What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Transcript

Imagine you went into a big clothes store and all that was on sale was 1 type of outfit, in 1 size, with no thought given to different individual body shapes or personalities. That would be crazy, right? Expecting everyone to be able to fit into the same size and express themselves in the same color and style? Yet, in many cases that's exactly what is happening in our education system. When it comes to learning, variability is the rule not the exception, and our college campuses are now grappling with the demands of an increasingly diverse cohort of learners with increasing numbers of international students, students from different cultural and socio economic backgrounds, mature students, and students with disabilities. Despite this, curriculums are still designed for the mythical average learner and all are expected to engage and learn on the same terms.

Not enough flexibility is built in at the design stage to give all students equal opportunities to learn in ways that play to their own strengths. So, how can our institutions respond to these challenges? Universal Design for Learning, or UDL for short.

UDL is an educational framework that guides the design of learning goals, materials, methods, and assessments as well as the policies surrounding these curricular elements with the diversity of learners in mind. The framework was developed by US organization CAST and is based on research in the field on neuroscience.

It promotes three core principles for educators to build into their teaching practice, calling on them to provide students with multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. The framework includes a set of guidelines on how you can turn these principles into practice for example: By fostering collaboration with the introduction of group work with clear goals, roles and responsibilities.

By using different types media to support learning and ensuring that all materials are accessible and by providing a choice of assessment instruments while maintaining robust learning outcomes, you are probably already including some UDL elements in your practice without realizing it. There is much more to explore so don't be afraid to let Universal Design for Learning give you a new lens through which to look at your teaching and learning practice and help you to better reach all of your students.
For more information and resources, visit www.ahead.ie/udl.