

ACCESSIBILITY AND INSTRUCTION WORKING GROUP - Report to VP Erin Sanders-O'Leary
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The Charge

The **Accessibility and Instruction working group** is charged by the UCLA Provost's office and Student Affairs, to consider ways to expand and improve learning and teaching modalities to increase accessibility for students. Students have a right to an accessible education and our mandate as a public institution is to serve and educate all of our students, equitably, so it is imperative to find solutions to increase access to all students. The workgroup is composed of faculty, academic and administrative staff, student affairs leadership and instructors who have specific knowledge and experience related to accessibility instruction. The workgroup has considered current and defining teaching modalities, mapping campus initiatives and aims to identify the benefits and challenges of options that improve accessibility and instruction for all students.

Scope

To achieve this goal we should strive for accessibility and flexibility without altering the fundamental nature of teaching and pedagogy; by using evidence based assessment and practice, data and analytics to recommend the best practices in teaching and learning. The scope of this working group is to examine accessibility and instruction at UCLA, including but not limited to questions about teaching modality. We are considering accessibility in general, rather than specifically focused on accommodations needed based on ability status. A critical lever for change to promote and increase accessibility in teaching is to universally provide training for instructors in a variety of modalities and teaching approaches, which will give teachers options. We are not suggesting that all class types (with respect to size and discipline) and all instructors must provide all varieties of teaching modalities, or completely redesign their courses to be universally accessible; but there are some concrete, actionable steps that can be taken to increase inclusivity, flexibility and accessibility in teaching. Implementing a new teaching strategy and approach does take some training and effort, but in the long run when students are given some flexibility and are more easily able to access and learn the material, these strategies will be time saving measures that center student learning. Making teaching universally inclusive and accessible is aligned with UCLA's commitment to inclusive excellence in teaching and will improve outcomes for all students.

Aim

The aim of this workgroup is to recommend teaching and learning modalities that improve accessibility for all students, rather than focus on formal accommodations for ADA compliance purposes.

Summary Recommendations

- We recommend that [the TLC, CAE, DCP] should develop and be resourced to lead implementation of a multi year strategic plan to continuously improve the accessibility of UCLA teaching and learning, following the broader definition given here.
- To inform that planning process and take some near-term actions, we have a more detailed set of recommendations, many of which have pilot opportunities or involve alignment/awareness of existing initiatives that can be adopted in AY23-24.
- This group is invested in this process and would like to continue to meet, work with Vice Provost Sanders-O'Leary, and implement recommendations. We are also open to additional members as the need arises.

Definitions

Accessibility

- The ability for each student to achieve the learning objectives, given each student's individual set of circumstances. Accessibility empowers the individual by removing barriers to learning.
- We differentiate between the instructor's legal requirement to provide individual students with approved accommodations through the Center for Accessible Education (CAE), from maximizing equal access to all students by using specific pedagogical strategies, backed by education research.
- Accessible Education is the process of designing courses and developing a teaching style to meet the needs of people from a variety of backgrounds, disability, abilities and learning preferences.
- It is essential to ensure that UCLA students with disabilities can access instructional content, UCLA services, and learning tools without any barriers, making their lives easier and more equitable. The purpose of accessibility is to remove these barriers and provide equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of disabilities.

Accommodations

- Accommodations are adaptations made for specific individuals when a product or service is not accessible.
- Within higher education, accommodations can often take the form of modifications to policies, practices, and procedures, provisions of auxiliary aids and services to individuals with disabilities, and academic adjustments and modifications to the environment intended to remove barriers to equivalent access.
- Accommodations are intended to be reasonable and appropriate for the context of the individual's need and the service or program's intended purpose. Above all, an academic accommodation is generally not considered reasonable and appropriate when it fundamentally alters the essential requirements of a course or academic program. Please refer to UCLA's guidelines on [determining essential requirements for accommodations](#).

Evidence-Based Teaching and Universal Design

- Courses designed using evidence-based teaching, which are pedagogical practices, course and curriculum design based on the core principles of learning derived from cognitive and behavioral psychology and social science research; and [universal design for learning](#) (UDL), which designs for flexibility and accessibility by incorporating multiple modes of: (1) student engagement, (2) representation of content/curriculum, and (3) action/expression of acquired knowledge/skills, into the instruction and learning environment may decrease the need for accommodations, when implemented effectively.
- The core principles of learning and pedagogical best practices apply to the spectrum of modalities from synchronous, in person classes to asynchronous, online learning. *By designing and developing instructional material that are inherently universally accessible without additional accommodations, the learning experience for all students is improved.*

Why now is the time for transformational change in how UCLA approaches teaching

- Instructors have faced many of the same stressors as students in the transition to "post" pandemic teaching and also have the unique challenge of coping with this new "normal", while being dedicated to meeting the diverse learning needs of all students. We are at an inflection point, where we need to interrogate our systems of teaching and learning and provide (students and) instructors with guidance on how to best learn and teach in this ever-changing environment.
- Many students experience inequities in access to education because they are combating multiple stressors (e.g. mental health issues, having to work and go to school, taking care of relatives, etc.), some are exacerbated by the return to fully in-person learning. In a 2020 Educause report, nearly half of students with disabilities do not register with their institution's disability services office for support.¹ This suggests that any given instructor, and particularly those who have large enrollment courses, most likely have students with disabilities who are not officially registered. With more and more students also experiencing undiagnosed and untreated mental disorders or illness, making the classroom a welcoming and accessible space, where students feel comfortable reaching out

¹ <https://www.educause.edu/ecar/research-publications/student-technology-report-supporting-the-whole-student/2020/accessibility-and-accommodations>

to their instructors, and where the teaching approach allows for some flexibility, will help increase equity in teaching so that all students benefit and can achieve the learning outcomes.

- The emergency pivot to remote instruction provided a remarkable breadth of experience to the entire campus in online teaching and learning, *and* demonstrated increased access through remote teaching. Research studies on the effectiveness of learning remotely is not yet conclusive. Student's perceptions are that they are learning as well online as in the classroom, although education research provides evidence that perceptions of learning are not aligned with actual learning (Deslauriers et al. 2019, R. A. Bjork 1994, Carpenter et al. 2020, Carpenter et al. 2022).
- Remote teaching allowed students and instructors to experience a more diverse set of instructional modalities and pedagogical strategies, and the potential flexibility they offer. However, there are significant challenges both technologically and pedagogically, in creating effective online synchronous streams and/or asynchronous recordings with respect to the diversity of class types (and classrooms) that UCLA currently has.

Recommendations of key considerations for how UCLA could maximize equitable access to education for all students

1. **Increase opportunities for instructors to engage with enhanced training on UDL and accessibility:** Instructional design should use [evidence-based pedagogical strategies for equitable and inclusive teaching](#), which includes the principles of [universal design for learning \(UDL\)](#) that incorporates multiple modes of engagement, representation, and action/expression, as well as [digital accessibility](#) with alignment to WCAG. This is only possible when instructors, including TAs, are trained and have opportunities to practice and receive coaching/feedback in professional learning communities. The new TLC, the [Cross Campus Teaching Innovations Group](#) in addition to the other teaching centers, should play an active role in providing educational development and training. Enhanced training, delivered in multiple formats to meet instructor needs, would provide instructors with onboarding, training and access to educational technology and tools, which, *when used effectively*, improve equitable access and increase engagement both in person and online teaching.
2. **Incentivize instructor engagement with training:** Training needs must be incentivized and incorporated into faculty promotion and tenure process and non-senate faculty advancement and evaluation. Without these incentives, and an explicit explanation of how participation will be rewarded, many instructors will not likely participate in training, workshops and professional development. Asynchronous training modules should be developed and iterated on over time (as technology advances) to support instructors that are not able to attend in-person trainings due to time constraints. Certificate programs for instructors on teaching, such as the [CITI program](#) or summer course design institutes, should incorporate the topic of accessibility and accommodations. Instructors should be provided a pathway and professional development on how to assess the effectiveness of their teaching with the help of educational developers. There is currently no official mechanism for this to happen although some faculty will individually request a consultation from OTL or CEILS or the Center for Educational Assessment, or academic units will assess their courses.
3. **Enhance accessibility of current courses:** Instructors can get started quickly by improving accessibility in small but effective ways. Regardless of the instructional modalities (see senate guidelines for definitions) chosen to increase accessibility, pedagogical strategies and technological requirements instructors should employ the following:
 - a. An [accessibility statement](#) should be included in the syllabus. This may be incorporated within or in addition to instructor statements on inclusivity in the classroom.
 - b. Course materials (readings, pdfs, slides) should adhere to the guidelines for accessibility so that technology such as screen readers can smoothly navigate through them. Trainings [and resources](#) on how to do so are available through [UCLA's Disabilities and Computing Program](#).
 - c. Live captions should be enabled and captions/transcriptions provided for videos embedded within courses. These services and automated technologies are provided at no cost and available through BruinLearn, Zoom, Google Slides, and other commonly used technologies.
4. **Exploration of and investment in multiple classroom modalities:** The campus should seek/develop specific guidelines for multimodality support as well as for a variety of classroom types. An example for a framework for developing learning spaces and analysis is [The Learning Space Rating System \(LSRS\)](#), which provides a set of

measurable criteria to assess how well the design of classrooms supports and enables multiple modalities of learning and teaching, especially that of active learning. Deeper alignment with Information Technology is needed to address the redesign of classroom spaces to remodel/redesign/upgrade wifi.

5. **Streamlined campus guidance and resources:** The new Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) should consolidate already existing documents that provide guidance on easy, quick, simple strategies that will increase accessibility in the classroom, which can be housed centrally in the TLC.
6. **Support and recognition for more resource-intensive course needs:** Department and campus leadership must acknowledge that the impact on time/effort to design, facilitate, and make accessible will vary according to course size (large lecture vs small discussion courses) vs. laboratory, studio, and project-centric courses. Resource allocation should be discussed upfront with explicit commitment to making new courses aligned with standards for accessibility.
7. **Collaboration with UCLA's new disability studies major:** UCLA leadership should work to elevate and spotlight the faculty research, course curriculum, and student experiences of the [newly established disability studies major](#). These efforts can support cultural change on campus and position UCLA as a leader in this space.

With appreciation that this is an important and timely issue we understand that the TLC will need time to get ramped up before implementing a plan. The following are suggestions for more immediate actions, initial data gathering and pilot activities that could be started that will inform the longer-term plan. We recommend and would like to provide feedback on a multi-year strategic plan **with the goal of maximizing equitable access to education for all students** that includes an ongoing investment to ensure the sustainability of a transformation in our approach to teaching in four areas:

- 1) Mapping of campus infrastructural and programmatic/course assessment of universal design

Pilot opportunity: *Identify and document a small set of exemplars across campus.*

- 2) Faculty training development and support around universal course design and evidence-based teaching

Pilot opportunities: 1) *Develop an online asynchronous module in BruinLearn for instructors that provides an onboarding to accessibility and accommodations and directs them to associated campus resources, with a feedback survey piloted by Department Chairs* 2) *Consolidate and disseminate existing resources on campus to include in BruinLearn training sites for faculty* 3) *Incorporate a live training component into the next offering of a Summer institute for teaching (modeled after the Disabilities and Computing Program in-person trainings).*

- 3) Improvement of physical spaces (physical space, networking, staff, furniture, services) and technology to sustainably support more flexible/equitable access to UCLA education, while also meeting the letter and spirit of ADA requirements; by supporting a variety of teaching methodologies that will achieve accessibility in instruction.

Pilot opportunity: *Fund a small number of evidence-based modifications in high-impact (or less-studied) areas and assess the impacts.*

- 4) Faculty incentives for Professional development as it relates to merit advancement, tenure and promotion process

Pilot opportunity (already being piloted by multiple departments across campus): *Course review and faculty feedback on teaching should be universally implemented by using UCLA's [Holistic Evaluation of Teaching Protocol](#), which provides multiple dimensions for evaluation, formative as well as summative, and provides opportunities for improvement to become more equitable and inclusive practitioners*

Alignment of efforts and resources on campus that support instructors in creating accessible education (this is not an exhaustive list and we will continue the process of compiling resources and efforts).

- [Disabilities and Computing Program](#) (DCP) provides faculty handbooks and guidance on how to make your course and documents digitally accessible to all students.

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- [Online Teaching and Learning](#) (OTL) provides expertise on instructional design to develop and implement evidence based online instruction and course design. They offer individual consultations, workshops and media production to support instructors in using technology to advance excellence in teaching and learning.
- The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) provides workshops, resources, consultation, and technical support to faculty and TAs to promote more inclusive and equitable teaching and learning practices.
- The [Center for Accessible Education](#) (CAE) provides a [Faculty Handbook](#) that outlines what faculty should know to ensure access for Bruins with disabilities.
- The [Center for Education Innovation and Learning in the Sciences](#) (CEILS) provides workshops, training, support, consultations and tailored departmental interventions to transform the STEM classroom using evidence-based teaching to create an equitable and inclusive learning environment.
- [The Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning \(CIRTL\)](#) an International network that advances teaching training, professional and leadership development for graduate students and postdocs. UCLA's membership in CIRTL is administered by CEILS and provides the [CIRTL@UCLA](#) program.
- [Bruin Learn Center of Excellence](#) (COE)- UCLA's learning management system provides integrated tools and infrastructure to support accessible instruction for synchronous and asynchronous learning, as well as training for instructors and students.

Next steps for the Accessibility in Instruction Working Group:

The Accessibility and Instruction Working Group will continue to meet for the Winter and Spring Quarters 2024, and will be Chaired by CEILS Senior Associate Director Jess Gregg. The priorities for the next 6 months will include:

- Continued iteration on these recommendations in partnership with Vice Provost Erin Sanders O'Leary and work with campus units and particularly CAE to provide instructor resources meeting the standard of guidance needed.
- In collaboration with CAE, refining an exemplary syllabus statement that instructors could include in their course syllabi.
- Review of existing public-facing UCLA materials on accessibility and accommodations and collaborative efforts to identify areas for improvement and/or consolidation of these multiple resources.
- For each proposed pilot opportunity, the working group will identify a campus unit or individuals interested in taking the lead on implementing/completing these pilot activities and reporting back to the working group. This will enable updates on these recommendations over time.
- Once the recommendations above are finalized, members of this working group will prepare a short slide presentation to share during upcoming faculty meetings in departments to help disseminate this important guidance, provide clarity on resources (current and forthcoming), and solicit feedback from instructors on any challenges for implementation.