

## Tips for Supporting the Success of ALL Students through Universal Design & Instruction

Universal pedagogy is a student-centered approach to course design and teaching in which instructors and students work together to create a supportive environment that takes into account the varied backgrounds, identities, personal circumstances, learning styles, and abilities of everyone and facilitates **full access to learning for every student**. You may be surprised how many of the following practices you already use!

---

### Low Hanging Fruit

These are the easier pickings that you can learn/adapt/practice with minimal time investment.

#### Setting Expectations

- Introduce your intent to support all students in learning. Invite students to privately share with you any concerns they have about their access or inclusion. Put this message in writing and also verbalize it in the first class.
- Use this [accessible syllabus template](#), which includes the approved language on accommodations.
- Invite students to share accommodations letters (as PDF letters attached to an email) and acknowledge receipt of it when they do. If you have TAs who may be helping implement accommodations, ask the student's permission to share any relevant accommodations with TAs.
- Describe the classroom to students as one where showing respect for one another is required and prejudice is not acceptable.
- Don't make assumptions about students' identities; Learn student names and pronouns, if offered, early in the term.

#### Creating a Welcoming, Accessible Classroom

- Ensure the instructional space is physically accessible to everyone and arranged to augment inclusion.
- Allow use of technology in class for all students; set guidelines for devices to be used for academic purposes. Many students may prefer (or require) use of a laptop or other device to stay organized and manage their classwork.
- Allow your lectures/demonstrations to be recorded. Let the class know verbally and in writing that recordings may take place to support students' learning, review, and processing.
- Incorporate reading and media materials produced by diverse authors/artists/creators.
- Show empathy when a student is struggling with the course material. If you are concerned about making exceptions to course policies when students request them, ask yourself: "What is the purpose of this policy? What will happen if I adjust it for this student? What will happen if I don't? How am I impacting their life with my decision?"

#### Implementing Accessible Pedagogy

- Provide clear verbal **and** written instructions for all assignments (never one or the other) and post to Latte; make assignment guidelines and due dates available far in advance (preferably the beginning of the semester).
- Develop grading rubrics for all assignments; share and discuss them with students in advance so they understand what you are assessing.
- Offer consistent feedback throughout the term.
- Clearly define new terms and ideas; avoid using too much academic or industry jargon without defining it, especially for first-year undergraduate students. Don't assume prior knowledge.
- Summarize main points (do not assume students will know), and provide students with context (i.e., why this matters).
- Consider using the pause procedure (pause periodically for discussion and review) during lectures. Instead of asking "Do you have any questions?" instead invite students with "I'm going to pause here- what are people thinking about this and what questions can I answer?"
- Assign or demonstrate guided practice before requiring independent practice.

## Mid-Hanging Fruit

You might need a step ladder, help from an accessibility champion on campus, or a little more time to implement these strategies in existing courses, but it's worth it in the long run. These strategies should be incorporated from the beginning when you are developing new course content.

### Providing Universally Designed Tools and Materials

- Use Latte to offer scaffolding tools such as lecture notes, study guides, links to videos, and other materials students can access when they are not in the classroom. Organize the course site carefully so that it is intuitive for anyone to navigate, because tutors who have not been in your class may be helping students access it (and for many other reasons as well!)
- Make sure all readings are available in a digital format.
- Make sure transcripts for audio assignments are available.
- Make sure all videos are accurately captioned and available in an audio-described format as well (the latter is higher hanging fruit than the former); MTS can assist with both
- Present visuals in a [high-contrast format](#).
- Make sure images have [alt text and image descriptions](#).
- Use [Microsoft Word](#) and [Adobe Acrobat Pro](#) Accessibility Check features to ensure any document you create/share are accessible.
- Check out additional tips from the [Brandeis Web Accessibility page](#) and take the [Making Digital Materials Accessible course](#) on Latte!

### Creating Universally Designed Assignments and Assessments

- Teach topics (particularly the most complex ones) through multiple formats; Use a video and lecture together, or supplement readings with podcasts, for example. This lets students access information in different ways, meaning they have a higher likelihood of understanding and connecting with it. It also helps keep class time more engaging.
- Show examples for each assignment to scaffold students' understanding of the expectations.
- Implement optional class practices that help quieter students participate, e.g. written exit tickets and online participation portals (like Padlet.com or a discussion board). Explain your expectations for participation.
  - Exit tickets; written, typed/emailed, and voice memo responses to end of class prompts-e.g. "in a paragraph, reflect on how the video we just watched connects to this week's readings"
  - [Padlet.com](#) allows students to post comments, web links, videos, audio recordings, images, etc. to an online bulletin board before, during, or after class.
- Allow students to use alternative means of presentation to satisfy course objectives (e.g. a student with social anxiety disorder/social phobia submits a research paper or video or presents to only you instead of delivering oral presentation in class, etc.).
- Use assessments that do not privilege students with speedy processing functions.
- Make sure you are assessing the learning outcomes for your course, not additional skills that you don't NEED to assess (e.g., quality of writing for weekly assignments in non-writing courses).
- Give students options for how they show their learning- choose between a paper or a presentation, a written reflection or a selfie-video, etc.

---

## Ready for the Rest of the Orchard?

- CAST's Universal Design for Learning in higher ed page for more ideas, resources and references: <http://udloncampus.cast.org/home>
- U of Michigan's article on creating inclusive college classrooms: [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3\\_1](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1)
- U of Washington's "DO-IT" Faculty Room: <https://tinyurl.com/UW-DO-IT>

- Contact Student Accessibility Director Cara Streit at [carastreit@brandeis.edu](mailto:carastreit@brandeis.edu) for questions or to set up a 1:1