Universally Designed Learning Activities

Applying universal design principles helps to ensure that a course is accessible to as many people as possible, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, under as many circumstances as possible. This tip sheet focuses on how to provide learners with choices in how they engage in learning activities.

Three Ways to Get Started

1. Provide a variety of activities to meet the needs and preferences of diverse learners.

Use a variety of active-learning strategies to engage a variety of learners in your classroom, including those with differing abilities and backgrounds. Whenever possible, use activities that tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn. Provide opportunities for active participation, exploration, and experimentation. Move beyond lecture by incorporating group work, including group presentations, or by incorporating online discussion forums.

2. Provide students with opportunities to interact with one another before, during, and after activities.

Peer-to-peer interaction provides opportunities for students to not only enhance their own learning but also to assist other students to more fully understand course content. Provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussion about course content. Allow students to contribute to grading rubrics, templates, and other guides for successfully completing an assignment. Encourage students to provide one another with feedback that is substantive and informative, rather than comparative or competitive.

3. Support learning with multiple levels of scaffolding.

Design activities that provide multiple levels of scaffolding, instructions, or task structure. For instance, an Internet research project might include independent web searches *and* instructor-provided links accompanied by scripted questions and tasks. Reading assignments can include a list of questions for students to consider as they are reading, while grading rubrics provided beforehand can establish expectations and illustrate what constitutes successful completion of the activity.

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and contact the instructional design consultant assigned to your department.

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Case Study

In Professor Singh's abnormal psychology course, students attend a lecture detailing multiple approaches to treating deviant behavior, including cognitive, behavioral, and medical approaches. Using randomly assigned iPads, students then watch one of three videos of an interview in which a patient describes a deviant behavior. Afterward, students break into groups according to which video they watched, to discuss which treatment approach seems most appropriate for the patient. After reaching consensus, each group presents its recommended treatment approach to the class, outlining the reasons for their recommendation and answering questions from Professor Singh and other students. While preparing this impromptu presentation, groups of students are guided by a rubric defining the structure and content of the presentation.

Resources

For more information on making your course materials, activities, and assessments accessible to all students, visit "Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning at Boise State." (https://accessibility.boisestate.edu/)

For examples of instructors using multiple means of engagement in higher education, see "UDL Examples" (http://bit.ly/2xS30Fo) on the website "UDL on Campus." (http://bit.ly/2yVHUWu)

The authors of "The Accessible Syllabus" (https://accessiblesyllabus.tulane.edu/) offer advice about motivating students through the rhetoric of the syllabus (https://accessiblesyllabus.tulane.edu/rhetoric/) and by rethinking one's policies about deadlines and grading distributions. (https://accessiblesyllabus.tulane.edu/policy/)

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