

Teaching & Learning Exchange Newsletter

DECEMBER 06, 2023
VOLUME 1. ISSUE 7



UDL & Technological Change

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How can adopting a UDL mindset prime us to be more adaptable to technological change?

UDL embraces technology when it solves problems associated with learning.

UDL is more than a framework for reflective practice. It is a mindset that accepts that there is no such thing as an average learner – everyone has a unique and variable learning profile. A UDL mindset means that you get rid of the idea of a 'normal' student and start asking what each potential student might need.

Disability drives innovation.

When you embody a UDL mindset, you also know that what is essential for some benefits so many others. Almost always when you find something that provides access for people with disabilities it will find its way into the mainstream in a way that is wonderful and makes life better. As such, disability drives innovation which has the potential to maximize inclusion.

Do you like to have captions on when you are watching something? I particularly appreciated them when I watched Peaky Blinders! Originally, it was made available so that the Deaf community can have access to the same as hearing people. While it is essential for Deaf people, captions also provide access to information in noisy rooms or during fast-paced speeches, help individuals learning to read and others building their English language skills, and allow people to watch content with the sound off.

There are many tools and technology originally designed for people with disabilities to participate and have access that is now ubiquitous and used by a wide variety of people and different contexts.

Advances In Society We Owe To Disability Innovation

Who were closed captions designed for?
Who else benefits and uses them?

How does this apply to your practice?



- Screen readers
- Speech-to-text, Siri, Alexa
- Predictive Text
- Audio Books
- Curb Cuts
- Accessible doors
- Ramps
- Utensils with widened handles
- Dishwasher drawers



At the beginning of the pandemic, and our rapid transition to online learning, there were many at GBC who were aware of the UDL framework and were deeply thinking about how to provide options for learning that minimized barriers. There was also an understanding that when you design for people who have been marginalized by, or pushed out of, the mainstream school system, you are supporting many others as well. As described in a previous [UDL Xchange featurette](#), learning is contextual. Technology and remote access can reduce barriers and create access. At the same time, it can introduce new barriers. This is why creating flexible pedagogies and giving learners agency and choice is key.

Since March 2020, the UDL community at GBC has grown tremendously and hundreds have taken part in the UDL Certificate course. In 2022, a large committee embarked on the selection process for a new LMS. As part of the criteria for the evaluation process, the committee employed the UDL framework to determine how well the LMSs aligned with the guidelines. The ability to integrate UDL principles is among the top criteria for choosing any of our teaching and learning systems. Here is a snapshot of what the committee found from Brightspace*:

Brightspace Features that Support Engagement

- **Progress bars** help students understand how far they've come and can get excited about what's ahead.
- **Awards tool** honors student achievements.
- **Feedback** can lead back to content areas and helps students understand where they still need to grow.

Brightspace Features that Support Representation

- **Video and audio** recording anywhere there is a content box provides ability to provide options to access information in a variety of formats.
- **Customizable** font style, size, colour allows information to be formatted for differences in perception.
- **Glossary** creation capabilities enhances student comprehension.

Brightspace Features that Support Action & Expression

- **Accessibility checker** assistive tech tools can access the information.
- **Customizable alert** capabilities (intelligence agents) can ensure students are supported for planning and strategy development.
- **Checklists** that lead to learning outcomes and helps guide goal setting.



GenAI is at the forefront of disability innovation.

As we use our UDL mindsets to embrace changes in technology, we also need to ask ourselves, how will we ensure we are embedding our values of equity, privacy, and social justice into the use of each new tool. It is important to note that there is a significant environmental cost when using GenAI tools. It is also currently controlled by big tech.

However, there are also many promising uses of GenAI. As we look to support new and innovative ideas to empower learners in their education journey, AI technology in the classroom is particularly capable of having an impact. It can provide transcription, translation, and support language understanding, and communication. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the educational landscape. COVID continues to disproportionately impact students with disabilities and an increasing number of students require flexibility, options and supports. If used wisely, GenAI is one of many tools that can increase accessibility. As educators we may now ask ourselves how GenAI can:

- shift the culture and decision making to support learner variability versus a mythical “average learner,”
- increase access to higher education and accessible curricula and content,
- provide adaptive, personalized learning outcomes to help meet students where they are.

Inclusion is a collective responsibility, and this means embedding the UDL principles in technological procurement and teaching tools. The capabilities are there but only we as educators can use them.

If you are interested in hearing from students with disabilities and how GenAI increases access for them, check out [HESA’s recent roundtable talk “AI and Inclusion.”](#)

Brightspace Training for Contract Faculty

Throughout December, the TLX will be hosting Brightspace training sessions for contract faculty. Secure your spot by registering through the provided links below:

- [Modules 1 and 2: Brightspace Environment and Creating Content](#)
- [Module 3: Communication Tools in Brightspace](#)
- [Module 4: Assessment and Grading](#)

Coming Up Next At TLX:


 A blue rectangular graphic with the text 'Coming Up Next at TLX!' written in a white, hand-drawn, chalk-like font. Below the graphic is a horizontal bar with segments of orange, purple, blue, yellow, and green.

Contract Faculty Welcome Session (December 13):

In addition to learning about the features that make George Brown College a unique place to work, this Welcome session will introduce you to vital supports and services that are available to all staff. We will also use this time to explore some important resources specifically for faculty, and we will touch on things to anticipate in your first day of in the classroom -- whether it's online or in-person.

[Register here.](#)

Contract Faculty Welcome Session (December 15):

In addition to learning about the features that make George Brown College a unique place to work, this Welcome session will introduce you to vital supports and services that are available to all staff. We will also use this time to explore some important resources specifically for faculty, and we will touch on things to anticipate in your first day of in the classroom -- whether it's online or in-person.

[Register here.](#)

Modules 1 and 2: Brightspace Environment and Creating Content (December 18):

Module 1 is an overview of the Brightspace environment and highlights its tools, widgets and admin options with opportunities to discuss implications for learning. It serves as a foundation for the upcoming modules. Module 2 will explore the options for creating and organizing content. This session contains more demonstrations and is less hands-on than upcoming modules. [Register here.](#)

Module 3: Communication Tools in Brightspace (December 19):

This module focuses on communication tools built in Brightspace: Announcements, Emails, and Discussions. [Register here.](#)

Module 4: Assessment and Grading (December 20):

This module includes an overview of the Brightspace Assessments (Assignments and Quizzes) and Grading tools. [Register here.](#)

New Micro-Certificate: Foundations of Teaching Excellence

This **new** micro-certificate, “**Foundations of Teaching Excellence**” is targeted for **contract faculty and instructors** who have been teaching at the college for **fewer than 5 years** (though it is open to all faculty). It involves approximately **15 hours of online learning as well as 4 synchronous online sessions**. Further details can be found below. The tuition for this program is \$300, but we are offering it free of charge to George Brown faculty. Successful participants will receive a digital certificate of completion at the end of the program. **Seats are limited** for the first cohort, which launches the week of **January 22, 2024**. Interested faculty can [click here](#) to register.

About TLX

The Teaching and Learning Exchange (TLX) serves as a ‘one-stop-shop’ for all full-time and contract faculty at GBC in support of their teaching and learning-related needs. We aspire to create a community of excellence in teaching and learning by fostering partnerships with and among faculty. We model innovative, evidence-informed practices and open spaces for risk-taking and experimentation so that George Brown learners are immersed in transformative learning experiences led by innovative and adaptive faculty.



Contact Us

To contact any members of the TLX visit the [Contact Us](#) page on our TLX website.

Coach's Corner

Week 14 of an academic semester can sometimes feel like Mile 20 of a Marathon. Most of the miles are behind us, but energy for running the last few is fading, and the finish line is not yet in sight. We'd all like to avoid “hitting the wall” which sometimes looks like physical exhaustion compounded by mental fatigue. Marathon experts suggest some helpful tips: hydrate, pay attention to nutrition, and pace yourself”. I'd like to add, “monitor your negative self-talk, and visualize the finish line!”.

So, today's Coach's Corner questions focus on end of semester strategies: What can you do to take care of yourself through the end of semester marking and student grade appeals? Is now the time to implement grading efficiencies like “chunking”, “setting a timer” and “relying on the rubric”? What might “pacing yourself” look like, and have you created a sufficiently enticing vision of the reward to propel yourself through the final steps? If you'd like to develop a quick strategy session, don't hesitate to reach out to me at nickimonahan2@georgebrown.ca. And, when you cross that finish line, don't forget to celebrate and congratulate yourself for a race well run.



[Nicki Monahan](#) , TLX Faculty Facilitator

