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The silver lining in the rapid movement to online learning: Considerations of access for all learners

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the experience of one Disability Services professional, instructor and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) expert as the world transitioned from a face-to-face collegiate classroom to online learning. Starting with the rumors of a potential shift to online learning and detailing what considerations, changes and plans went into place as the reality of COVID 19 set in, the author works to find a silver lining in the upending of higher education. An expert in UDL, the author offers a positive way of approaching the transition to online learning through the UDL Plus One approach. This paper will offer a relatable journey and concrete strategies that educators may apply to the challenges of teaching online at a moment's notice.

Do you remember what you were working on the week of March 9th? Do you remember the excitement of a new week of teaching? Or a project coming to fruition? Or a committee meeting you looked forward to attending? Or maybe you were on spring break, taking a moment to take a breath before returning to campus for that last sprint to the finish. And then the rumors started... sure there were conversations of the impact of COVID -19 but for me those conversations were mostly limited to how do we get our study abroad students home and how do we fill in their curriculum. That was the worry until March 9th.

On March 9th my phone blew up with texts from colleagues; Amherst College closed and is going to turn their face-to-face classes into remote online classes for the rest of the semester. Can they do that? How do they do that? Let's wait and watch. The next day – Harvard University went. Wait what? Harvard is going online? Two schools in our area going online in two days? Now I am paying attention.

The week of March 9th (Week 0)

While the week of March 9th did not start out as rosy as I may have indicated, looking back on it, those meetings, those curriculum plans, those projects – which at the time may have seemed daunting, now seem like a piece of cake. By the morning of March 10th, I was in my office making a list of my students who had a chronic health disability. I was calling our medical providers asking what medications might weaken an immune system, then cross checking that with the 900 students I have on my case load to see who might be more vulnerable. I had a plan to reach out to those students and check in – are they okay, to ask

them what they and their physicians might advise with the rest of their semester. Should we start planning for remote access for each of them individually? Should I reach out to their faculty and ask the question, “If Susan went home and needed to remote into your class due to her disability, would that *fundamentally alter* the nature of your course?” Fundamentally alter. This is the phrase that many of us in higher education and disability services spend our days trying to determine and trying to untangle what this means in individual courses. Based on what we’d seen on the news and watching what other colleges were doing, now was the time to begin those conversations.

By 8pm on March 10th, Tufts University announced that it too would follow in the footsteps of Harvard University and Amherst College and the other institutions of higher education starting to make the same decision. We would finish our semester remotely and both our students and our faculty had about two weeks to pack up, move to their homes, to their make shift offices in attics, kitchens, garages and basements, and to turn a 7 week face-to-face already mapped out semester into a 7 week online, engaging learning experience for our students. And to do this, they needed to learn how to use the remote teaching technology, now, like right now.

Our team at Tufts responded with unbelievable effort. Students were assisted on the ground by the Dean of Students, Advising Deans, Residence Life, Diversity Offices and others as they packed up, found places to go, had flights purchased on their behalf, made sure that they had technology or WiFi access that they would need and left campus. Our education and information technology teams mobilized to teach faculty how to log into Canvas, what Zoom was, how to use WebEx and in some cases how to answer emails. I and my Student Accessibility Services team wrote an *Accessibility in Online Classes; A Guide for Faculty*, to make access an easily digestible habit change and to ensure that our students with disabilities had equal access to online courses. Our Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) began offering classes around pedagogy and online learning.

Individually, offices began looking at how they could support students remotely. My offices, Student Accessibility Services and the Academic Resource Center, moved all appointments online, figured out how to tutor and run study groups, writing retreats, time management meetings remotely, how to help faculty implement accommodations in an online environment and how to respond to students in crisis without physically sitting across from them. We did this quickly, with precision, and with consistent messaging that while our office is physically closed, we are here and able to help. And on top of that, we all had to adjust to moving home and working remotely too.

The week of March 16th (Week 1)

On Monday we closed our office doors at Tufts for the foreseeable future. A few of us went in, finalized our technology, packed physical boxes with files and books (because yes some of us still use those methods) and headed to our new “offices” at home. By Tuesday we were happily jabbering and zooming away through routine meetings, trying to solve unforeseen problems, sharing pictures of our new workspaces to bring some normalcy to

things and adding enthusiastically to a shared “Surviving COVID” document with all of our favorite Netflix shows, online workouts and recipes. It felt okay. It felt like we had this.

Faculty meanwhile were hurriedly scrambling to move everything online. The students were on break and the faculty, who may have had plans of their own had to scrap them to ensure that their WiFi was strong enough, their laptops had all the latest software and then only after days of downloading software and uploading documents, did they have to figure out how to actually put a class online. And they had to do so in a way that was engaging, inspired learning and was dynamic. Maybe it was posting PPT slides, and links to articles or websites with videos demonstrating how to create a theatrical production of Hamilton. Or it was recording all of their PowerPoints as if they were lecturing in class and then uploading a 90-minute lecture for students to listen to on their own. Or maybe designing new types of assessments after getting frustrated at the inability to proctor an exam to their liking online. Or maybe rethinking the grading structure of the whole class. If we weight the first exam more and scrap the final exam could that work? And participation – how to measure that? How many faces I see in Zoom? Discussion boards in organic chemistry? Mini quizzes to test if students are reading? The ideas were endless, some good, some bad. The support was there, but you needed to find it, and more realistically you needed to find time to find it.

The week of March 23rd (Week 2)

I worried. As I settled into my new normal, a spare bedroom with a card table for a desk, frequent interruptions in the middle of work calls by my young children and my own issues with technology – how do I turn this video on? I worried about the quality of education we are offering our students.

The content is there. Tufts faculty are incredible. They offer classes that students look forward to and carry with them into graduate school and their careers. But that is a dynamic face-to-face experience, where questions can be answered in the moment, where body language can be read (huh – why all the blank faces) and where peer-to-peer learning can happen while walking across the quad or over lunch in a dining hall. In the absence of the physical campus – can collegiate learning be the same?

I also worried about our students. To be fair, my first instinct is always students with disabilities. Are those whom I was originally worried about safe? For those who receive accommodations, will their professors accommodate them? How do we scribe for an exam remotely? Do all face-to-face accommodations truly transfer to the online world? The answer to that one is no. But is now, mid-semester, mid-pandemic, the time to be worrying about those nitty gritty details or do we proceed as “normal” as we can to the end of the semester?

As the week progressed new worries were brought to light, Remote Worries if you will. Some of our students with mental health diagnoses reached out for help. Being socially isolated was negatively impacting their ability to manage their anxiety. Yes, they had telehealth and their medication, but they were alone and unmotivated and struggling. Some

asked us to intervene on behalf of their professors, reminding them that accommodations still needed to be provided. Some struggled to get their technology up and running, while others – fewer, reveled in the privacy and peacefulness of not having to get dressed and walk across campus to class.

What was interesting for me was the amount of non-disability related challenges that students were calling and seeking help for.

- “I live with my 4 siblings and my parents in a New York City 2-bedroom apartment. I cannot find space to think, never mind do course work.”
- “My parents are both health care professionals and I need to watch my kid brother. It’s so hard to take a live class when he is screaming in the background.”
- “I live in China, the time zone difference is hard. I have to get up at 3:00am to watch my history class. My professor insists we have our camera on, but I am afraid I’ll fall asleep.”
- “I have to share my computer with my sister. She is also a college student and two of our classes meet at the same time.”
- “My computer is old. I don’t have the latest version of Microsoft that my professor wants me to work on.”
- “I have no WiFi in my apartment. The libraries are closed. Campus is closed, I am not sure how to connect and turn things in.”
- “In my country Zoom is banned. I asked a friend to send me notes and I tried to reach out to my professor but I haven’t heard back.”
- “I did an internship at a hospital last summer. They called and asked if I’d come back and volunteer right now. I want to help but that means I am too exhausted to focus on my course work.”
- “I am in quarantine right now. That is a lot. I just don’t think I can focus on college classes right now.”
- “My migraines are killing me. So much screen time hurts my head.”
- “I need more time to complete my work, I just can’t get motivated at home.”
- “My professor seems to be adding more work and more time in our lecture classes. It’s like he is worried he can’t get to everything remotely.”

- “I am an international student, the recordings are brutal. It takes a lot of rewinding to try and understand what the professors are saying.”

These are just a handful of some of the calls and emails that we have received from students looking for guidance on how to successfully navigate a collegiate experience. One that they did not sign up for but one that they were participating in because they had to. Some of these issues may be related to a disability, but most of them are related to situational disabilities that arose as a result of this quick transition.

The week of March 30th (Week 3)

Late last week the Chronicle of Higher Education published a piece by Aisha Ahma, “Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure.” Ahma shared her three stages of adjustment to our new normal: 1. Security, 2. The Mental Shift, and 3. Embrace a New Normal. Ahmad’s message is it takes time to adjust. Our initial plans for how we would handle teaching online and taking online courses will most likely be shifted within days or even weeks of the change. Personally, this rang true for me. During the first weeks at home I oscillated between trying to support my team, planning reactively and feeling overwhelmed by the work. My solution – check the news, text a friend to make sure that they are okay, go and get yet another snack. Nothing terribly productive but representative of the reality of our new world.

But somewhere in the second week of remote work, I started wondering at the potentially positive impact this could have on our faculty, students and higher education as a whole. If we all have to be in this space for the protection of mankind, then why not also use it as a launching point to rethink the way we “do” higher education. For so long higher education has been about brick and mortar. You go to a campus, you stroll across a quad, you sit in a lecture hall and listen to an acclaimed professor detail the historical impacts of the Cold War. Until this pandemic, only 33% of college students either took a course online or were going to college exclusively online (NCES, 2017). The majority of our students enrolled in the more traditional college experience.

Despite the massive hardship that this pandemic has brought in so many areas of our life, what if we could find a silver lining. What if we could tie the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) movement to the reality of online learning?

The Turning Point: Using UDL to Find the Silver Lining. Four Areas of Consideration.

The week of April 6th (Week 4)

As an educator, and someone who practices, writes, speaks and teaches about UDL, I cannot help but think that there is an abundance of UDL strategies out there, destined to be a life raft in this moment. UDL asks that educators consider the needs of the broadest group of users from the beginning (CAST, 2020). It asks us to design for the unexpected, to remember that no two learners learn alike or in this case are learning in the same

environment and have the same set of tools. By incorporating flexibility into our courses, we can create an educational environment that offers dynamic experiences for our learners no matter who they are or where they are or what they have available to them.

Over the years, after giving many talks on this topic across the nation, one common challenge has emerged; ironically UDL just makes sense. The “ah ha” moments come easily when you speak about it or ask people to consider how they may have accidentally done UDL work in the past. But because it makes sense and it is fairly easy to implement, many faculty jump in with two feet and work to redesign their entire courses. They get excited, they get motivated and their big picture efforts quickly become consumed by life. Redesigning an entire course while teaching 3 others won’t work. Redesigning an entire course while serving on many committees or navigating your kids at home or worrying about your parents or supporting your friends and neighbors won’t work. The initial effort and enthusiasm die out as life takes over. UDL soon becomes another good idea collecting dust on a desk. In order to do UDL and make a long-term impact, I recommend starting with just one more strategy.

Tom Tobin and I affectionally refer to this as the Plus One strategy in our book, *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone; Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education*. Our theory is that if you just add one more strategy to a course, to a topic you intend to teach, to an assignment you have given or to the list of course materials you have devised, than you are creating greater opportunity for students to engage with the course. Adding just one more strategy should be fairly easy, low time consumption and highly rewarding.

One question I frequently encountering when I am speaking about the Plus One strategy, is “Where do I start?” Do I add Plus One strategy to each aspect of the course, to each assignment, each lecture? No, because that enthusiasm is what slows down progress. Rather it is important to start slow, with just one strategy at a time.

Begin by identifying your pinch point. A pinch point is a time, a lesson plan, a text, an assignment, that has not been successful in the past or that you cannot seem to clearly work through in designing a new class (Tobin and Behling, 2018). What is an aspect of the class that hasn’t gone well, or causes you to make the same face you might make when your pitched really hard in the arm? When you last taught the class, what assignment tripped up your students? When you lectured, was their one lecture that drew blank faces you’re your class? Have you found a really cool text you’d like to incorporate into your next class, but your not sure how it will resonate with your students? These are examples of pinch points; points in your previous class or the thought process in a class your designing, that did not go as you designed them to go or cause concern. I would also argue that the sudden change in how we must teach our classes is a pinch point, an overwhelming one at that, the Plus One approach is designed to incorporate UDL easily.

Below I offer a few examples of UDL strategies in the key areas of course design with the Plus One approach. My hope is to provide you with that “ah ha” moment for your own

class, or to help you advise others struggling with remote instruction. These examples are in response to the feedback we are hearing from our students. If there is a pattern in your own feedback, use that as the pinch point for change.

1. Remote Course Design on the Fly

When I think of course design, I think of the hours upon hours that we spend thinking through the topic, our goals and objectives, choosing course materials to help students engage with the material and then designing in-class activities to help students reach those goals. UDL on the Fly requires us to adjust our design in the moment.

Face-to-Face Strategy	+1 Remote Strategy	Benefits
Read the course text, discuss it in class.	Post an audio version of the text.	Students can listen to the text while caring for family members, driving parents to work, or when they need a break from screen time.
Watch the presidential debates, fact check them.	Read the transcripts from the debates, look for patterns of thought/ speech.	Students may either watch the debates or read them. Reading them may be easier for ESL students. It allows more time for comprehension.
In-person office hours.	Phone or Zoom office hours.	Chatting on the phone or Zoom office hours are both great resources. Zoom allows for screen sharing to work on specific class problems.

In addition to the specific face-to-face and corresponding Plus One strategies noted above, there are some commonalities when designing an online course that can benefit from a Plus One Strategy. Whether you are teaching an asynchronous or synchronous course you are still responsible for guiding your students through the course curriculum. The need to be there, answering questions, pointing students in the right direction is infinitely harder if you cannot stand before them to set the pace, the expectations and be responsive in the moment.

Hollingshed and Carr-Chellman, 2019, remind us of the importance of posting a weekly map for our students. They argue that weekly communication “builds a stronger sense of community and strengthens the connection between the instructor and learners,” (Hollingshed & Carr-Chellman, 2019). In a time when the success of remote learning is being questioned by students, prospective students and faculty building this connection is critical.

Within the strategy of posting a “weekly map” there are a lot of Plus One strategies you could use. Whether it is an actual graphical map, essential questions to be considered and answered or even an outline of the course for the week, adding one of these ideas to the course each week will increase the understanding of your students.

Another common aspect of online learning is the discussion board. Many online courses rely on the discussion board to serve as a simulation for classroom conversations (Lieberman, 2017). The challenge though is to create a discussion board that thoughtfully emulates what a lively classroom experience might be. Rao and Tanners found in their research of online learning that traditional discussion boards, in which an instructor posts a question and students file their responses like robots, the experiences that students walk away with are far less than those of a live classroom conversation. Therefore, Plus One strategies for discussion boards are warranted.

As we know many students learn best from teaching others (Jarrett, 2018). Some Plus One strategies may include asking one or two students to post a discussion question and to lead the board each week. Another might be to ask students to back up their thoughts with videos, audio files or images of work that they are doing, or others have done. There may be some students in your class who can vocalize their thoughts better, by allowing students to either type or dictate an audio response, you are incorporating the Plus One approach easily.

Once you have designed your course, with Plus One strategies you can turn to figuring out how to engage a class full of students who may never physically meet.

2. Delivering an Engaging Course Remotely

When you designed your face-to-face courses you allowed for nuances. Those moments when you look at your students and see blank stares back and are pinch points that you need to circle back to or try to explain in a different way. You may have planned to lecture only, or to lecture a bit and then allow for discussion. You may have planned to write on the board or demonstrate things as opposed to rely on PowerPoints. How we planned to engage our students in a face-to-face environment may not always work in a remote setting. Below are a few strategies to consider with the transition.

Face-to-Face Strategy	+1 Remote Strategy	Benefits
Lecture with PowerPoints.	Audio record the PowerPoints or add in graphics and visual explanations. Post them in 10 minute chunks. Create a corresponding discussion board for each PPT.	Students can choose to either watch the entire PPT in one setting or chunk it up depending on what works for them, their timeframe and their attention span. Using targeted discussion prompts also helps to engage students throughout the lesson as opposed to just at the end.

<p>Hold a seminar-style course.</p>	<p>Post the frame of the conversation before the live sessions. Ask students to come with one point and one question.</p>	<p>Giving students the chance to prepare their work ahead of time negates the anxiety of being called upon in the moment, or even the ability to answer in the moment. It also allows students to write their responses and submit them ahead of time, if they cannot join a live conversation.</p>
<p>State the class attendance policy and impacts of missing class.</p>	<p>Increase the attendance policy in remote sessions. Record the live sessions and post afterwards.</p>	<p>By allowing students to choose whether or not to attend in real time or afterwards, you are giving flexibility to those who share a computer with other family members, have slow WiFi or are unable to join a live session for another reason.</p>

Engaging students in an online class requires you to be creative. As I noted, the feedback that I am hearing from students right now is around distractibility whether within the environment that they are trying to participate in class, due to the environment outside their homes or even if they naturally manage distractibility, now those levels have intensified.

When I think of how I am going to engage my students, I think of both what I am going to do, and how my students are going to take in that information. Instructors can add Plus One strategies to their courses with relative ease. Instead of just posting a static PowerPoint slide deck, create an engaging one with audio or video feeds, add in images that explain concepts, direct students to links outside of the presentation for a deeper level of understanding. These strategies have been proven time and time again to be effective (Rose, et. al, 2013; Rao, 2012.).

For disability services offices on college campuses, note taking is one of the most obvious UDL opportunities. Each year, those of us in disability services spend weeks organizing a note taking resource for our students with disabilities. For those of us who pay other students for this service, it can encompass a larger percentage of our budget (Scott, 2019). The ability to have access to a supplemental set of notes is a Plus One strategy that will benefit most of the students in your class. Rose, et.al, 2013, agree that note taking can be shared amongst the entire class. You might assign one or two students each week to take notes and share them on the class site. Or you may decide to post your own notes for students to use instead. Either way, you are both giving students the permission to sit back and actively listen to the class, while knowing that they can supplement those moments of lax attention later on.

CAST put together a wonderful resource for instructors on how to engage students in courses. The great thing about their “10 UDL Tips for Engagement” is that these tips can be transferable to either the face-to-face classroom or to the online world (CAST, 2020). For some students, taking a class online will encourage them to take bigger risks than others, so

let’s give them the space to do that. Ask students to share examples from their own lives as they relate to the class. For others group collaboration is easier when you are not sitting across from your peers, so offering this as a form of engagement may be beneficial. However, keeping the Plus One approach in mind, how can we diversify these engagement tips? Instead of requiring students to submit images of how they are navigating COVID, for example, give them the Plus One option of finding an image in the media that speaks to them. With regards to methods of engagement, instead of requiring a group project, leave that as a choice as opposed to working alone. Choice, not requirement, increases access and engagement to an online class exponentially.

3. Assessing the True Knowledge of our Students Remotely

Assessment is the opportunity to evaluate how much your students have learned from your course. It is also a measurement of whether or not our teaching was effective. Just as there is no one right way to teach a concept or topic, there is no one way to assess students. Think back to your own collegiate experience. Did you dread those papers? Did the thought of taking a multiple-choice exam cause your heart to race? Did you ever walk out of an exam frustrated because you knew the topic but got tripped up on the questions? These experiences may reflect that the choice of assessment does not accurately measure what a student knows. The student is punished for not being able to take a multiple-choice test, or for not being able to write a succinct paper. Yet in class it is clear that they understand the topic.

When we move to a remote online class, it is easy for instructors to rely on one type of assessment. It is easy for us to grade, it is easy to administer, there is one rubric; it is just works well. But it does not reflect the true knowledge of your students and it may even cause further disparity because the students’ ability to take remote classes may be compromised. Below are a few suggested Plus One strategies to consider.

Face-to-Face Strategy	+1 Remote Strategy	Benefits
Give 3 exams spaced throughout the semester.	Add a 4th exam, allow students to choose to drop one exam grade.	Students struggling to find a quiet place at home can take their exam without the same pressure that they must do well.
Students must write a research paper.	Using the same rubric offer them the choice of presenting their knowledge in another way (PPT presentation, a wiki blog, a brochure, video recording, etc.).	This allows students who are not strong writers to use other skills to demonstrate their knowledge. This may be particularly beneficial for ESL where the task of writing a paper is more difficult than dictating thoughts. Or for students who have slow WiFi or must share technology, they could use their cell phone as an audio recording device.
Students must work in groups to develop	Using the same rubric, allow students to work alone.	Some countries do not allow access to certain internet platforms, in these cases it might be easier to work alone. Or for students who are

<p>a project and share it with the class.</p>		<p>in different time zones or navigating competing priorities or who need less screen time. This choice allows them to determine how to proceed.</p>
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I am the first to admit that I like to be in control of my courses each step of the way. With that desire came massive amounts of nerves when I added a Plus One strategy to my assessment. Yet the research done by Rogers-Shaw and their team shows that students benefit from having more than one option to demonstrate what they learned. With my fingers crossed, I added the choice of interviewing someone with a disability to my traditional case study analysis assignment in which my students needed to walk through the high school to college transition process of a student with a disability. About half of my class chose my Plus One option, giving me everything from audio files, to a NPR like report, to a journal-esq entry complete with pictures of barriers from the person’s experience whom they interviewed. The reflections of those who chose the Plus One option were just as powerful, if not more so, than those who responded to the case studies I had created. And as an instructor, I am not ashamed to admit, grading was a lot more engaging for me than in the past. Increased engagement all around.

3. Access for All

Reporter Benjamin Herold, took a look at a series of different research studies on the impacts of COVID 19 and education. Herold found that there is no consistency in whether or not students have access to basic technology access, how instructors are teaching – or even if they are teaching, whether students have time to focus on their courses, or the space in their home to do so without distraction (Herold, 2020). His findings echo what we are hearing on the ground, from our students. Remember our students are reporting that they do not have access to technology, or if they do, they may have to share it, or it may be slow. They may be on different time zones or navigating other aspects of their lives that are commanding attention. And don’t forget our students with disabilities, whose ability to participate in a class may be dependent on the way in which we structure our courses.

Use this guide to help you build in access for all as you transition from face-to-face learning to remote learning. Each Task is a suggestion for how you can increase access to your course. The Notes section is designed for you to jot down if you have done this, who to reach out to for help if needed, and what you need to do to do the task.

<p>First Steps to Take</p>	
<p>Task</p>	<p>Notes</p>

Create a short guideline document (time zone of live sessions, due dates/ times, discussion posts, group work methods, etc.). Post it on the main course page.	
Put a SAS disability statement on your syllabi and on your Canvas home page.	
Determine how you will deliver course content (synchronous, asynchronous), recorded PPTs, pasted PPTs, other resources (websites, videos, discussion boards).	
Determine your course requirements based on your course objectives. Do students need to attend all live sessions, for example? How may discussion posts “counts” as participation?	
Make sure your students have access to the text/ course materials in an online environment. Check with the publisher to see if any electronic versions exist that you can share with students.	
Get Your Course Learning Management System Ready (Canvas, BlackBoard, Moodle, 2U)	
Task	Notes
Post your course material in a manner that makes sense. Follow your syllabus, use the LMS tools to put materials in appropriate places.	
Use the tip above to post appropriate links to class resources/ materials.	
Post the syllabus in a Word format.	
Consider chunking your recorded lectures into smaller (less than 10 minute) chunks.	
Frame each task (watch this video, write this discussion, visit the website) with a brief description of what the students need to do and why. Give it context.	
If you are going to break your class into groups, determine how to do that ahead of time. Work with educational technology or the LMS administrator.	
Consider how you will assess your students. If you are changing your approach from your face-to-face class, clearly explain that to your students. Offer a rubric, set clear deadlines and test dates. Repeat this often throughout the class.	
Learn how to set different exam times, to support students with disabilities.	
Consider how students will access the material if they do not have access to high speed Wifi or a computer and are dependent on their mobile device.	

Use the Announcement page on a regular basis to up-date students with new information, remind of due dates, and to check in.	
Offer virtual office hours at varying times during the week. Be sensitive to students in different time zones.	
Incorporating the Top 5 Accessibility Tips	
Task	Notes
Use the formatting structures in the Microsoft tools (Word, PPT, Excel, Publisher).	
Use San Serifs.	
Use formatting appropriately (bold, underline, italics).	
Make sure to use high color contrasts.	
Embed your links appropriately.	
Add alterative text descriptions to all of your images, charts and graphs.	
Choose videos with captions.	
Record videos/ PPTs have captions.	
Learn how to turn on the captions in your live class sessions.	
Run the Microsoft checker on all your content before you posted it online.	

If remote learning is our new “normal” for the foreseeable future, then it is our job as educators to rethink the way in which we design our courses, deliver and assess them. If we take a moment to think about our own reactions early in March those moments of disbelief followed by panic followed by taking the first step, then we can probably think of a moment or two that is similar to the experiences that our students are sharing with us. These frustrations can be lowered if we offer increased flexibility in how we design, deliver and assess students in our courses.

One of the unforeseen benefits of quickly going online and paying attention to access is the larger impact it will have on your students. By this point, you may have received panicked emails or hastily noted discussion prompts. In addition to the challenges faced by us as faculty and our students with disabilities, many of our other students are also struggling to adapt to this new “normal”. For some it is a lack of appropriate technology in their house. For others it is a time zone issue, language issues, or struggles getting the technology up and working. Some are sharing the inability to find a quiet space to work without

distraction, or to be present in a live classroom without siblings, friends and animals darting through the background. These are all valid and very real situations that our students are navigating.

By incorporating the UDL Plus One approach into the way in which we are designing, delivering and assessing in remote environments we can enhance the ability for students to engage with our courses in a manner that gets them to that ultimate finish line. The goals and objectives you so clearly laid out when you originally designed the course. Ultimately, whether we are in week 1 or week 18, our goal as educators is to help any student, no matter who they are or what challenges this pandemic has brought to them, to walk away from our class knowing a bit more. If ever there was a UDL moment, this feels like it to me.

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