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ARTICLE

Prioritizing Accessibility in the Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Anthropology Introductory Courses

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Abstract

This paper discusses a project to develop an introductory course in Cultural Anthropology that prioritizes accessibility. Drawing inspiration from Universal Design for Learning and other teaching strategies, we explore ways of making course materials, content delivery, and assessments more accessible for students with different needs and abilities. We also consider accessibility from the perspective of instructors with disabilities, a topic that has received less attention in the literature. We discuss the use of varied classroom activities to increase engagement and participation, different forms of expression, adaptive technologies, and evaluation components that anticipate and mediate barriers to learning while enabling students to connect the course content to their lived experiences. We conclude with a discussion of challenges and future considerations.

Keywords: *Accessibility; Inclusive Education; Universal Design for Learning; Pedagogy; Introductory Courses*

Introduction

Teaching introductory courses in anthropology means encountering diverse students with varied backgrounds and different levels of preparation, a microcosm of the larger campus. In some colleges and universities in Canada (where we are based), hundreds of students enroll in introductory anthropology courses each term, and teaching these courses can be both challenging and inspirational. The students who take these courses have different learning needs based on their majors, year of study, previous preparation, social identities, language skills, familiarity with the North American educational system (in the case of international students), and diagnosed and undiagnosed disabilities. Recognizing the diversity of our students can help us, as instructors, think about how to make our teaching more accessible, engage students more fully in the learning process, and inspire critical thinking and active learning (Merriam and Bierema, 2014).

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The importance of accessibility is well-established in the academic literature on post-secondary education (Kirby, 2009; Opini, 2008; Pace and Schwartz, 2008; Seale, Burgstahler, and Havel, 2022). In some cases, "accessibility" is used in a general way to refer to improved access to learning for all, while in others, it refers specifically to access for people with disabilities. In this paper, we consider both aspects of accessibility, since an important tenet in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which inspires our approach, is that educators should be proactive in catering to all students from the outset (Meyer et al., 2014). This is one of the main distinctions between UDL, an overarching approach that focuses on inclusive design for everyone, and Differentiated Instruction, which adjusts course designs and materials according to each student's individual needs (Gritful-Freixenet et al., 2020). Our approach considers accessibility broadly, with the aim of creating an equitable classroom. We emphasize the importance of making teaching and learning accessible to students and instructors with disabilities, but we also recognize that disabilities are not always diagnosed or revealed to others.

We also recognize that the benefits of increased access extend beyond people with disabilities to include other marginalized groups. This is because many of these groups, categorized based on their ethnicity, race, sexuality, or gender identities, face similar barriers and challenges in accessing resources, services, and opportunities (Oland, 2020; Porter et al., 2021; Taylor, 2024). However, thinking of accessibility in general ("universal") terms to include the broadest range of students risks erasing disability altogether (Dolmage, 2015), which can sidestep the specific challenges and valuable contributions of students and instructors with disabilities in and beyond the classroom. Instead of thinking of accessibility as "good for all," we need to put disability at the forefront of discussions about diversity and inclusion in academia, innovative teaching, and student-centered learning.

Even as we aim to prioritize accessibility in the classroom, it is not always easy to adapt courses and teaching methods. For example, large class sizes in introductory anthropology courses at some post-secondary institutions (including our own) mean less individualized support and in-class interactions. There is also a heavier reliance on evaluation methods that are intended to reduce marking time, such as multiple-choice testing based on one of the many standard textbooks for introductory courses. Such strategies are needed when the structure of courses and programs requires some consistency across the various sections of the same course. From a pedagogical perspective, however, this model of instruction at the post-secondary level has significant drawbacks, including the lack of preparation that students feel when they move into second-year courses, where they are required to write papers, engage in critical analysis, and demonstrate independent thinking (Puthiaparampil and Rahman, 2020).

This article is about a project on "Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning in Anthropology"[1]. The lead author, Fabiana Li (a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba), applied to the University of Manitoba Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF)[2] with the goal of addressing some of the limitations of introductory courses in anthropology and the challenges that instructors face when teaching them. Part of the rationale for the project was that the format of the first-year Cultural Anthropology course at the University of Manitoba does not always meet the needs of students and could better prepare them for higher-level courses. Another impetus for the project related to a personal challenge for the instructor: adapting to a disability (hearing loss). This necessitated rethinking accessibility from the perspective of the instructor and developing new teaching strategies for the classroom.

The TLEF grant provided support in the form of a teaching release for the instructor and funds to hire two Student Research Assistants (co-authors Tasheney Francis, PhD student in Linguistics, and Salmah Quadri, PhD student in Language and Literacy Education). Our main goal was to prepare a section of the first-year course Cultural Anthropology designed with accessibility as a priority. Over a semester, we read and learned about Universal Design for Learning (UDL), inclusive education, adaptive technologies, and teaching strategies. We also attended workshops offered by the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL) on UDL, which aided us in creating and designing accessible materials for the introductory course. We held regular Zoom meetings from January–March 2023 to discuss these topics and brainstorm specific ideas for the course. The lead author taught the course in the 2023 summer session, with an in-person enrollment of 50 students. This traditional face-to-face instructional setting allowed for direct interaction and observation of student engagement, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of the course design and assessments.

In this article, we share what we have learned about accessibility and UDL in relation to the design of an introductory course in Anthropology, in keeping with previous work in this area (e.g., Blatt, 2022; Kissel and Blum, 2022; Miller, Klales, and Maxwell, 2022; Oland, 2020). We begin with some background about our university and the anthropology program to contextualize the teaching of introductory courses. Next, we provide an overview of approaches to disability and inclusion, which takes us into some key tenets of UDL, the framework that inspired this project. We provide examples of how this scholarship shaped our course development, with specific focus on UDL in anthropology and related disciplines. We also describe some of the strategies we used to increase accessibility in all aspects of course design. Finally, we conclude by discussing the challenges we faced,

[1] The project was not designed to include research in the classroom, so we did not submit an ethics protocol for approval from the Research Ethics Board that would have enabled us to inquire more systematically about students' responses to various teaching strategies. This paper reflects on our own learning and experiences, which we hope will serve as a foundation for future scholarship on teaching and learning.

[2] Each year, the TLEF provides funding for innovative projects that promote teaching and learning excellence, creative or experimental pedagogy, and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

lessons learned, and future considerations for teaching introductory courses in anthropology.

Background: Our University and Teaching Experiences

The University of Manitoba is the largest university in the province, with approximately 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Fall 2023. Students in our introductory anthropology courses come from different programs of study and from varied cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic or racial backgrounds, reflecting the makeup of the larger community. This diversity can enrich the classroom experience, creating an environment where students learn from each other; sharing different perspectives becomes an asset for class discussions and contributes to building cultural inclusiveness (Goethe and Colina, 2018; Samuels, 2018). Adding to this diversity, international students make up a significant (and growing) segment of our student body. They may face challenges in studying a new language or navigating a different educational system with different expectations from those they experienced in their previous schools.

The Anthropology Department at the University of Manitoba offers courses in sociocultural anthropology, biological anthropology, and archaeology. The two introductory courses are in Cultural Anthropology (the focus of this paper) and Ancient Peoples and Places. These introductory courses are offered every year, with several sections of each course taught each semester (Fall, Winter, Summer) by different instructors (full-time faculty, sessional instructors, or PhD students hired on a contract basis), using various forms of learning (in-person, distance education, or synchronous remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic). In-person introductory courses enroll approximately 200 students in the Fall and Winter semesters, and unlike some universities that have "tutorials" alongside the larger lectures (often led by a student teaching assistant), we do not break up large classes into smaller groups for more personalized instruction. The courses are typically lecture-based and, due to the large class size, some instructors continue to rely exclusively on multiple-choice tests (two midterms and one final exam).

The pandemic and switch to remote learning inspired some innovations and a move away from this format, in part due to the challenges (for both students and instructors) of conducting the exams online. With the move to remote learning, the requirement to restrict the evaluations to multiple-choice tests was dropped, giving instructors an opening to try out other ways of testing students' knowledge (such as small writing assignments, online discussion posts, and open-book exams). The impact of the pandemic on our teaching cannot be overstated. This period of remote learning allowed for experimentation, new ways of using technology, and increased awareness of how our teaching strategies can support or hinder accessibility.

The first author of this article has been teaching sociocultural anthropology for more than 15 years and requested accommodations to deal with hearing loss following the pandemic period of remote learning. While academic institutions must provide

accommodations for instructors with permanent or temporary disabilities, it is up to the individual to determine what accommodations they require. This is not straightforward when it comes to hearing loss, since there are no "technological fixes" that can effectively compensate for the loss of clarity in speech that comes with moderate-to-severe hearing loss, which is highly contextual (depending on factors like background noise, voice pitch, visual cues, etc.). In some contexts, hearing loss is an "invisible disability," which leads people to continue relying on verbal communication when interacting with hard of hearing individuals and to assume that it is not necessary to modify their behavior. However, hearing loss makes it difficult to rely on strategies that are central to teaching cultural anthropology, such as class discussions, question and answer sessions, student presentations, and other teaching techniques that involve oral communication. This project arose from the need to explore alternative strategies for teaching and theoretical approaches to pedagogy and disability that can empower instructors and students in the classroom setting.

The second and third authors (Francis and Quadri) came to this project as graduate research assistants with experience as educators and an interest in innovative and inclusive teaching strategies. Our common goal was to learn about UDL and other approaches with the aim of incorporating new approaches in our teaching and research endeavors. While the strategies discussed in this article are ones that many instructors already use in their classes, thinking about them in relation to UDL helped us to think more deliberately about accessibility from the perspective of students and instructors. Consequently, this enabled us to identify and address potential barriers, refine our teaching practices, and create a more supportive and accessible learning community.

Disability and Inclusion

Our approach to making learning more accessible is informed by the literature on various aspects of disability and social inclusion. Thinking about accessibility in teaching requires reframing our understanding of disability. Traditionally, a medical model of disability focuses particularly on the health condition and perceives the physical or mental disability as a problem that must be cured, fixed, or eliminated so the person with the health condition can adapt to the expectations of an able-bodied society (Shakespeare, 2006). As a result, this approach gives more attention to diagnoses and treatments. Managing a disability becomes the sole responsibility of the individual (with the help of healthcare and social service professionals), without adequate consideration for social factors and systemic problems.

Some scholars (e.g., Oliver, 1990, 2018; Shakespeare, 2006) have argued for the need to move from a medical deficit-based model of disability (where disability is seen as a problem of the individual that requires intervention and remediation) to a social model of

disability, which positions disability as a social phenomenon[3]. A social model of disability vies for social change to create more inclusivity and remove discrimination. It focuses on the problems and barriers that society creates for people (Harpur, 2012; Kim, 2020; Winter, 2003).[4] Related to this approach, a Human Rights focus postulates equality for people with disabilities in how they are treated and the opportunities they may have, and thus challenges systemic barriers and discrimination affecting their full participation (United Nations, 2022).

In the educational context, Haley-Mize (2018, 118) contends that a situation where students must self-identify as having a disability and request accommodation "perpetuates the idea that the individual has a deficit and, thus, needs a 'fix' to be able to participate in classroom activities." By contrast, a social model of disability suggests that our task as educators is not simply to respond to accommodation requests, but to minimize barriers for everyone (Adelman and Taylor, 2017; Takacs et al., 2021). In other words, we need to change the environment (of the classroom, the workplace, and other academic settings) to make it less disabling (Cooke, 2023). By thinking about accessibility in this way, and with a practical view in mind, as afforded by UDL, we can develop strategies for communication and teaching that can also benefit instructors with disabilities. This aspect of accessibility is not talked about enough, as disabilities among faculty remain largely undisclosed[5] or not considered in discussions about accessibility (which focuses on the students' experiences) (Saltes, 2020) or equity, diversity, and inclusion (where disability tends to be left out) (Burke, 2021).

Thinking about accessibility in teaching and learning requires a critical framework that examines how power relations and social inequalities affect those with disabilities (Corker and French, 1999). Some scholars challenge social norms about normality and body differences, embracing disability as a source of power, in representing human diversity, and examining how it intersects with gender/sexuality and other social categories (Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006). They propose a shift in thinking about how we value different bodies and advocate for a more varied understanding of human experiences (McRuer, 2006). From this perspective, both the medical model and the social model of disability strengthen

[3] The social model is not without limitations, as it may not sufficiently address the nuances of the experiences of disability. Some scholars propose a Biopsychological Model that acknowledges the complex interaction between the anatomical, genetic, psychological, and social factors that affect disability (Wade and Halligan, 2017). This model also considers how the individual's mental, emotional and cognitive processes are affected by the disability. Bury (2001) demonstrates how chronic illness and disability disrupt people's lives and their evaluation of self, underscoring the need for social support, including the assistance of family, friends, and healthcare professionals, as well as provision from and within the social contexts.

[4] A Cultural Model of Disability, meanwhile, shows that disability is not just a social phenomenon, let alone a medical one, but rooted in cultural beliefs and practices. For example, different cultures interpret and value disability differently, which could lead to negative connotations or acceptance based on its cultural integration (Morris, 1991; Riddell and Watson, 2014).

[5] Decisions about disability disclosure in the workplace are complex, and some faculty members maybe not seek accommodations to avoid the stigma, the risk of being disbelieved, or the possibility of losing employment (Heath-Stout, 2023).

normative conventions by focusing on individual impairments or social accommodations. However, this challenge to normative social expectations should not undermine the importance of tackling broader systemic issues and institutional barriers or restrain practical advocacy (Tremain, 2015).

Universal Design (UD)—the removal of physical and structural barriers—is an example of a practical approach to creating environments, products, and services that are accessible to all people, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, be they temporary or permanent (Ostroff, 2011). With a goal to create inclusive spaces, UD focuses on tangible solutions (Maisel and Steinfeld, 2022) and aims to accommodate everyone from the start, rather than making accommodations after the fact (Kearney, 2022). While it may not address deeper social issues, UD provides practical tactics for creating the accessible environment that is needed in the learning space and can lead to progress towards accessibility (Moore, 2017; Rose et al., 2006). More specifically, Gabel and Danforth (2008) address disability in educational contexts across different cultures, thus helping us understand how UD can be applied across various educational environs. UD provides a more holistic approach that fosters the kind of practical treatment of accessibility we endeavor to promote in our use of Universal Design for Learning.

Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

In this project, we draw inspiration from the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to minimize barriers to teaching and learning in an introductory course. One of the defining features of this approach is that UDL expects differences, and instead of seeing them as exceptions, they are viewed as strengths to enhance students' overall learning experiences (Haley-Mize, 2018). Therefore, UDL can help to make a course more accessible to students without singling out those who request accommodations. Prioritizing accessibility and making this commitment explicit to students early in the term can foster a climate in which instructors with disabilities can be more open about their own access needs (such as facing the listener to facilitate speech reading and other communication strategies that help with hearing loss) and reasons for using specific teaching strategies in the classroom (for example, requesting discussion notes after group work, or asking students to communicate in writing whenever possible).

UDL encourages the use of multiple means of Engagement, Representation, and Action and Expression (CAST, 2018). According to the principles of UDL:

- Students differ in the ways they are engaged or motivated to learn.
- The representation of course content must consider that students perceive and comprehend information in different ways.
- Providing options for action and expression can allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in multiple ways.

Using these guidelines as a starting point, we developed specific techniques and lesson plans that were used in teaching an introductory Cultural Anthropology class in Summer 2023.

Engagement

One of the challenges that we face in teaching introductory courses (which are not unique to anthropology) is that the students who enroll are at different stages of their education (from first-year students to graduating seniors), which means students have different degrees of familiarity with academic conventions and the subject matter. Coming from various programs, students also have diverse interests and different levels of investment in the course; some might be exploring a potential subject to major in, or they might be looking to boost their Grade Point Average and fulfil a requirement for another major. We can turn these challenges into an opportunity to think about how to make our course content accessible, engaging, and relevant.

UDL recommends connecting the course material to current issues and students' lived experiences and drawing on their different points of view to inspire critical thinking and open-mindedness. An introductory course provides ample opportunities to show students the relevance of anthropology and how it can be useful for understanding the world around us. For this class, we focused on preparing lecture content and activities that students would find relevant to their interests and useful for understanding current local and global issues that affect them. For example, references to recent newspaper articles and global issues helped students connect the course content to pressing social concerns. We also designed a journal assignment that consisted of a choice of prompts that students could choose to write about. Each prompt consisted of questions or an activity that asked students to connect what they learned in class to their own life experiences.

The students posted their entries (5 in total, over the term) on the online course content management system so they would be visible to other students. Some of the prompts were adapted from the suggested activities in the teaching guide that accompanies the *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology* textbook (Brown et al., 2020). For example, students were asked to choose a public space (like a coffee shop or mall food court) and carry out participant observation; to write about a recent purchase and use it to examine global connections and inequality; or to reflect on their own racial/ethnic identity. Other prompts asked them to share a legend or myth passed down in their family; to describe an environmental conflict that affects their community; or to interview an older family member on ideas about gender and gender roles and how these have changed over their lifetime. The assignments asked students to connect the course content with their personal experiences in a short journal entry, which we hoped would enable first-year students to adapt to academic writing without the pressure of a longer and more formal essay.

In an informal classroom poll, most students indicated that the journal assignment should be kept as part of the evaluation for this course (instead of students being evaluated entirely with multiple-choice tests). In personal interactions with the instructor, several students commented positively about how the journal assignment helped them engage with the material in a more personal way. The journal prompts required them to think of examples from their everyday lives to describe new concepts (like various types of reciprocity), or to experience the impact of their actions in a brief experiment that asked them to violate the unspoken cultural rules of non-verbal communication. They were also able to draw on their cultural backgrounds, family histories, and personal observations. By engaging in these exercises, students brought their own knowledge and experiences to the course. As they engage with the material and share their entries online, each student is contributing to the course content and the overall class learning experience. Consequently, they learn from one another to understand the importance of varying perspectives on a subject matter. Emphasizing the assets that students bring to the classroom (including cultural knowledge and personal experiences) may help reduce feelings of inadequacy and isolation that are especially common among first-generation and historically minoritized learners (Miller, Klales, and Maxwell, 2022).

At the same time, these personalized assignments helped the instructor learn about the students and what they were taking away from the course. In comparison to previous years of teaching this introductory course and relying on multiple-choice testing, the journal entries showed evidence of critical thinking and originality by providing a reflective space for students to explore ideas, express themselves authentically, and develop their own thoughts and perspectives through writing. Additionally, the use of journal entries also identified gaps in understanding and challenges with written communication. For the instructor, hearing loss has sometimes meant that in-class discussions need to be more structured or kept to a minimum. The informal conversations with students that typically happen before or after class, or during breaks, can be difficult or stressful in a noisy environment. Reading and commenting on the journal entries provided a way to connect with students without relying on verbal interactions in the classroom. For students, especially those who are less comfortable socializing or speaking in class, the opportunity to receive feedback from the instructor and share their entries with classmates has the potential to make the classroom experience less isolating and more engaging.

Representation

According to UDL principles, course materials should be presented in a variety of formats. The lectures and supplementary materials for this course included a combination of auditory and visual forms of representation (along with adaptive technologies such as open captions on videos and a transcript to accompany a podcast). Video clips and documentaries that presented first-person accounts and experiences were especially effective. The course evaluations (conducted through the online learning platform) showed that students appreciated the use of diverse teaching strategies and materials to

complement the lectures (the use of video came up several times in open-ended responses as a strategy that facilitated student learning within the course).

Our course also encouraged active learning through brainstorming activities, class discussions, and group work. While these activities typically focus on oral participation, adding a written component was a necessary accommodation for the instructor. For example, students took turns writing on whiteboards in a collective brainstorming session. In other instances, starting an activity or group discussion with an individual timed-writing exercise gave students another way of expressing themselves without the obligation to share with the rest of the class, unless they chose to do so. Providing students with a different way of communicating and receiving information that does not depend on speaking/hearing can be a good modification for students with disabilities or who prefer other forms of expression. In an informal survey soliciting student feedback at the end of the term, the whiteboard brainstorming activities and in-class activities were mentioned as being "fun" and "very engaging." In the course evaluations, one student noted that even though they usually struggle with class participation, this class created a space where they felt comfortable sharing their opinions and being part of class discussions. Using multiple strategies to encourage participation—such as a combination of individual and collective activities that solicit both written and oral responses—slows down the pace of class discussions, which is helpful for those who need more time to formulate their thoughts or who find it stressful to speak spontaneously in front of the whole class.

Another excellent complement to class discussions (and an effective way of dealing with hearing loss) was Mentimeter, an audience engagement platform that allows students to respond to questions from their personal electronic devices. Mentimeter offers a mix of free and paid features; in this case, the free version was used regularly and in various ways during the term. For example, in response to an open-ended question during the lecture, students sent in their answers anonymously using their cell phones or laptops; Mentimeter aggregated class responses, which were projected on the screen in real-time in the form of graphs, word clouds, or short answers. In other cases, after a period of small-group discussions, students shared highlights of their discussions on Mentimeter as a way of reporting back to the class. Mentimeter was also highly effective in increasing engagement through live quizzes (for practice test questions), polls, and Q&A sessions. For example, live polls on religious identity or media use allowed students to see their own anonymous responses in relation to those of other students. Questions on language use revealed the multilingual backgrounds of many students, while asking what word they used to describe an object pictured on the screen helped illustrate the concept of linguistic variation. Mentimeter made it possible to solicit anonymous feedback and questions in writing, which was ideal for the hard of hearing instructor and for students who might not otherwise have felt comfortable speaking in public. Because it became an integral part of classroom interactions, Mentimeter was well received by students, as was shown in formal and informal feedback (including a Mentimeter poll about teaching strategies on the last day of class).

Action and Expression

UDL recommends evaluation methods that allow students to express their knowledge in different ways, but it was not feasible to completely move away from multiple-choice evaluations in this course. Nevertheless, the journal assignment (mentioned above) invited students to think critically and creatively while honing their writing and composition skills. This type of assignment can benefit students who might not do well with a multiple-choice exam format. The journal assignment also provided options for using multiple media (e.g., text, video, photography, etc.), allowing students to express themselves in different ways. However, perhaps due to time constraints and the compressed schedule of a summer course, most students chose the more traditional option of written entries.[6]

UDL encourages a flexible approach that can be helpful to students who, for a variety of reasons, might require more time to complete an assignment. For the journal, flexible deadlines were built into the assignment since students could choose the weeks in which to submit their entries. Having the option of selecting which prompts to write about (in this case, choosing 5 out of 12 possible options) also relates to the first point above about increasing student engagement and motivation to learn. Based on their entries and personal comments to the instructor, it was clear that students appreciated being able to choose options that resonated with them and corresponded with their personal interests and experiences.

Other Ways of Incorporating Accessibility in Course Design

Accessibility can be built into all aspects of course design. As Dolmage (2015) notes, however, UDL must not be thought of a checklist that can be applied in every context; rather, any suggestions are simply starting points that should be adapted as part of a process that is fluid, ongoing, and collaborative (involving both teachers and learners). We must also remember that some strategies that may improve access for some students and instructors could pose problems for others. Thus, "Universal Design" cannot encompass everyone's needs (Dolmage, 2005), and we must take into account the specific circumstances of each classroom. With that caveat in mind, below are some of the strategies that we considered adopting in our course design. Some of them were successfully incorporated into the course taught in summer 2023, while others may be useful in our future courses.

1. *Creating accessible course materials*. From the course outline to PowerPoint slides, handouts, and course readings, we endeavored to make our course materials more accessible (see Government of Canada, 2023). This task has become much easier

[6] Some of the written entries included photographs, which highlighted the problem of copyright infringements when the images were taken from the internet. The use of other media also raises additional questions about visual accessibility.

with the help of built-in accessibility features in computer applications. For example, the accessibility checker in Microsoft Office provides tips on making documents accessible, while online learning platforms, such as Desire2Learn, check the content that we upload to our course sites. PowerPoint provides a series of templates that meet accessibility standards, and we were mindful of design features (such as font size and color contrast) that ensured slide presentations could be read easily (Microsoft, 2023). It is also good practice to provide a caption or short description to accompany any images, which can be helpful for those with visual impairments or who are using screen readers.

2. *Open access textbooks*. Course materials can create economic barriers, especially with the typically high cost of introductory textbooks (Miller, Klales, and Maxwell, 2022). For this course, we used an open access textbook and articles that are free to read or download online. The textbook, *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology* (Brown et al., 2020), is designed to be compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers and text-to-speech tools. Open access eliminates the need to purchase costly textbooks, which students greatly appreciated, though they also had the choice to buy a printed copy if they required it.
3. *Using open captions*. The use of captioning (subtitles) reduces physical barriers in the classroom. We used open captioning for all video content and videoconferencing (e.g., Zoom office hours), which is a required accommodation for the instructor. However, captions and transcripts have been shown to aid learning (comprehension, engagement, and retention) regardless of accommodation need (Dello Stritto and Linder, 2017). Using auto-captions in virtual or hybrid invited speaker seminars can also increase accessibility for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants (The Mind Hears, 2021). An additional option that we will consider in the future is the use of automatic captioning on PowerPoint, which can be turned on during lectures.
4. *Student surveys.* Strategies necessary to make our classrooms more accessible will depend on the students and what they identify as the challenges they face (and ways to address these challenges). A pre-course survey can set the tone for the course and help instructors get to know the students, their expectations for the course, and why they chose to take it. We prepared a pre-course survey (conducted anonymously through the online platform) and invited students, by email, to respond to it prior to the first day of class. We also provided time to do so at the start of the first lecture in case some had not had a chance to take it.

   We included questions such as, "What would you like me to know about you that would help me help you learn better?", which urged students to reflect on their own process of learning and let them know that they could communicate with the instructor about their learning needs, difficulties, or concerns. A question on their impressions of "cultural anthropology" before taking the course helped to address pre-conceptions (or misconceptions) about the discipline that we could return to

during the course. Our survey also confirmed that students seek out many of the strategies for accessibility described in this article. In response to the question, "What factors or conditions do you think would help you participate fully in this course?" students mentioned: visual aids, relatable content and real-life examples, flexibility, "a kind environment," "an inclusive environment," and an interactive classroom with group work and group discussions. While the short length of the summer session did not give sufficient time for follow-up surveys, in future courses we would consider adding another survey at the mid-point (Miller, Klales, and Maxwell, 2022) to help determine what strategies are effective or not and plan accordingly.

5. *Adaptive technologies*. The number of apps, websites, and assistive technologies available today are constantly improving and can provide support that students might not know is available to them, often free of charge. These include apps for organization, time management, annotation, translation, converting text-to-speech, and more. In future courses, we would consider providing a list of recommended apps (or features that are already embedded in our online learning platforms) that could help students explore different ways of receiving, processing, and retaining information.
6. *Multiple forms of communication*. The pandemic normalized the practice of providing students with different options to communicate with instructions, such as virtual office hours. We continued this practice for the benefit of students who live far from campus or have other reasons for preferring virtual meetings to in-person office hours. In the future, we will also consider setting up an online discussion board dedicated to questions about the course, which can provide another way to relay important information to the class and answer questions that several students might have but are reluctant to ask. Discussion boards can foster a sense of community and participation in online education (Covelli, 2017; Levine, 2007) and can also serve an additional tool for in-person classes in ways that are beneficial for students and instructors with disabilities.

Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Future Considerations

Universal Design for Learning provided a valuable foundation for thinking about effective teaching in introductory courses. However, there are limitations to UDL and challenges to its implementation. Some barriers to adopting UDL, identified by Hills et. al. (2022), include time/workload constraints, resource constraints, and student discomfort. For example, the journal assignment fostered critical thinking and personal engagement with the course material, but the time it takes to mark them remains a challenge for larger classes. In most cases, the time and effort required for class preparation and feedback on assignments are the main deterrents when introducing alternatives to the lecture format and multiple-choice testing. Some of the strategies mentioned in this paper were effective with a summer session enrollment of 50 students but could become overwhelming with

200 students during the regular school year. As disability scholars remind us, societal expectations of work and time management can also be exclusionary (Kafer, 2013; Samuels, 2017). For example, the "average" amount of time that instructors are expected to spend on class preparation and instruction does not consider that people with physical, mental, cognitive, and sensory disabilities may require more time, energy, and resources to complete the same tasks (Heath-Stout, 2023).

How can we apply UDL in classes with high enrollments? How do we balance the sometimes rigid course structure of introductory courses (and the need for standardization) with innovative approaches? With large classes, student teaching assistants can provide some help with grading, class activities, and preparation of course materials, but this requires resources that not all institutions can provide. Inconsistency with marking and course delivery across multiple offerings of the same course can be a problem if students perceive a lack of fairness in course evaluations and expectations. Sometimes, the sheer amount of information that needs to be covered in an introductory course makes the lecture/PowerPoint format the most efficient way to relay the course content. For this reason, some students and instructors might feel that moving away from the more traditional lecture format might detract from the course content (Burgstahler, 2015; Jordan Anstead, 2016; Kumar and Wideman, 2014).

In this course, combining lectures with more interactive activities and group work proved to be a good compromise. However, there is no teaching strategy that will appeal to all students, and some students expressed discomfort or resisted class activities that required more active participation. In some cases, they refrained from participating in group discussions or preferred to work alone rather than in small groups. Instructors will have different ways of dealing with this challenge. Some might insist on student participation in group activities and class discussions, since teamwork, public speaking, and other skills that can be gained from these activities require practice and could serve students well in their future studies and career aspirations. In this case, it would be important to justify this requirement at the start of the term and explain the teaching philosophy that shapes the course design. One way forward, in keeping with the principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1981), is to explicitly align the assignment instructions with the skills students will obtain by engaging with the task. Others, however, might choose a more flexible approach that gives students more agency and allows them to choose among different options (i.e., individual or group work; written or oral forms of expression).

With the journal assignment, we learned that questions or prompts requiring personal reflection and/or action (such as conducting an interview or participant-observation) helped reduce—but did not eliminate—instances of plagiarism, AI use, and academic misconduct. Encountering these problems reiterated the importance of helping students (especially those who are new to academic culture) distinguish between knowledge that is collective or shared and university expectations regarding individual work, originality, and attribution of sources. While some students start learning to cite references and recognize

the importance of individual authorship at the high school level, others may need to adapt to different guidelines and expectations in a new academic setting. These are issues that need to be addressed early in the term. One way of doing this in future classes might be to have an open discussion about different forms of knowledge. For example, we could discuss the difference between collective knowledge and individual authorship, or the benefits and limitations of crowd-sourced information (e.g., online encyclopedias). We would also discuss the development of AI and online resources where authorship and intellectual property rights may seem more ambiguous. Through these discussions, we would provide explicit instruction about when and where such knowledge is or is not appropriate (Crook, 2018; Hayes and Introna, 2005).

As we have shown in this article, the idea that UDL is "universal" and accessible to everyone is unrealistic, since we cannot meet the needs of all students using a prescribed set of strategies or principles. Our teaching practices cannot account for every type of diversity or learning need, and ultimately, our teaching should be responsive to the specific needs of students in our class. Similarly, teaching strategies must be tailored to suit the course content and the individual instructor's own needs and challenges in the classroom. Nevertheless, UDL can be helpful for instructors with disabilities since some of the strategies that can benefit students can also be useful for instructors. While much research and writing explores the topic of UDL and improving access for students, more research is needed on the experiences of instructors with disabilities.

As the student body at our universities continues to change, we need to consider the many factors that influence people's experiences with education, including cultural background, economic barriers, health challenges, mental and physical disabilities, and other aspects of human diversity. We also need to reimagine ways of teaching and learning that embrace the different abilities and needs of both students and instructors and that go beyond meeting basic accommodation requests. UDL and principles of accessibility provide a good starting point and useful strategies to create a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere in the classroom.

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