Universal Design for Learning

Welcome to this web cast on Universal Design for Learning: Elements for Good Teaching. Hi I’m Rick Peterson director of the Career and Technical Special Populations Training and Resource center here at AgriLIFE Extension. The No Child Left Behind Act holds schools and local education agencies accountable for the improved achievement of all students. In addition, Texas is asking all schools to implement the new TEKS or Texas’s Essential Knowledge Skills in September of 2010.

So how are you going to do it? How will you ensure that the new curriculum reaches all of our students? Well Universal Design for Learning can help. UDL principles call for the curriculum to be presented in multiple modalities and students are allowed to demonstrate their learning through a variety of formats. Universal design has its roots in Architecture and Urban Planning. Ramps, automated doors, and curb cuts were created to provide access to people with disabilities, but actually easy access to everyone. Incorporating UDL principles into your curriculum can benefit many different types of students, including those who speak English as a second language or international students or students with disabilities.

Universal Design Curriculum overcomes limitations by incorporating three principles of flexibility into design.

The first one is multiple methods of presentation. Universal Design Course Content provides alternative representation of essential concepts that which can allow students to learn the information in their preferred means. For example, placing course materials on the web, allowing students to tape record, use videos, podcasts and other multimedia will help them in their instruction.

The second principle is using multiple options for participation and engagement. Universal Design Course Content maintains a variety of skill levels, preferences, and interests by allowing options. By having flexible teaching strategies and course content students can choose methods that support their interests and skill level. For
example, assignments and course content maybe tied to a current topic or world event. This allows the instructor to tap into the student’s own interest.

The last one is multiple means of expression. Universal Design Course Content allows for alternative methods of that expression. For example, the teacher can let students choose a format in which to demonstrate knowledge of a subject by doing an oral presentation, a written paper, or taking a test. Allowing student choices leads to multiple means of demonstrating mastery of that material.

The US office of special education programs further explains that UDL can be incorporated in education by building accessibility into design helps ensure that features meeting the needs of the widest range of students are incorporated into the curriculum. Such designs can prevent the need for adaptation or retrofitting course materials. Providing adaptable materials and media allows students to choose and customize formats suited for their best learning needs. Using multimedia such as video and audio formats provides a variety of ways to represent a concept and allows students to access materials through different censuses. Providing challenging salient and age appropriate material to all students, motivates students who may not otherwise access curricular content they need given their age and develop mental level. Presenting information in multiple parallel forms helps to accommodate diverse learning styles. In summary, using Universal Design principles are elements of good teaching. To access more Universal design from learning site and examples please visit our resource website at ctsp.tamu.edu.