**UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)**

Universal Design for Learning is an instructional framework that offers flexibility and adaptability to meet the needs of increasingly diverse learners and attempts to maximize their engagement while doing so.

### PROACTIVITY & UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design emerged from the architecture and consumer marketplace. One of the main ideas around Universal Design is proactivity – explicitly considering your uses before you actually design something, and not after the fact. Universally designed products can benefit a variety of users and not just those who require products designed in this manner as a necessity. Keeping in mind this mindset from universal design, we can see how it could translate easily and effectively to teaching and learning. As instructors, universal design for learning encourages us to begin our course design and teaching process with this idea of learner variability in mind. And as a reminder, just like our universally designed products, universally designed learning environments and teaching and learning activities are going to be absolutely essential for some of our learners in our Niagara College classrooms, but they're also going to be very beneficial for all.

### UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING FRAMEWORK

The UDL framework is an educational framework based on research in learning science. It was developed by David Rose at Harvard in the 1990s and a key idea is moving away from focusing on individual differences and focusing on differences as predictable. Essentially, there is a continuum of variance in how students will learn and express their learning and we as educators need to predict and plan for that variance within our own course design.

UDL contends that we have their key networks in our brain that broadly correspond with how we learn:

* Affective Network – the why of learning – how users get engaged and stay motivated
* Recognition Network – the what of learning – how we gather facts and categories
* Strategic Network – the how of learning – how we plan and perform tasks, express our ideas

### PRINCIPLES OF UDL

To correspond with these three networks, proponents of UDL have offered three major principles that can help us increase accessibility for all learners.

* Multiple Means of Engagement – Stimulate interest and motivation for learning in different ways
* Multiple Means of Representation – Present information and content in a variety of ways
* Multiple Means of Expression – Differentiate the ways that students can express what they know

### MULTIPLE MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT

Multiple means of Engagement corresponds with the why of learning or the motivation for learning. It is how students can be engaged, stay motivated, be challenged, and get excited about learning. We know, however, that students are going to be engaged and motivated in different ways. UDL proposes that if we can provide multiple means of engagement – multiple means or ways for students to stay motivated and be challenged – we are going to be able to collectively engage a larger group of students overall. For example, some learners are motivated and engaged to complete a task if they know why it is important. As an instructor, you can spend time explicitly articulating the relevance for tasks that you assign or help draw connections between course readings and materials.

### MULTIPLE MEANS OF REPRESENTATION

THE UDL framework tells us that there is no single way of presenting information that will be optimal for all of our learners. Therefore, we want to diversify the ways that we present information in order to attempt to make it optimal for a variety of learners. Focusing on multimodal information and content is a great way to start. Ask yourself, “How can I represent information in different ways whenever possible?” Multiple means of representation is not just for our teaching content and it is important to think of the different ways that we can represent other information pertinent to our courses. For example, can you create a video of yourself explaining assignment instructions that can be posted with the written assignment instructions?

### MULTIPLE MEANS OF EXPRESSION

Students differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what we know. Therefore, we want to offer learners choice in how they demonstrate what they have learned. Using a variety of valuation methods to allow students to express what they know in multiple ways is beneficial. When designing assessments, ask yourself, “Are there different ways that students can express what they know in different formats that is still acceptable and meets all the outcomes?” This can also refer to a particular evaluation method in and of itself. If you have a test, can you provide different types of questions e.g. multiple choice, matching, short answer, essay questions. You may also want to give students, where possible, the opportunity to choice the format of their work. For example, could a written assignment also include the option of submitting a video presentation instead? If you cannot give students the possibility of choice for format of their work, can you give them a choice of topic? Allowing students more choice in expressing what they know will create more engaged and motivated learners in your courses.