



The 2017 Accessibility Conference:
**Becoming a Catalyst
for Inclusion**
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Implementing Universal Design for Learning in a Graduate Program Transcript from the 2017 Accessibility Conference

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SPEAKER:

Good afternoon everyone, welcome to the session this afternoon entitled Implementing Universal Design for Learning in a professional graduate environment. We have Wenonah Campbell and Shaminder. Winona has a background in speech pathology at McMaster University.

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She studies Universal Design of Instruction by health professionals to support the inclusion of individuals with health conditions and disabilities in educational settings.

Shaminder Dhillon is an occupational therapist and assistance Professor. She is a Ph.D. student interested in the accommodation process and regulated health professional programs. Recognising UDL is a proactive approach the company that. An approach to accessibility that may be helpful to a broad range of students, Shaminder has learned more about this and influencing strategies in her teaching.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

Thank you so much. We had planned to do introductions. That is the purpose, thank you so much for that and giving people a good background of who we are. To speak to the CanChild Centre, I work as part of a research centre, at McMaster University, and as part of my work that I do there, I do research with health professionals like occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists on how to work with educators in the school system to support inclusion into classroom-based services and school wide services to support everyone's success.

My interest began more than a decade ago and I have taken that passion and interest in inclusion and accessibility to the post-secondary environment around work for how faculty can change their teaching approaches and views to support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities who want to pursue higher education and in particular professional graduate studies. And also to look at the idea of accessibility for all and looking at that as an alternative or complement to the accommodation process at postsecondary level. I will turn over to Shaminder to talk about her passion.

SHAMINDER DHILLON:

Thank you. My interest in Occupational Therapy began with an understanding of disability. I was different from the rest of my cohort who might have done shadowing of traditional OT placements, the first OT I met thought disability and human rights.

I thought that was what we did in Occupational Therapy. I had a different lens and decided to come back and do my masters and doctorate people with disabilities advocating, occupational therapists and how does that work. And I happen to be at the right place at the right time. I was starting to teach in the OT program and it was over the years of teaching that I considered the idea of disability and what does that mean within our profession, looking at it from a certain lens and what it means the teaching and learning.

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Accommodations produced some tensions and I wanted to explore that in a professional program. That is when Wenonah and I intersected in our interests.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

We want to leave lots of time for discussion at the end so we will have our part a bit shorter. We wanted to give a background about what the context is where we are coming from and key concepts we will talk about. We wanted to talk about what initiatives we have taken within our programs to enhance accessibility. We do have something to do an evaluation, we wanted to talk about what we're doing to figure out if what we are trying is making a difference.

And then we don't have the study done so we wanted to say here is what we have noticed to date, here are some challenges and facilitators, in our efforts to bring accessibility to the forefront of our program. And then opportunities for a question and answers and exchange ideas.

If you have questions along the way don't hesitate to let us know.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

The first concept to make sure we are on the same page, properly speaking to an audience fairly well versed in these things, the particular framework we're using is Universal Design for Learning.

I know other frameworks have similar ideas like Universal Instructional Design, Universal Design of Instruction; University of Guelph is a leader in those.

We have begun to explore if other frameworks would be useful as well. UDL is a framework for thinking about how would you create flexible learning environments and originated like many ideas around Universal Design for Learning, around architecture and efforts to design universally built environments. Some people describe UDL is being (unknown term) for education.

Universal Design for Learning has three main principles you would think about as an educator. When designing your curriculum, assessments, you think what multiple options, quasi-competent information to people and help them learn and how do I do that in different ways.

You think about all the different ways learners have to show me what they can do. Then you

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look at having multiple ways to engage learners in that process of learning. That is the framework we came from and that is UDL as a framework, developed for the Centre for Applied Technology out of Boston, Massachusetts.

SHAMINDER DHILLON:

Let's talk about our context, where we come from. The occupational program at McMaster, students already have an undergraduate degree, and so there are competencies related to a Masters level program. It is more course based and not your traditional thesis style of programme. Graduates must meet competencies such as working inter-professionally with other health care providers. Also being independent professionals making autonomous decisions in the social service and healthcare environment.

They graduate with the knowledge and professional behaviour to enter the practice at an entry-level.

There is a problem based learning approach, using a healthcare problem as a stimulus for learning. Problem-based tutorials are all small group learning. They identify their learning goals, meeting those particular learning objectives. And to monitor their own progress as well. It puts a lot of demand in terms of being self-directed, a lifelong learner and building goes as opposed to a more passive, traditional approach they may or may not have had in undergraduate.

OK. So why did we start looking at UDL? A couple of things are happening. One is accreditation. There are Occupational Therapy programs across the country.

We are required to be accredited every seven years. I'm on the writing team for the self-study guide. There are a lot of standards that were not there in 2009, during our last accreditation related to accessibility. This was clearly a change something we will respond to, that was on our radar. We identified in our small group, something our committee was to look at more.

It is engaging clients with disabilities at work. That is where it started. There was more accommodations, we understood that universal design would not eliminate. There would always be made for accommodation, but we felt that there were things we could do to lower the number of accommodations and both the sensitive inclusivity in class, that would be helpful to all students in the class.

It is not a small group but it is not large either. Students see one another. There are other

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activities where accommodations might be evident. We wondered what more we could do and were lucky to have expertise in the school. That is where Wenonah came in.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

In terms of the background I have been UDL, as I mentioned. I studied it for a number of years in the educational setting and have done a lot of work with professionals about how they could be using strategies to deal with accessibility and inclusion in their work in the school system. As part of that, I went to the Centre for Applied Special technology in Boston, Massachusetts to pursue advanced training to be a champion of change, bring that knowledge to others and be an advocate for Universal Design for Learning.

Part of that was learning how to deliver workshops and other events that were organised according to the UDL principles to teach others. I was approached by our assistant dean in the occupational therapy program to partner with the OT faculty and offer a recruiter them about this, give them some foundational knowledge, what is UDL and think through if this is something that could be a complement to the things they are already doing in the OT program. We did that in May of last year. Concurrent with planning, we also started to think one-off workshops are not helpful.

You can get a lot of knowledge but often you need a lot more support to make lasting change. We started to partner together and apply for an educational research grant to actually do a two-year project to try and do ongoing development of the knowledge and skills faculty we need to implement UDL on the programme. Lo and behold, we actually got the funding. We were very fortunate; we found out on the very day of our retreat that we secured funding for this two-year study.

I was nominated principal investigator on that project but I really recognise this first and foremost was an initiative happening in the occupational therapy program. It was not going to be very helpful for me to come in and say this is what you should all be doing. We have taken what is called in the research world Participatory Action Research, we are co-drivers. Shaminder is one of the faculty and she has been a core part. Her and her faculty are part of a working group that has been with us from day one to really decide what this will look like and how we go about it and how we will know if what we do makes a difference.

At the moment, we established terms of reference so we have our expectations outlined and who does what and how to support each other. We come together every other month. We

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started ad hoc and as time passes fast, we needed a more regular schedule of meetings. Shaminder and her colleagues have really taken the initiative in terms of planning what it is the faculty will need to know and learn about and what skills will be important to them. They advise me on how I can help them evaluate their efforts and power can take the grant resources we have a dedicated to supporting the implementation of this initiative and using those resources wisely.

So the study itself has three major objectives. First, we want to actually look at every build from that one day workshop and we were looking at doing a sustained professional development tailored to the interest and needs of the OT factory. What would that look like and figuring out what are the topics we cover, when we cover them and why, and how we actually deliver this information. We hope some of what we learn from that we can share, it will be on our program and if others want to look at using UDL and its principles. We also want to know what faculty experience in trying to make changes to how they are delivering and developing their curriculum, delivering courses, how they do their assessments and what are their needs.

We also want to look at what this might have in terms of an impact on students. In terms of our evaluation plan, how will we know if this is making a difference or not. We have used a number of different approaches and strategies. One thing we looked at what educational literature around how you implement change in educational settings. There is a questionnaire called the stages of concern questionnaire and it can be used any time educators are being asked to do something different using new technology, adopt the new curriculum, and it looks at your concerns at this particular point in time about this new thing we are asking you to do.

What use of a questionnaire has shown that over time as there are predictable patterns of by the educators go in terms of our day non-users and in fact this is something I am willing to learn about it but it is not a priority for me right now. All the way up to I am implementing this every day and consider myself an expert and I am innovating on the innovation. We wanted to get a picture of where the whole faculty is right now and where do they move over time. Do their concerns become different and what the literature would suggest is as your concerns change, you are more likely to go from a nonuser of that innovation to being gay user. Now our faculty are mostly non-users, they are generally positive about the idea of using Universal Design for Learning and looking at accessibility. They want more information but at the moment they are not saying this is something that really affects them on a day-to-day basis.

They have a general interest right now. According to the literature, it is typical. We want to

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move them further. All of the efforts we do in between these questionnaire administrations is to see how we actually get them from point a to point B.

The sum up we will be undertaking individual interviews with faculty volunteers, some who have been active, we hope to get a spread. We have several early adopters, who have really gotten into trying out these principles and strategies and we have other faculty who are at various stages of readiness to do this. We hope to get a sense of where people are through interviews and to repeat that again at the end of the study.

The faculty want to try something out, we want to formally document that for us. Every time they try something new, we want to know what they tried on the course, what made them do it and the problem they were trying to solve. How will you look at that change, how that made a difference, can you share it back with us.

If you think of the three objectives I mentioned to you earlier, one must develop the faculty and approach to professional development. We have done a number of initiatives around that.

SHAMINDER DHILLON:

If we go back to the first study objective, it was about professional development for the faculty itself. When the working group got together what we took back to the larger curriculum committee is, we need some dedicated time to do this. The things that you value you put time too. They were in agreement with that. At curriculum meetings that happened every month, we would set aside our professional development time, usually 30 minutes of the meeting, to talk about issues and learn about UDL. That time was about becoming better educators. It was about making the decision to change the topic or user forum to learn about UDL for the entire faculty, the OT faculty.

That has also been balanced with potentially other needs as well put in total we have had six professional development sessions and the topics were determined based on things we heard from the whole faculty and the working group got together to try to flush them out, but the people need to do in terms of preparation, how do we best use the 30 minutes. I want to give you examples of what we did.

The first topic had to do with the notion of student evaluations. We asked after the retreat, we asked the faculty where we began. UDL is huge. What I think people found very concrete was the notion of student evaluation, the assignments, exams, the things we have built into the

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program to evaluate how students are doing in terms of progress. The other pieces if we look at accommodations, that is where the bulk of the accommodations. If we could change our evaluations so it was more inclusive and accessible to students, it made sense to start from that perspective.

Some of what we talked about, if you look at the literature around looking at student evaluations and accessibility, to identify your learning goals. What are you trying to evaluate and that assignment. It was surprisingly challenging to do that. There are a lot of things, have a look at my own example where I inherited courses. Not a full-time faculty member, I'm contractually limited. I am typically assigned courses where people are on the eve of the retirement. I am filling in for other individuals, I'm not entirely sure what the thinking was behind it much less the goals.

That was a process in itself. We require two sessions to do it. It enables us to start to work out the means versus the end goal. I will give you an example, specifically one I have started to look at. In the first semester that students come in, the course I took over from someone who retired was an enquiry seminar, about theory and systems. The final exam at the end, the essential goal was to evaluate student ability to identify and apply OT theory to clients and areas. The exam was next.

I thought the exam was great, I didn't understand the time-limit, it is a common accommodation. How did we know the 2.5 hours to do an exam rather than more or less. They thought about extending that time. It bought up other questions. How much, what would be the limit, how long could I book the room for, would there be breaks.

It raised all kinds of questions. Time is a barrier for people who take longer to apply OT theory. That is where the thinking came from.

I will tell you later in terms of what happened, in terms of other professional development topics, we also looked at knowing the means and when they are flexible.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

So one of the interesting, when we finished up the first two sessions, we started getting people thinking about identifying the goals of your evaluation. That very naturally led to a discussion about presumably assessing those things that would be the essential requirements are becoming an occupational therapist and these are the things we need to know you either know,

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you can apply, you can do, in order to graduate this program, become a licensed therapist and deliver services.

So what makes something an essential requirement, what can be known only in a certain way be done in a certain way or time limit. If you can't do it, we cannot change and be flexible on that. We had some very passionate discussions in our professional development meetings around what that might mean for an occupational therapist and debates about if it is our job as educators to ensure that a person could be licensed. If someone was, an occupational therapist but don't want to practice later and choose not to, it is our obligation to tell them they can't become an occupational therapist because you can't do the essential requirements, is it choice they should be able to make.

How do we know this is no flexibility. We didn't get to an answer, there were more questions than answers. This is how our story goes, we identify goals of evaluation so we can decide what we make accessible. I can't decide what I make accessible unless they know it is essential.

People went a little... We have a lot of UDL, can we have something else? My hand is hurting. What faculty told us, they had other initiatives they knew were happening on our campus, that the OT were involved. They thought we should tie things in the UDL.

We had a group of faculty involved in a study looking at mental health of students, in particular, having students see the mental health is being affected by their interactions with faculty and how things happen in the courses, what were the expectations and how faculty react to them when they don't go and meet those particular expectations. And also looking at what faculty think their role is in the mental health of their students.

They had done a study on that. What they found, and part of, making the environment more accessible and inclusive might reduce tensions around faculty and student tensions and mental health. If we would support mental health, could you use universal strategies or accessibility to do that.

That led to interesting discussions about accessibility and making environments less anxiety provoking or more accessible, do you have to build resilience so students can face challenges in the real world. It is interesting given we have the keynote speaker talking about adversity and embracing diversity versus moving away from adversity. We had a lot of interesting discussions about grappling with our responsibility to help build resilience and students so when you have

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multiple demands, make priorities, competing things, you have time limits, thinking ahead to when they have caseloads they have to manage and many professional tasks, do we develop resilience?

Or do we take away demand and create accessibility, can you do both for one or the other? No answer but lots of interesting discussion.

SHAMINDER DHILLON:

The last couple of sessions we had focused on in-house activities. A few members from working groups have been working on how we can make our specific assignments in our courses more accessible.

That feeds into this second study that we had as well. I have some examples, the one I started to tell you about. I will give you more information about that, I did some analysis on the data. An extended time for written exams offered to everybody. We have another faculty member who had an in-class exam she flipped into, a takeover exam. She increased accessibility, collected data on that. Offer to everybody. Currently we have a faculty member who had a book report, all on disability. It has typically been a written assignment, or video. Submission.

In terms of speaking to the different goals of the assessment or assignment, that is in progress. We are looking to find out how that went. If we go back to the exam I told you about, the concept application exam I will tell you about that. It was a 2.5 hour exam, I didn't have a benchmark to how I should extend it. I thought I wouldn't have the room any more. I decided to take the longest accommodation we were typically ask for and make that the deadline, but was double-time. The exam was five hours long and I was clear with the students I have not changed the exam, the number of questions are the same, how you submit it is the same.

The idea was to bring students with accommodations into the fold as well. I asked students to record their time next their student number; we mark without knowing whose paper is whose. We collected the data and compared it to the grades they got on the exam. I also invited comments on the course evaluations which are anonymous, not just in this particular exam but specifically to comment on the course as a whole as well. Then we tracked accommodations as well. At McMaster, there is a student disability office that generates the letters of accommodation; the Assistant Dean will send it out to the faculty in each term. The student needs to show if they are activating all accommodations.

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The average time of completion on the exam was just over three hours. The time did not significantly predict grades. Those who stay the longest didn't necessarily get the highest. 16 students, I believe there were 62 in class, they valued the course time and wrote about that. There were also 15 students that the exam was too long.

One student, it was an unusual year. We only had two students with accommodations, bearing in mind this is term one. Term one is when students will engage.

In term one, we had just the two. One student activated all accommodations. It included a separate room and computer in double time. The other student, it was interesting, had a very open conversation with me and said I think if there is double-time, which was all three of them, her accommodations, I should be able to handwrite it with her peers. She chose not to.

In terms of next steps, then, my thinking is that the exam being too long as a barrier and the specific piece of that is the handwriting piece. This is the handwritten exam, it is challenging to handwrite for three hours, very challenging.

It is not just the pain and fatigue which is significant but also issues with limited space. If he wrote really small, that was challenging to me in terms of reading challenging the students who were spending times on things that were not testing what the exam was supposed to test.

And then I created anxiety about space then decreased for the exam. Computer labs in most educational Institutes started because without the need for students to learn about computer use. Now my students know how to use computers better than I do.

I'm trying to figure out how to make this work logistically.

If I can't make it work, I maybe need to consider dropping questions. Many hesitation is if you drop questions, the stakes become higher. The exam is still worth 40%.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

In terms of next steps, we want to engage students a little more and are looking to do focus groups in the fall around introducing them to the idea of UDL and getting their input on what they think about this. What they see as the pros and cons of moving in this direction and let them guide us a little bit about what could be changed and made more accessible. We have been through the grant, compiling a fairly large repository of materials that would allow faculty

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to begin to learn about and implement UDL.

We have been putting that into a core shell and our online looking system. We're looking to make that available to all faculty. My sense is unless you have a highly motivated faculty or specific thing they go for, it will be a resource not used a lot. It is useful putting the material into one place. And then it is connecting initiatives that McMaster. I had an opportunity for a timely presentation a few weeks ago where McMaster has started a new initiative called forward with flexibility.

It is that the equity and include an office that McMaster and teaching and learning session, it will meet the American... The accessibility with disabilities act. Donald Trump is clearly in my head. They will focus on accessibility on campus and not put all the emphasis on more accommodations but actually really look at training and teaching faculty and other university staff and see what they can do to change the environment and try to move from the problem is the person to the problem is the environment around the person.

I'm excited, they are releasing a suite of online resources. I think that will help our project move forward because as I understand, faculty will need to engage in as training that McMaster is going to put as part of their compliance. We think that will be helpful and gives another reason to make UDL and accessibility a priority for faculty who have many competing demands. For a lot of faculty it has been hard to put attention into this.

And I think we will stop here because we talked a lot more than I thought we would. We have got 5 minutes for questions so let's turn it over to you guys.

SPEAKER:

Thank you. I have lots of questions. Great presentation. I'm a faculty member and have a background in speech and I implement universal design the learning into curriculum. We had a campus grant to determine if our courses are UDL compliant. We have a UDL consultant at the college now. I was wondering if I could connect with you guys.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

That would be lovely. The resources are in our repository that Mohawk developed. I'd like to make a connection with that person.

SPEAKER:

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Did you have to apply to the Research Ethics Board (REB) to do your research?

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

No. We consulted our research ethics board about it and forget that in consultation with the faculty and the reason we didn't want in fact faculty had, even before approaching me to do the retreat, they had planned to try to implement this and move towards accessibility. The idea was that the program changes would be happening regardless and therefore what we were doing is program evaluation rather than a true research study by researchers implemented that wouldn't be there otherwise.

SPEAKER:

I was wondering, Shaminder, when collecting data in the classroom on extended time for tests, you're not publishing the results.

SHAMINDER DHILLON:

I don't think that is what the distinction was. When I have gone to REB and even frame them as educational interventions, I modified the exam and transparently talk to students about data collection and I should have shut the data with them. We normally go to the next term to take it up with them.

The REB said it is about enhancing the program and not true research as they see it.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

At McMaster, the designation programming research does not have anything to do with publication. In fact, you can publish something that has been done with evaluation and you simply report that separate REB was not sought because that is program evaluation, that is what you report but you can report your data. All of our student data would be collected, and on the most unreported only in terms of a group. It does not preclude you doing that.

SPEAKER:

Can I ask another question. OK. I moderate a UDL group at Mohawk and one of the questions I get asked, is your faculty provided with time specific to their duties, the UDL course?

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

This is the challenges, and the workload, as a plus, the leadership and the OT faculties and community decided this was a priority. We get a professional regularly and also get the time of

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those faculty to come to the working group and be part of that. That is probably not factored into your workload.

Some of those things are there. I try to provide resources through the grant. I have research assistants. I try to provide support, I know it is not a long-term solution. I would say no, one of the things we struggled with people is the sense of do I make all the changes. How would I do that.

SHAMINDER DHILLON:

Those of us who've done it, it is our responsibility to make it better every year and making it accessible. It is how we frame it. I can certainly appreciate there are other initiatives that happen among faculty. I'm not saying I can not wait to do this versus this one really speaks to me.

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

We have tried to convey the message that you don't have to change your entire course. But you can make one change, one thing that you will try to do differently and that is just fine.

A unique feature of the OT is all the courses are interconnected. If you change something in your course, it is not like you are teaching a course in history. I can make whatever changes I want and it doesn't affect your course. We have to be mindful that faculty are making changes, there is a trickle through all that. I think that is also sometimes a barrier, because people are hesitant to be the dominoes that sets things in motion.

SPEAKER:

We have reached the end of the time. Thank you very much for an interesting presentation.

(Applause)

WENONAH CAMPBELL:

We have our emails there so if anyone wants to reach out to us later, we will stick around for other questions.

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