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# Implementation of UDL in Higher Education: An North American overview

## Successes, challenges and lessons for the next decade

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# Methodological reflection

- In the remarks that follow, I draw both from my experiences as faculty/ previous experiences as manager of accessibility services on a large Canadian campus
- I consult nationally on UDL with post-secondary institutions and will also draw from that consultancy work
- Finally my research portfolio is focused on UDL and I also hope to convey trends from the current North American literature on UDL

# A recent burst of initiatives

- The last few years have been marked by a growing momentum when it comes to UDL implementation:
- Interest now **extends well beyond Accessibility Services** (the responsibility of promoting UDL has always been problematic for these units: theoretical stance, staff training, funding model)
- Growing **awareness of UDL among Teaching and Learning staff** (Guelph University has led the way here for some years)
- **Instructional Designers** are increasingly being hired and used in post-secondary education and they demonstrate a readiness to discuss UDL with faculty

## A recent burst of initiatives (contd.)

- **Equity Diversity Inclusion (EDI) agenda** is growing and has been adopted as a priority nationally by funding agencies in Canada. Leads to commitment from senior administration on most campuses around change. UDL is a strong/visible contender as a framework for Inclusion.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Recommendations, #metoo movement, current Mental Health crisis (exacerbated by the COVID crisis), and Black Lives Matter have placed considerable pressures on campuses to **address learner diversity in tangible ways with urgency.**

# Areas where rapid growth of UDL initiatives is being observed

- Interest in UDL with regards to the creation of **inclusive provisions for International students**
- Growing relevance of UDL in **attracting and retaining Indigenous students** in the post-secondary sector (ground breaking work of Mohawk College in Canada)
- Potential of UDL to support the **inclusion of first generation students** is rapidly becoming apparent. Important initiatives have begun in numerous community colleges across North America. These institutions are confronted with a very different reality: huge degree of student diversity, short time frame of degrees & close connection to the changing needs of the employment market (Dawson College, Sheridan College, George Brown College, Camosun College, Mohawk College are but a few examples across Canada)
- Relevance of **UDL in trade schools and field education** is becoming more apparent. These sectors have been yearning for teaching and learning practices that offer increased flexibility.

# The current landscape



# Challenges

- Lack of reflection around **funding for UDL implementation at institutional level** (all initiatives are currently run from the corner of people's desk, often using funds earmarked for other initiatives)
- Flowing from the first point, the **remuneration of individuals' efforts to redesign** must be considered in practical ways: pay that reflects the redesign work, release from courses, secondment of instructional designers, involvement of unions, etc.
- **Embedding UDL in mission statements** within organizations is essential: fast turn around of senior administration, short term agendas, natural attrition all contribute to the loss of momentum. There is a need for sustainable action.
- **Proactively discussing ownership of the implementation drive** within institutions and involving all stakeholders. This goes against the silo mentality often apparent in Higher Ed – will require creativity and interdisciplinarity.

# The next decade: a wish list!

- A use of the **UDL discourse** beyond accessibility services – must serve as a common language. Buy-in from other units is essential.
- Urgent to now examine **UDL implementation from a strategic, organizational perspective in terms of management of change**. The ‘curiosity phase’ is over. The challenge is no longer just to demonstrate the pedagogical value of UDL; it’s about making it happen in managerial terms.
- Emergence of a **literature that goes beyond initial curiosity**: instructors are yearning for literature that models UDL in a variety of disciplines and teaching spaces (labs, trade workshop, language classes, sports and field experiences/ practicums)
- Develop **osmosis between the development of UDL in schools and its development in post-secondary education**. Institutions must capitalize on this momentum within each jurisdiction
- Pressing need for modelling of how **UDL supports current online and blended teaching initiatives within the COVID pandemic**.