

How UDL Can Support Your Transition to Online Teaching

Instructors moving to online teaching for the first time may be wondering how to best support their students in these challenging times. The [Universal Design for Learning guidelines](#) provide some guidance to instructors looking to help their students feel safe, engaged, and motivated.

One of the core principles of UDL is to provide multiple means of engagement as a way to support students' affective networks. But what does that mean for you as an instructor, especially in a time of crisis? Here's an explanation from the British Columbia Ministry of Education (n.d.) of how the affective networks of the brain are involved in learning and how that relates to times of increased uncertainty and stress:

The brain's affective networks are responsible for the “why” of learning. These networks drive our emotions, motivations, and ability to self-regulate. Students who are enthusiastic and confident in a classroom setting are more likely to engage, focus, and persist in the face of difficulty. Conversely, students who are uncomfortable, insecure or are experiencing real or perceived personal tragedy have less capacity to learn because they are preoccupied with their emotional concerns.

We've cherry-picked a handful of relevant UDL guidelines related to supporting students' affective networks and crowdsourced ideas for implementing them in your online classroom. We want to make this as easy for you to implement as possible! **If you have ideas, please add them!**

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UDL Guideline: Optimize individual choice and autonomy (7.1)

UDL Suggestion	Ideas for implementation
Allow learners to participate in the design of classroom activities and academic tasks	• Use the poll feature in Zoom (or other video conferencing software) to give students a choice of different activities and/or topics to focus on in your class session or to delineate the amount of time in a session devoted to specific topics (basically, let students vote on the topics they are most interested in or need most help with and delineate your time accordingly) • Create a Google Doc (or wiki if your LMS includes one) with your weekly objectives, topics, or goals. Post this document to the learning management system before or after your class sessions and allow students to suggest topics to cover, questions to be answered, or activities to be completed inside or outside of class sessions (you could consider allowing the person who suggested an idea to organize an optional activity outside of class time using the group tool in your learning management system or another tool of their choice)
Involve learners, where and whenever possible, in setting their own personal academic and behavioral goals	• Share your goals for each session and give students a few minutes to think about or write down their personal goals as they relate to yours. You could ask them to share their goals in the chat tool if they feel comfortable doing so. • Create a reflection activity. You could use the assignment tool in your learning management system or a Google Doc students fill out throughout the term. Ask them to reflect on what they've learned and how it ties back to their personal goals. You could also ask them to share questions or additional information they're interested in and use that to adjust your lectures. • Provide a handout at the beginning of (or before) your synchronous sessions that outlines your planned lectures and provides space for them to take notes. Include a space for them to reflect on their personal goals and how the material relates to those goals.

UDL Guideline: Foster collaboration and community (8.3)

UDL Suggestion	Ideas for implementation
Create cooperative learning groups with clear goals, roles, and responsibilities	Use the breakout rooms in Zoom, Adobe Connect, etc., to divide students into smaller groups for problem-solving sessions, case-study analysis, prototyping exercises, etc. Ask someone to volunteer to be the leader and provide them with a list of rolls (such as notetaker, timekeeper, reporter, etc. Roles could be documented in a Google Doc and shared with each group through the chat). Ask the leader to assign those roles. You could have students summarize each group's work when everyone returns to the main session.
Construct communities of learners engaged in common interests or activities	- Use the Group tool in Canvas to allow students to join informal groups related to their discipline, interests, or hobbies. - Use the Group tool in Canvas to divide students into informal learning communities they can go to with questions or to brainstorm ideas. - Ask for student volunteers to form optional study groups that can meet synchronously outside class times. Students can use their own Zoom accounts or other tools such as Google Hangouts.
Provide prompts that guide learners in when and how to ask peers and/or teachers for help	Create a community forum in your LMS where students can post non-personal questions and crowdsource answers and resources. Mention this forum in your class sessions and in the syllabus and/or home page in Canvas.

Minimize threats and distractions (7.3)

UDL Suggestion	Ideas for implementation
Create an accepting and supportive classroom	Allow yourself moments of vulnerability. Share times of personal stress and how they made you stronger. Give

climate	students the space to share their stories, triumphs, and fears, whether in class or in another space (such as a Canvas forum). Allow them space to acknowledge and process their feelings so they can move on to their learning tasks. • Consider beginning class (or giving students the option to log on a few minutes early) with a short deep-breathing exercise. This could be as simple as taking two or three deep breaths as the beginning of class. • If you are offering a synchronous session, offer to stay on past the scheduled end time to talk with students about their concerns, even if not course related. Offer to help connect them with other institutional resources if appropriate. • Use the closed captioning feature in your video conferencing software to help learners with hearing impairments. If you don't have access to a professional captioning service (the preferred option), you could consider asking a TA, colleague, or even a student volunteer to transcribe. Another option is turning on the auto-captioning feature in presentation software such as Google Slides.
Vary the social demands required for learning or performance, the perceived level of support and protection and the requirements for public display and evaluation	• Allow students to keep their cameras off and to answer questions using the chat feature in Zoom if they prefer to do so. • If students are asked to give a presentation, consider giving them the option to present in Zoom or upload a video presentation to Canvas. You may even consider allowing them to create videos in which they do not speak or do not appear.

Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies (9.2)

UDL Suggestion	Ideas for implementation
Seeking external emotional support	• Curate a list of school resources available to students during a time of crisis. This could be something you crowdsource with a colleague, team, department, school, or college. Students may not know where to find this

	information or be aware of the services available to them. ● If your students are comfortable using social media, create a hashtag they can use to share resources.
Developing internal controls and coping skills	● Consider adding a few optional readings to your syllabus or Canvas shell on stress-relief tips and coping skills, especially in times of high stress. ● Create a Google doc or other shared repository (LMS discussion board, Yellowdig, etc.) where students can share self-care tips and strategies they are using successfully. This could also be an optional activity using social media and a special hashtag for your course.

References

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *UDL Core Principles and the Brain* | UDL Resource. Retrieved March 17, 2020, from [//udlresource.ca/2017/12/udl-core-principles-and-the-brain/](http://udlresource.ca/2017/12/udl-core-principles-and-the-brain/)

Glossary

Term	Definition
Learning management system (LMS)	Software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of educational courses, training programs, or learning and development programs (LMS definition from Wikipedia). Examples include Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, etc.