Implementing UDL the Benefits and Barriers: Listening to the voice of faculty and staff

Cathy O’Kelly and Jennette Kilroy
Introduction to Research
  Background and Design

Research Findings
  Focus Group Output

Recommendations
  Based on Findings

Presentation Overview
Introduction to Research
Background

Part of an initiative from the ATU UDL Steering group to identify barriers in implementing UDL in higher education

Academic Staff Focus Groups - identifying the barriers for implementing UDL for academics through academic peer led focus groups

Faculty and staff across ATU who completed the UDL digital badge were invited to a focus group session to share their experience with implementing UDL
Design

Format: Microsoft Teams

Time frame: 1 hour

Participants: ATU Faculty and Staff - 10 participants divided into 2 sessions

Overview:
• Participants were asked to complete online questions using Padlet [www.padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)
• Time was allowed for individual reflection in advance of group discussion

Research Outcomes - Common Themes
➢ UDL implementation
➢ Benefits
➢ Barriers
➢ Recommendations
Padlet questions

Discussion point
How have you implemented UDL principles in your teaching practice

Discussion point
What impact did these changes have on the learning experience of students

Discussion point
What obstacles if any did you face in implementing UDL into your teaching practice

Discussion Point
What can the institution do to make the learning experience more inclusive for students
Research Findings
Focus Group Output
Implementing UDL
Engagement

Breakdown complex information into chunks

Integrate a catch-up day for assignments in class

Increased student feedback

Used Lego models to help understand complex molecular biology theories
Provided audio and written feedback to capture my tone

Encouraged students to read up around the topic before class by providing reading material and pictures on our virtual learning platform

Ensured that students are comfortable using blackboard and made resources more accessible by using Microsoft accessibility tool and Ally

Use multiple means of engagement using videos to support lecture materials and always use closed captions
Detailed rubric for assessment

Redesigned assessment to allow students to express learning their own way through writing, recording audio, or creating a video

Open submission dates

Vary types of assessment and give students choice on them
Focus Group Output
Benefits of UDL
Benefits of UDL

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT

• Students appreciate being able to demonstrate their learning in a model preferrable to them
• Offering flexibility in assessment empowers students to make their own decisions and not feel restricted

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

• Students engaged very well with the alternative assignment options and submitted assignments well ahead of the deadline
• Provides opportunities for learners and enhances creativity

INCREASED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:

• The performance of a particular lab report - the class average GPA increased by 49%
Benefits of UDL

ENTHUSIASM

• Staff enjoyed applying UDL principles and student surveys indicated that learners enjoyed the experience
• Shifting from PowerPoint presentations to workshop style tutorials makes the skills being taught to the student more relevant to them

MIRRORS WORKPLACE

• Develops skills for students - they learn how to reflect and evaluate better
• Allows students to have their own goals and work towards them
Focus Group Output

Barriers
BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS

- Moving out of student comfort zone
- Fear of the unknown
- Choice of alternative assessment can be overwhelming for students
- Many students went to the traditional assessment methods
- More confident students more willing to embrace alternative assessments
- Some students not accessing feedback focus on grade only
- Language barriers ‘educational speech’ not always understood by students
BARRIERS FOR STAFF

- Lack of flexibility in assessments due to having to follow the module descriptor which is tied to the Approved Programme Schedule (APS)
- Time constraints – Lecturers ‘what can I do in the time available’
- Time consuming e.g. providing different rubrics for alternative assessments
- Learning challenges that lecturer may not be qualified to support
- Pushback from staff not engaged in UDL – viewed as something extra and time is not available
- Semesterisation – 12 exams instead of 6 in a year “So you put in more hurdles”
A lot of students are very assessment driven – takes time to discuss which method they will use.

Some students “just want to get the course done box tick and get on”.

What works with one group might not be replicated with another cohort.

UDL is not what we’re teaching students – we’re concentrating on our own disciplines. “Alternatives can be perceived as putting more work on them rather than actually trying to help them”.

VLE e.g. Moodle pages all the same template. Lack flexibility. Hard to make it exciting.

Students don’t navigate how you think they’re going to navigate around your VLE.
BARRIERS FOR STAFF

- Lower pass grades – reducing standards
- Constantly being given new modules to deliver

Quotes:

- “We keep getting people to teach stuff which is not their core - If we taught our core and we’re passionate about that we teach and why we’re teaching and why it’s important to the students”

- “So many people come in, bright eyed, bushy tailed and they’re thrown something which is really not their thing”

- “Usually the week before or the day before you’re going into the classroom”
Recommendations
Institutional Support

- Allow more flexibility to change assessments ‘on the hoof’ to improve UDL implementation
- Allow flexibility with deadlines where appropriate
- Make UDL part of the culture of the institution so students become familiar with it
- Encourage all staff to incorporate UDL into professional practice
- Provide additional time to incorporate UDL into practice
- Acknowledge staff who engage in UDL activities
Student Engagement

- Provide students with resources that will help with alternative submission format
- Provide quality examples from previous student work
- Train students on how to receive, understand, and implement feedback
- Provide additional supports to students who may need learning supports
- Link UDL activities to students' career aspirations
- Incorporate peer assessment to develop integrity
Resources and Training

Have a UDL support group and provide and allocate time for activities such as a lunch and learn.

UDL practitioners could share their ideas with Teaching and Learning to build a bank of resources, templates, and rubrics.

Consider the physical environment to maximize creativity and accessibility.

Have additional training at staff induction on Ally and MS Immersive Reader to demonstrate how they support learning.

Resources on how to encourage students to become more of an active vs passive learner.

Provide additional staff training for supporting students with learning difficulties.