

PLuS Perspectives

Information about College Students with LD

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Universal Design: Practical Applications

As college campuses become increasingly diverse, the need to provide flexible, practical ways to access information both inside and outside of the classroom has intensified. By applying principles of universal design to the classroom and student services, faculty and university staff can enhance the educational experience not only for students with LD and ADHD, but for the entire student population.

Universal Design Principles in Action¹

Equitable Use. The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. *For example, a professor's website that is designed so that it is accessible to everyone, including students who are blind and using text-to-speech software, employs this principle.*

Flexibility in Use. The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. *An example is a museum, visited as a field trip for a course that allows a visitor to choose to read or listen to the description of the contents of a display case.*

Simple and Intuitive. Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. *Science lab equipment with control buttons that are clear and intuitive is an example of an application of this principle.*

Perceptible Information. The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities. *An example of this principle being employed is when multimedia projected in a course includes captions.*

Tolerance for Error. The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions. *An example of a product applying this principle is educational software that provides guidance and back-ground information when the student makes an inappropriate selection.*

¹ The Center for Universal Design. *North Carolina State University*



PLuS Perspectives Continued

Seven Principles of Universal Learning Support Design

Donald L. Opitz and Lydia S. Block propose seven principles to guide academic and student support services in implementing universal design. These guidelines encourage a holistic integration of the college educational experience with learning experiences outside the classroom. Taken together with the principles and examples guiding universal instructional design, these methodologies can enhance the overall collegiate experience for *all* students.

From: Opitz, D. & Block, L. Universal learning support design: maximizing learning beyond the classroom. *The learning assistance review*, 11 (2006): 33-45.

Welcoming and respectful space.

“Features of the spaces, resources and services are welcoming, respectful and comfortable to students having the widest range of characteristics and abilities.” *Examples of this principle include the centralization of core administrative services into one entity, such as DePaul Central.*

Clear mission and procedures. “The purpose of resources is clear and the procedures for their use are easy to follow regardless of the students’ experience, knowledge, language skills and abilities.” *Examples of this principle include signage displaying the mission and important procedures in an administrative office, and a knowledgeable and friendly staff who can interact with students.*

Technology. “Technology resources enhance opportunities for students to be engaged and learn, and assists in implementing other ULSD principles.” *Examples of this principle include a website with the office’s forms and information in a clear, easily navigational format.*

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Natural supports for learning. “Resources and services foster students’ holistic learning and engagement in a developmental manner. Staff members are trained to accommodate diverse learning styles of students. Services empower the students using them.” *Examples of this principle would be writing across the curriculum programs, tutoring services, and skills workshops.*

Varied delivery of resources and services. “Varied, non-stigmatizing means of delivering resources and services foster equitable and flexible use by students. Varied delivery meets the needs and interests of students having the widest range of experiences, characteristics and abilities.” *Examples of this principle are online forms which can be read visually and with a screen reader, or a tutor who adjusts his/her tutoring methods to meet the learning needs of the tutee.*

Multicultural values. “All aspects of learning support/ embrace the broadest characteristics, backgrounds and interests of students. Students’ knowledge and experience are incorporated into design elements and improvements.” *Examples of this principle are printed materials which reflect a diversity of potential users of the services.*

Opportunities to engage. “Space, resources and services promote students, regardless of their characteristics, to be engaged in learning. Positive interactions among students and staff are fostered by resources, services and programming.” *Examples of this principle include diversity training for staff on the needs of students with LD and ADHD, and promoting an environment in which staff and students are encouraged to take an active role in resolving issues.*

