

# Introduction to Accessible Education

Do students learn as much as they can from your teaching?

Accessible Education<sup>i</sup> is the process of designing courses and developing a teaching style to meet the needs of people from a variety of backgrounds, abilities and learning styles. Just as there is no single way to teach, people learn in a variety of ways; using different instructional methods will help meet the needs of the greatest number of learners<sup>ii</sup>.

The Educators' Accessibility Toolkit provides guidelines and tips on how to make your courses and your teaching more accessible to students. These tips are in line with research on best practices in teaching and learning<sup>iii</sup>.

## What are the characteristics of Accessible Education?

- Takes into account a variety of student characteristics, such as ethnic background, race, abilities, disabilities, age, gender, language abilities and preferred learning style.
- Does not compromise academic rigour.
- Is a dynamic, proactive and inclusive way of teaching and designing courses and curricula.
- Mitigates barriers before they can affect the learning environment.
- Identifies and clearly expresses the essential course content, while recognizing that students can express understanding in multiple ways.
- Is consistent with universally recognized principles of good teaching<sup>iv</sup>.

- Is consistent with the spirit of the Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

## Advantages for educators

(e.g. faculty, teaching assistants, course instructors and developers)

- Often improves student learning.
- Reduces the need for individual and specialized accommodations.
- May improve student engagement as it reaches a broader audience, which could lead to greater student satisfaction and improved course evaluations.

## Advantages for students

- Less time spent arranging individual accommodations and more time focusing on course content.
- Greater inclusion of students from a variety of backgrounds and abilities, which could lead to increased student retention.

- Students are not singled out for being different. (We would like to discuss our concerns with this point).

Accessible Education aims to reduce dependence on the accommodation approach and move toward inclusion.

### Accommodation Approach and Accessible Education Approach

| Accommodation   | Accessible Education  |
|---|---|
| Access issues are addressed on an individual basis between the person requiring accommodation and the service provider. | Access issues stem from poorly designed environments and should be addressed by the designer. |
| Access is achieved through special accommodation and/or retrofitting existing requirements.                             | As much as possible, the system or environment is designed to be used by all.                 |
| Access is reactive.   | Access is proactive.  |
| Access is often provided in a separate location or through different treatment.   | Access is inclusive.  |
| Access must be reconsidered each time a new individual uses the system, i.e. is consumable.                             | Access, as part of the course design and curriculum, is sustainable.                          |

### More resources on Accessible Education:

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST): <http://www.cast.org>

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT Centre): <http://www.washington.edu/doi/>

National Center on Universal Design for Learning: <http://www.udlcenter.org>

University of Guelph, Teaching Support Services, Centre for Open Learning and Educational Support, Universal Instructional Design Project: <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/>

UDL-Universe: <http://enact.sonoma.edu/udl>

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To obtain this document in an alternative format, please contact:

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Office (AODA)  
4700 Keele Street  
Kaneff Tower, 1050  
Toronto ON M3J 1P3  
Tel: 416-736-5310  
Fax: 416- 736-5094  
Web: <http://accessibilityhub.info.yorku.ca/>

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<sup>i</sup> The term Accessible Education has been adopted to capture the value of two frameworks in improving the accessibility of university education: Universal Instructional Design (UID) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Both were informed by the architectural concept of Universal Design, which is “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” (Center for Universal Design, [The Principles of Universal Design](#)).

“UID is not just about accessibility for persons with a disability – it’s about truly universal thinking – maximizing learning for students of all backgrounds and learner preferences while minimizing the need for special accommodations.” (University of Guelph, [UID Implementation Guide](#)).

“UDL is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone – not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.” (Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), [Universal Design for Learning](#)).

<sup>ii</sup> Nilson, Linda B. (2010). [Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors](#) (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). John Wiley and Sons.

<sup>iii</sup> University of Guelph, [UID Project](#), and the [National Centre on UDL, Research Evidence](#).

<sup>iv</sup> Chickering and Gramson in University of Guelph, [UID Project](#).