



# Washington State University

## College of Education, Sport and Human Sciences

### Maliha Shah

Will defend their dissertation on

**Date: March 24, 2026**

**Time: 11:00 A.M.**

**Zoom: Link by request [ceshs.gradstudies@wsu.edu](mailto:ceshs.gradstudies@wsu.edu)**

*Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend*

Title:

#### **“STUDENTS ENGAGE IN DIFFERENT WAYS”: PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING IN TECHNOLOGY MEDIATED WRITING INSTRUCTION**

Chair: Deanna Day Wiff

Abstract:

Engagement is considered pivotal to student interest, involvement, learning, and achievement. This exploratory single-subject case study gathered a writing instructor’s beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a guiding framework to engage undergraduate students in a technology-mediated composition writing course. Despite an increase in the awareness of the need for equity in teaching and learning, equity in engagement remains underexplored in educational research. Instructors’ instructional planning and practices may not evidence consideration for learner variability and equitable engagement. UDL, as an instructional framework, not only anticipates learner variability but also celebrates it as a strength in the instructional planning process (Rao et al., 2023). Of the three UDL principles, the principle of engagement stresses the need to allow students to engage in different ways according to their individual challenges, needs, strengths, and preferences (CAST, 2018). UDL, informed by Vygotsky’s social constructivism and John Dewey’s pragmatic theory of experience, guides the theoretical framework for this study by suggesting that engagement is best understood by understanding student experiences and is best supported by creating experiences that stimulate student engagement (Schmidt & Allsup, 2019). This study used semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to collect data to explain the instructor’s perceptions and practices to engage students equitably. In addition, student voices were incorporated through self-reporting questionnaire. The findings indicate that student engagement is shaped by purposefully designed learning environments and experiences influenced by instructor beliefs, institutional policies, and theoretical alignment. Efforts to cultivate a safe, trusting, and empathetic learning environment—through emotional responsiveness, pedagogical flexibility, and growth-focused feedback—helped reduce barriers to engagement. However, equitable engagement supports were offered through individual accommodations, requiring students to advocate for themselves rather than being built preemptively into the instructional design as UDL recommends. Furthermore, minimal integration of authentic tasks, structured collaboration, and the underutilization of technology for differentiation and multimodal composition to address learner variability constrained equitable engagement. These findings offer significant practical and theoretical insights for strengthening UDL-informed instructional design and faculty development to promote more equitable engagement for diverse learners in undergraduate writing classrooms.