

How universal design can be applied to assessment in Higher Education

“Always allow participation of the widest possible range of students”
(Thompson, Johnstone & Thurlow, 2002).

Ensure the same means of access to assessment for all students regardless of ability, if it's not possible to be equal, offer a counterpart. Initial interest in universal design within higher education was a result of the increasing number of students with disabilities in higher education (Steinfeld, Maisel & Levine, 2012). Present information in various formats from lectures to individual/group assessments to discussion forums both online and in the classroom to give all students the opportunity to obtain and share knowledge. Use a design that is easy to understand irrespective of student experience, with clear and easy to understand procedures, using words, graphs, images etc. Think about the ways in which things are presented and if they impede students learning modifications must be presented. Provide a choice of method for assessment, i.e. written, spoken, online. Offer all text in print and digital format. Provide a clear line of sight for all so student do not miss important elements for assessment. If it's a written exam, ensure all students can access the room where the assessment is taking place, plan enough space for assistive devices or a personal assistant. For those with sensory limitations provide larger text/different colour schemes for assessment papers. Offer online alternatives for students who need specialist software to do an assessment. Give flexibility for student's speed and ensure that there is always little physical exertion. If it's an online assessment, ensure all students have access to a device to do the assessment and guarantee compatibility across devices. I would say the principle barrier to implementing universal design principles in higher education is funding. Both in terms of building works to ensure inclusion for all students in all areas of higher education institutions and access to technologies which can provide students with more possibilities.

How universal design can be applied to learning in Higher Education

I completed the discussion on how universal design can be applied to assessment in higher education first, a good deal of the information given in that discussion is also relevant to this discussion. Keep in mind it is essential to be inclusive of all students from the beginning in addition to being flexible at all times. The principles of universal design are fundamental in ensuring access to all learning materials and learning spaces within higher education institutes. Naturally the usual barriers would apply in terms of funding or indeed the lack there of. Higher education institutes promote inclusive learning but how far can they go with buildings that may need spaces updated to be fully inclusive or assistive technology that often goes out of date soon after it has been purchased. There should be no inaccessible areas or facilities in higher education institutes. Students need to have equal access to learning, subsequently various ways of engaging students must be considered (active learning, problem based learning and/or discussions). Staff must also consider various instructional methods and content to improve student learning, from lectures to individual/group assessments to online discussion forums. All course material should be accessible in both print and digital formats and institutes must provide/seek to make available assistive technology to help students with learning limitations. Space for assistive devices and/or a personal assistant must be available in all class settings, and all students should have a clear line of sight so they do not miss important elements of classes. If an online learning environment is used the materials available on this platform must be accessible to all regardless of ability, consider colours and styles, alternatives to auditory

and visual content must be provided. In terms of the learning space some students will have specific requirements that impact their learning or access to higher education, for example visually impaired students may need improved lighting or handrails along corridors. Students with psychological or mental health difficulties may benefit from a comforting environment created by the suitable use of calming colours. Simple considerations like the availability of power points to ensure access to laptops/mobile devices or assistive technologies are vital to learning. Higher education institutes must provide several means of engagement, and demonstration together with numerous methods of action and expression to improve teaching and learning (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014).

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