

MOLLOY UNIVERSITY

School of Education and Human Services

Department of Teacher Education

EDU 5900.xx Smart Design: UDL for the Neurodiverse Classroom (3 credits)

Fall 2026

Instructor: Paul Zaratini

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Office hours: Monday - Friday 3:00 PM - 7:30 PM

Course Description:

Intentional lesson design is the key to a manageable inclusion classroom. Led by a 24-year inclusion veteran, this course provides K–12 educators with a practical, streamlined framework for applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles directly to all content areas. Instead of exhaustively modifying lessons after they are written, participants will learn how to intentionally architect units that naturally accommodate neurodiverse learners—including students with ADHD, Autism, dyslexia, and executive dysfunction—from the very start. By focusing on high-impact design choices, clear templates, and targeted accessibility strategies, you will learn how to eliminate learning barriers and optimize student engagement without increasing your grading or planning workload. Leave with classroom-ready strategies that respect your time, simplify your preparation, and elevate your teaching.

Shared Vision:

The Molloy University Teacher Education faculty has derived its vision for the exemplary teacher from the University's mission statement, the four pillars of the Dominican tradition, comments and input from the Professional Education Unit's Advisory Board and degree candidates as well as numerous faculty discussions rooted in the department's knowledge base which undergirds the initial and advanced programs' curriculum, pedagogy, and values

The teaching professionals who complete Molloy's teacher preparation programs are distinguished by their ability to exemplify and promote core values in their own teaching. These values include:

- Belief that all children can learn
- Learner-centered and value-centered curriculum and pedagogy ●
- Ethics and spirituality
- Intellectual curiosity
- Independence and risk taking, while promoting collective identity and responsibility
- Diversity, multiculturalism and pluralism, including divergent thinking ●
- Passion for teaching
- Commitment to students and their communities
- Civic responsibility through the promotion of social justice and interdependence
- Commitment to democracy

Course Objectives:

- Analyze how executive dysfunction, working memory limits, and processing delays manifest in core content areas.
- Evaluate existing district curricula to identify and systematically remove barriers to student learning.
- Investigate the three core pillars of UDL: Multiple Means of Engagement, Representation, and Action/Expression.
- Design multi-sensory and multimodal content delivery methods using low-stress assistive frameworks.
- Formulate flexible, high-integrity assessment options that allow neurodiverse students to accurately demonstrate academic mastery.
- Create a practical, classroom-ready inclusive unit blueprint that reduces the need for retroactive differentiation.

Course Format:

This course will be offered online through Canvas, Molloy's learning management system. The course will open on the start date and close on the last day of class. This section is offered during the fall semester of 2026. There will be daily activities and discussions that must be completed at the end of each day. Assignments will have various yet flexible due dates throughout the course. All work must be completed by the last day of class.

Required Readings, Videos, and Other Materials:

All necessary materials will be provided throughout the course.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

Module 1: Re-Architecting Engagement (The "Why" of Learning) [10 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will identify and describe how environmental triggers and executive dysfunction create hidden barriers in lesson introductions.
- **Topics:**
 - Moving past standard "hooks": Designing predictability and student choice into the first 10 minutes of class.
 - Mitigating cognitive fatigue and anxiety during high-stakes tasks (e.g., science labs or oral historical presentations).
 - Strategies for supporting initiation deficits—getting the neurodiverse brain to start a task without immediate teacher prompts.

Module 2: Multimodal Representation (The "What" of Learning) [10 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will compare and contrast traditional text-heavy delivery with multimodal presentation methods.
- **Topics:**
 - Stripping the cognitive load: Retrofitting dense informational text, reading assignments, and primary source materials.
 - Leveraging low-prep, high-impact visual anchors, graphic organizers, and assistive audio tools.
 - Presenting abstract academic concepts through dual-coding (combining verbal and non-verbal data).

Module 3: Flexible Action & Expression (The "How" of Learning) [10 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will analyze evidence-based alternatives to traditional assessments that maintain high academic rigor.
- **Topics:**
 - Rethinking the unit exam: Allowing students to show what they know without processing speed or writing mechanics acting as a bottleneck.
 - Designing flexible student outputs (e.g., models, oral recordings,

structured templates) for science and social studies concepts.

- Creating clear, objective-focused visual rubrics that evaluate content mastery, not compliance.

Module 4: Managing Executive Dysfunction in the Content Area [10 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will evaluate real-world structural supports that assist inclusion students with time-management and working memory.
- **Topics:**
 - Time blindness in the middle/high school inclusion setting: Building visual pacing timelines.
 - Reducing working memory load: Externalizing the instructions through checklist-driven assignments.
 - Workspace design: Simple adjustments to physical or digital learning spaces that limit sensory overload.

Module 5: Case Study – The Neurodiverse Profile in Focus [10 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will analyze a specific student profile case study to identify proactive design mismatches rather than "fixing" the student.
- **Topics:**
 - In-depth profile analysis: Deconstructing the hidden classroom challenges of ADHD, Autism, and processing speed delays.
 - Proactive adjustments vs. retroactive interventions: Shifting the teacher paradigm from "fixing a problem" to "clearing the path."

Module 6: Collaboration & Co-Teaching Dynamics in UDL [10 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will evaluate case studies of collaborative lesson-planning models that streamline the inclusion workflow.
- **Topics:**
 - Maximizing the general education and special education partnership through universal design templates.
 - Dividing responsibilities during intentional planning sessions to prevent double-work.
 - Keeping the academic bar high while sharing the load in a co-taught room.

Module 7: Technology as an Accessibility Leveler [10 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will design active learning choices utilizing low-maintenance, built-in accessibility features within existing school software.
- **Topics:**
 - Smart use of everyday tech: Immersive readers, text-to-speech, audio commentary, and closed captioning tools.
 - Eliminating tech barriers: Keeping assignments streamlined so technology remains a scaffold, not an extra distraction.

Module 8: Final Project – The Inclusion Blueprint [20 pts]

- **Performance Objectives:** Participants will take an existing, standard district curriculum lesson or unit plan and successfully audit it using a standard UDL template.
- **Topics:**
 - Applying the three pillars of UDL to your own current Science, History, or general curriculum unit.
 - Peer reviews: Collaborating on structural design feedback with fellow course participants.
 - Final Polish: Leaving the course with a fully upgraded, inclusion-ready unit plan designed once and ready to use for the entire upcoming school year.

Discussions & Reflections [10 pts total]

- **Discussion #1: The Differentiation Myth (5 pts):** Evaluating the workload shift from reactive troubleshooting to proactive design.
- **Discussion #2: The Executive Function Gap (5 pts):** Reflecting on personal content-area lessons where structural tweaks would replace behavior problems.

Total Points: 100

Molloy University and School of Education and Human Services Policies and Supports:

Expectations of Academic Integrity for All Students

[Honor Pledge and Academic Honesty Policy](#)

Course Withdrawals

View [Withdrawal Policy](#) for potential financial implications

View [the Academic Calendar](#) and/or the course syllabus for the last day to withdraw dates

Incompletes

[Incompletes Policy](#)

Health and Wellness

[Student Health Services](#)

[Student Counseling Center \(SCC\)](#)

Center for Access and Disability (Access)

[Center for Access and Disability](#)

Technical Support

[Student Account, Technology and Canvas](#)

Ally for Canvas

[Supportive Tools and Resources/ Ally](#)

Use of Proctorio for Exams/Quizzes (if applicable)

[Proctorio Resources for Students](#)

Email Accounts

Students are to utilize their Molloy e-mail account or via Canvas when communicating throughout the semester. Those who use a non-Molloy account may miss important messages. Students are responsible for responding to all methods of communication in a timely fashion relating to this course. Instructors will respond to emails from students within 24 hours. When/ if you email the instructor(s), please indicate what course you are in with the course number and section.

APA Manuscript Style

All manuscripts in the field of education are written in the style format of the American Psychological Association. Candidates in the Graduate Education Programs are required to purchase the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.). (2010). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

All papers written in every course must adhere to the manuscript prescriptions defined in this manual.