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Topic: ECU Learns: UDL as a foundation for engaging students, faculty, and staff in the creation of effective learning environments

What areas of student learning or student success will be impacted by this topic or theme?

This Quality Enhancement Plan will impact the success of students who are at risk for academic challenges, as well as all students enrolled in participating General Education and gatekeeper courses at ECU. Grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, we seek to establish a signature learning experience that will set East Carolina University apart from the other state institutions, remove barriers to learning, and increase student academic success through 1) expanding campus awareness about student neurodiversity and 2) providing support for utilization of the principles of UDL by students, faculty, and staff in and out of the classroom.

What data or evidence exists to support the topic?

Across the nation, college populations are increasingly diverse, and students come to us with a complex array of neurodevelopmental strengths and needs. Traditional methods that teach *to-the-middle* are no longer effective and unintentionally marginalize rather than fully engage some learners. Therefore, we are challenged to design and implement models of instruction and student support that attracts, retains, and meets the increasingly varied learning needs of postsecondary students.

Nationally, college completion rates for students with “hidden” disabilities (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADHD, Autism) are below that of their peers, and as student enrolment becomes increasingly neurodiverse, campuses must address the negative impact this can have on retention and graduation outcomes. Estimates of students on a college campus with learning differences can range from 5 - 20 %, but unfortunately, this is generally an anonymous population. Students at the heart of this QEP are not limited in cognitive capacity, learning potential, work ethic, or motivation levels, but are impacted in the *way in which* they learn. Learning differences are not outwardly obvious, and an estimated 75% of students who have identified disabilities do not self-disclose. Other students, with similar characteristics, remain undiagnosed or without documentation necessary to access support services. This brings significant instructional design implications for college classrooms and support offices, and students at ECU do not always come to campus already prepared to strategically and effectively navigate the college learning environment.

Student success is predicated on progression through General Education (GE) and gatekeeper courses. Courses that carry GE credits are more likely to include a broad array of students with wide ranges of learning strengths, needs and interests. At ECU, these courses represent a large proportion of our high-enrolled courses, making it difficult for faculty to tailor instruction to individual student needs. A current shift in the postsecondary online learning landscape has created a critical need to offer more program options online in such a way that ensures quality and student success in all GE courses. This simultaneously raises the demand for DE versions of GE courses, adding distance to the mix, and making it even more imperative to consider learner variability up front. Some courses do not carry GE designations, but function as gatekeepers to majors or are high priorities in their respective colleges.

Describe how this project will improve student learning or student success.

This QEP is designed to support students to employ the UDL framework to determine how to approach each course, proactively anticipate their learning needs, and implement personalized academic routines to foster success. By also supporting faculty to design strategically selected courses using this same framework, we can foster success in high-

need areas while simultaneously equipping students with a skillset that can be applied in future courses and in the workforce. This project will utilize the UDL framework as a common foundation for a two-fold strategy to include (1) wide-spread awareness-building and (2) in-depth support for target groups of faculty, staff, and student participants.

1) Campus Awareness Campaign: This QEP will utilize a systematic awareness campaign to engage campus stakeholders in better understanding learner variability and the role students, faculty, and staff play in creating welcoming and effective learning environments for academic and social success. This component of the QEP will cast a wide net and draw from effective models that have been used on other campuses.

2) Direct Support for Students, Faculty, and Staff: The QEP will provide direct support to faculty, staff, and students in strategically selected settings. Participants will have dedicated time and support for training, applying the UDL framework, exploring innovative techniques, and making iterative improvements each semester. This approach also provides a realistic foundation for evaluation, scaling, and sustainability.

- *The Classroom:* We envision working with each college to strategically identify approximately 40 courses (10 new per year) for direct focus, with priority given to: GE-designated courses, those with high DFW rates, high demand courses, high-enrolled courses, and high-stakes/gatekeeper courses. The QEP will partner faculty participants (from both Academic Affairs and Health Sciences) with training and instructional design support to infuse the principles of UDL in such a way that will positively impact their students as well as generate learning and resources that can be shared and scaled more broadly.
- *Targeted Student Supports:* Equipping and empowering students to personalize their learning process is a key component of this QEP. Currently, we envision targeting four key touch points (Freshman Seminar course, New Student Orientation, academic support services, and Canvas LMS) in which to infuse modeling, direct instruction, and support for students around the principles of UDL.
- *Campus Offices:* Infusing the principles of UDL across campus extends beyond the classroom. We will support approximately two campus offices each year to engage in a facilitated UDL self-audit and begin to implement resulting action plans that utilize a multiple-means approach to engaging with students and accomplishing their respective goals (e.g., website redesign, resource development, resource revision, office environment).

The UDL framework centers around three basic but powerful principles: (1) Multiple Means of Engagement, (2) Multiple Means of Representation, and (3) Multiple Means of Action and Expression. Whether being utilized by faculty and staff to design educational environments or utilized by students to build academic routines, UDL addresses learning as a shared process and emphasizes proactively anticipating learner variability and selecting strategies accordingly.

Who is the target population of students for this topic?

This project targets students at risk for academic difficulty due to neurodiverse learning profiles as well as all students participating in courses selected and student support touch points for the QEP.

Why is it important for student learning in this area to be improved at ECU?

The QEP seeks to address the gap between academic preparedness, learning expectations, and educational environments for students at risk for academic challenges with learning needs that may otherwise go unnoticed. Students with learning differences are not the only students at risk for academic challenges. First-generation, racially diverse, non-traditional students (and others) all bring differences to the classroom that can be supported by the “multiple means” principles emphasized in the UDL framework. Evidence suggests that strategies that are effective for students with learning differences are also helpful to other student groups. Therefore, as we employ and evaluate strategies that are necessary for the success of target students, we will also be making adjustments that are good for all learners. By reducing unnecessary barriers to access, engagement, and expression, we can keep both student success and learning rigor in our courses high.

Will this proposal be a new initiative, or if it will expand upon an existing enhancement plan?

This QEP is a new initiative but will benefit from initial groundwork begun in earlier UDL and neurodiversity related initiatives. Leveraging existing expertise, momentum, and early learning already on campus will not only enable us to hit the ground running in Year 1 but could also position ECU as a leader in service to neurodiverse students.

What mechanism will be used to measure the success of the project?

The evaluation model used for this QEP will align with the two-pronged implementation strategy. One aspect of the evaluation process will address the awareness-building goals of the project utilizing strategies such as participation rates, asset mapping, and surveys, designed to measure general impact on a larger scale. The second component of the evaluation model will enable a deeper look at impact on target students, courses, and offices with a design that includes common elements across all participants (e.g., grades, DFW rates, measures of student engagement with course materials, proxy survey to assess impact on target group, student use of support resources), as well as formative evaluation that can be tailored as needed and inform ongoing iterative revision and refinement.

What plan will be developed to garner broad-based support across campus?

This project will only be successful if it is grounded in a shared vision and mutually beneficial partnerships among a variety of stakeholders across campus. We have already reached out to several potential campus partners. If invited to write a full proposal, we will work with representatives from colleges in Academic Affairs and the Health Sciences, support offices, Student Affairs, Academic Advising, Career Services, students, and campus administration to build a steering committee and implementation team structure that ensures that expertise from key voices informs the design of the QEP and sets the stage for continued active engagement.

Relationship to University Mission and Goals:

This project relates directly to ECU's mission to be a national model, specifically in the area of student success. Through the use of innovative learning strategies and delivery models that align with the principles of UDL, this proposal aims to not only reduce barriers to student success in the college environment, but also to empower students with the academic skills and self-knowledge that can extend to their contributions to the workforce and our region. An explicit emphasis on addressing support for courses carrying GE credit aligns with ECU's General Education commitment, and the flexible nature of the UDL framework will enable alignment with other campus goals and current priorities (e.g., Strategic Enrollment Planning). This QEP addresses the university's institutional priorities to improve student retention and graduation rates and may help to recruit and maintain a student body that values innovative learning.

Available ECU Expertise:

We will build upon contributions, expertise, and experience of a wide range of individuals and offices across the ECU campus during the design and implementation process. Examples of existing expertise upon which we can build include the *Office for Faculty Excellence* (experience with the UDL framework and College STAR initiative), *Pirate Academic Success Center* (exploratory groundwork for the student support element of this QEP over the past several years and is well positioned to scale), *Learning Platforms - ITCS* (UDL Specialist position), STEPP Program (success with students with identified learning disabilities), Faculty Leaders (early work and publications around the UDL framework), and Disability Support Services (expertise related to students with identified disabilities and accessibility strategies in general).

Tentative Budget:

Expense	Proposed Budget	Proposed Budget	Proposed Budget	Proposed Budget	Proposed Budget
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Salaries	755,000	864,550	1,140,115	1,293,872	1,265,470
Benefits	157,793	245,986	333,991	377,650	366,930
Purchased Services	2,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	8,000
Supplies & Materials	25,000	25,000	20,000	15,000	10,000
Equipment	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	30,000
Total Expenses	974,793	1,180,536	1,539,106	1,731,522	1,680,400

Budget Notes:

- Estimated salaries include projections for annual increase. This would depend on pay increase circumstances for campus overall.
- We anticipate associated retention/recruitment related revenue and student saving implications with this project. If invited to submit a full proposal we will learn more about how to estimate those predictions.
- Some of the personnel costs included here will be new costs, and some could potentially involve reallocation of existing personnel/positions.