



Universal Design for Learning – Common Misconceptions

The following statements below attempt to clarify some of the misconceptions surrounding universal instructional design and its relation to student learning styles, academic standards, and tailoring of course content.

1. *Universal design for learning is an educational theory to be followed precisely.*
 - Universal instructional design is a set of principles that provide a convenient and flexible outline, in which faculty can arrange a number of 'best practices' to improve outcomes for students with learning disabilities.
2. *Universal design for learning is only for students with specific learning and other disabilities.*
 - Students with learning disabilities serve as the benchmark to judge the success of universal instructional design: if universal instructional design techniques can improve outcomes for students with learning disabilities, outcomes for all students would be improved.
3. *Understanding learning style is the same as understanding the content accessibility issues related to learning and other disabilities.*
 - All students have identifiable or preferred learning styles; however, learning style variation is not equivalent to a specific learning disability. Often, learning disabilities may precede or influence a student's preferred learning style (and in that sense, both are related). Tailoring course content and delivery to meet the needs of students with a broad range of learning disabilities may require different interventions.
4. *Universal design for learning is 'spoon-feeding' students.*
 - Universal instructional design is meant to make the course content more manageable from a delivery standpoint (i.e., so that jargon is clearly explained, and misconceptions are cleared up); it is not designed to make the material easier.
5. *Universal design for learning means watering down standards of performance.*
 - Universal instructional design is meant to ameliorate issues with course content delivery, so that high standards can be maintained.

6. *If we follow Universal design for learning methods, students will not come to class.*
 - Feedback from students has shown that implementation of universal instructional design in classroom instruction enhances student motivation (since they can clearly digest the course content). Students have increased motivation and eagerness to participate in class.
7. *Using technology is the same thing as using principles of Universal design for learning.*
 - Technology is simply a tool in the hands of competent teachers, and can be used to efficiently incorporate aspects of universal instructional design into a course; however, simply using technology (say, PowerPoint during a lecture) does not automatically impart aspects of universal instructional design to a course.

References:

Bryson, J., Learning Opportunities Task Force, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Province of Ontario. (2003).