Teaching at Torrens: Using UDL for accessible education (transcript)

Slide 1: Hi everyone. My name is Meng Lim and I am the Accessibility Advisor at Torrens University. Thank you so much for switching on to today’s session and I am proud to present Teaching at Torrens: Using UDL for accessible education.

Slide 2: A few points about today’s session: please note that it is prerecorded and will be captioned with closed captions. There is no facilitation for this poster presentation, but if you have any questions or feedback for the facilitator, please feel free to send an email to meng.lim@torrens.edu.au.

Slide 3: I would like to begin the presentation by providing an acknowledgement to the traditional custodians and owners of the land in which I work on. This session is being recorded on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and I wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners. I would also like to pay my respects to their Ancestors and Elders, past and present, and members of other communities who may be here today.

Slide 4: We’ll start today’s session by providing a brief glance at the cohort of students studying at Torrens University. We’ll go over the proactive and reactive supports we offer students with accessibility needs, and start to describe the DAPS model: digital, assessment, physical and social. This model is how Torrens University thinks about universal design and accessibility in education, and helps to inform the accessible learning checklist which we’ll then discuss later in the session. Finally, we’ll end on an overview of focuses for continuous improvement to make sure all education at Torrens University is inclusive and accessible.

Slide 5: Who are our students at Torrens University, and how do they identify? AS you can see from the chart, there is a wide diversity of needs that students disclose throughout their studies with us, ranging from mental health, chronic medical conditions, neurological conditions and many more. As you can also see, and as is aligned with the industry, the vast majority of students identify with a mental health condition. The other factor which is not captured in this chart is the wide number of students who actually disclose multiple conditions, which really goes to emphasise how much complexity exists within the range of students who have accessibility needs.

Slide 6: In addition to information on the category of needs that students disclose at Torrens University, we also track the faculties and areas of study that students with accessibility needs enrol into at Torrens University. As you can see, Health and Design are the two most strongly represented faculties. This presents some interesting challenges, on how to accommodate for the practical, clinical or other unique components that these two faculties comprise.

Slide 7: Once a student discloses an accessibility need, there are many reactive supports that we can offer to ensure that they can progress and succeed in their studies. these are standard across the industry, including individual needs assessments, development of a learning access plan, pastoral care and counselling supports as well as referrals to additional student support services. In addition, Torrens University is committed to proactive practices in order to ensure we practice universal design and allow for accessibility throughout all aspects of our teaching. This includes assessment and curriculum review on an ongoing basis, as well as personal development initiatives for students and training for academic and operational staff.

Slide 8: I would now like to introduce you to the DAPS model. This refers to the way Torrens University thinks about the various ways in which accessibility and universal design need to be practiced throughout our teaching and activities, and informs the way we set standards and expectations for all members of our community in order to ensure open and inclusive environments.

Digital accessibility is practiced through default procurement of alternative format materials, regular review of our learning platforms and technologies as well as ongoing digital support for students.

Universal assessment design is often achieved through scaffolded tasks, flexible conditions and arrangements as well as establishing multiple or alternative formats of the same task.

Physical accessibility is continuously considered through recent renovations and new designs to our physical campuses, as well as the ability to make flexible changes to all our classrooms and campus environments.

Lastly, we commit to social inclusion by making sure that we are conscious of our interpersonal interactions, the ways we communicate as well as the awareness we promote in all our spaces to support accessibility and positive space.

Slide 9: The four quadrants of the DAPS model inform the checklist that we use at Torrens University to ensure we are allowing for accessible teaching and practicing universal design in our activities.

Using technology to allow for accessible recordings and blended learning provides multiple modes for students to participate, and having different opportunities for interaction and contribution can ensure that all students are able to engage in a comfortable and supported way. Designing multiple formats of notes and materials helps to ensure learning is inclusive, and can supplement the additional services and academic literacy tools which are offered to students as well.

We also prioritise conscientious and accessible design for assessments, through the use of scaffolded tasks, case studies and other alternative format options, to ensure all students can achieve the same learning outcomes while allowing for diverse and inclusive pathways.

Slide 10: As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, Torrens University have also identified four theme for the future to ensure we continue creating more accessible environments and practicing universal design as a default standard throughout our teaching.

These four areas include place activation, support provision, training and development as well as process transparency. Together, these themes capture the various ways in which we try to improve on our ability to accommodate and support our diverse student cohorts, in order to ensure equitable learning outcomes, positive experiences, a strong sense of belonging for students as well as a united responsibility and passion across our staff in the pursuit of accessibility.

As we continue to prioritise universal design in all aspects of our work, we hope to expand on existing supports, increase training and development opportunities as well as collaborate with other partners and stakeholders to foster and develop an inclusive and supportive learning experience for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstance.

Slide 11: There is no doubt of the diversity of our students as well as the wide ranging categories of needs and impacts that they experience as a result of their personal circumstances. By using a holistic approach and taking a step back to see the bigger picture, Torrens University strives to ensure that all aspects of the student experience are accessible and that participation can be equitable for all students. We continue to emphasise the importance and value of universal design in teaching in our efforts to improve best practice and advocacy, while maintaining supportive processes to react when necessary to disclosures of need and other unanticipated challenges.

Slide 12: This brings us to the end of today’s poster presentation, and I would like to thank you again for your time, attention and attendance. If you have any questions, comments or feedback, please feel free to contact me via the details provided on the slide, and I hope to connect with you in the future. Thank you again and enjoy the rest of the conference.