



# Support Learners with Flexible Availability

## **UDL CHECKPOINT 9.2: Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies**

— Offering support, encouragement, and a safe space to discuss course objectives, strategies, and concerns can improve learner comfort and confidence to allow for better understanding and engagement in the course.

### What is it?

Office hours allow learners the opportunity to ask specific questions as well as discuss course information and individual concerns with their instructor. These one-on-one meetings can improve learner engagement, understanding, and knowledge, which can result in improved learner success. In these meetings, learner's anxieties can be alleviated, and instructors can offer emotional and academic support to ensure the well-being of the entire learner. Establishing office hour times and formats that allow equal access for all learners is essential to individual and holistic success in the course.

### Why do it?

The simple reality is that learners' schedules outside of their class time can be very limited. Whether from other courses, work schedules, family obligations, or numerous other time-demands, it is unfair for instructors to maintain a strict office hours schedule without any flexibility or variance. Doing so can create barriers for learners. However, by creating flexible office hours and formats, learners can engage with their instructor in a constructive manner and become more aware of the material as well as their successes and shortcomings with the course. Additionally, meeting with instructors can help learners feel a stronger sense of personal and emotional support, which can increase their self-esteem and confidence (both inside and outside the classroom).

### How can I apply it?

Here are some ways that you can better support learners with your availability.

- **Offer varied times and formats for office hours.** Staggering office hour times throughout the week can allow learners who may be busy at certain times each day to attend meetings and improve their academic success. Additionally, offering various formats to meet with learners during office hours (face-to-face, online/Zoom, email, telephone, etc.) can improve accessibility for learners.
- **Incorporate self-reflection for learners throughout the semester.** Self-reflection writings/recordings can allow instructors access into the concerns that learners may have with specific activities in a class as well as the course in general, and these insights can help the instructor navigate conversations with learners in office hour meetings.
- **Send periodical check-ins with learners.** Throughout the semester, send several messages to the class, checking in with them (on a general and course-specific level),

and urge learners to attend office hours and/or reach out with any questions or concerns they may have.

- **Offer non-mandatory meeting times for asynchronous courses.** In online, asynchronous courses, learners often feel disconnected from their instructor, so offering weekly, or bi-monthly open Zoom sessions can help invite learners to join in and discuss the course, including questions and concerns they may have.

## Summary

Being a quality and impactful instructor requires a time commitment outside of normal class meetings; office hours offer learners the chance to have individualized times with their instructor, which can help learners grow as academics. However, it is important to be flexible with the availability of these meeting times and formats to allow all learners the opportunity to improve themselves and succeed.