

Why I wish my university had UDL

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If each student is different, how can we provide a learning environment that allows everyone to flourish? As a university student, I join the voices of other students around the world to say that it is only fairer, more equitable and most importantly more effective that our curricula are universally designed to meet our diverse needs.

I would like to start by sharing with you the testimony of Oussama, a 19-year-old Law student, who graduated from high school despite his dyslexia, but who has increasingly encountered at university challenging difficulties in terms of curriculum and physical conditions: "I am a first-year university student studying law in French. I needed to multiply my efforts to be able to succeed and get to this point because I suffered since my childhood from dyslexia. Studying was not an easy undertaking for me. This year, everything has changed. Studying at the university is different from school. Before, I was able to have a supporting tutor, generally one of my teachers. I could find a variety of digital resources that helped me understand my lessons. This year, I feel lost ... I cannot focus or understand the lectures which are exclusively presented verbally without providing a choice of alternative formats and resources. If my university adopted the UDL principles, I would certainly have had the opportunity to study without difficulty since the courses would have been presented and adapted in a way that meets my needs too. "

The needs of Oussama, shared in this testimony, could have been largely satisfied had the three fundamental principles of UDL been implemented.

1- The what?

It refers to representations of learning. Indeed, when my university adopts this approach, it will offer students resources in different formats, with textual and verbal descriptions for all images, graphics, videos. Video lessons will be captioned for hearing impaired learners. Classes will be equipped with a sound system and a microphone.

With UDL, my university will provide us with various materials and resources for different learning preferences: ex. books, articles, blogs, websites, multimedia presentations, documentaries, observations, experiments, manipulatives, etc.

2- The how?

Indeed, if my university adopts CUA, it will allow students to express their learning in various ways. Each student can choose the method that suits them best to submit their work: produce written pieces, use audio recordings, develop a work of art, edit a video capsule, create a blog, etc.

The inclusion of diaries and/or portfolios could also facilitate self-reflection for students during the semester.

3- The why?

A university that integrates the principles of UDL in its teaching is a university that motivates and engages the young adult in their journey, and promotes the skills and strategies related to their personal reaction. It allows them to self-assess and self-regulate while optimizing their motivation and feedback.

The voice of Oussama is supported by that of Ms. Loubna Lekrebssi, teacher and president of the NAMAIE association for creativity and development (ANCD), who says: "As woman in voluntary work with experience in training and support of students with disability. I can say that most of them cannot cope with their university courses. They struggle with the expository and traditional methods of teaching predominant in our faculties. The teacher-student relationship is just a 'question-answer' relationship. Do teachers have any idea about the profiles of their students? Their abilities and skills? If they have specific needs, learning disabilities, or sensory impairments (or others ...)? Have their problems been solved because they graduated from high school and are now university students? Can they be considered general education students? These students have made a great effort to reach university. They need support and adaptation of courses to their levels and their physical needs. A variety of methods, techniques, learning strategies, flexible courses suitable for everyone is the way forward. "

All in all, UDL is a framework that can help all student to achieve their main objective to be good and productive citizens, capable of adapting to any new situation, to any change, at all levels of development to serve their country.