Top 10 Tips
for Universal Design in the Classroom

1. Provide crisp, high contrast printed handouts.

2. Encourage optimum classroom physical environment (lighting, noise, pathways, etc.).

3. Face the class when speaking.

4. Invite students to discuss any access issues with a statement on your syllabus and in the first class.

5. Verbally describe images on all slides and overheads.

6. Use a microphone when speaking.

7. Repeat student questions and comments out loud.

8. Provide electronic handouts ahead of time.

9. Request electronic versions of textbooks when ordering.

10. Provide equivalent text for all graphical items in instructional materials.

Top 10 Tips
for Universal Design in the Classroom

1. Crisp, high-contrast printed handouts are visually easier for people with low vision. Good handouts reinforce lessons as a supplement to oral presentation. Contrast, color, size, font, and spacing are a few legibility factors.

2. Environment, activities and equipment impact students with a wider variety of disabilities than formerly known. Address all potential student characteristics in safety considerations. a.) Good lighting helps with low vision, but also helps everyone minimize eye strain; b.) Noisy distractions can have an adverse effect on students with Attention Deficit Disorder, but will also impact the concentration and focus of many students; c.) A ramp entry enables the student in a wheelchair to get to class on time. Ramps allow for instructors who carry a heavy load to efficiently use a wheeled carrier; d.) A podium ramp permits full student participation in presentations.

3. Facing the class allows a student with a hearing impairment to read your lips. It will facilitate eye contact, encouraging engagement and interaction with all students.

4. Use a syllabus to outline the essential components of the course, your expectations, office hours and procedures. Discussing accessibility on your syllabus enhances inclusiveness for students with disabilities. It signals all other students of your availability and approachability and facilitates a positive classroom environment.

5. Verbal descriptions enable a student who is blind to "see" the slides. "Auditory learners" will have an alternative means to understand the content of your graphics. Additionally, students sitting behind any obstruction or students taking notes can hear what they may otherwise be missing.

6. A microphone amplifies audio for someone who has a hearing impairment. It benefits every student, by distributing the instructor's voice evenly throughout the classroom. Research has shown that in the average classroom, the teacher's voice usually arrives at the students at a level only 6 dB or so above the background sounds. The extra 8 or 10dB of amplification provided by a classroom sound field system is sufficient to ensure a more suitable speech to noise ratio. For the benefit of the instructor, the use of a microphone can eliminate voice strain, notably a common occupational health problem.

7. Repeating information from students who face the front of the room redirects the information back out to the entire group. If you repeat the question while facing the class, a student who is deaf can read your lips. Repeat questions and/or paraphrase to insure everyone has heard and you are clear on understanding the question.

8. Electronic hand-outs enable a blind student to use a screen reader (voice or large print). Accessible design allows all students to obtain information and convert it to whatever format is convenient for their study.

9. Electronic versions of textbooks are necessary for blind students. Additionally, audio files enable everyone ease in carrying their textbooks and more flexibility of use. Many instructors and students would "read" their text assignments "on the go."

10. Equivalent text descriptions convey information to people with low or no vision. They also summarize non-text elements for all students, supporting varying learning and processing styles.

Design for Disability is better Design for everyone!

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