formats – text, video, audio and so on. Multiple means of representation will allow students to find optimal ways to take in the content of the course.

By providing learners with additional options, students are able to select their learning materials in the format that is best suited to their need at that time, for example, listening to an audio lecture in podcast form while commuting.

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Students need to be able to engage with the information to make sense of it, and to demonstrate their understanding and learning. By encouraging students to use content material as often as they need to, and in ways that suit them, learning can become more effective. The lecturer can assist this by modelling ways to interact with the subject, or by providing scaffolds to support students in developing these skills, for example, a question guide to accompany course materials such as journal articles or videos.

Students can also manipulate learning resources to find a way that enhances their interaction with the learning material. For example, a text in MS Word can be changed to a personally favoured font, text size and spacing, or can be read through text-to-speech app, making it more accessible to an individual student.

Students may also have preferences for demonstrating their learning. Assessment options may be possible that appeal to students' strengths, while still allowing them to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Some may demonstrate their learning well in a written assignment, while others may be more confident with a presentation style assessment. However, students should still be challenged to develop new skills. Providing multiple means for action and expression will assist students to manage content and express their learning.

Multiple Means of Engagement

Students have different levels of motivation and respond to different stimuli when engaging with their studies. As they study, students learn how to manage their workload, becoming independent and autonomous learners. Recognising that a diverse group responds to engagement in learning in different ways and are motivated by different factors means that a lecturer must consciously include multiple means of engagement to assist their students in learning.

Why use UDL?

Application of UDL to curriculum design and learning and teaching approaches will help to create a more inclusive and accessible learning environment.

Research by Chickering and Gamson (1987) suggests that in higher education, identifying and respecting the varied talents that students can apply to their learning will contribute to a stronger learning experience. Supporting students to complete their studies is important. Changing the pedagogy to include a UDL basis can achieve this as it allows lecturers "predesign courses to reach all learners as opposed to retro-fitting to meet needs of some learners" (Eitzen et al., 2017, p.59). Course content will be more accessible, allowing students to interact with the course materials and engage with them as independent and autonomous learners.

Benefits of UDL

A direct result of a UDL approach is accessibility for all learners, with more student-centred learning experiences. UDL improves learning opportunities for all students, encouraging them to become more responsible participants in their learning. By challenging them to manage their learning, reuse class resources to learn effectively, and at times, to make choices that best suit them, students will learn in a meaningful way (CAST, 2021).

A UDL approach to curriculum development and classroom practice offers an educational approach that reaches out to all participants. This promotes greater accessibility to students who are often marginalised, resulting in more interaction with peers, and greater engagement with learning (Eitzen et al., 2017). This also benefits groups such as English as second language (ESL) learners, students with disabilities, and students with learning difficulties as it allows a more equitable access to learning, and demonstration of learning in a way that uses their strengths (CAST, 2021). Lecturers also benefit from a UDL approach to

learning. Research (Centre for Teaching and Mohawk College, 2020) suggests that this approach allows a greater reach to the diverse student population and development of students as independent learners. By presenting materials that students can modify themselves to the most accessible format, less time is spent on individual accommodations for individual students. By encouraging students to revisit materials outside of the classroom as needed, and scaffolding learning to challenge learners to work independently, lecturers give their students more opportunities to demonstrate their learning.

Curriculum Design Model

The ADDIE model of instructional design (McGriff, 2000) was selected as a suitable model for curriculum design based on UDL. This model has five stages – analysis, design, develop, implement, and evaluate – and is used in a cyclical way. Each of these stages contributes to the application and development of a UDL focused curriculum.

Analysis: Consideration is given to the current status quo of the intended learners, identifying the needs of the student cohort and naming the learning outcomes.

Design: Focusing on the needs and learning outcomes, content is determined, and a learning sequence and possible assessment tasks identified. The principles of UDL should be considered.

Develop: More precise preparation of tools and resources for presenting the content, activities and learning experiences to encourage students to connect and engage with the content, and preparation of assessment tasks which reflect the principles of UDL:

*   **Multiple Means of Representation:** sharing content through different formats;
*   **Multiple Means of Action and Expression:** offering ways for students to use the content to increase their understanding, skills and knowledge;
*   **Multiple Means of Expression:** motivating and encouraging the students to be autonomous learners, using the resources provided as a starting point.

Implement: The programme is implemented with the learners.

Evaluate: The course is reviewed, identifying areas for improvement and making any changes that might enhance the next iteration of the course (McGriff, 2000).
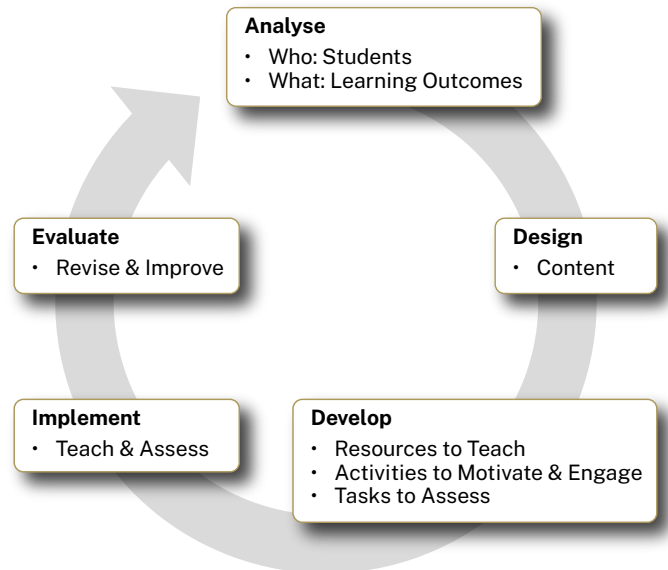

Figure 2 ADDIE Model correlated to UDL principles, devised by O'Donoghue & McMahon.

This model of instructional design is suitable because of its cyclical nature, and therefore, its adaptability. It allows the designer to revisit every section, resulting in the most relevant curriculum design. Each stage has a specific focus, such as types of media to be used, who will be using the resource, and how it will be used. The formative and ongoing evaluation that is inherent throughout the process adds value to this model of instructional design.

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Staff Resources

UDL Curriculum Explainer

Start with Learning Goals	Make these accessible to the widest group of learners by considering: • Multiple representation – what you use to teach. • Multiple action and expression – how students use the materials to study and demonstrate what they have learned. • Multiple engagement – how students are motivated to learn.		
	What	**How**	**Examples**
Representation	How will you share information?	• Use different means to provide content: text, graphics, digital content access, and a variety of media.	• Use written, audio, visual materials. • Create screencasts. • Add items to Moodle in advance of class. • Remind students to access class materials.
Action and Expression	What will your students do with your content?	• Allow students to demonstrate what they have learnt using their strengths and preferences. • Encourage students to manage content materials to suit their own preferences and needs and so enhance learning.	• Change background and font of word docs. • Allow use of different assessment forms. • Remind students to view parts of content they need to explore via class materials.
Engagement	What will your students do with your content?	• Allow students to select a learning activity that utilises their strengths. • Employ active learning. • Use authentic assessments. • Scaffold management of learning tasks e.g. assessment timetables.	• Use an assignment calendar. • Add content to the Moodle course calendar. • Provide rubrics. • Use scaffolding tools for assignments. • Use draft and feedback. • Explore possibility of using alternative assessment methods.

Module Manager UDL Guidelines

|	Brief Description	Multiple Means of Reresenta-tion	Multiple Means of Engage-ment	Multiple Means of Action & Expression	Questions
Learning Outcomes (LO)	Identify what the students will achieve by the end of the module.		√		Are LOs written in clear and accessible language?
Teaching Strategies	Identify how you will present and share the information with the students.	√	√		Are you able to use a variety of strategies to reach all students? Have you identified ways that assist students to become independent learners in your subject?
Learning Strategies	Identify what the students will do as part of their learning-independently, as a group or in a class situation.		√	√	Can you include active learning strategies? Can you include group work? Can you use Vevox/ interactive tools to promote student engagement?
Assessment Strategies	Identify how you will determine that the learning outcomes have been met: • Formative – providing feedback to support further learning; • Summative – providing a final mark.		√	√	Are assessment opportunities built in throughout the module? Have you considered the assessment schedule for the programme? Have you considered providing options for types of assessments for students to choose from?
Repeat Assess-ments	Identify strategies that will apply if students are required to resubmit an assessment.		√	√	
Indicative Syllabus	Outline the main content that will be covered in the module.		√	√	
Coursework Assess-ments	Identify types of assessment that will be applied.		√	√	Can you offer assessment choices aligned to the learning outcomes? Have you considered different ways students can demonstrate learning outcomes have been met?
Workload	Identify amount of time for • Face to face teaching; • Independent learning.	√	√	√	Have you advised students how much time per week they should spend in independent study?
Required Reading	Identify material that students are required to access as part of their own learning.	√	√	√	Have you included resources in formats other than printed matter in the list? Are the resources reflective of inclusiveness and diversity?
Recom-mended Reading	Identify resources that students can access as part of their own learning	√	√	√	Are there a variety of resources/formats listed for the students to select from?

Guidelines for Creating a UDL Word Document

Background	Dark print on a light background. Some readers may prefer a particular colour paper to enhance readability.
Electronic Accessibility	Readers can use navigation pane to enlarge text. Readers can apply speech to text tools. Hyperlinks allow the reader to use the navigation pane to skip to relevant sections.
Font	Use a sans serif font (e.g. Arial, Calibri). General text: use 12 plain. Headings: use 12 bold. Footnotes: use 10 or 11 plain. Left align all text. Add page number on bottom right.
Spacing	Use line spacing of 1.5.
Emphasis	Use BOLD.
Organisation	Use simple English. Use the Readability Statistics and Accessibility Checker in Word to check that your document is easy to read. Use hyperlinks to connect to information within the text.
Images	Add alt text to describe any images/table/graphs. Resize and crop images to focus on required information. Use simple tables with headers on all columns.

Further information:
Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities (Microsoft)

Guidelines for creating a UDL Word Document (Graphic Form)
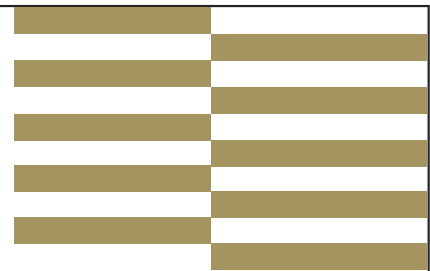
Guidelines for Creating UDL Word Documents

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Organisation

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- Use the Readability Statistics and Accessibility Checker in Word to check that your document is easy to read.
- Use hyperlinks to connect to information within the text.

Spacing

- Use line spacing of 1.5.

Images

- Add alt text to describe any image/table/ graphs.
- Resize and crop images on required information.
- Use simple tables with headers on all columns.

Electronic Accessibility

- Readers can use navigation pane to enlarge text.
- Readers can apply speech to text tools.
- Hyperlinks allow the reader to use the navigation pane to skip to relevant sections.

Emphasis

- Use **bold**.

Font

- Use a sans serif font (e.g. Arial, Calibri).
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- Footnotes: Use 10 or 11 plain.
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Further Information:

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Guidelines for Creating a UDL PowerPoint Presentation

Background	Choose a light pastel background and use a dark font. In some cases, a light font on a dark background is also effective. Avoid multiple images that clutter slides or block text.
Font	Use a sans serif font (e.g. Arial, Calibri, Microsoft Sans Serif). General text: use size 24 minimum. Headings: use size 36. Left align all text. Restrict font styles to two or three only.
Spacing	Use line spacing of 1.5.
Emphasis	Use BOLD. Use images and graphics to support learners. Limit use of animation.
Organisation	Add a title to each slide. Use bullet points/numbering rather than sentences. Add a punctuation mark at the end of each point. Limit the number of points per slide: 5 – 7 is optimal. Ensure lines are not too long. Use simple tables with named header columns.
Videos and Images	Add subtitles or closed captions. Add alt text to any images.

Further information:
Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities (Microsoft)

Guidelines for creating a UDL PowerPoint presentation (Graphic Form)

Guidelines for Creating UDL PowerPoint

Font

- Use a sans serif font (e.g. Arial, Calibri).
- General text: Use size 24 minimum.
- Headings: Use size 36.
- Left align all text.
- Restrict font styles to two or three only.

Electronic Accessibility

- Readers can use navigation pane to enlarge text.
- Readers can apply speech to text tools.
- Hyperlinks allow the reader to use the navigation pane to skip to relevant sections.

Organisation

- Add a title to each slide.
- Use bullet points/numbering rather than sentences.
- Add a punctuation mark at the end of each point.
- Limit the number of points per slide: 5 - 7 is optimal.
- Ensure lines are not too long.
- Use simple tables with named header columns.

Video & Images

- Add subtitles or closed captions.
- Add alt text to any images.

Emphasis

- Use **bold**.
- Use images and graphics to support learners.
- Limit use of animation.

Background

- Choose a light pastel background and use a dark font.
- In some cases, a light font on a dark background is also effective.
- Avoid multiple images that clutter slides and block text.

Spacing

- Use line spacing of 1.5.

Further Information:

Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities (Microsoft)

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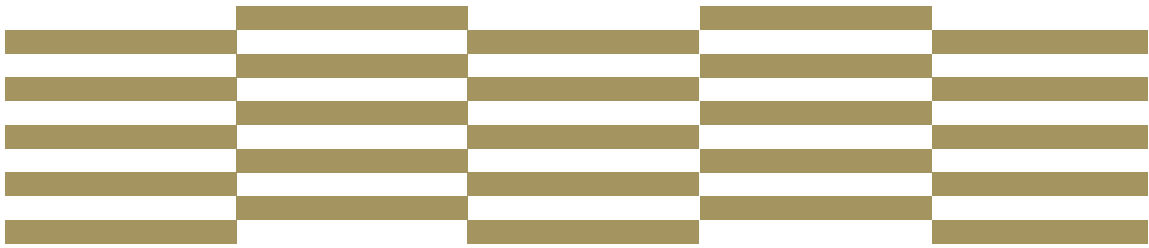FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Guidelines for creating a UDL Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

Background	Explore the accessibility tools which give limited changes to font and background colour.
Font	Choose the larger font size if appropriate. Use the heading structures on the page.
Organisation	Create a logical structure to your page. Use suitable headings for each section. Consider using collapsed topics or a grid layout so page is not crowded with text.
Content	Ensure materials can be accessed in multiple formats. Incorporate different sources of information (video, audio as well as journal articles etc.).
Media Files	Add alt text for images at the point of image upload to the virtual media library. Make text transcripts for audio content available as links where you have audio content. Use captions for video content.
Time Management	Make use of the calendar to encourage students to manage their learning.
Use Blocks	Add blocks to your page to assist students easily link to important webpages and information.

Further information:
Creating accessible content: Websites, wikis, blogs and social media (University College London)

Guidelines for creating a UDL Virtual Learning Environment (Graphic Form)

Guidelines for Creating a UDL Virtual Learning Environment

Background

- Explore the accessibility tools which give limited changes to font and background colour.

Use Blocks

- Add blocks to your page to assist students easily link to important web pages and information.

Media Files

- Add alt text for images at the point of image upload to the virtual media library.
- Make text transcripts for audio content available as links where you have audio content.
- Use captions for video content.

Font

- Choose the larger font size if appropriate.
- Use the heading structures on the page.

Time Management

- Make use of the calendar to encourage students to manage their learning.

Further Information:

Creating accessible content: Websites, Wikis, Blogs and Social Media (University College London)

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Content

- Ensure materials can be accessed in multiple formats.
- Incorporate different sources of information (video, audio, as well as journal articles etc).

Organisation

- Create a logical structure to your page.
- Use suitable headings for each section.
- Consider using collapsed topics or a grid layout so page is not crowded with text.

UDL Infographics

Multiple Means of Representation

UDL Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Multiple Means of Representation

Share text and short videos on topics covered in class. Make your own or select some from YouTube.

Share your class notes with your students on Moodle.

Make sure documents you share with the students are accessible - see UDL guidelines.

Provide a glossary of core terms or build one on Moodle as a class activity.

Chunk information into smaller units that students can build on and master.

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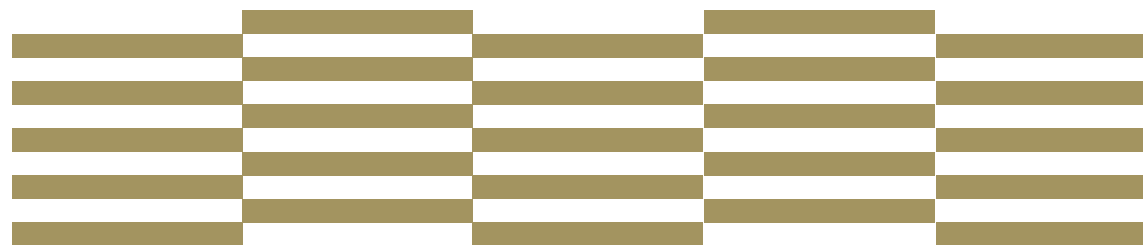Centre for Pedagogical
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Multiple Means of Action and Expression

UDL Active Participation Strategies

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Allow students to demonstrate learning and knowledge in different formats - oral and written.

Show students how they can control videos to control speed and sound, and documents to change font & background.

Allow options of assessments where possible e.g. text, screencast, poster presentation.

Make use of different technologies in class to encourage participation.

Use group work and cooperative learning to encourage application of skills and knowledge in the classroom.

CPID
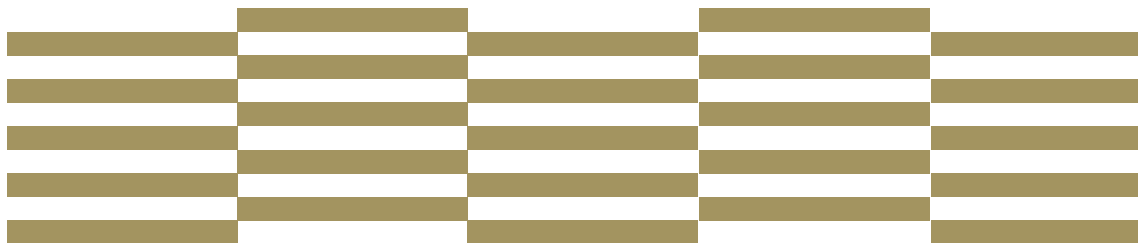Centre for Pedagogical Innovation and Development

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Multiple Means of Engagement

UDL Student Autonomy Strategies

Multiple Means of Engagement

Publish an assessment calendar for all modules across the course at the start of the semester.

Share a course outline at the start of the semester.

Supply scaffolds for assignments to assist students to develop independent study skills.

Provide feedback on draft assignments so students know how they can improve.

Use a rubric for all assessments. Share this with the students when you give out the assignment brief.

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Student Resources

Student Planning Sheet

TUS Students' Union focused on supporting students to develop engagement. To achieve this, they developed an assignment planner sheet for students to use to create their own assessment calendar. This involves the students entering details for their own study pattern, thus promoting responsibility for their own time management and assignment completion plan, an important element of multiple means of engagement.

My Assignment Planner

✔	MODULE	ASSIGNMENT TITLE	WORD COUNT (%)	DUE DATE

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY

My Assignment Planner

✔	MODULE	ASSIGNMENT TITLE	WORD COUNT (%)	DUE DATE

SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

Student Guidelines for Creating UDL Accessible Documents

UDL Guidelines
For Word Document
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning is a way of making material more easily accessible. Follow these guidelines to create word documents that are easy to view and read.

When you are reading a document, change the background colour, font style and size, and page spacing to suit your needs.

Font
- Sans serif font (e.g. Arial, Calibri).
- General Text: Size 12 plain.
- Headings: Size 12 bold.
- Footnotes: Size 10 or 11 plain.
- Use **BOLD** to emphasise.

Spacing
- Line Spacing of 1.5.
- Double space between paragraphs.

Page Layout
- Left Align all text.
- Add page number on bottom right.

Background
- Dark print on a light background.

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AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Student Guidelines for creating UDL PowerPoints

UDL Guidelines
For PowerPoints
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning is a way of making material more easily accessible. Follow these guidelines to create accessible PowerPoint presentations.

Content
- Add a title to each slide.
- Use bullet points /numbering.
- Add a punctuation mark at the end of each point.
- Limit the number of points.
- Limit use of animation.
- Include graphic and images.

Font
- Sans serif font (e.g. Arial, Calibri).
- Limit fonts to 2 or 3 only.
- General text: Size 24 plain.
- Headings: Size 36 bold.
- Use **BOLD** to emphasise.

Page Layout
- Left align all text.
- Add page number on bottom right.
- Use 1.5 line spacing.

Background
- Dark print on a light background.
- Avoid too much clutter on slide.

CPID
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Innovation and Development

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