# ADCET & RMIT – UDL Symposium

## Keynote Description: June 12, 2024

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### Title: Scaling Up with Universal Design for Learning . . . and How to Get Colleagues to Join You (up to 90 minutes)

Abstract

To help make educational materials and practices inclusive and useful for all learners, this interactive session radically reflects on how instructors and designers can adopt Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in order to create learning interactions that provide students with more time for study and practice in their busy days: broaden our focus beyond learners with disabilities and toward a larger ease-of-use/general-inclusion framework.

Our session will contain three scaffolded elements: an overview of UDL, how to scale up UDL efforts beyond individual actions, and how to talk with colleagues in order to establish UDL communities of practice in line with the recent focus of the *Australian Universities Accord* on “learning and teaching that is personalised and scalable” (Australian Government, 2023, p. 81) through the use of UDL principles.

Part 1: The Brand-New UDL 3.0

This session will introduce you to Universal Design for Learning, especially as newly revised for higher education (CAST, 2024), with a focus on equity and inclusive practice, which aligns strongly with the goals of the *Australian Universities Accord* (2023). You will discover how to implement UDL in the design of your course and clinical interactions, creating spaces for best teaching and support practices to take place—in the classroom and beyond.

You’ll also find out where to look for help at your institution and in the VLE: recent research from CAST and the Center for Universal Design in Education suggests that institutions whose faculty-support staff members use UDL, too, see better adoption rates and deeper penetration of UDL principles across all courses (CAST, 2014; DO-IT, 2015). By attending this session, you will be able to

* incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) elements into your courses,
* design course components using UDL principles, and
* describe how to expand your institution’s use of UDL elements beyond just accessibility requirements.

This session uses active-learning techniques and provides use-them-now resources for participants. Especially by relating UDL to broader access benefits for all learners, this session’s activities serve as a model for participants to re-frame accessibility and inclusion conversations.

We will posit diversity in its most inclusive form: instead of relying solely on accommodation services for learners with disabilities—most often a last-minute, ad-hoc, reactive process—adopting UDL as part of an institution’s culture of course design, teaching practices, and support services allows all learners to benefit, regardless of their place on the ability or availability spectrum.

Part 2: Scaling Up

The universal design for learning (UDL) framework has been shown to lower barriers and increase learner persistence, retention, and satisfaction in colleges and universities worldwide. Large-scale studies within the past two years are demonstrating that learners who have a sense of voice, choice, agency, safety, and belonging in their programs are significantly more likely to complete their educational goals successfully (Tobin, 2018).

Further, the adoption of inclusive design practices of all kinds, including UDL, is most effective at the systemic level. Much of the literature in the field focuses on steps that individual instructors and designers can take; the field of campus-wide and systemic UDL application is relatively new, and theorists and practitioners are creating new approaches to help colleagues to discover the most needed places in their services and offerings where lowered barriers will have the greatest initial impact (cf. Cameron, 2016, Tobin & Behling, 2018, and Nave, 2019).

This part of our session is intended to introduce participants to these new approaches to system-wide adoption of inclusive-design practices, using data and evidence from recent large-n studies (such as Manly, 2022). By attending this session section, participants will be able to

1. define how UDL considerations change at the institutional and system-level scales;
2. create action plans for UDL along three strategic pillars of access, inclusion, and predictability; and
3. attract funding, resources, and time for systemic UDL application and assessment.

This interactive segment is intended to be a guided-practice exploration of large-scale UDL applications. In addition to the core accessibility practices of audio image description, text labeling, and chat-based conversation, the presenter plan to incorporate four multi-format engagement strategies:

* *Built-in time for reflection and structuring.* Participants will have 2-minute reflection/thought times built in to 4 segments throughout the hour of the session. Their notes can take the form of private comments, shared comments in the Zoom chat feature, or sharing via the Zoom microphone and/or video.
* *Participant-led application.* For each of the three key pillars of the UDL-at-scale practices, participants will engage collaboratively in order to build one system-level interaction with UDL characteristics.
* *Post-session details.* Because the session is intended to be an intermediate-level use-them-tomorrow examination of the three pillar practices, handouts, white papers, and a bibliography will serve to guide further practice beyond the conference session.

Most of us know how to implement universal design for learning (UDL) in individual activities, courses, and service interactions. But how do we go from having a few people who know a lot about inclusive design to helping everyone to know and do a few keystone practices based on the UDL framework?

In this interactive session, you will learn how the principles and checkpoints in the UDL framework translate into action plans for UDL along three strategic pillars of access, inclusion, and predictability. You will take away models for attracting funding, resources, and time for systemic UDL application.

Our conversation will begin by situating UDL in the neuroscience of how humans learn. Because UDL is couched in social-emotional learning research, it is a useful “middle ground” between a rigid curriculum and differentiated instruction. In individual interactions, the three principles of multiple means of engagement, representation, and action & expression lead to the 31 checkpoints of access options (recruiting interest, perception, physical action), building options (effort & persistence, language & symbols, expression & communication), and internalization options (self-regulation, comprehension, executive functions).

At scale, the broad goals of UDL remain: creating expert learners who are purposeful, motivated, resourceful, knowledgeable, strategic, and goal-directed. However, instead of thinking in more granular terms, system UDL addresses fewer, broader, more strategic goals: learner persistence, retention, and satisfaction. As focus shifts from individual applications to systemic practices, UDL leverages the power of defaults and applications move beyond the classroom and formal teaching-and-learning interactions. We will examine how UDL creates tension between individual academic freedom and countervailing benefits of access and predictability.

Implementation of UDL at large scale requires re-framing, so that practitioners know the core values and strategies to implement, and can exercise flexibility in doing so. The strategic pillars of access, inclusion, and predictability tie back to UDL’s broad goals. Access to interactions is a foundation-level pillar that supports diverse, and equitable systems. The pillar of inclusion focuses on sharing the benefits of teaching, research, and scholarship throughout institutional service areas and beyond our traditional borders to enhance the holistic development of learners by combining learning in and beyond the classroom that is steeped in the values of the institution. And the pillar of predictability strengthens ethical practices, educational outcomes, career development, and the learning experience for all learners, while strengthening financial performance, growing revenue, and delivering innovative ways to invest in strategic priorities.

In our interactive conversation, we’ll make time to reflect, construct, and collaborate on five UDL-at-scale key practices.

1. Adopt UDL principles and goals in the institution’s vision and strategic plan.

2. Define core UDL applications to be implemented institution-wide, along with milestones for measuring success (like the Basic Four).

3. Get campus leaders to direct funding, time, and people toward the development, assessment, growth, and maintenance of core UDL implementations.

4. Provide options within and beyond campus-wide levels of implementation.

5. Create faculty-development programming, staff-development programming, IT-level changes, and media-services enhancements that expand the culture and practices of the entire institution.

Part 3: Scaling Out

Over the years, we’ve had a robust conversation about why accessibility is a noble goal for colleges and colleges (Ableser & More, 2018). Despite our common challenges of fragmented service silos, unclear compliance definitions, limited human and financial resources, and lack of guidance from campus leadership beyond meeting legal mandates, we would be hard pressed to find anyone who doesn’t think that making content accessible to the broadest possible audience is the right thing to do.

We would also be hard pressed to find many people who are expert in exactly how to make accessibility a reality across campus. Sure, we have laws in place, as well as industry standards and working groups and advocacy efforts. But still, at the end of the day, we also have lawsuits, and our dark secret is that almost none of us feels, deep down, that our institutions are yet fully compliant with the basic legal requirements, let alone ready to say publicly that we are accessible institutions.

Campus leaders seem—almost uniformly—to think about instructors and course offerings when they think about accessibility and inclusive design (Borghans & Golsteyn, 2015): how can professors make classes more accessible? When presidents and provosts think of other aspects, they invariably add the institution’s web site in terms of video captioning and image alt-tagging (Brown, 2018). This low-hanging fruit encompasses only the maintenance tasks performed by the most powerful accessibility players on campus: the staff.

IT, library, and academic support units are in the best position to influence how all college constituents experience systems, processes, content, and tools (Burgstahler & Vinten-Johansen, 2017). We should adopt universal design for learning (UDL) as we design interfaces, procure and purchase staff tools, and support inclusive-design initiatives on our campuses (Bowery & Houston, 2017). We have great language to use in conversations about accessibility (Moriarty, 2018), lofty goals about providing access to education for everyone (Thompson, Jenkins, & Campbell, 2018), and strategy-level milestones to target. But how do we actually do it?

The institutions that are furthest along in their accessibility efforts tend to have staff leaders who share certain practices. They typically chop off the end of the word “accessibility,” focusing their efforts on expanding access, regardless of the ability profiles of their learners. They shift their goals away from making content accessible and look instead at making interactions easier to engage in (Cullen, 2018). And they have largely moved beyond the mental model of universal design (UD) in the physical environment, which is static, bounded, and predictable—instead designing interactions according to UDL, which sees interactions as dynamic, open, and emergent (DeSilva, Nemeroff, & Lopez, 2017).

That’s all advanced-level accessibility, though. What most of us are after are starting points.

Rather than starting with CAST’s neuroscience-based three brain networks and multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, a more manageable starting point is “plus one” thinking (Tobin, 2019). For now, think of the interactions that your student-support operation offers to people, and think of how they might interact in just one more way than happens now.

This section of our session will take the format of a guided-practice presentation, with open idea gathering and experience documentation, information sharing among the facilitator and participants, and then planning and take-aways about how to frame UDL for peer audiences.

This session will provide multiple ways to keep participants engaged (solo, collaborative, and interactive), multiple ways to present information (slide visuals, video sharing, text-chat, spoken audio), and multiple ways to join the conversation and show skills (video, text chat, self-guided reflection). We will use active-learning techniques and provide use-them-now resources for participants. Especially by relating UDL to broader access benefits for all learners, this session section’s activities serve as a model for participants to re-frame accessibility and inclusion conversations.

You will leave our session with practical, hands-on strategies for expanding access to learning and increasing your chance of success in the classroom—an outcome for which we have 30 years of evidence-based practice and research (Fonosch & Schwab, 1981; Fichten, 1986; Nelson et al., 1990; Houck et al.,1992; Bento, 1996; Benham, 1997; Bigaj et al., 1999; Cook et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Murray et al., 2011).

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