



Graduate School of Education Penn GSE

PLN 41A: Building a Strong Foundation for Universal Design for Learning and Innovation

January 12, 2026 - April 20, 2026

Live Sessions: To be announced

1.13 Course Units = 4.5 Continuing Education Graduate Credits

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course will provide an overview of skills and competencies needed to support implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the learning communities we serve. With a focus on the four components of the core of teaching and learning, modeled after the best-selling book, *Innovate Inside the Box: Empowering Learners Through UDL and the Innovator's Mindset*, the course is designed to help to scale the core through the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Each module will include a variety of resources to increase options for representation and increase engagement throughout the course. Additionally, there will be numerous options for action and expression so all course assignments are relevant, authentic, meaningful.

The Four Lenses of Learning framework reflects a comprehensive perspective on language, literacy, and learning. These lenses identify teaching and learning as:

- **Meaning-centered** - Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is focused on activating the affective network of the brain - which seeks meaning and engagement. A consistent focus of this course is helping participants take evidence-based strategies and connect them to the design and delivery of meaningful, empowering

teaching and learning.

- Social - In Universal Design for Learning (UDL), it is critical to foster collaboration and community to build engagement. The power of social relationships, both in-person and online are critical pillars for building effective learning communities.
- Language-based - we learn through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This course offers numerous opportunities for rich literacy experiences as participants grow as expert learners and consistently engage in the **five reading, writing, and talking processes**.
- Human - at the core of leading and learning are relationships. This course will focus on making meaningful connections among leaders, educators, and the communities they serve to ensure that all learning experiences create equal opportunities for learners to meet rigorous goals, create personalized learning experiences, and embody the Innovator's Mindset.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, participants will:

- Develop a position on the core of teaching and learning that is empirically and theoretically supported
- Facilitate deep reflection and help participants to refocus intentions and actions to have a more significant impact on the outcomes for all learners
- Develop new and better ways to design, and to determine the impact of authentic teaching and learning on student learning using multiple means of evidence including student feedback, family and community engagement, and qualitative and quantitative data as students work toward goals that are relevant, authentic and meaningful

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- The core of teaching and learning creates implementation drivers that help to scale Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in all learning environments
- Systems that work for all learners are developed through strategically addressing the core of Innovative Teaching and Learning to ensure equitable opportunities through Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

COURSE ORGANIZATION

This course has eight (8) online modules which will include both synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

Module availability and live lecture dates to be shared in the final agenda within the course.

- Module 1: Preparing Your Portfolio and Course Introduction
- Module 2: Universal Design as the Foundation for a Multi-Tiered System of Support
- Module 3: The Core of Teaching and Learning in a Universally Designed System
- Module 4: Teaching is Emotional Work: The Power of Relationships
- Module 5: Learner-Driven, Evidence-Informed
- Module 6: Creating Empowering Learning Experiences
- Module 7: Master Learner, Master Educator
- Module 8: Reflection

The final course grade is based on the following criteria:

- Active participation in online class discussion boards in each module
- Submission of “mini-risks” for each module
- Comprehensive & quality completion of the final project

READINGS AND RESOURCES

- Couros, G. & Novak, K. (2019). [Innovate inside the box: Empowering learners through UDL and the innovator's mindset](#). Impress. (Required)
- Couros G. (2015). [The Innovator's Mindset: Empower Learning, Unleash Talent, and Lead a Culture of Creativity](#). Impress. (Optional)
- All other materials are freely linked through the course in Canvas

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Attendance:** Attendance and participation are vital to success in this course as networking is a key component of innovation. Each participant is expected to be an active learner and participant in every online module and online discussion.
- **Participation:** Central to the course is the sharing of ideas among participants. In addition to commenting about the course resources through discussion posts, participants will participate in “mini-risks” in each module to stretch universally

designed practices and innovation.

Certificate

This course is 1 of 2 courses required to earn a certificate in Universal Design for Learning from The Penn Literacy Network of The University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. The certificate program is structured to be taken in sequence, with PLN41A preceding PLN41B. To register for Part 2, [click here](#).

In these courses, we'll share the power and promise of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the Innovator's Mindset and provide learners with options, choices, and opportunities to reflect, create, connect, and innovate. This certificate program consists of 2 courses, each worth 1.13 Course Units = 4.5 Continuing Education Graduate Credits. Courses are provided in cooperation with The Penn Literacy Network of The University of Pennsylvania's GSE, Katie Novak, Novak Education, and George Couros.

In order to receive your graduate certificate, you have to successfully pass PLN41A and PLN41B.

Course Drop & Incomplete Policy

Drop Deadline: After the due date for Module 1, you will no longer be able to drop this course. If you choose to drop the class after this point, your transcript will reflect a "W" (withdrawal).

Incomplete Grades: If you are unable to complete the required work for this course, you may be assigned an "I" (incomplete). Please note that incomplete grades are only given to students who plan to complete the course requirements. Incomplete grades must be resolved within three months; otherwise, they will become permanent.