Title: Time to Design Your Next Course: Be Inclusive

Are you designing a new course for the next academic year? As a one time college staff instructor, I learned a few tips that make all students feel more welcome and will provide improved equal educational access for every student. In this post, I will share some examples and benefits of Inclusive or Universal Design for Instruction (UDI), and will describe how you can design courses with all learners in mind. My resources come from the University of Washington Do-IT Center.

Let me first introduce myself. I am Rick Gubash, the UC Santa Cruz Director of the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and a person with disabilities myself. Without getting into details, I had a great deal of barriers making learning difficult in my early years. Thanks to good diagnostic tests, I learned my strengths and weaknesses and was able to knock down those barriers using strategies and accommodations...and of course a lot of hard work. But those course barriers could have been eliminated from the beginning.

Universal design concepts come from the late 1990's when a group of designers, architects and engineers developed Seven Principles of Universal Design. Essentially, this consortium of architects and designers wanted to include everyone in the use of the physical designed environment—design features include sidewalk curb cuts and automatic doors, which are useful to all users but *essential* to those needing equal access. The seven universal design principles can also be applied to your course. When applied, students who may have typically missed important course information due to how they perceive information are able to have effective and immediate access to course content.

Let me give you two examples. First, when you choose to use a course video that is already captioned and turn on the captions when showing the video in class, you just created equal access for many participants. Clearly deaf students will benefit from captioned videos, but others who benefit also include international students, students who are learning English as a second language, those sitting near loud fan noise and students who are visual learners. All benefit from this universally effective resource. Best of all, the deaf student did not have to make a request to have the video captioned or be denied the benefit of the instructional material. They had immediate equal educational access and they did not have to jump through bureaucratic hoops to get this access. It was thoughtfully designed into the curriculum.

The next example: Many students use adaptive or assistive technology (text to speech/screen readers) to read their required articles and books. If books are not posted early to the Bay Tree Bookstore, the Disability Resource Center (DRC) will not have time to ensure that texts are in a format that is usable by blind or dyslexic students. Simply posting your required textbook reading list to the bookstore helps the DRC to know which books to covert so that we can provide a usable format for students to read with their individualized assistive technology. The benefit for you is that all students will have access to the required texts and all can be prepared for class. This will lead to greater participation in your courses.

The topic of UDI or Universal Design for Instruction is a massively broad topic. I recommend starting small and incrementally. Today's takeaways are: 1. Always use captioned videos and only purchase videos that are already captioned. 2. Use a syllabus statement that encourages students to come to your office hours to share their disability related access needed. This will help you plan ahead and avoid access barrier surprises. 3. Post articles and required reading lists early so that the DRC can convert materials for students using assistive technology to access reading texts.

In the next blog, I will discuss how to make documents accessible to blind students and students with other print related disabilities who use technology to read print and text. Think articles posted with actual electronic text, not just JPEG images. Stay tuned.

More UDI information is found here.