

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Lillian Nave
Episode 126 - The Transcript

LOUI:

Hello, and welcome to UDL in 15 Minutes where educators discuss their experiences with UDL. I'm Loui Lord Nelson, UDL author and leader. Today, I'm talking with Lillian Nave, faculty and educational development specialist at Appalachian State University in Hickory, North Carolina. Lillian is going to talk about how she's applying UDL to the development of policies, procedures, and daily life on a newly established college campus. Welcome, Lillian.

LILLIAN:

Thank you, Loui. It is really fun to be on the UDL in 15 Minute podcast because I've been a fan ever since we both started our podcasts in about October of 2018. So this is a lot of fun and I always look up to what you're doing.

LOUI:

Oh my gosh, thank you so much. And for those who don't know, Lillian hosts ThinkUDL. So if you're looking for another high, high-quality podcast about Universal Design for Learning, that's where you head. So I'm so excited to have you here. Okay, so can you offer a bit about who you are, what you do, and how you came to know about UDL?

LILLIAN:

Absolutely. I am a former faculty member, so I taught in higher ed for about 20 years and I've just switched to a new position, which is a staff position where I get to be a faculty developer. So I get to support our faculty. And so my focus is of course on higher ed and my podcast too is focused on higher ed, and how we can implement those things. And so what I'm doing now is supporting our faculty in their careers, and in their teaching especially because all of our faculty, where I am, at the campus where I am in Hickory, are non-tenure track faculty and we like to call those VITAL faculty and VITAL stands for visiting and instructor and temporary and adjuncts and lecturers, all those other kinds of titles besides assistant and associate professor. And so I support them in their teaching and in their really career success. And how did I come to know UDL was, boy, about eight to 10 years ago, working with a grant called College STAR. So it was yeah UDL in the college world because I will say that, honestly, UDL has caught on much more in K-12, and my goal with the podcast and with what I do is trying to get UDL into the higher education sector, and letting folks know about it. So with College STAR, the STAR was an acronym that stood for, because the grant's over, but it stood for supporting, transition, access, and retention. So bringing more students into higher ed and helping them succeed by taking down barriers that have existed in higher ed because we do have a lot of traditions that are based on some older ways of doing things that were based on different kinds of students, and they aren't serving our current students, some of them are. So that's one of the things I'm trying to tackle in higher ed. So from that grant, I worked as a UDL coordinator, learned a lot about UDL on my own, and working with folks at CAST and all over the country to learn all I could about it and did workshops and introduced it to our faculty. And that helped me into my new role

as that faculty developer. So it's all, been pretty much, I think the reason why I have my new job and that I love is, from UDL.

LOUI:

Awesome. And you said 2008, right?

LILLIAN:

2018.

LOUI:

2018. Okay.

LILLIAN:

So that's when I started the podcast. So I started learning about, UDL around probably 2016.

LOUI:

Yeah. Okay. That makes sense. So I think we need to give listeners a little context to understand Appalachian State University's unique new campus and its relationship with the main campus.

LILLIAN:

Yeah, so this is a really new venture for the state of North Carolina. The UNC system has 18 schools and we are very proud to have the first public higher ed institution at our flagship in Chapel Hill. But we have a really fantastic group of universities. But not all of them have that UNC-Charlotte or UNC-Chapel Hill. So some of them like Appalachian State are part of this system. However, what we found is that there were some pockets of North Carolina that did not have an opportunity for its citizens to go to a public higher ed institution that was a four-year program. Now, we do have, by the way, an incredible system of community colleges that almost every North Carolina citizen has access to within driving distance a community college campus, but not a four-year campus. So Appalachian State wanted to offer that, and we worked with the legislature to buy an old building from, actually, it was the Corning Building, so one of our big companies in North Carolina, and have revamped that building. So it's one giant building. It's actually the largest academic building that Appalachian State has. And it is now the new home of a new campus. And so we are, we've redone the first floor and that's where most of our classrooms are. That's happened last year. So this campus opened in 2023 in August. And we just opened parts of the second floor with a new cybersecurity lab, a new computer lab, and a new biology lab. So this is a way to make higher ed more affordable for the citizens of North Carolina, for students who do not want to go away to a four-year campus and live on campus, which is far more expensive than if you were to commute to a college campus. So App State has now, we'll say we are kind of three entities. We have the Boone campus, which is about an hour north in the beautiful mountains in the Blue Ridge, right on next to the Blue Ridge Parkway. And then we have our Hickory campus, so an hour south, it's in the foothills. It's about halfway between Boone and Charlotte, our major metropolitan area with a big airport. And then we also have the online portion of App State University. And one other thing that we're venturing into as

well is a new entity called Project Kitty Hawk, which is for older adults or returning students to complete their degree. Project Kitty Hawk is an online program, but it's not in the traditional semester sense. It's in shorter, like eight week, almost micro-credentials in order to get a four-year degree. So this new campus is very much functioning like a community college campus. There are no dorms. Students will come every day. The building closes at night, that sort of thing, and all of the faculty though are within their departments that actually reside in the Boone campus. So everybody's department chair is about an hour up the mountain so it's a bit of a high flex the whole relationship where we've got faculty, you know, spread across several counties and a wide geographic area, but we all function as the same entity. So we did not create a new UNC Hickory, right? That would be a brand new university for our system. Instead, we've added a campus to one of our universities.

LOUI:

Got it. So yeah, I'm really intrigued by that design because like you've said, you're serving those folks in that area, the driving distance, so they drive in and not staying there, but still having that connection...

LILLIAN:

Yes.

LOUI:

...to the main campus, like the hour away up the hill, up the mountain.

LILLIAN:

Yes.

LOUI:

So what I'm interested in is how you've been using UDL to establish everything from those quality instructional practices to the effective procedures. So like you explained, these were non-tenured faculty, VITAL faculty, which I love that acronym.

LILLIAN:

Yes.

LOUI:

That's great. So maybe start with that instructional piece because you have that mixture.

LILLIAN:

Yeah, so a lot of our faculty are practitioners in residence. So when I made up that or used that VITAL acronym, we didn't have practitioners in residence back then. So I might have to change that one. But that means they've come from an industry because so one of our main majors at the campus is business. So we've got a really fantastic Walker College of Business at Appalachian State. And a lot of folks will come to App State for a business degree. And so in order to staff, you know, a lot of the professors that we have at the new campus in Hickory,

we're drawing on folks who have a lot of real-world experience because this really is serving students who want to get that degree to go work, you know. They are coming to App State's Hickory campus because they want to really put in practice, they're very practical students, they wanna get a better life. Actually, about 70% of our students are first generation too. So let me go back to the faculty and say, these are folks that are really student-focused. They want to teach and they have so much to share from their previous backgrounds. So we have a lot of folks who are, first of all, new to Appalachian State University, right? So which has all of its policies and procedures, and things that happen on a college campus. But then we also have many of these faculty who are coming in having, you know, great success in their business world or as teachers. We've got a big education program, and they haven't taught in higher ed before. So it's a lot of onboarding of new faculty. So that means that there's a lot of how do you translate that knowledge that you have into teaching students. And that's difficult. That's difficult for anyone. Coming right out of your graduate program, you know, with a PhD, it's very rare that college faculty get a background in how to teach. So people don't know about how the brain works. We don't know about what's the best teaching practice for chemistry or art history, right, or economics. We just sort of wing it, like, okay, I guess I'll just tell you what I know, and so that has been a major focus, is helping the faculty know what will work also with our students because our students are different that we get on the Hickory campus, then we will get on the main Boone campus because those students go away from home. They are on the campus full-time. They don't have as many outside, some of them, you know, will have jobs and other life activities. But our students will often be working a job, sometimes a full-time job, have family responsibilities, and it is a very different than the traditional college campus where our students are kind of, they could roll out of bed in their pajamas, walk across the quad and sit in a class. And at our campus, it's very different. So helping the instructors meet the needs of those students, come up with like policies that will work when your students can't make it to class because their car broke down. That's not a problem that you have on a traditional college campus. So things like what is your policy going to be for attendance if there are so many things that are beyond the student's control, can you make a Zoom link available? Can you have a way for students to have attendance points or something like that that's not just sitting there in the classroom if they can't be there? You know, can there be alternate ways of showing participation and those types of things?

So I get to meet with our faculty and do kind of faculty orientation and support them. And it's a completely new campus. So there's lots of things like I need to laminate these biology tags, but we don't have a laminator on the campus yet. It's like, okay, well, and I just took those home because I have my own laminator and I brought them back.

LOUI:

Yeah, what I'm hearing is that you and your colleagues are really busy with knowing the student experiences, understanding the experiences of your learners, and then also layering that with the knowledge of variability, and knowing that they already came as variable learners. They already came with their different ways and needs of learning based on the context. But then having that additional information about them is so helpful and directly impacts how they're going to learn, how they're going to be successful partners in learning, and then how they're

going to be successful in their, oh gosh, how they're going to be successful implementers of what they're learning.

LILLIAN:

Yeah.

LOUI:

I think what's really brilliant about how you're talking about UDL, and we didn't dive too deeply into it, but it's clear that you are using that UDL-aligned thinking...

LILLIAN:

Yes.

LOUI:

...to think about the learners, to think about their experiences, but then also to think about the faculty and what their needs are in how they can improve their outreach and the design of their instruction.

LILLIAN:

Yeah, and it is it's all flexibility. We have got to be flexible with our faculty and with our students, because even our faculty travel in from an hour away. So we have faculty members that live in cities that are an hour east, an hour west, an hour south of Hickory and come in to teach. And we have students that live an hour south and east and west, you know, and that need for flexibility is imperative. Like, there's no way we can have like, everybody needs to be on campus nine to five. And that just doesn't work with a lot of faculty schedules, that they're really coming into campus to teach on the days, you know, that they teach and they'll have their office hours in. But let's say, all right, everybody needs to be here on a Wednesday. That's, you know, a two-hour, two-and-a-half-hour round trip. So let's make a Zoom link available for meetings. You know, it's not that hard to think of those things, but, we do need to make things as flexible, and as open and accessible for everybody. So things like having live streams for big events that are on the main campus. We'll have a live stream to our Hickory campus and folks can watch that. So if it's not like a Zoom open to everyone where it's more of a campus thing, we can do that. We're trying to also link our students up to the main campus in Boone with things like a big football watch party we're going to have because it's one of the things that Appalachian is known for after several national championships. And so it's part of the vibe, you know, the Appalachian experience. And so instead of busing students up to a game, which we tried already last season, and had a big hickory day there. We're going to have a big watch party, you know at the Hickory campus with them you know wings and tailgate food and stuff like that. So trying to make equivalent experiences and also unique experiences for the students, and being flexible enough with our faculty that it's not onerous to do this. And we've got class classes that are sometimes really small. like five students. I've got one with seven students this semester so it's really fantastic actually to to get to know your students so well. And then we've got some you know much larger classes and it's difficult when if you've got 20 students and you've got four sections and maybe a quarter of them at any one particular time might have

difficulty getting to campus, oh, I am sick, somebody got COVID, I can't come in, you know, we need to make it a really flexible space because of all of the variables that both our faculty and our students have. So that's a lot of what my job is, is thinking about how we can do this flexibly and accessibly. So a lot of, all right, do we make sure is this, is this new floor that we just opened? Is that accessible? How are students using the elevators? Do they have access to all the elevators? You know, at least physically too, and moving around in the classrooms. And do they have access to all this information with a new campus? We need to have a lot of communication and lots of ways to communicate so students know what sort of opportunities that they have. So lots of signage, lots of, we have those digital Scala slides, you know, to tell students about what's going on. And then we send out emails, but students don't read emails and we all know that. So what sort of social media is going to have is we can use so it's just it's a matter of like translating all those traditional campus things where you would just go and put like a thumbtack a piece of paper up and say come over here. Our students are not in the building all that, you know, to see everything or they might not be able to, there's not like the campus dining hall where everybody goes, right? So that sort of thing, just have to keep thinking about different ways to reach the students because it is not the traditional campus. So the traditional ways of doing things, of teaching, of getting out information, all of that has to be modified for a new campus like this.

LOUI:

What I was really taking away from what you just shared is that Appalachian State and you and those with whom you are partnering, you're modeling that hyperflex, you are modeling that flexible thinking rather than the very old model of, well, if they don't read their emails, that's their problem. You know, the old thinking of this is the way we do it and we're not gonna do it any other way, but instead, but then there's the sway, there's that whole big sway that people will go on, which is, well, that means we have to do it a hundred different ways.

LILLIAN:

Yeah.

LOUI:

And no, no, no, no, no, no, you're finding the effect efficiency in like the example of communication. You're finding and using the efficiencies that we have in communication, you're likely communicating much the same message. You're just doing it across different platforms, which once that process is put into place, we're talking a two-minute thing, you know, figuring it, yeah, it's effective. And so instead of saying, well grumpy person saying, oh, they have to, they have to only use the email or getting caught in a system that is not well-designed, and so it's using all sorts of different communication platforms, but not using them effectively and efficiently because they're not using them in the way that users use them.

You guys are finding that that center point that is all driven by UDL-aligned thinking and I think it's just brilliant.

LILLIAN:

Yeah, and I am here to say today and in 2024, I think this is the future of education. It has to be flexible, that not as many students are going to go away from their families, from their culture, from their lives, from their jobs, and do that four-year experience, it's expensive. Students are finding that sometimes they aren't ready for it when they're 18. That you can get a college education, that's less expensive, that serves your purposes, that's flexible, and that takes you where you want to be in a completely different way. And I think that's where we're headed. And we need to be prepared for those students.

LOUI:

Yeah. Thank you so much, Lillian. I really appreciate that. I appreciate this conversation and I think that listeners are going to find value in it, especially because we are talking about that UDL-aligned thinking and how to apply that and not necessarily going through the specific guidelines of it, but rather knowing the gestalt of the framework and saying, ah, I can take this and apply it to what I'm doing. So thank you for modeling that.

LILLIAN:

Absolutely. Thank you. And thank you for having me on the podcast. I love it.

LOUI:

You're welcome. So for those listening to this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed captioning, that montage with audio descriptions, a transcript, and an associated blog at my website, which is www.theudlapproach.com/podcasts And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 Minutes, you can contact me through www.theudlapproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL, and making it our goal to build learner agency.