Universal Design for Learning

Elements of Good Teaching

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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Teaching Methods</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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 learned needs to be clearly indicated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class size is not an issue</td>
<td>Only learn from one source</td>
<td>Course instructor should allot adequate time for content to be presented</td>
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<tr>
<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 to guide discussion and keep group from going &quot;off-track&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<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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<tr>
<td><strong>Role Playing</strong></td>
<td>Can be very impacting</td>
<td>Students may feel &quot;put on the spot&quot;</td>
<td>Course instructor needs to identify rules, situation and roles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students are able to test concepts and techniques presented in class</td>
<td>Only practical for small classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<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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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gives students contacts in the field</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide introduction and background of speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Panel of Experts</strong></td>
<td>Allows for multiple expert opinions and ideas on a topic</td>
<td>Speakers may be poor quality</td>
<td>Identify and schedule experts</td>
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<tr>
<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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<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeps students' attention</td>
<td>Unable to control what students learn</td>
<td>Prepare questions for discussion after video from video</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Ohio State University Partnership grant 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 a definition of bolded terms and an example of a professor employing Universal Design in the classroom, please visit www.telr.osu.edu/dpg/glossary.html

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

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


Important Note
This information is available in alternate format upon request. Please call the Office for Disability Services at (724) 738-4877.

It is also available at http://www.sru.edu/ods and Accommodate faculty resources tab at https://sru-accommodate.symphlicity.com/.

Public requests for accommodations through the Office of Disability Services can be made by visiting the following link: https://sru-accommodate.symphlicity.com/public_accommodation.

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