



California Community Colleges

SYSTEM WEBINAR SUMMARY: Universal Design for Learning (Dec. 2024)

This [webinar](#) focused on reimagining college education through Universal Design for Learning (UDL), covering the basics of UDL and how colleges can begin to implement its principles. Guest presenters included Sam Johnston from CAST and Janet Williams from North Orange County Community College District.

What are the Goals of UDL?

- UDL supports equitable success and completion, core commitments of Vision 2030, by empowering learners to take ownership of their own educational journey. Traditional approaches do not work for all students, so we must reimagine and redesign our efforts to ensure that every student can succeed.
- UDL ensures that courses are accessible to all learners, fostering an inclusive learning environment. It prioritizes accessibility from the start, reducing the need for separate accommodations for students with disabilities.
- The [UDL framework](#) proposes that barriers are in the environment, not the learner. Variability among learners is the norm and is contextual. We can plan and design with that variability in mind. The goal of UDL is learner agency, helping students to master both content and learning itself, and to encourage joy in the kind of continuous learning that is essential in today's world of work.
- Our job is to foster environments where learners with different characteristics, abilities, and interests can have their capacities fostered. Some examples of learner variability include their memory, language, curiosity, perceptions, and interests. We need to think of each person's pathway through learning as being as unique as a fingerprint to ensure we are fostering an inclusive environment.
- UDL is based on three major brain networks. The affective system plays a role in motivation and engagement. The recognition system regulates perception and comprehension. The strategic network controls setting goals and executing the steps to achieve them. We must proactively design for variation across these three networks by providing multiple means of [engagement](#), [representation](#), and [expression](#) as outlined in the [UDL guidelines](#).

How is the UDL Task Force Supporting the Goals?

- The CCCCOC convened the task force in 2023-24 to develop recommendations for systemwide implementation of UDL to ensure that all students experience

community college as a place where they belong. The goal of the task force is to make curriculum, classroom instruction, and service delivery more accessible to all students. The focus is on not waiting for students to seek help, but rather to remove student burdens and barriers and bring tailored support to those in need.

- The task force membership reflects a wide composition of campus leaders to ensure broad input and collaboration and includes students.
- Themes from the draft recommendations of the task force for system-level implementation include a student-centered focus, aligning UDL with other system initiatives, a communications plan, systemwide professional development on UDL, infrastructure and technology support by the CCCCCO, and implementation of equity-informed assessment processes.

What Can Colleges Do Now to Implement UDL?

- Creating an inclusive environment according to UDL principles requires a proactive, collaborative approach to shift how we understand learning to create, maintain, and continuously improve a student-centered approach.
- Designing curriculum according to UDL principles requires that we drop the common approach of addressing the needs of the mythical “average student.” This student does not exist, so curriculum and teaching methods aimed at the supposed “average” student will be laden with inadvertent and unnecessary barriers to learning.
- Some basic concepts to keep in mind include:
 - Inclusive teaching is a mindset; ask who is being left out as a result of this approach? Ensure students have varying means of learning the content and demonstrating what they have learned.
 - The more structure the better. Most students need it, and it doesn’t harm students who don’t. Too little structure leaves too many students behind. Lectures and cold calling on students are not inclusive practices.
 - Examine classroom policies. Do we need to ban laptops, prohibit eating in class, lock the door to discourage late arrivals, or penalize late work?
 - Review course outcomes. All learning outcomes should be observable and measurable; use verbs that enable students to understand what they will do to demonstrate mastery; and avoid abstract verbs and phrases like appreciate, understand, or show awareness.
 - Rethink assessments. Be flexible whenever possible and allow students to demonstrate competency with alternate outputs.
 - Use the LMS. Canvas has features that can make life easier for students and faculty.
 - Reimagine the syllabus. Be detailed but brief and use visual images to engage students (e.g., interactive calendar, content links).