



March 1, 2018

Chairman Lamar Alexander  
US Senate HELP Committee  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Patty Murray  
US Senate HELP Committee  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

We write on behalf of the UDL Task Force, a coalition of national organizations that have come together to promote the use of universal design for learning (UDL) strategies in federal policy and legislative initiatives, in to respond to the Senate HELP Committee's request for input on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA).<sup>1</sup>

UDL is a set of principles and guidelines for guiding curriculum development and educational practices that optimize learning for all students. Although UDL is supported by nearly 30 years of research and best practices, it was first recognized by Congress as a necessary component of high-quality education in 2008 when the definition of UDL was included in the Higher Education Opportunity Act. Most recently, UDL has been included in the Every Student Succeeds Act and recognized in the law as a critical component of accessible assessments.

UDL provisions must be included in the reauthorization of HEA to serve two key purposes:

- (1) Including the definition of UDL and opportunities for its implementation in post-secondary settings to enable institutions of higher education to address learner variability, improve instruction, and help ensure that all students, including students with disabilities, can optimize their learning; and
- (2) Incorporating UDL into teacher preparation programs can ensure educators will have the knowledge and skills to apply UDL principles in elementary and secondary education classrooms.

Therefore, we recommend the following:

- (1) **Retain the current statutory definition of “universal design for learning” in its entirety.**

When HEA was re-authorized in 2008 as HEOA, it codified the definition of “Universal Design for Learning” in the Higher Education Opportunity Act (PL 110-315) as:

*“a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that:*

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<sup>1</sup> See [here](#) for information about the UDL Task Force.

*(A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and  
(B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.”*

This same definition was used in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 and was referenced and endorsed throughout many provisions of ESSA.<sup>2</sup> It is important that teachers and administrators are prepared to implement UDL as clearly expected in ESSA, the nation’s K-12 general education law. Including UDL in HEA will not only ensure that UDL is a part of teacher preparation, but it will also assist higher education faculty in their instruction, engagement, and assessment of students.

Further, the same definition of UDL has been referenced and endorsed as a best practice in the National Technology Plans of 2010 and 2016, as well as the National Ed Tech Developer’s Guide of 2015.<sup>3</sup> Any reauthorization of HEA should maintain this codified definition of UDL in its entirety.

**(2) Retain all current UDL provisions within programs for college faculty and teacher candidates in HEA.**

When HEOA was passed in 2008, UDL was included in many provisions relating to teacher preparation.<sup>4</sup> By equipping teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement UDL in their classrooms, HEA can ensure that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of more learners and address learner variability.

**(3) Include provisions within HEA that provide opportunities for post-secondary education programs and their administration, staff and faculty to receive training, support, and technical assistance to ensure programs of instruction, curricula, and support services are developed according to the principles of UDL.**

UDL is a natural complement to higher education teaching and learning initiatives that promote the use of technology in learning, research on how people learn, and good teaching practices (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000 & Chickering & Gamson, 1986). Instructional materials can include textbooks, digital texts and media resources, and web-based tools that encourage student learning and participation. Eliminating time-consuming adaptations and retro-fitting of instructional materials, UDL allows for efficient use of time and resources and the ability to infuse instructional approaches that can reach more learners.<sup>5</sup> The same benefits apply when college faculty in all the departments of an institution of higher education are prepared to use UDL to teach their courses.

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<sup>2</sup> See [here](#) for a list of references to UDL in ESSA.

<sup>3</sup> See [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> For a full list, see [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> See [Higher Ed FAQs](#) from the National UDL Task Force.

**(4) Add UDL as a criterion for the awarding of higher education grants authorized by HEA**

Research has supported the importance of UDL as an educational framework to consider for postsecondary education.<sup>6</sup> Thoughtful planning through the lens of UDL can offer important options for learners as they navigate a range of college or career postsecondary opportunities. It is well-known that college students are incredibly diverse in their learning needs, preparation, and approaches. UDL offers a practical instructional method to anticipate this learner variability and provide every student with equal opportunities to learn. Additionally, UDL is an effective means for shaping learning experiences outside the classroom, such as online instruction, hands-on learning, or work-study experiences. Where applicable, UDL should be listed as a factor in the reauthorization of HEA in the awarding of grants to postsecondary institutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations regarding the reauthorization of HEA. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions regarding our suggestions.

Sincerely,

Nancy D. Reder, Esq.  
UDL Task Force Co-Chair  
[Nancy.reder@nasdse.org](mailto:Nancy.reder@nasdse.org)

Debbie Taub, Ph.D.  
UDL Task Force Co-Chair  
[DrDTaub@gmail.com](mailto:DrDTaub@gmail.com)

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<sup>6</sup> See [here](#) for more details and successful examples of UDL at the postsecondary level.