

Accessibility of Online Course Materials

WHY CREATE ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS FOR ONLINE/HYBRID COURSES?

Over 20 years ago, several laws and addendums were passed to ensure that students in both public and private educational settings would be provided with equal opportunity and equal access to school programs, activities, and materials. The laws detailed below in Tables 1 and 2 contain brief descriptions of the statutes, who the statutes are designed to benefit, and what is the purpose of each statute as related to K-12 and higher education.

Table 1. Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 and the 2008 Amendment

Title	Institutions Covered	Purpose
Title II	Extends to all the activities of state and local entities such as K-12 public schools and public colleges and universities.	To provide qualified individuals with the equal opportunity to benefit from all programs.
Title III	Extends to private entities such as private daycare centers, private elementary and secondary schools, as well as private post-secondary institutions.	Required to accommodate students with disabilities, though not at the levels required of public school institutions.

ADA, 1990

In addition, an amendment to the ADA called the Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act of 2008, does not change the above requirements included in the original ADA. In fact, it extended the meaning of disability to increase the number of individuals covered by the ADA. (Stafford, 2009)

Table 2. Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Related Addendum (1998)

Statute	Individuals Covered	Purpose
Section 504	K-12 and higher education (if receiving federal funds).	To provide access to their programs including auxiliary aids and services to qualified students without discrimination.
Section 508	Employees of the federal government and the general public.	To provide equal access to electronic and information technology for qualified individuals. Federal agencies are therefore required to purchase only software, hardware, telecommunications, and other products (including web-based information or applications) that are accessible.

WebAim, 2013

Higher Education Opportunity Act Reauthorization of 2008

One major emphasis of this law was to increase the availability of educational resources for those students attending colleges and universities. The 2008 reauthorization specifically relates to making post-secondary education more accessible to student with disabilities (US DOE, 2011).

One major emphasis of this law was to increase the availability of educational resources for those students attending colleges and universities.



WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF DIVERSE LEARNERS IN AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT?

Diverse learners have a wide range of preferences, skills, abilities, strengths, and needs. These types of students face challenges that other students may not have to face. However, when provided with appropriate strategies and technology, these students can learn to use available resources that will strengthen their skills.

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)?

“Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn ... it is not a one-size fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.” (CAST, 2014). Based on neuroscience, Image 1 from the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) represents the three primary brain networks that are activated when learning takes place as well as strategies that can be applied to enhance learning.

Some of the benefits of applying UDL principles include:

1. Addresses the needs of diverse learners.
2. Less time is spent retrofitting courses when accommodation requests are received.
3. All students benefit (e.g., ESOL students benefit from video captions).

Universal Design for Learning has been gaining ground as a viable educational practice. In fact, UDL was included as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and was defined as a scientifically valid framework that:

- Provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged.
- Reduces barriers in instruction.
- Provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges.
- Maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient (HEDA, 2008).

Image 1. Universal Design for Learning

<p>Recognition Networks The “what” of learning</p>  <p>How we gather facts and categorize what we see, hear, and read. Identifying letters, words, or an author’s style are recognition tasks.</p> <p> Present information and content in different ways</p> <p>More ways to provide Multiple Means of Representation</p>	<p>Strategic Networks The “how” of learning</p>  <p>Planning and performing tasks. How we organize and express our ideas. Writing an essay or solving a math problem are strategic tasks.</p> <p> Differentiate the ways that students can express what they know</p> <p>More ways to provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression</p>	<p>Affective Networks The “why” of learning</p>  <p>How learners get engaged and stay motivated. How they are challenged, excited, or interested. These are affective dimensions.</p> <p> Stimulate interest and motivation for learning</p> <p>More ways to provide Multiple Means of Engagement</p>
--	---	---

© CAST, 2014

References:

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), (1990). <<http://www.ada.gov>>.
- CAST. (2014) *What is Universal Design for Learning?* Retrieved from: <<http://cast.org/udl>>.
- Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, 110th Congress, 2008, sec. 103, p. 122 stat. 3088. <<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ315/html/PLAW-110publ315.htm>>.
- Stafford, T.L. (2009, February). *Implementation Issues: Impact of the ADA Amendments Act of 2008*. Paper presented at the Community College Conference on Legal Issues, Orlando, FL. Abstract retrieved from: <http://www4.uwm.edu/acad_aff/climate/ada/agenda/0809/march/ada_implementation.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2011). Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. <<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>>.
- WebAim (2013). United States Laws: Overview of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504 and 508). <<http://webaim.org/articles/laws/usa/rehab>>.

Authors

Kathleen Bastedo and Nancy Swenson are instructional designers at the Center for Distributed Learning at the University of Central Florida.



Kathleen Bastedo



Nancy Swenson