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

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


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

