

Teaching Times

BALDWIN CENTER FOR LEARNING &
TEACHING

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JULY 30, 2020

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6 Quick Ways to Be More Inclusive in a Virtual Classroom

How do you create online or hybrid courses with an ethos of inclusion and equity embedded throughout?

By [Flower Darby](#)

JULY 23, 2020

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/6-quick-ways-to-be-more-inclusive-in-a-virtual-classroom>

If you're teaching this fall, you're probably trying to figure out how your courses will be affected by the dual reverberations of Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter. Being prepared for an uncertain semester means both improving your remote-teaching skills and finding ways to make your classroom more inclusive.

The two aims overlap, given that online teaching will figure heavily in the coming semester. As someone who has taught in virtual classrooms for 12 years, I have been writing this series on quick, practical ways [to get better](#) at online teaching (for latecomers, here's [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)). This month's column turns to inclusive teaching in a virtual classroom.

The ethos of an [equitable and inclusive classroom](#) is simple: "Everybody gets to learn. No one has to out themselves. All are welcome. All are supported by the very *design* of this class." The hard part: How do you create online or hybrid courses with that ethos

embedded throughout? Two frameworks in your teaching toolkit — Universal Design for Learning and culturally responsive pedagogy — create a powerful way forward. Let's look at each in turn.

Universal Design for Learning. UDL takes research on how people learn and [applies it](#) to course design and teaching. A good way to think about this is to consider the concept of "universal design" in architecture. Picture a ramp alongside a set of stairs; both lead up to a building entrance. The ramp was constructed to help wheelchair users get where they want to go — that is, into the building. But the ramp benefits others, too: people using walkers, strollers, luggage on wheels, or cargo dollies. The ramp wasn't originally conceived for them but once it's in place, they benefit from it, too.

UDL applies that idea to the classroom. It's about offering choices — akin to the stairs or the ramp — to support learning and get students where they want to go. With UDL, you can plan your course from the outset in ways that, while they lower barriers to learning for students with certain needs, benefit all students. Specifically, this approach flips the idea of needing to provide an accommodation in class for a student with disabilities — something that risks stigmatizing the student and imposes extra work on a faculty member. Instead of rushing to adapt to a last-minute accommodation for a particular student, UDL helps you design "ramps" as part of your course, so they're already in place for anyone who needs (or wants) to take advantage of them.

A classic example of UDL for an online course is providing captions for or transcripts of videos. Prerecorded videos (as [I've noted before](#)) are a great way to communicate and build connections with online students. Besides being easy to create, videos are a powerful means of explaining complicated concepts and are more efficient than Zoom teaching (for those who like videoconferencing, check out "[8 Ways to Be More Inclusive in Your Zoom Teaching](#)"). You can reuse your videos in future semesters, too, if you make the content evergreen.

But videos need captions in order to be of use to students with hearing loss. Instead of letting that extra step — and extra work — stop you from creating videos, think of it as a way to lower barriers for everyone in your class. Many students prefer to read along while they watch an instructional video; it helps them absorb and process information. A text transcript is a good alternative to captions (or you can offer both). Some students like to print out transcripts, take notes on them, and then use them to study for a quiz. The point again: By offering this option to help students with hearing loss, you aid all students.

Ready to use UDL in designing your online courses for the fall? There are loads of options, but here are some simple, practical ideas to get you started:

- **Provide the same course content in two different formats.** I just mentioned a good example of this — videos with captions — but there are many other ways to do it. Give students a piece of text, and offer the same content in a visual format such as a chart or [infographic](#). Or, when you ask students to read a chapter of the textbook, make an audio file of you reading it, so students can “read” it on the go or to absorb new ideas in a way that works best for them.
- **Allow two options for how students can complete an assignment.** For example, permit them to submit a weekly reflection on their learning either in writing or by smartphone video. Some students process information and express their ideas better in speech than in writing.
- **Offer students a choice in completing a final project.** Will a research paper or a video presentation enable students to achieve the learning goals and show what they know? Let them decide which one they prefer to create.

Does all of this sound like a lot of work for faculty members? It doesn’t have to be. Nor does it have to cost a lot of time or money. Thomas J. Tobin, a distance-learning guru at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, advocates a “plus-one” approach to UDL: Simply add one option to help your students engage with the content in ways they prefer. For more, listen to [his interview](#) on Bonni Stachowiak’s [Teaching in Higher Ed podcast](#), or read his [recent book](#), written with Kirsten T. Behling, *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education* (West Virginia University Press, 2018).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. An equally important consideration for the fall is how you will [support culturally diverse learners](#) in your online courses. Especially at this moment in American history, you must think critically about how to help Black, Latinx, and other students in historically underrepresented groups succeed in your online (or in-person) courses.

Courtney Plotts is a [researcher and educator](#) who specializes in supporting culturally diverse students in online classes. Her [recent interview](#) on the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast is a good place to start. There and elsewhere, she argues that online classes function in very transactional and Eurocentric ways. Students who do best in online courses, she says, are self-directed learners, have been shaped by cultures that value individual well-being, or both. What about students from cultures that value community over individual success? What about students who, for a variety of good reasons, don’t possess a strong self-identity, or who feel uncertain or worried about asking the instructor for help?

This is a complicated, sensitive subject. But again, there are simple, practical things you can do to be more equitable and inclusive in your online teaching. Here are a few of Plotts’s suggestions:

- **Lead an exercise asking students to help set classroom values.** Create a [Padlet](#) (an online visual Post-it board with [limitless uses in teaching](#)), and ask students to post words and images that represent what's important to them in a classroom. Students might come up with things like respecting all perspectives, creating and maintaining a safe space for all, engaging in civil discourse, using person-centered language, etc. You can refine their ideas into a list or leave them gloriously unstructured on Padlet. Revisit these co-constructed values throughout the term, asking how well the class is doing in upholding them. You can try an anonymous survey or poll, a classwide discussion, or both, for different purposes.
- **"Which picture best describes how you're feeling?"** Here's a quick exercise (another good use of Padlet) to help you gauge how students of different backgrounds feel about your online course. Provide a variety of images — a serene landscape, a feisty cat, a race car, a stormy sea cliff, a mournful hound dog — and ask students to write or record themselves talking about which one best represents how they feel, whether about online learning, about the fall semester, about the subject matter, or about anything else you want to know about. Best suited for a small class, this activity shows students that you care about them as people and are not fixated on just their meeting class deadlines. Follow up by emailing those students who selected images that conveyed anxiety or other negative emotions, and periodically check in with them throughout the semester.
- **Remind them to reach out to you for help.** Be aware, Plotts says, that students from some cultural backgrounds may hesitate to ask an instructor for assistance. The same goes for introverted students. In remote teaching, you can use announcements, short recorded videos, and email messages to encourage students to contact you, even if it's outside their comfort zone. Repeat that message frequently enough for them to believe you mean it. Use a warm and encouraging tone. Respond quickly to their emails and questions. All of that will encourage students to take you up on your offer.

Be patient with yourself as you try these new approaches. Both UDL and culturally responsive pedagogy can feel overwhelming. So do just one new thing this fall. Add another in the spring, or improve upon your approach from the fall. We say we support our students. We say we want all of them to learn and succeed. Let's show them we mean it by working to lower barriers in our course design.

[Flower Darby](#)

Flower Darby is an instructional designer and the author, with James M. Lang, of *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes*. Find her on Twitter [@flowerdarby](#).

Upcoming Faculty Development Opportunities

Small Teaching Online Discussion

Tuesday, August 4

9:30-10:30am OR 2:30-3:30pm

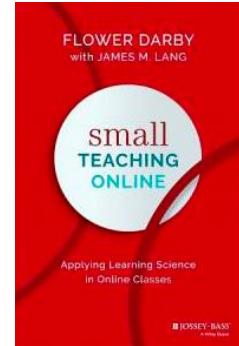
Register: <https://bit.ly/OnlineSmallTeaching>

Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes (2019) by Flower Darby & James Lang

ebook is available through the Bowdoin Library:

<https://cbbcat.net/record=b6061263~S19>

<https://library.bowdoin.edu/>



The concept of small teaching is simple: small and strategic changes have enormous power to improve student learning. Instructors face unique and specific challenges when teaching an online course. This book offers small teaching strategies that will positively impact the online classroom.

More workshops are listed here: <https://www.bowdoin.edu/bolt/workshops/index.html>

OR in the Orientation course on Blackboard

Faculty Orientation Course for Online Teaching and Learning

The faculty orientation course contains a series of resources to help you deliver an engaging and quality online course experience. There are guides, white papers, and tutorials that are organized and sequenced within three overarching phases of online course development — planning your course, building within the LMS, and teaching students in the online modality. It is an **asynchronous** course on **Blackboard**.

Course Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Describe important considerations for online learning.
- Plan your online course structure.
- Build your course content into the Learning Management System (LMS).
- Adhere to accessibility guidelines when developing your course.
- Facilitate your course successfully online.
- Leverage your available resources to support you and your students.

Teaching Writing with Blackboard: Peer Review, Written Feedback, and Collaboration (Meredith McCarroll & Jennifer Snow)

August 10, 10-11 am

Open to all faculty

<https://bowdoin.zoom.us/j/91780492882?pwd=MmYwQnZlZ3B6UWNyYTFPOTg4TEw2QT09>

Meeting ID: 917 8049 2882

Passcode: 620534

Course Design Experience with Colby & Bates Colleges

Bowdoin Lead Facilitators: Katie Byrnes & Irina Popescu

3-day Intensive, August 11-13 (Live Sessions: 9-10am Webinar, 1-2pm Small group meetings; 3-4pm Reflection)

Register: https://bit.ly/2020_CDE

For more information: <https://cbbpedagogymatters.com/>

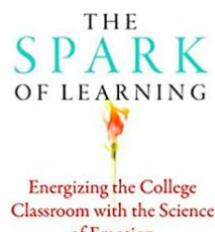
The Colby, Bates, & Bowdoin (CBB) Course Design Experience (CDE) is a place for faculty and instructors to start the design of a new course or rethink the design of a pre-existing course. The CDE is a learner-centered experience that allows each participant to spend time working on the elements of their courses that need the most attention (Learning Goals, Assignments, Learning Activities) while engaging in conversation with the facilitation team, fellow educators and colleagues. Ultimately, this experience will help faculty and instructors to develop courses for in-person and online contexts that promote deep learning, support academic integrity, reflect the needs of diverse learners, and enhance the academic experience for all learners.

Save the Date: August 21, 2020 Colby, Bates & Bowdoin Pedagogy Matters Conference Online

Keynote: [Dr. Sarah Rose Cavanagh](#), author of *The Spark of Learning: Energizing the College Classroom with the Science of Emotion*

Register: <https://forms.gle/faqdZQzPNvLaKQsQA>

FMI: <https://cbbpedagogymatters.com/>



SARAH ROSE
CAVANAGH

Take an online course “Resilient Teaching in Times of Crisis and Change” through the University of Michigan

<https://www.coursera.org/lecture/resilient-teaching-through-times-of-crisis/a-community-oriented-mooc-VAcUB>

Resilient teaching is the ability to facilitate learning experiences that are designed to be adaptable to fluctuating conditions and disruptions. This teaching ability can be seen as an outcome of a design approach that attends to the relationship between learning goals and activities, and the environments they are situated in. Resilient teaching approaches take into account how a dynamic learning context may require new forms of interactions between teachers, students, content, and tools. Additionally, they necessitate the capacity to rethink the design of learning experiences based on a nuanced understanding of context.

Attend a CIRTL course or teaching institute

<https://www.cirtl.net/>

The Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL) seeks to enhance excellence in STEM undergraduate education through development of a national faculty committed to implementing and advancing evidence-based teaching practices for diverse learners. This summer the CIRTL Network's online programming includes [3 courses](#), [1 MOOC](#), [3 teaching institutes](#), and [3 online teaching office hours](#). Courses and teaching institutes require advance registration during defined registration periods; MOOCs and office hours do not.

Read:

Small Teaching Online by Flower Darby & James Lang

Intentional Tech by Derek Bruff

The Blended Course Design Workbook by Kathryn Linder

Online Teaching at Its Best by Linda B. Milson & Ludwika A. Goodson

Resources at: <https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/>

The Baldwin Center for Learning and Teaching

The Baldwin Center promotes *intentional, equitable, and effective* learning and teaching environments. We are committed to inclusive excellence and to helping all students, faculty, and staff grow as learners and teachers. The programs housed in Kanbar 102 serve as a location for discussions, tutoring, mentoring, and advising. Tutoring, mentoring and writing assistance occur Sunday-Thursday nights in Kanbar 102 between 6-10pm. Students may schedule appointments at: www.bowdoin.edu/baldwin-center or drop in for peer-to-peer support or make an appointment directly with Baldwin CLT Staff listed below. Faculty may make an appointment for a consultation directly with staff.

Administrative Contacts

Kathryn Byrnes, Director 102D Kanbar 207-725-5035 kbyrnes@bowdoin.edu
Tammis Donovan, Administrative Coordinator 102G Kanbar 207-725 3006 tdonovan@bowdoin.edu

ACADEMIC COACHING

Tina Chong, Assistant Director, cchong2@bowdoin.edu

Tina consults individually with students to strategize plans and schedules, develop techniques for acquiring new knowledge and skills, and manage their workload while maintaining health and well-being. [Make an appointment here!](#)

ENGLISH FOR MULTI-LINGUAL SPEAKERS (EMS)

Lisa Flanagan, Advisor, 102B Kanbar 207-725-3056 lflanagan2@bowdoin.edu

Students, faculty, and staff who are multi-lingual or who have parents who are non-native speakers of English may work with EMS Advisor Lisa Flanagan. They may seek help with understanding assignments and reading strategies, grammar, outlining, revising, editing, and the conventions of scholarly writing.

THE Q (QUANTITATIVE) REASONING PROGRAM

Eric Gaze, Director, 301 Kanbar 207-725-3135 egaze@bowdoin.edu

James Broda, Assistant Director, 222 Kanbar 207-725-7148 jbroda@bowdoin.edu

Provides support to students in understanding and using numerical information. Peer tutors lead study groups and individual tutorials for students in quantitative courses. Supports faculty in the design and analysis of quantitative material in coursework.

WRITING AND RHETORIC

Meredith McCarroll, Director 102E Kanbar 207-721-5056 mmccarro@bowdoin.edu

Students in any discipline may work one-on-one with a trained, peer writing assistant to improve their writing process and strengthen their writing. Writing assistants work with students in selected courses, semester partnerships, and drop-in workshops. Directs the First Year Seminar program and supports faculty incorporating writing and oral presentations in their classrooms.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT-TEACHING

Kathryn Byrnes, Director 102D Kanbar 207-725-5035 kbyrnes@bowdoin.edu

Provides support to faculty on course design, learning goals, syllabi, assignments, assessment, mid-course feedback, Bowdoin Course Questionnaires, challenges with students, and other aspects of teaching and student learning. Supports Baldwin Faculty Fellows program and Teaching Triangles reflection program. Organizes August, January, and May Institutes on teaching and learning.