Welcome to this special issue of your Faculty Forum Newsletter!

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As you flip through the pages of this newsletter, I’m sure you’ll notice the oodles of UDL focused articles. Well, UDL (not pronounced ‘oodle’) is the abbreviation for Universal Design for Learning, and perhaps you’ll find yourself in one of the following categories (or anywhere in between):

• What the heck is UDL? Is it somewhere on a planet, far, far way?
• I’ve heard of it; maybe I’ve seen diagrams of it? It’s somewhere out there…
• I can point to it, up there, out there, but I don’t have a map…
• I’ve got the map, but maybe it’s upside down? I’ll be there soon!
• Almost there! Sometimes I’m driving in the fast lane, and sometimes I’m driving in the slow lane, but I’m driving!
• I’m consciously living in the UDL Universe! My passport is stamped “UDL Champion”!

No matter where you find yourself in the UDL universe, I hope these articles inspire you to learn more, try out new things, and connect with others who are also on the UDL journey.

You may also want to check out the following:

• UDL GBC Faculty Guide – GBC Library Learning Commons
• Designing for Inclusion – UDL at GBC
• www.cast.org
• #UDLchat on Twitter

And, go to My Learning/Cornertone to check out the Learning Calendar for upcoming UDL focused Faculty Learning Circles.

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A Look at How UDL Approaches Have Saved the Day

By Pooja Kapoor, Hanadi Hajj, Mythili Subramanian, and Sharon Hauck  
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When the opportunity for discussion is presented in class, we do our best to seize it as a means to further our learning and understanding of a concept. However, we have found that it is the same few students who get involved in the conversation and the same few who prefer to sit quietly in the back and avoid speaking. The students that tend to disappear when an opportunity for class discussion arises may know the answer to the question being asked; however, their anxiety or fear of being wrong causes them to freeze up in such situations. Albert Einstein once said, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.”

What if there was a way to engage these students while eliminating their fear of being singled out in front of the class? This is where Nearpod has come to save the day. This app has provided a platform for students to participate in such discussions while remaining anonymous. The entire class is able to view the answers to the questions being presented in class and fix any wrong ones together, without any one person being pinpointed. At the end of the day, the students have increased their knowledge of the concept, without having experienced any sort of fear or embarrassment.

We know how much our students adore their devices and how comfortable they are with them. Nearpod caters to the love our students feel for their phones and laptops, while enabling us to reach out and involve each and every person in the classroom. After introducing the app, we have been able to engage these students within their comfort zone, and as a result, we have seen a significant increase in class participation.

While social anxiety remains prevalent within classrooms, a subject we find especially heightened in college is test anxiety. A successful method we have used to alleviate their stress is by giving them the option of either writing their test in paper-format on the provided date or writing the test online during the following week in the Assessment Centre. This has been especially helpful for students during Week 12 of a 14-Week program, at which point deadlines and assignments begin to pile up. Not only has this option created a positive teacher-student relationship, but it has also discouraged requests for last-minute make-up tests. As teachers, we know that students ask us for make-up tests in the eleventh hour. In providing proactive, preset test options, we have been able to avoid making these modifications in haste.

Since the beginning of education, we have needed a UDL environment for students. Each student is different, and as such, the journey through which they reach their destination should also be different. Through UDL strategies similar to the ones discussed here, George Brown College can develop students unlike any other.

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Sparked as a collaboration between the Student Affairs department’s Healthy Campus Initiative and Staff Development, FacultyConnect is an online, video-based, peer-to-peer, learning resource for GBC faculty. Built particularly with the professional development needs of contract faculty in mind, this resource is designed to facilitate skill-sharing on practical strategies for fostering well-being in the classroom. Grounded in an understanding of the important connections between emotions and learning, these short videos are meant to support GBC faculty in understanding how to create supportive, connective, inclusive, and caring learning environments that encourage students to bring their
Faculty Share their UDL-oriented Teaching Practices Through Videos

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Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has significantly changed the essence of my classroom design and pedagogical practices. My classroom design has changed in the presentation (ways in which my students acquire information) and has changed with student engagement. My pedagogical practices have changed in student expression (how my students demonstrate learning and outcome-based assessments).

The premise of UDL was challenging for me initially to incorporate into my accounting and financial management courses; I felt UDL would be easier to incorporate into more theory-based classes. With the notion that UDL does not have a definitive method of incorporation and offers multiple ways of expression, presentation, and engagement, it created barriers for me initially to understand that the design is not incorporated using a set blueprint and that it is infinite in the approach.

The previous design of my accounting classes consisted of 3 summative evaluations (each a heavily weighted test) that created anxiety and pressure on students to demonstrate knowledge in one method of evaluation. Even though the evaluations consisted of various types of questions (case based, short answer, analysis, and multiple choice) the barrier and failure rate was associated with only offering one method of summative assessment.

After learning about UDL, one of the first changes I made was incorporating weekly formative assessments through the use of I-clickers. This method allowed me to measure student comprehension during lectures and offer a second method of presentation. They would select their answers on the I-clickers and immediately showcase a quantitative summary of student comprehension. This allowed me to see what content required more explanation and where student knowledge was strong. It was also interactive and removed barriers for students who were more introverted, allowing them to participate anonymously.

Secondly, I altered the course evaluations and created a 30% summative evaluation by incorporating an accounting simulation through Pearson. This allowed students to complete a set of 3 labs (10% each) with unlimited attempts until the due date. This allowed for interaction with the content outside of class, removed the anxiety associated with only evaluating in testing environments, and offered a collaborative approach with student-student learning. The failure rate dropped from 27% to 5%. Students communicated that the unlimited attempts allowed them to become content experts by learning from their errors and being able to correct their errors. It was also communicated that the labs significantly prepared them for their tests.

A UDL approach in the design of your courses is imperative to diverse learners and student success. The challenge is determining where and how to incorporate UDL into a course that offers a balance to both the professor and the student. My recommendation is to incorporate small, incremental changes. One course at a time and one professor at a time will eventually result in a better learning environment and a stronger graduate.

‘whole selves’ to the learning environment

We know that there are strong overlaps between practices that promote well-being in the classroom and practices that promote access, inclusion, and engagement – in this sense, the objectives of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and those of the Healthy Campus Initiative are very closely related.

We are excited to share another suite of FacultyConnect Videos with you all! These videos are specific to UDL-oriented teaching practices that 4 George Brown College faculty members have been utilizing in their classes. We want to help the GBC community see that these practices are good for students in a very holistic sense – not just for their learning but also for their well-being.

If you haven’t done so already, please check out the FacultyConnect videos now at https://www.georgebrown.ca/ facultyconnect/supportive_curriculum!

If you are interested in sharing a teaching practice with your colleagues or learning more about this project- please contact Patricia C. Robinson at pcrobins@georgebrown.ca.
Coping with End-of-semester Stress:
Hacks to Improve Your Mental Health

By Laura Scoufaris
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During mid-terms and exams we can become so focused on helping students manage their stress and anxiety that we forget to take care of our own mental health. Whether we’re responding to emotionally charged students, or spending grueling hours marking papers, the workload and emotional investment of finalizing students’ grades can take a toll.

A troubling list of questions can plague even the most experienced teachers – Am I being as fair and objective as possible? Am I marking consistently and accurately? The angst of grading assignments can leave us feeling stressed, short-tempered, and frustrated and these emotions can bleed into our classroom, our professional relationships and our personal lives.

So how can we manage the anxiety that results from this essential part of our job? Here are some strategies - academic and practical - to help us finish the semester feeling physically and mentally healthy.

1. Don’t wait until the last minute: This advice is much easier said than done. We all know that if we wait until the last minute, we do a rushed job and that added stress negatively impacts our attitude toward our students. If we mark and return papers within a week, however, we reduce the anxiety that comes from procrastination and ensure the assignment we’re grading makes sense to our students. Application and feedback are key parts of learning and waiting weeks to provide that feedback interrupts that process, negatively impacting student results.

**AVOID PROCRASTINATION**
Add deadlines for returning assignments to your course outline to stay accountable to your students.
Mark a small number of papers each day instead of grading a stack of 40 papers all in one sitting.

2. Create interesting assignments: The tedium and repetition of marking papers is often what makes it so overwhelming and discouraging. To help stay more engaged with our students’ work, we can ask questions we’re curious about. That means not relying on old exams and avoiding boring, vague subjects. If we’re engaged in the material, it’s more likely our students will also be engaged. As a result, grading their work will be more interesting and rewarding.

**CREATE FRESH ASSIGNMENTS**
If possible, base assignment topics on current events.
Brainstorm with your class to discover their areas of interest.
Ask your colleagues for ideas on creating assignments and don’t be afraid to ask if they’re willing to share.

3. Be positive: Even if it’s not our intention, it’s easy to discourage students by using impersonal or critical comments. Studies show that it may be possible to strengthen students’ performance using simple comments that show we’re invested in our students’ success. Writing positive comments takes time and thought, but has the added benefit of shifting our mental state. If we’re writing positive comments, our attitude towards the grading and our students will also be more positive.

**USE POSITIVE COMMENTS**
Instead of routine critical comments like “wrong word,” try using encouragement: “Your word choice is creative/unique/captures the reader’s interest and can be improved by…”

4. Design a strong rubric: A good rubric takes the guesswork out of marking. It helps minimize fears and anxieties that can make grading papers stressful. Professors have been using rubrics for decades, but according to researcher and professor, Julianne Treme, designing a rubric that explains grades in terms of student outcomes not only increases student motivation, it also improves professor grading happiness and reduces the time spent grading (Treme, 2017). Why? A thoughtfully designed rubric creates a more objective grading process, which limits the anxiety and stress professors naturally feel in grading open-ended assignments. A strong rubric also reduces the time it takes to grade each paper, since students are ideally submitting a higher caliber of work. A rubric helps
them understand the requirements of the assignment and the quality of work needed to achieve their goal grade.

CREATE A GOOD RUBRIC

Need help designing a rubric or improving one you already have? The Teaching & Learning Exchange (TLx) at George Brown offers a workshop that focuses on designing rubrics. Sign up on My Learning/Cornerstone (https://adfs.georgebrown.ca/adfs/ls/IdpInitiatedSignOn.aspx).

5. Take a break: This strategy may seem counterintuitive since our first instinct can be to power through until our mountain of grading is conquered. However, according to Room 241 (https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/five-time-management-tips-for-teachers/), a blog written by education professionals from Concordia University Portland, although it’s tempting to put more time into our work, neglecting time for personal care inevitably results in teacher exhaustion. Teaching, grading, and student interactions suffer. A teacher who is energetic, healthy and refreshed is more successful, no matter what teaching-related task they’re tackling (Room 241, 2013).

References

Navigating the end of the semester with students is intense, challenging, and ultimately rewarding. Stress and anxiety are often unavoidable effects of dealing with a heavy workload, tight deadlines, and similarly stressed students. By focusing on strategies to help us manage that stress in a positive, productive and professional way, we can model effective coping techniques for our students and become even better leaders in the classroom.

TAKE A BREAK
1. Move: Get some light exercise.
2. Visit: Do some face-to-face socializing.
3. Eat well: Choose a wholesome, nutritious snack.

Save the Date: Experience Experiential Education (E3) Symposium February 27, 2019

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Let us take you on an explorative and interactive journey of the Experiential Education (EE) and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) landscape at GBC. Some of the themes we will explore include:

- What is Experiential Education (EE) and Work Integrated Learning (WIL)?
- What impact does EE and WIL have on students, industry and the GBC community?
- What role can we play in enhancing the quantity and quality of EE and WIL at GBC?
- What role does EE and WIL play in the overall 2022/2030 plan and the future success of learning and career readiness?

After a series of invigorating and interactive morning workshops, take the time to put yourself in students’ shoes and experience many of the dynamic, collaborative and futuristic EE opportunities happening at the college.
As Educators, you constantly dedicate your time and efforts into helping your students learn and grow. While you take care of your students’ learning needs, let Lynda take care of your learning requirements. Whether you wish to follow the hobby of photography or playing guitar, or you wish to master the art of time management, Lynda would have just the right course for you.

Let’s take a look at what Lynda is and how it could benefit you:

With over 8,000 courses, Lynda is an Online Learning Platform that can help you achieve your personal and professional goals. These courses are taught by recognized industry experts and award you with a certificate after completing a course. Because Lynda is LinkedIn’s very own learning platform, it seamlessly integrates with your LinkedIn profile and allows you to share your achievements with your network.

Some benefits of Lynda:

1. **Teaching with Lynda**
Lynda could be a great tool for adopting a flipped classroom approach. You can assign online videos or courses to your students as a pre-work for your class and then your class could be more focused around implementation of concepts learnt. You can even customise a playlist and share it with your students or colleagues.

2. **Accessible and Active learning**
Lynda, the founder of Lynda.com is an educator herself. And so, she understands the different learning styles of people. With features like speed control, closed captioning and transcript, Lynda.com makes learning accessible for everyone. The note-taking and built-in quiz feature further helps in making it an active learning experience for you.

3. **Micro-learning**
When you are constantly busy managing your class schedules, answering student queries, and attending staff meetings, there is barely any time that you get for yourself. So, how do you make time for learning? Well, one solution to that is to make learning a part of your schedule and learn with 2-4 minute videos on Lynda.com. So, now you can learn a topic while your coffee brews.

4. **Flexible Learning – Learn Anytime, Anywhere**
The Lynda.com App (https://www.lynda.com/apps) for mobile and desktop allows you to learn on the go. All the courses that are available on Lynda’s website can easily be accessed using the App. Not only that, but you can even download content for offline viewing. With Lynda on your mobile phone, you can make it your travel partner, lunch partner, or even your workout partner; the choices are limitless.

5. **Lynda is available to you free of cost**
Yes, you read that right. Lynda is available to all George Brown College students and staff free of cost. Visit this LINK for a quick guide to accessing Lynda through your George Brown College credentials.

If you have any questions or if you would like to find particular content for yourself or for your students, please feel free to reach out to our LinkedIn Student Ambassador at dipinti.phutela@georgebrown.ca or https://www.linkedin.com/in/dipinti-phutela/.

Happy Learning! 📚
Creating Safe Spaces for Learning and Engagement

process. As a direct consequence, the learner takes ownership of the learning process.

The fostering of safe spaces requires mindful facilitation of groups while they go from forming to performing, passing through storms and norms of their own making, co-authoring learning and co-creating knowledge in the process.

As mindful practitioners, we (Silvia and Michel) meet up from time to time to discuss happenings in our classes and share our own learning. This article is an outshoot from one of those reflective sessions that we believe will inspire you to share personal learning with each other and tinker more in your own classrooms, like we do.

After teaching Speaking with Confidence (GHUM 1025, 201801), Michel had concerns about one assignment that required the learners to give a one-minute elevator pitch speech for 20 points. Student and colleague feedback corroborated the issues. She decided to change the assignment and turn it into a more experiential exercise that gives the learners real life practice.

The new assignment became a panel interview in which students play the roles of interviewer and interviewee for a fictional company. In the assignment students respond to six behavioural interview questions posed by a panel of peers. Then the interviewees learn whether they have made it to the next round of interviews.

Michel came to the class with a draft and asked the students to help shape the assignment. Working in groups, they provided ideas, with great excitement, to improve the structure, the process and the quality of the assignment. Being able to shape the assignment gave the students a sense of ownership. The final version of the assignment resulted from class collaboration and negotiation, and ultimately, this process created a great deal of student engagement, much more than the one-minute elevator pitch speech would have ever created.

Here is a sample of student feedback Michel received:

The experience was realistic; felt like real life. It was very scary, but I valued the practice. —Indra

It was a great preparation for a real job. After qualifying with certificates or diplomas it really boils down to the ability to be successful in an interview in order to get the job and this process helped us to build confidence. —Thulie

I’m now confident on how to prepare and practice for a real interview. —Tenzin

It was the first time I was doing an actual interview and I didn’t realize the level of preparation that was required so I did not prepare enough. I have to challenge myself more should I have an interview. —Kebba

The lessons we learned from reflecting on this experience:

a. The knowledge and experiences students bring enrich the learning process, creating spaces in which cocreation and ownership can happen.

b. Students value both giving and receiving peer feedback, negotiating and collaborating with peers, and collaborating in meaningful ways, especially when their contribution is immediately incorporated. This develops practical skills and builds self-confidence.

c. Students for whom English is a second language especially value the opportunity to practice oral communication skills and explore cultural peculiarities in a low-stakes environment.

d. Experiential, collaborative activities such as this increase student engagement, strengthen motivation, deepen interpersonal connections, and heighten overall learning.

e. Students found a safe space that enabled them to open up, take risks, consider disparate points of view, admit errors, judge each other’s performances objectively, negotiate to come to a unified decision, and ultimately enable them to speak and live with confidence.

We will continue tinkering and sharing ideas with each other and with you. Look out for additional experiences about creating safe spaces for learning in the next publication.
The TLX –Teaching & Learning Exchange– is OPEN!!!