Universal Design Ideas

Meeting the needs of students with disabilities, and many other students, by using Universal Design

Introduction

Many Instructors will now find themselves with students with a disability in one or more of their classes. At UNC-CH there are more than 830 students now registered with Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS) in receipt of a wide range of accommodations. We appreciate that Instructors want to do an excellent job, but that there is sometimes a lack of clarity about what is being asked of them in relation to accommodations. ARS is working hard to provide information and resources to Instructors to assist them in this their work with students with disabilities.

Commonly, Instructors will have a number of questions or anxieties when they find out that they have a student with a disability in their class:-

1. Will there be a need to modify my lectures?
2. How much extra time is this going to take?
3. How can accommodations be provided without providing the student with a disability an advantage or without eroding academic standards or diminishing the ability of the other students to learn?

In many cases Instructors will find that using the principles of Universal Design can assist with this.

Universal Design Presentation
What is Universal Design?

Universal Design (UD) in teaching is the principle of creating a learning environment where everyone can learn without special concessions or treatment. In a classroom environment that conforms to Universal Design, the teacher is not required to specially modify his or her lectures when a student with a disability is present, nor do the course materials need to be "retrofitted" to any student.

It is also very important to understand what Universal Design is not; it is not the diminution of the intellectual level of the course material or reduction of academic standards to reach the lowest common denominator of ability. Rather, by adopting UD principles, Instructors should maintain those standards but also be able to meet the needs of most students with a disability, while, at the same time, enhancing the learning experience for all other students.

Accommodations and Universal Design

Students with disabilities are not looking for preferential treatment, just courtesy and a basic understanding of their needs and accommodations. Nevertheless, it is important to be informed of a few ways you as a teacher can make the learning process easier for them. In fact, under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act, it is your legal responsibility to provide the accommodations determined by ARS.

Any requests for special accommodations should be initiated by the student; it is not your responsibility to anticipate every accommodation issue that might come up and have a solution for it, but it is the responsibility of The University to have a process in place for considering and implementing reasonable accommodations. Instructors play an important part in this process. You will find more information and resources on the Faculty section of our website [https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff](https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff) .

The Benefits of Universal Design

Universal Design not only benefits students with disabilities, all students benefit from a clear, coherent teaching style. International students and students who are predominately verbal or predominately visual learners will especially benefit. In addition, many groups of non-traditional students including mature learners and first generation students and those with developing study skills will also benefit.
Applying Some Principles of Universal Design

In advance

1. Post the class syllabus online so students are aware of the expectations and demands upon them as early as possible and can arrange their schedule. Provide information about what students can expect from your classes by way of the style of your delivery, how you construct lectures, the kind of content they can expect, the resources you provide, the assignments and assessments which they can expect and their access to you for individualized assistance. This knowledge can help head-off some of the accommodation requests students may otherwise make, for example, a student who is confident that your outline notes plus your willingness to be recorded and your supplementary resources on Sakai may well feel able to deal with notetaking / notemaking independently and may not ask ARS for a supplementary notetaker accommodation.

2. Provide the reading list in advance so students needing alternative formatted text can acquire them. Locating and obtaining alternative formatted text can take time and it would be beneficial for students to begin this process as soon as possible. Also, ensure all video material to be used is captioned.

3. Make a clear commitment to accessibility in your syllabus by including an accessibility message, for example: 'If you have a disability or medical condition for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you should contact Accessibility Resources & Service [3] as soon as possible.

4. Check the physical accessibility of the room you are scheduled to use. If you are aware that a student with a physical disability is enrolled in your class you can contact the Registrar's Office to have the class re-scheduled.

In-class

1. Let your students know that to provide accommodations, you will need to receive Professor Notifications from Accessibility Resources & Service and that if a student feels that accommodations are needed but they are not yet registered with ARS then they should contact ARS as soon as possible. Re-iterate your commitment to working with students with disabilities who have accommodations by repeating the accessibility message: 'If you have a disability or medical condition for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you should contact Accessibility Resources & Service as soon as possible. For more information call 919 962 8300, email accessibility@unc.edu [4] or visit https://ars.unc.edu [5].

2. Provide all important material in written as well as verbal forms. This will not only help students who are blind, deaf or who have learning disabilities, but will also be beneficial to students without disabilities.
3. Allow students to record lectures; this helps students who cannot make handwritten notes or can make better use of alternative format materials and also gives students the ability to review material and add to their notes later to ensure that they have a thorough set of notes.

4. Speak clearly and at an appropriate volume for the size of the room. Face the class while speaking, and make eye contact with the students; in addition to assisting students with hearing impairments, this will help you measure the level of understanding of the students and will let you know if you need to provide more help in one area.

Handouts

Distribute key or outline notes prior to starting class. This helps to make sure students who cannot write, or are just bad note-takers, get all of the key points of the lecture in an easy to review form. This also allows the teacher to emphasize the areas that are the most important, and doesn't leave the student unsure of what to study. Outline notes can provide students with shaky study skills a great framework for their own notetaking and a "scaffold" to get them started.

1. PDF documents can be made accessible but this can take some work. MS Word documents are more accessible to users of assistive technology resources to enable access and are more easily manipulated for their use. However, if you do wish to use PDFs then this Online Video Course - Creating Accessible PDFs available from Lynda.com will help: http://www.lynda.com/Acrobat-tutorials/Creating-Accessible-PDFs/147579-2.html.

2. For handouts created in Word - use in-built style settings. Word offers a gallery of presentation styles that you can choose from within the Home tab on the MS Word 2010 ribbon. Use the Styles settings within Word 2010 to specify and customize the way your document is structured and presented. For maximum accessibility, try to develop the habit of using Styles features in all of your documents. For instance, instead of changing the font size of certain text and making it bold, it is a better practice to use one of the pre-determined style options. Once you build a complete style set for your documents, you will find it more efficient to rely on built-in formatting rather than recreating styles for each new document. If you make your styles available to new documents based on the template you can avoid the need to recreate styles for each new document or situation.

3. Adopt a standard font style and sizes ? for example:
   - for titles use N=18/Verdana/bold/blue
   - for headings use N=16/Verdana/bold/blue
   - for sub-headings use N=14/Verdana/bold/blue
   - for paragraph text use N=12/Verdana/black

4. Avoid a mixture of styles, formats and justification variations. Please note that italicized text can be particularly difficult for some students with "print disabilities."
5. Use `align left` only; avoid `full` justification which distributes text evenly between both left and right margins. For people with print disabilities this can be very difficult to read as the spaces between words and letters are varied to achieve the full justification effect.

6. For in-depth instructions on MS Office accessibility this Online Video Course - Creating Accessible Microsoft Office Documents available from Lynda.com will help: [http://www.lynda.com/Excel-tutorials/Why-accessibility-important/186696/367383-4.html](http://www.lynda.com/Excel-tutorials/Why-accessibility-important/186696/367383-4.html) [7].

**Assignments, quizzes, tests and examinations**

1. Be clear about your schedule of in-class tests/quizzes and about the date and length of the midterm and final examinations; many students with disabilities have to juggle their schedules and negotiate with other professors to ensure that they can properly benefit from the accommodations to which they are entitled and need. It is tempting to simply extend the allotted time for an examination for all students, but, oddly, this UD approach will not satisfy our legal obligations.

2. At UNC the final examination schedule by and large provides for examinations which are a maximum of 3 hours in length. However, for many students with disabilities (those with a +50% extended time accommodation) this means that they will have 4.5 hours available. The consequence of this is that many of these students have to negotiate a later start time for a subsequent examination or even negotiate a re-scheduling of an examination for another day. Examinations ordinarily scheduled to take 2 hours would deal with this difficulty as the extended time accommodation of +50% would afford the student 3 hours to complete the examination, still leaving sufficient time to reach a subsequent examination.

3. Incorporate a range of question and answer styles in your timed assessments including multiple choice, short answers and longer answers. If you can incorporate options into your timed assessments all the better as students can then choose a means responding which is most suitable to their strengths and abilities.

4. Announce all assignments, especially reading assignments, well in advance. Students needing alternative format materials will need time to source the materials. Be sure to give all assignments both orally and in written form and
ensure students have plenty of opportunity to seek clarification and be clear about deadlines.

5. Be willing to provide testing accommodations locally; this might entail extended time on tests, a quiet non-distracting place to take tests, or oral exams. Accessibility Resources & Service can assist Instructors who cannot make their own arrangements, but it is often much more preferable for arrangements to be made locally; not only does this ensure that students have access to Instructors should any queries arise or if clarifications are needed but it also enables ARS to concentrate its limited resources on students with more complex testing requirements, for example those who need +100% extended time, alternative format papers, a scribe or assistive technology.

6. The most common individualized testing accommodations are +50% extended testing time in a low distraction setting. In some cases this can be accommodated locally in which case ARS would very much welcome this assistance, for example by using TAs to proctor an exam for the students in a separate room or by careful positioning of students who need these accommodations away from “traffic”, doorways and so on.

7. Short / Pop Quizzes can be particularly challenging for instructors to manage in relation to accommodations. Students with disabilities often qualify for extended time accommodations on timed assessments, including Pop-Quizzes. on examinations, tests and quizzes, Here is the accommodation dilemma: These often take place at the start of a class session or midway through it and so trying to administer a quiz with extended time for those who have such an accommodation can be near impossible; a five-minute Pop Quiz during class necessitates a time extension of 2 1/2 to 5 minutes more for the student with the disability (depending upon the extended time accommodation) posing a logistical problem for the Instructor and the rest of the students. In addition, the student with the disability is clearly outing as such placing the student under extraordinary stress or even preventing the student identifying him/herself in the first instance. Having the student discreetly finish a Pop Quiz in the Instructor’s office is not always possible because of class schedules.Pop Quizzes are simply not "accessible" and fair to all students. Some creativity is required. One possible way forward is to use the quiz to provide a student with a touchstone for his/her understanding and a check for the instructor but not use the results to contribute to the grade. A student with testing accommodations may not be concerned about
his/her individual testing accommodations under these conditions.

- If extended time needs to be provided for then Instructors and students will need to work out a means of providing for this before or after class or simply allow a student to complete the quiz at home. Another alternative is to provide the quiz via Sakai out of class time.

- Put pop quiz-type questions on the course or department Web site or on a class e-mail list at a certain time, to be e-mailed back or turned in (hard copy) by the next class time;

- Put all pop quiz-type questions on the syllabus reading list, following each assigned reading (this allows students' reading to be more directed); vary the response mode requirement each week to be posted on a special Web site, e-mailed to the professor, or handed in at the beginning of the next class.

- Put pop-quiz questions into a PowerPoint. Each class member is asked to speak to a question in turn or ask for volunteers. Alternatively ask for contributions to an answer and build up the answers iteratively from several students. Such a technique has proven to be a good learning experience for everyone, in that students whose cognitive abilities are different are allowed the opportunity to observe how their peers think, problem solve and internalize course elements. This also allows the Instructor to observe how students absorb course material and display knowledge in different ways.

- Offer a short take-home pop quiz, due for submission at the beginning of the next class. The Instructor can put the question on a standard-sized sheet of paper and specify the maximum length of the answer e.g. 200 words.

- Assign an in-class, small-group question and have students construct the answer with one student from each group reporting the collective answer. Depending on the size of the class and the amount of material to be covered, the Instructor might assign each small group the same questions or
a different question, asking that the answers be turned in at the end of class to be uploaded online, via a website, blog or via email, for everyone’s benefit.

- The Instructor could turn the tables and ask students to devise their own Pop Quiz-questions that they think is relevant to the assigned readings and ask to have it answered; again the answers could be made available via a website, blog or via email, for everyone’s benefit.

8. On-line quizzes and tests are also subject to any extended time accommodations afforded to the student. Information about how to provide for this accommodation through Sakai is available here: http://sakaitutorials.unc.edu/?Special_accommodations [8].

9. Extended time accommodations applicable to papers, 24 hour + assignments and take-home exams are subject to some debate. ARS has carefully considered the good practice and legal precedents surrounding this issue and is clear that there will be circumstances when an extended time accommodation is appropriate for some students faced with such assessment tasks. ARS will enter into an interactive process with the student on a case-by-case basis and determine if such an accommodation is reasonable. If so, we will invite the student to complete this form: https://ars.unc.edu/extension [9].

And finally

It is important to remember that without exception, students with disabilities should be, and should expect to be held to the same high standards as their class peers. You should feel confident in questioning any accommodation which you feel fundamentally alters? the nature of a class or the target / construct of an assessment activity.

Useful resources

- Georgia Tech's GRADE Project - Universal Design and Distance Learning - http://www.catea.gatech.edu/grade/ [13]