

## Transcript of Morganna's Perspective

Hi, my name is Morganna Maylon and I use she/her pronouns. I'm a white settler woman with long brown hair that extends past my shoulders and green eyes. Today, I'm wearing a beige wool sweater. I'm a student accessibility specialist at Brandon University where I provide learning strategies and assistive technology support for students with disabilities. I am joining you today from Treaty 2 Lands, the territory of the Dakota Oyate, the Anishinaabeg, and the Red River Metis. Creating accessible and inclusive learning spaces is part of the important work of decolonizing education and honoring the many ways of learning and knowing. I am grateful for the opportunity to play, work, and learn on these lands. In my work with students, I often see barriers created by how information is presented. Many courses rely on a single mode of representation, which limits access because learners differ in how they perceive and process information. When content is only available in one format, it can become difficult or even impossible to access.

Students may encounter uncaptioned videos, scanned or untanked PDFs, or visuals without descriptions. Those who use screen readers, text-to-speech software, captions, or other assistive technologies may face immediate barriers in these situations. Beyond representation, I also see barriers in how students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge. Assessments that rely on timed writing or single forms of communication may not accurately reflect what a student knows. Universal Design for Learning addresses these issues by offering multiple ways to perceive, interact with, and express understanding of course content. The model recognizes that barriers are usually in the environment and not in the student, and it encourages us to design courses that anticipate learner diversity. What I value most about Universal Design for Learning is its proactive approach to inclusion and student success. In my work with students with disabilities, I see how important this really is. The process of getting accommodations can involve many barriers.

Students may need documentation that is costly or difficult to obtain, and they often navigate extra appointments, forms, policies, and communication steps that students without disabilities never have to consider. Even when accommodations are approved, the process itself can add stress and delay access. It is also important to acknowledge that some students who need accommodations cannot access them at all. They may lack documentation, be managing complex life circumstances, or simply get lost in the system. Without built-in support, these

students can fall behind, and it's not because they cannot learn but because the learning environment does not meet them where they are at. Universal Design for Learning helps reduce burden on students by building access into the course from the very beginning. When the environment is designed with flexibility in mind, students can participate without repeatedly needing to advocate for basic access. This is ultimately what I value most about UDL is that it shifts responsibility away from individual students in places at where it belongs, on the institution, and the learning environment. I see the impact of Universal Design for Learning daily when instructors provide accessible formats such as captioned videos, tagged PDFs, students who use screen readers or text-to-speech can engage with content much more quickly and effectively, when modules are clear and blurred, students with executive functioning challenges are able to stay organized and less overwhelmed. And when assessments allow different ways to demonstrate learning, particularly in untimed environments, students are able to provide work that reflects their actual understanding. These small design choices often result in less stress, higher engagement, and greater learner persistence. While Universal Design for Learning is supportive of students with disabilities, it also benefits many others who may never register for accommodations or identify as a person with a disability.

Students learning in a second language, for example, may benefit from captions and multimodal materials. Those with caregiving responsibilities or full-time jobs benefit from clear organization or flexible participation options. Universal Design for Learning recognizes that all learners have fluctuating needs and live complex and diverse lives. Accessibility should not depend on whether a student has a diagnosis or identifies as a person with a disability. As you consider implementing more Universal Design for Learning principles into your courses, I think it's important to remember that you don't need to redesign everything all at once. Small changes do and can make a big difference. Consistent weekly structure, captioned videos, adding audio materials like podcasts with transcripts or offering one flexible assignment option can reduce barriers for all students. Think about accommodations you've supported in the past. How many students needed to record lectures or review material more than once? Providing recordings or multiple formats from the start can support everyone. Have you ever heard of students expressing ideas more effectively in conversation than in writing? That might be your sign to build more flexibility into assignments. It can feel overwhelming to begin, but I encourage you to look at your own courses. Many instructors are surprised to find they're already using UDL practices without naming them as such. Building on what you already do is a great way to continue moving forward and create more accessible and inclusive learning environments.