Ensure Learners Have a Clear Understanding of the Course

UDL CHECKPOINT 1.1: Offer ways of customizing the display of information

— Allowing learners different opportunities and mediums by which to understand expectations for a course (as well as receive directions on independent assignments, projects, and assessments) can help learners remain academically engaged and successful.

What is it?

While a written syllabus has been the traditional mode of conveying information about a course, it is necessary to understand how a syllabus alone is not always the best nor most inclusive way of educating learners about course expectations, assignments, or schedule. This is why it is essential to offer learners varied modes of attaining information about the course (from recorded audio and/or videos to the design, structure, and presentation of the Canvas shell).

Why do it?

Learners often have questions about the courses in which they are enrolled. And while it is pertinent to stress the importance of open and clear communication with the instructor (email, face-to-face question and discussion, etc.), frontloading information about the course in various modes and media (i.e. written, audio, video) allows learners the opportunity to have a clear understanding of expectations for the course and its organization while allowing them the opportunity to re-play this information (when recorded). By ensuring that learners have multiple opportunities to understand the course, instructors can limit confusion, which can lead to learner success.

How can I apply it?

Here are some ways that you can better ensure that learners have a clear understanding of the course material and expectations.

- **Be thorough when creating the syllabus.** Rather than keeping descriptions vague, give clear information about the course's purpose, instructor's expectations, and schedule/agenda for each class.
- **Offer audio and/or video options.** Along with the written syllabus, it is helpful to offer recorded audio and/or video(s), where instructors can expand on and clarify information presented in the syllabus. Offering these other modes/media in the Canvas shell can also allow learners the opportunity to watch or listen to these recordings as many times necessary.
- **Customize the syllabus and Canvas shell.** In addition to text, utilize graphics, images, hyperlinks, and other visual elements (dual coding), which can help learners have a clearer understanding of the material.

- **Be mindful of communication with learners.** Whether it is an on-ground or online course, be sure to consistently stress to learners the importance of clear communication (during a class meeting, after a class meeting, or by email). And when a learner reaches out, it is important that the instructor responds in a timely and constructive manner.

Summary

Making sure that learners of all levels have a clear understanding of a course's expectations and policies is essential for creating a positive and successful class culture. This is achieved by frontloading information in the syllabus, in Canvas, during lectures, and in other communications with learners. Additionally, it is necessary that learners feel heard and seen when they ask questions. By allowing learners to feel comfortable with their courses, they have a much better opportunity of succeeding.