

# Universal Design for Learning

## *Quick Reference Material*

Creating curricular materials under a universal design concept creates learning models that are usable by all students, whether they are gifted, typical learners, or have special needs. The central premise of universal design for learning (UDL) is that a curriculum should include alternatives to make it accessible and appropriate for individuals with different backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, and disabilities in widely varied learning contexts. The “universal” in universal design does not imply one optimal solution for everyone. Rather, it reflects an awareness of the unique nature of each learner and the need to accommodate differences, creating learning experiences that suit the learner and maximize his or her ability to progress in the general education curriculum.

### **Inspiration for the Concept**

UDL was inspired by the universal design movement in architecture. The basic realization behind universal design was that designing buildings with built-in accessibility to everyone was far superior to making modifications after the fact. Adaptability is subtle and integrated into the design. Designing for the divergent needs of special populations increases usability for everyone. The curb cut is a classic example. Although they were originally designed to help those in wheelchairs negotiate curbs, curb cuts ease travel for those pushing strollers or grocery carts, riding skateboards, pedestrians with canes, as well as the average walker.

### **Paradigm Shift**

UDL shifts old assumptions about teaching and learning in four fundamental ways:

- Students with disabilities fall along a continuum of learner differences rather than constituting a separate category.
- Teacher adjustments for learner differences should occur for all students, not just those with disabilities.
- Curriculum materials should be varied and diverse including digital and online resources rather than centering on a single textbook.
- Instead of remediating students so that they can learn from a set curriculum, the curriculum should be made flexible to accommodate learner differences.

## **Essential Features**

The essential features of universal design for learning have been formulated by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) into three principles:

- The curriculum provides multiple means of representation. Subject matter can be presented in alternate modes for students who learn best from visual or auditory information, or for those who need differing levels of complexity.
- The curriculum provides multiple means of expression to allow students to respond with their preferred means of control. This accommodates the differing cognitive strategies and motor-system controls of students.
- The curriculum provides multiple means of engagement. Students' interests in learning are matched with the mode of presentation and their preferred means of expression. Students are more motivated when they are engaged with what they are learning.

## **UDL versus Assistive Technology**

The following information compares traditional assistive technology (AT) delivery model with the universal design for learning (UDL) model.

### *Universal Design for Learning Model*

- May be used by a wide range of students with diverse learning needs
- Is used to adjust or modify the curriculum to make it accessible to students with varying needs
- Is implemented by general education teachers

### *Assistive Technology Model*

- Is used by a student to meet the expectations of a given curriculum
- Is used by a student to meet the expectations of a given curriculum
- Is under the purview of special education

## **Resources: Internet Sites**

### **Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)**

<http://www.cast.org/udl/>

UDL as a paradigm for teaching, learning, and assessment, drawing on new brain research and new media technologies to respond to individual learner differences

### **Fast Facts: Universal Design for Learning**

<http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/grants/dpg/fastfact/undesign.html>

Tips on using UDL as an approach to designing course instruction, materials, and content to benefit people of all learning styles without adaptation or retrofitting

### **ERIC Digest**

[http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed437767.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed437767.html)

Guidance on using UDL to provide access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities

### **Universal Design of Instruction**

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/instruction.html>

Examples of instructional methods that employ principles of universal design