Point Counter Point: Principles of UDL and Quality Matters in Designing Online Courses

David Wizer
Dept. of EdTL, Towson University.
Towson, MD, USA
wizer@towson.edu

David Robinson
Dept. of EdTL, Towson University
Towson, MD, USA
drobinson@towson.edu

Abstract

In this interactive presentation, participants will learn how the guiding principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Quality Matters (QM) can be used together to enhance online: virtual and blended learning. During this lively UDL talk the presenters will exchange complimentary ideas to enhance online learning as each presents the leading elements from a set of practical UDL and QM principles. This session will present useful online learning strategies for implementation in a point/counter-point style. The goal is to demonstrate how UDL and QM principles relate well in designing online courses. Participants will learn UDL and QM principles so they can apply these ideas to their online courses, in areas such as course (1) background/context, (2) design, (3) content, (4) feedback and (5) student interaction. Participants will learn multiple strategies in each of these areas. Checklist and online resource lists will be provided as well as digital resource examples.

Keywords

UDL; Quality Matters; Online Course Design

INTRODUCTION

The guiding principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Quality Matters (QM) can be used together to enhance online: virtual and blended learning. This session will present useful online learning strategies for implementation in a point/counter-point style. QM principles include research-based standards used to evaluate the design of online courses (Quality Matters, 2015). UDL includes a set of principles for curriculum development that provide all students equal opportunities to learn (CAST 2011). Online course design can be enhanced through the combination of QM and UDL principles.

BACKGROUND

As our home institution, Towson University, began the migration to offering more blended courses and fully online courses, we were asked to participate in the development of institutional online learning guidelines. Our research and experience led us to integrating two frameworks in the development of institutional online learning guidelines.

Quality Matters (QM) and tenants of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provided premier sources of materials to support the writing of this document (CAST, 2011b). Quality Matters (QM) provide a standards-based, collaborative peer review process to assure the quality of online courses (Varonis, 2014). UDL is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone--not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs (CAST, 2012).

The intent of this practical summary is to provide guidance about elements that are recommended to faculty as they plan for highly effective, goal oriented and interactive online instruction and student learning. An understanding of context and impact of UDL and QM on the design and delivery of instruction provides the framework for this research summary and presentation.

UDL AND QM IMPLEMENTATION

Within the realm of course content, context and background information will be described as a means to provide students with a solid, detailed grounding in the field of study as well as a sense of prior background knowledge that is required in the course. Examples that will be featured include learning objectives, background, and contextual information presented in a wide array of formats with sample project outcomes, and key concepts.

In course design and content, UDL and QM principles guide faculty to present instructional material using a wide array of media (including written, audio, video, and graphics, to name a few) while allowing students to represent their own learning and knowledge from the course experience in diverse ways. These instructional materials and media should be current, engaging, useful, varied, and clearly presented.

Course design suggestions will be presented that minimize distractions and facilitate readability. Course features that accommodate learners (by providing embedded links related to key concepts) and optimize expression via the use of assistive tools (word prediction) and technologies (such as animation and graphic organizers) will be included. Course

design, navigation and implementation are ways to highlight accessibility for all learners. Audio and video tours of core elements of the online course and key assignments are suggested.

An online faculty plan for prompt and useful feedback to assignments will be noted. Active learning can occur within the course by optimizing relevance, value and authenticity of the learning activities, fostering collaboration and communication and increasing mastery-oriented feedback. Examples to be presented include faculty use of audio-based feedback and presenting the prior work of students that include annotated case studies from the field.

In the area of learner interaction, this presentation will include examples of group work that foster collaboration online through group creation of video and structured online discussions. Online book talks, web resource demonstrations and research sharing will be featured.

The goal is that participants will learn UDL and QM principles so they can apply these ideas to their online courses in the areas of course background, design, content, feedback and student interaction.

APPLICATION OF UDL AND QM IN ONLINE COURSE DESIGN

An opportunity to utilize the QM rubric and principles of UDL in the design and implementation of a fully online course was presented via a grant from the Towson University Office of Academic Innovation. The grant provided for a faculty member in partnership with an instructional designer serving as a peer reviewer, to convert a face-to-face course to a fully online course using the QM guidelines as a foundation. Additionally, the faculty member, having a keen interest in UDL, applied UDL principles to the course design.

The development of the course was reviewed in two formative phases by the instructional designer. At each juncture, the instructional designer utilized the QM rubric as a formative evaluative tool. In addition, the instructional designer examined the course redesign from the perspective of a potential student. The instructional designer provided feedback to the faculty member, who made formative revisions based on that feedback. Summative feedback was provided once the course was fully designed and all elements were posted in Blackboard. This summative feedback can be characterized as positive, as this course was well aligned with the QM rubric.

The success of the course implementation was evident in the students' evaluation of the course content and the instructor. In the first implementation of the course, the student evaluations rated the course with mean score of 5.00 on a 5.00 point (n=18) on a 1.00-5.00 Likert scale evaluation. The mean ratings for the second implementation of the course were 4.86/5.00 (n=17).

Some useful examples of course design elements follow. The implementation of the course involved a video guided tour and tutorial of the learning management system. A course introduction video was recorded via screen capture software. This video provided visual and audio accompaniment of the course syllabus, sequence, module design, a review of course expectations and assignment criteria.

Each learning module contained printed directions, audio and video directions, and where applicable, video-based tutorials to provide multiple means of representation. Students were provided with a choice of assessments to complete based on their backgrounds and needs. These are a few of the course design elements that we helpful to the success of this online course.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the grant provided to us by the Towson University, Office of Academic Innovation. Their support has led to useful dissemination of quality ideas.

REFERENCES

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) (2011). *Universal design for learning guidelines version 2.0*. Wakefield, MA: Author. Retrieved from http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation

Center for Applied Special Technology. (2012). *What is universal design for learning*. Retrieved from http://cast.org/udl/index.html

King-Sears, P. (2014). Introduction to learning disability quarterly special series on universal design for learning: Part one of two. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *37*(2), 68-70. doi:10.1177/0731948714528337

Quality Matters Program. (2015). Higher Ed program – Rubric, standard 3.3. Retrieved from https://www.qualitymatters.org/rubric

Varonis, E. M. (2014). Most courses are not born digital: An overview of the Quality Matters peer review process for online course design. *Campus -- Wide Information Systems*, *1*(4), 217-229. doi:10.1108/CWIS-09-2013-0053