ANNETTE SATOR: My name is Dr Annette Sartor and I'm in the School of Education, and I do teach the subject universal design for learning. It was initially introduced as a post graduate specialist study subject for teachers, and I do have some teachers coming in and doing it, but it's now offered as an elective for the Master of Teaching Secondary Program. I started the conversation about UDL with our university Learning Futures Group, who look after education across the university, and they've started to think about it more over a couple of years now. They've introduced quite a passive blog that people can actually click into to find information on it, but it does require a few clicks, so I'm still sort of trying to work with them to make it more prominent, as other universities do have a web page that actually appears as soon as you Google the search. The other thing that I've also noticed is that through learning futures, they're starting to talk about UDL in the conversations about AI and how do we integrate AI in an ethical way, but in a useful way, bearing in mind that it's something that students really need to be able to use as they progress in their studies and in their work. The other big thing that's happening in our university, which is Western Sydney, is that they've done a massive review of the retention numbers, and so on, and looked at their engagement strategy, and I've noticed that UDL is now starting to pop up in the conversations about improving engagement across all areas.

So if we could have the next slide, please? So as Helen said, we all came together in the subject universal design for learning, but within the School of Education we're actually bringing it on board in a lot of different ways, which I'm really excited about. We've started recently, over the last three years and this is why we're all so exhausted we've introduced three new undergraduate degrees, Bachelor of Education Primary was the first one, Bachelor of Education Early Childhood just started last year, and this semester coming and I'm also an academic program advisor for the Master of Teaching Secondary we're actually starting the Bachelor of Education Secondary Program.

Now, within those programs in the final year of the Bachelor of Education degrees, we've actually introduced an inclusive major suite. That means that students can take four subjects in inclusive education and UDL will be a part of those four subjects. So they can do this inclusive education minor in their fourth year and then if they want to go on and become, you know, a particular inclusive education teacher, they can then have those four subjects as a credit towards a post graduate degree, which I think is very exciting.

Now, the other thing that another colleague and I have just started, just recently we got a seed grant to have a look at how we practise what we preach in the school of education in terms of teaching UDL. So there will be a research assistant scrutinising what I do, and the research assistant will also be going into other classes and talking to students about whether they think that we're doing UDL very well. So it's very good to put the lens back on ourselves before we start sort of talking to other people about all the good things they can do.

I might just say that having Nicole and Helen in my class, initially when they emailed me was a little bit daunting. I'm like "Wow, they're academics, I have to teach them", but they were so fantastic, and they brought such a different lens and critique to the subject of UDL, and also, they were very informative for other students. I did have feedback from other students saying how it was good having them in the tutorials. So thank you very much for that, Helen and Nicole.

I think that's it. Is there another slide? Please move on to the next slide.

Okay. So I'm now going to well, I might just pass back to Helen, actually, because this is Helen's little introduction about her journey to UDL. She may have covered things already. So Helen, could you just talk to this slide, and then we'll have Nicole after that. Thank you very much.

HELEN BLACK: It was really great to have Annette as our instructor because she is passionate about UDL, having built the unit herself, and it was great for us to be able to bring what we did to that, as well as hearing from how UDL works and how inclusive education works within the secondary and primary schools from the other cohort as well.

So through my Master of Education, like I said, I'd come through a bit of a difficult time, and I really focused on EDI type subjects when I was choosing my subjects within my Master of Education. I was lucky enough to have a couple of credits because of my PhD and the research topics and things, so I managed to skip over those ones, but it was great to be able to choose those electives, such as the mental health in education, and inclusive environments, which I didn't do in an education setting my assessment for that. So I was looking at my broader community then and, you know, I can really see now, because I've got that in my mindset, I'm actually looking for how is this communicated or how is this accessible for other people and how is this not accessible for other people. So I'm actually training my brain, I guess, to see barriers where I previously wouldn't have seen. So those are helping to inform my redesigning of my unit as well.

So redesigning my unit, I've gone and redone all of my lectures, I've taken out all the stuff that just happened to be in the same chapter in the textbook. They don't need to know that. I'm not assessing them on that. Get rid of it. Simplified it, straight to the point, straight down the line, assessments that are meaningful to their learning outcomes, not just recreated from what had been the model that I was given. Because I don't have an education background. In my previous life, I was an accountant, you know, and you teach clients certain things that you want them to know, but, you know, you keep boundaries on that. Whereas I want to inspire my students to be lifelong learners. So through using UDL, I've been able to make my content more accessible, not just in a physical, or visual, or audial sense, but also more accessible to learning, with taking all the jargon and taking all the unnecessary clunkiness out of it, and actually getting rid of the textbook because the textbook was confusing. "Read this part in chapter 2 and then this part in chapter 4, but don't worry about that bit in chapter 4 but read the rest of it." It was meaningless. I've tried to make it more meaningful. And what I have been doing, which is also a really exciting thing I've been doing, I've got an adjunct team of teaching staff. I have no funding, but they have come along on this journey with me because they want to, because they are passionate. And when I started talking to them about inclusivity and UDL, they were like, "Oh, this is great. Can I come on board?" So they've been giving me feedback and they've gone, "Oh, can I look at this part and play with that?" So they're contributing as well. And through this I've been able to create a shared vision of what inclusivity means and why are we doing this, and how are we going to deliver this to our students? And because they're teaching on the subject as well as, you know, engaging with the students at the front line, for me this means that all the students in the cohort, whether they're in my class or another class, they're going to receive that same inclusive, warm learning environment that we've been focused on creating for them.

I'm also, when I get back from my sabbatical, implementing what I've developed this coming spring, and I'm looking forward to sharing the results, not only after the semester, but even before, what I've been able to create and the process that I've taken with that. I'll share that with my School of Business colleagues and hopefully it will infect a few of them with our new pandemic, and then I want to promote the adoption of the UDL principles and inclusive practices throughout other programs, the first year undergraduate accounting subject that I've redeveloped, I want them to then experience similar inclusivity, if not better in the following subjects as they go along through their university journey, rather than it just being, "Oh, that was a wonderful first subject and now we're back to traditional, more difficult situations." So looking forward to doing that. I won't be too much longer, but on my other side hustle in the School of Business is that I am the AOL, or the Assurance of Learning lead for the accounting discipline in our AACSB program working team. Through that, I do have another little audience I can preach to about my UDL and hopefully infect them through that part as well.

Alright. Let me hand over to Nicole and I will change the slide for Nicole. There we go.

NICOLE BRIDGES: Thank you, Helen. Can everyone hear me? All good? Excellent. Thank you for having me, everyone. It's lovely to be here. My name is Dr Nicole Bridges. I am a senior lecturer and have been academic program advisor and currently director of academic program at Western Sydney University and I'm within the School of Humanities and Communication Arts. I'm here today on Darug country and would just like to acknowledge anyone from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background who might be here today. So my journey is very similar, I guess, to Helen's, in terms of my introduction to UDL and was so very, very pleased to select this subject with Annette in my Master of Education leadership as well. I'm a little bit further ahead in my journey. In fact, I graduated on Saturday, so I have completed my Master of Education Leadership, and I must say that Annette's subject was one of my favourites. Previous to doing the subject, even though the concepts that I learnt in that subject seemed to me to be common sense, I had actually never heard of that terminology before, and it's not something that is really thrown around in the academic sense as academic teachers, and I really do believe that it should be much more.

So my background is in public relations and communication subjects. I've been an academic for 20 years and Western Sydney, as you may be aware, has a high proportion of low socioeconomic and first in family students to attend university, and I'm one of those people, have grown up and lived my whole life in Western Sydney, and was the very first in my family to attend.

I have three wonderful children. Two of these are also neurodiverse, so I've always, I guess, had a little bit of an awareness of those aspects and the challenges that some of these types of students might have. So I guess that's where my passion has always come from in terms of education as well and making it as equally accessible as we possibly can.

In my previous role as academic program advisor, I obviously realised how complex some of the needs are of our students, and I think many of those needs, as you all have understood, have been compounded by the COVID pandemic. And now we are seeing students who had complex needs with super, super, super complex needs. It's becoming increasingly difficult to support these students.

So I'm currently in the Director of Academic Program role and that means that I manage the staff and teaching of three different programs, communication, creative industries and screen media, and our university, like most, are currently reviewing our programs, and we've just launched the new Bachelor of Communication.

Now, we were a little bit too far gone in terms of the planning of these subjects by the time I discovered UDL, but what I'm planning to do is I actually have one of my introductory public relations subjects that is going to be overhauled for teaching in autumn next year. So I guess I'm a little bit behind my journey, behind Helen in terms of changing things at the grassroots level in my own program, but that's what I'm going to do, is do that for one of my subjects and then hopefully infect the rest of my academic colleagues to change and to modify their subjects.

I did recently have an example, some experience with a student in one of the programs that I manage not a student that I've taught who had very, very complex needs, and after studying with us for many years was basically at risk of being removed from the program with very, very few subjects left to complete. And I really drew on my awareness of the UDL principles to find another way to support him through. It was challenging at times because, as you can understand, you know, some academic colleagues are very much down the line, "No, we've given him all the chances, we followed all of the policy and that is it." But I honestly believe that if you have a student who has been studying with you for eight years and has tried the best that they can do with the circumstances that they are in and the challenges that they are facing, that the onus is on us to support them the very best we can and enable them to show us and to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and the skills that we know that they have. So we worked through with a couple of subject coordinators who were very, very willing. And I think that's the thing with UDL, you've got to have people on your team with the right mindset, and I'm pleased to report that only a few weeks ago he finally completed all of his assessments. So he will be graduating. But it was kind of at the point where everyone had given up on him and I just ended up going to the Deputy Dean and saying, "Look, this is where we're at. If you look at the fundamental principles of UDL and you look at the learning outcomes of that subject, and you look at the assessments this student has been set, there is another way around this." That was really reassuring for me and a real eye opener, and I guess helping me to really be determined to start to introduce this into our programs as well. So I think we're at a very exciting time at the beginning of, yeah, some interesting times at our university. Thank you, Annette, because, you know, you've inspired us all. It's been wonderful having you teach us about this concept. Would you like me to present the next slide, Helen? Yep? Okay.

So what we would like to achieve, not just today, but moving forward. We want to lead by example in demonstrating renewal for inclusive curriculum and in-built flexibility to enhance student engagement, retention and success. We want to share the benefits of UDL approaches for both students and academics in meeting learners where they're at. We want to raise awareness that all learners have diverse needs, demonstrating the importance of providing choice and flexibility and empower learners to have control of their learning journey. And hopefully achieve cultural change at a broader level across the university, and promote UDL into as many programs as possible and advocate for professional development of teaching staff in this area. I think that would be a great way to start. You know, I'm thinking as we're chatting, getting Annette and Helen to come to one of my school meetings and share your success because that's kind of how it works, right? We see how one person does it and then we keep going, one subject at a time.

HELEN: Thanks, Nicole. So just some of the challenges that we anticipate. The usual, the resistance from academics to change, also in other schools such as School of Business where they don't have an education background, you know, "I'm the expert in accounting and they'll take it the way I give it." So lack of pedagogical training. And the inherent barriers that we face in university policy. And also in School of Business, particularly with the professional bodies and their accreditation requirements, you know, it has to be an exam, it has to be this and it has to be that. And of course the workload and time constraints.

Finally we just wanted to flip it over to you guys and go help, what can you share with us that is going to help us on our journey to infect the rest of the university. You know, what have you done to achieve academic buy in. I know there's a couple of sessions today that I'm keen to attend and just how have you shared in your context.

KATE: We are running overtime at the moment, but I can take one short comment from the audience and then we'll hopefully continue this discussion at morning tea as well.

STEVE: Hi Helen, Steve from Deakin University here, student access inclusion. So one thing that really helps us with having those conversations is tying together a narrative between the student experience, so from comments from surveys or getting students to actually present to teaching teams, and infuse that with stats around, you know, retention, success, satisfaction or gaps in those stats for students with disability in particular. One challenge that we really do have is that accreditation side of things, and we can sometimes get adjustments through for one individual, but it's the systemic change that's really challenging. Particularly in things like accounting where that default is "accreditation says no". So, yeah, I was going to ask if there were, I guess, examples of where you've been able to see that systemic change happen, particularly in those courses that have accreditations, but sounds like you're sort of starting the journey.

HELEN: Yep. Hopefully next year I'll be here to tell you.

ANNETTE: I can actually comment in the School of Education. I don't know if you can hear me. Can you hear me? Yes? Yes. So we did introduce because we have it's very, you know, accreditation focused and we also have placements, like prac teaching that students have to do, a few years ago we introduced the PIP, which is the… it's like adjustments for students on placements. So we were able to it was a whole university wide consultation process. I was involved in that and we were able to come up with a strategy for supporting students who required adjustments, or at least in a UDL vernacular who would have liked barriers to be removed to have a successful placement experience. And that has worked quite well so far. But it's always the students that aren't on those academic integration programs or academic adjustment programs that we miss. And that's what I see as being about UDL. You set it up first, being very comprehensive to capture as many students with their diverse needs and then you go back and you look at the individual adjustments that often come with a particular diagnosis that will come through the actual, you know, disability services and so on. But I certainly look at it more in terms of how we set it up to start with. So I hope that helps.

KATE: Thank you. Thank you so much to our presenters. I would like you to give them a round of applause for some excellent work done.