

# **Universal Design for Learning**

## **Elements of Good Teaching**

Learning Resources Department  
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 student to control the method of accessing information while the teacher monitors the learning process and initiates any beneficial methods.

Although this design enables the student 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 speak 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 student
- 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

This information is available in alternative format upon request.  
Please call the Learning Resources Department at 770-229-3442.

## Common Teaching Methods

METHOD	STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS	PREPARATION
Lecture	Ensures dissemination of specific facts	Little, if any, student participation	Information to be learned needs to be clearly indicated
	Class size is not an issue should	Only learn from one source	Course instructor allot adequate time for content to be presented
Class Discussion	Information and ideas drawn from multiple people	Only practical with small classroom	Course instructor needs 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 and ideas on a topic	Speakers may be poor quality	Identify and schedule experts
	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 from video	Prepare questions for discussion after video

\* The Learning Resources Department strongly recommends that all videotapes be captioned.

## Implementation

Put course content on-line 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 comprehensive syllabus with clearly identified course requirements, 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 student to tape record lectures or provide him/her with a copy of your notes
- Allow the student 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

For an example of a employing Universal Design in the classroom, please contact the Learning Resources Department.

## **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 the web allows students to gain the information by lecture and text. Additionally, a student with a visual impairment could tape 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 student 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 a test. 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/doi/>.

This publication is adapted from The Ohio State University Partnership Grant funded by the US Department of Education # P333A990046.