

Beyond Accessibility: Universal Design for Learning

Byron R Roush, roush.94@osu.edu

INTRODUCTION

Accessibility is the ability for **anyone** to access something, regardless of any adaptations the person may require. For a building, this means having ramps and certain door handles, but it isn't always as clear in an educational setting. Although accessibility is often an afterthought or provided "as needed", **there are strict legal requirements in place and, most importantly, benefits** from incorporating accessibility into your design process.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for considering how your courses and curricula are designed to reduce barriers that inhibit learning and engagement, support student development and provide flexibility that enables all students to be successful, **without accommodations**.

Universal Design is far beyond legal accessibility requirements. UDL is a way of thinking that **benefits all students** in your class as well as the instructor as they consider the course with a new lens.

What is important to consider is that **UDL goes beyond physical or cognitive impairments**, using UDL will ensure that you consider cultural differences, fluency and individual preferences.

RESOURCES

Ohio State: Universal Design Think Tank

<http://u.osu.edu/universaldesign>

Penn State Accommodations Training

<http://accessibility.psu.edu/accommodations/>

UDL Center

<http://www.udlcenter.org/>

UDL on Campus

<http://udloncampus.cast.org>

THE THREE PILLARS OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN REQUIRE MULTIPLE MEANS OF:

REPRESENTATION

What does it mean?

Providing multiple means of representation means that information is provided in a clear, easy to understand way, that students can exercise choice in how they interact with material and that adequate background knowledge is supplied.

How do you do it?

- Use multiple types of media, like videos and text.
- Provide guides to understanding or navigating information using mind maps or concept maps.
- Help student generalize and apply new knowledge and skills using practical examples.
- Provide links to background knowledge or important cultural references.

ACTION + EXPRESSION

What does it mean?

Providing multiple means of action and expression means that you design with "construct relevant factors" in-mind; that is, focus on what students need to do to demonstrate growth or competency.

How do you do it?

- Identify what factors are "construct relevant" by identifying what you want students to demonstrate.
- Promote flexibility in designing assessments by allowing various formats (presentations, papers, videos, posters, etc...).
- Provide adequate support to ensure students are setting goals and making progress by designing multi-part projects.

ENGAGEMENT

What does it mean?

Providing multiple means of engagement means that you provide choices for how students navigate and engage in your class. Students should have options that comport with their own preferences and you should employ a variety of teaching strategies to reach the maximum number of students.

How do you do it?

- Allow students to exercise choice in how they take in information by providing a variety of formats.
- Provide opportunities for personal reflection and goal setting.
- Design collaborative experiences employing a variety of strategies.

Universal Design for Learning Persona: Michelle

Michelle suffered a mild traumatic brain injury while playing soccer his senior year of high school. She has always been an excellent student and plans to enroll in college this fall. Although she feels like she has recovered from her injury, she has noticed that she still has problems focusing in class and while studying.

Unique Challenges

- Problems concentrating or studying.
- It is particularly challenging to understand implied meaning and metaphor.

Universal Design Considerations to Support Michelle

Because Michelle's challenges have to do with concentrating and studying, there are some simple changes that could improve her ability to be successful in her courses. As with most other UDL considerations, these changes will actually benefit **ALL** students, whether they have identified accessibility issues or not.

Design Recommendations

- Chunk online content into "small bites" using headings and sections.
- Use plain language and explain jargon, don't assume it is known by students.
- Allow for extra-time on quizzes and tests.
- Alternate tasks in class to break up lecture and class-wide discussions and use peer learning.
- Don't assume that students understand metaphors or jokes you may use in your presentations, explain them.



Universal Design for Learning Persona: Jean Paul

Jean Paul moved to the United States from Haiti as a teenager, when his mother transferred to a new job. Although he learned English in Haiti and attended an American high school, he still prefers to communicate in French with his family.

Unique Challenges

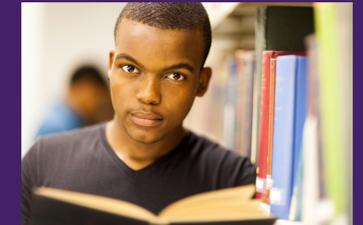
- Lack of familiarity with American culture.
- Still building fluency in English and struggles as a writer.

Universal Design Considerations to Support Jean Paul

Although Jean Paul does not have any known physical or cognitive limitations, he can still struggle in the classroom due to the fact that he is building his English fluency and still struggles, especially with writing tasks.

Design Recommendations

- Ensure that materials are captioned so that Jean Paul can read along while watching movies.
- Do not rely upon references to American cultural events or history without explaining the references, students from different cultures may not have this knowledge.
- Promote resources, such as the campus writing center, to all of the students in your class.
- Permit and promote ways that the student can demonstrate their learning through alternative assessments; for example, instead of writing a family history, producing a video interview about his family's journey.



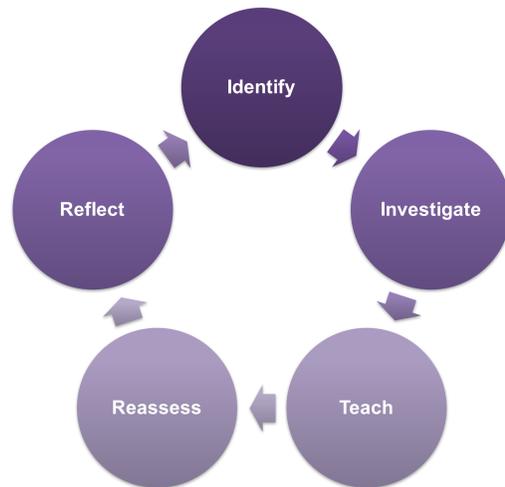
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GETTING STARTED PROCESS



Nelson, L. L. (2014) Design and deliver: Planning and teaching using universal design for learning.

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Additional Resources and References

<http://go.osu.edu/swde-udl>

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