UDL for Assessments

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PURPOSE

The Purpose of this Job Aid is to introduce Universal Design for Learning principles to support the design of assessments that are inclusive to all learners.

BACKGROUND

What is UDL?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles and guidelines which aims to provide an equal opportunity for success for all students (*UDL On Campus: About UDL*, n.d.). The UDL guidelines, developed by CAST, form a framework for intentionally planning learning activities and assessments and choosing resources that reduce barriers to all students. Further, the framework creates a flexible learning environment which can be adjusted for individual needs.

La, Dyjur and Bair (2018) stated the following:

> "UDL prompts us to consider the complex factors of learning, including the instructor's decisions in course design, students' motivations for learning, and the learning environment. The UDL framework emphasizes flexibility in how instructional material is presented, how students demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and how they are engaged in learning"

UDL and Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to measure the student progress towards the course learning outcomes. However, assessments can sometimes unintentionally measure unrelated factors such as reading level, writing speed, or familiarity with a particular format, rather than the actual knowledge or skill being taught. This can create barriers for some learners and compromise the validity of the assessment. By applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, instructors can reduce these barriers and design assessments that more accurately capture what students know and can do. UDL can address this in two ways:

1. Supports can be provided to reduce the measurement of those skills unrelated to the learning outcome. For example, allowing students to use text-to-speech during a multiple-choice test.
2. Providing students with options for demonstrating their knowledge and understanding. For example, students could be given the option to do an audio recording, a video recording, or a short paper to show their understanding of a topic.

HOW TO: ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

To think about applying UDL to assessment, we will consider each of the primary principles of UDL: Multiple means of engagement, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of representation.

Multiple Means of Engagement

Multiple means of engagement refers to providing different opportunities for student involvement.   When considering multiple means of engagement in assessment a few options that could be used are:

a.) **Consideration 7.1 – Optimize Choice and Autonomy –** students are given a choice of the topic for a research project.

b.) **Consideration 8.1- Clarify the meaning and purpose of goals –** on assignments highlight to students what learning outcome this assignment is assessing. Even better, outline how this assessment connects with their future roles in industry or in the community

c.) **Consideration 9.3 – Promote individual and collective reflection –** students are given the opportunity to reflect on a completed assignment or test and discuss their work towards the learning outcomes of the course and their own learning goals. [Exam Wrappers - Eberly Center - Carnegie Mellon University](#) are a fun way to bring reflection after an assessment. Note – they are called exam wrappers but they could be modified for use after any kind of assessment.

d.) **Consideration 8.4 – Foster belonging and community –** provide time for students to meet with small groups to share their progress towards course goals.

Multiple Means of Representation

"Multiple means of representation is about providing learners various ways to access and engage with course materials and information" (La et al., 2018). When planning assessments, consider the ways in which items are presented – text, graphs, charges, images, videos, discussion, etc. The following are examples how multiple means of representation can be implemented in assessment:

a.) **Consideration 1.1 -Support opportunities to customize the display of information –** Post assessment descriptions on Moodle – students will be able use technology to change how information is displayed or screen readers.

b.) **Consideration 3.2 -Highlight and explore patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships** – in your assessment description, be sure to highlight the important part of the assignment. Use explicit cues or prompts in order to point students to key information and instructions.

c.) **Consideration 2.5 – Illustrate through multiple media** – Give instructions for assessments in multiple formats. Provide a handout in Moodle, explain it in class, record a video in which you go through the assessment pointing out important aspects.

Multiple Means of action and Expression

Multiple means of action and expression refers to students demonstrating their learning through a variety of methods. In the realm of assessment this could be as simple as ensuring that tests have different types of questions (long answer, short answer, fill in the blanks, diagrams, labelling, etc.) or including a variety of assessments throughout a course (presentations, tests, written assignments, graphical organizers, etc.). Another example of multiple means of Action and Expression is giving students the options on the format of their assessment for i.e. whether they do a paper or video. The following are some examples of providing multiple means of action and expression.

a.) **Consideration 6.1 - Set meaningful goals –** Include the learning outcome that the assessment is measuring on your assignments or tests.

b.) **Consideration 5.2 - Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity** – allow students to use different tools such as spell and grammar checkers or speech-to-text software to complete their assignments.

c.) **Consideration 6.3 - Organize information and resources** – Include checklist and guides for students on large assessments.

However you are integrating UDL into your course assessment plan, it is important that student is showing their achievement of the learning outcome but supports and choices are being used that remove barriers and let us get a focused look on student achievement of the learning outcomes.

Considerations with Assessment Tools

When creating assessment tools, such as rubrics, the tool should be applicable to multiple types of assessments for the learning objective. If there are more than some minor adjustments that would need to be made, consider whether your assessment is assessing the learning outcome or the method of assessment itself.

Additional Resources on UDL

UDL on CAMPUS
http://udloncampus.cast.org/home
CAST – Top 10 UDL Tips for Assessment
https://slds.osu.edu/posts/documents/top-10-udl-tips.pdf
UDL Guidelines
https://udlguidelines.cast.org/

Books available through the Assiniboine library:

Bracken, S., & Novak, K. (Eds.). (2019). *Transforming Higher Education Through Universal Design for Learning*. Routledge.

Tobin, T. J., & Behling, K. (2018). *Reach everyone, teach everyone: Universal Design for Learning in higher education*.

References

La, H., Dyjur, P., & Bair, H. (2018). *Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education*.

UDL On Campus: About UDL. (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2025

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