

Accommodate or Redesign

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Abstract

According to Rose and Meyer (2002), “barriers to learning are not, in fact, inherent in the capacities of learners, but instead arise in learners’ interactions with inflexible educational materials and methods” (p. vi as cited in Varnois, 2015, p.143). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) “empowers all learners by creating flexible options and equitable opportunities for representing, expressing and engaging with information (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 4 as cited in Varnois, 2015, p. 148). It can be used by staff, faculty, and students in post-secondary institutions to break down barriers, meet the needs of a diverse student population, and make information accessible and transformable (CAST, 2008). Fundamentally, UDL is a good pedagogical practice. It involves anticipating inclusive course design, evokes empathy for every learner, and demands responsiveness.

Fitting into the AUT Showcase theme of Critical Hope and Other Academic Virtues, this session will guide participants in the use of student personas to adopt a student’s frame of reference, identify potential learning barriers, and discuss ways to address these barriers through the fundamentals of UDL. These student personas encourage empathy for student experiences and emphasize the barriers experienced by students with a variety of needs. This session will contrast when barriers may be approached through academic accommodations or course redesigns. With each scenario, the questions for participants are asked: “Could the required materials present barriers to your Persona? Could those barriers be addressed through a “redesign”? What barriers remain and could they be addressed through accommodations?”

References

CAST. (2008). *Universal design for learning guidelines* version 1.0. Wakefield, MA: Author.

Varonis, E. M. (2015). From barriers to bridges: Approaching accessibility in course design. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, 32(3), 138.