COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

University Disability Services

Universal Design for Learning – Elements of Good Teaching

The Ohio State University Partnership Grant
Improving the Quality of Education for Students with Disabilities

Definition

Universal design is an approach to designing course instruction, materials, and content to benefit people of all learning styles without adaptation or retrofitting. Universal design provides equal access to learning, not simply equal access to information. Universal Design allows the students to control the method of accessing information while the teacher monitors the learning process and initiates any beneficial methods.

Although this design enables the students to be self-sufficient, the teacher is responsible for imparting knowledge and facilitating the learning process. It should be noted that Universal Design does not remove academic challenges; it removes barriers to access. Simply stated, Universal Design is just good teaching.

Who Benefits

- Students who use English as a second language
- International students
- Older students
- Students with disabilities
- A teacher whose teaching style is inconsistent with the student's preferred learning style
- All students

Principles

(compiled from The University of Minnesota's Curriculum Transformation and Disability grant)

- Identify the essential course content
- Clearly express the essential content and any feedback given to the students
- Integrate natural supports for learning (i.e. using resources already found in the environment such as study buddy).
- Use a variety of instructional methods when presenting material
- Allow for multiple methods of demonstrating understanding of essential course content
- Use technology to increase accessibility
- Invite students to meet/contact the course instructor with any questions/concerns

Common Teaching Methods

	Strengths	Limitations	Preparation
Lecture	Ensures dissemination specific facts	Little, if any, student participation	Information to be of learned needs to be clearly indicated
	Class size is not an issue	Only learning from one source	Course instructor should allot adequate time for content to be presented
Class Discussion	Information and ideas drawn from multiple people	Only practical with small classroom	Course instructor to guide discussion and keep group from going "off-track"
	Student's attention easily maintained	Some students will monopolize the conversation while others will not engage in discussion	Discussion topics/questions should be prepared before class
Role Playing	Can be very impacting	Students may feel "put on the spot"	Course instructor needs to identify rules, situation and roles
	Students are able to test concepts and techniques presented in class	Only practical for small classroom	
Guest Speaker	Provides a real-life example	Quality of the speaker may be poor	Identify and schedule appropriate speakers
	Gives students contacts in the field		Provide introduction and background of speaker
Panel of Experts	Allows for multiple expert opinions topic	Speakers may not be of great quality	Identify and schedule experts on a
	May capture more students' attention	Competition among experts	Provide introduction and background of experts
Videotapes*	Allows for alternate means of representation	Students do not have to actively participate	Required to operate equipment
	Keeps students' attention	Unable to control what students learn	Prepare questions for discussion after video

* The Ohio State University Partnership grant strongly recommends that all videotapes be captioned.

Implementation

- Put course content on Brightspace allowing students to "pick up" material that might have been missed in lecture
- Use peer mentoring, group discussions, and cooperative learning situations rather than strictly lecture
- Using guided notes enables students to listen for essential concepts without copying notes off of overhead
- Update course materials based on current events and student demands
- Provide a comprehensive syllabus with clearly identified course requirements, an accommodation statement, and due dates
- Fluctuate instructional methods, provide illustrations, handouts, auditory and visual aids
- Clarify any feedback or instructions, ask for questions, and use multiple examples
- Relate a new topic to one already learned or a real-life example
- Secure a note taker, allow the students to record lectures or provide them with a copy of your notes
- Allow the students to demonstrate knowledge of the subject through alternate means
- Permit and encourage the use of adaptive technology
- Develop study guides
- Give shorter exams more frequently

Essential Qualities

Course content offers various methods of Representation

Universally designed course content provides alternative representations of essential concepts. Faculty should use various methods of representation to allow the student to learn the information in their preferred means.

Example: Placing course notes on BOLT allows students to gain the information by lecture and text. Additionally, a student with a visual impairment could record the lecture to capture the notes in alternate format.

Course content offers various methods of Engagement

Universally designed course content maintains varied skill levels, preferences, and interests by allowing for options. By having flexible teaching strategies and course content, students can choose methods that support their interest and skill levels.

Example: When teaching a foreign language, students could choose from a variety of on-line options that would allow them to practice fluency and comprehension at a reading level that is appropriate for them.

Course content offers various methods of Expression

Universally designed course content allows for alternate methods of expression. This allows the students multiple means of demonstrating mastery of the material.

Example: Allowing the students to demonstrate knowledge on a subject by doing an oral presentation or writing a paper or taking an exam. Students with a speech impediment may be unable to present the information orally while students with a fine motor disability may have difficulty taking a written exam.

Resources

Universal Design. [on-line]. Available: http://www.cast.org

University of Minnesota's Curriculum Transformation and Disability. Funded by the US Department of Education. Project #P333A990015. Ways to Incorporate Universal Instructional Design.

Honolulu Community College's Common Teaching Methods [on-line]. Available: http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/comteach.htm

Do-It. University of Washington. Funded by the National Science Foundation, The US Department of Education, and the State of Washington. Grant # 9725110 [on-line]. Available: http://www.washinton.edu/doit/.

University of Arkansas at Little Rock. College of Education. [on-line]. Available: www.ualr.edu/~coedept/curlinks/sped.html