

Supporting Special Education Students in the Online Environment

A common misconception is that struggling learners are not strong candidates for online learning. This class will break that misconception and provide concrete strategies for supporting student success.

Course Description

As online learning grows in K-12 education we have a responsibility to ensure that all students are able to access online environments. One of the main ways this is accomplished is through implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The goal of the UDL approach is to design curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are able to meet the needs of as large a learner variability as possible, rather than an imaginary average student. In this way the course is designed from the outset to meet a variety of needs. Additionally this class will look at the laws and research in the field of online special education and specific issues that only arise in an online environment. The class will end with each student receiving a module of canned content and exploring and modifying the content to apply UDL principles to improve the curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

Credit

Participants who successfully complete all requirements will earn a certificate for 15 hours of professional learning. One graduate credit is available from Marlboro College Graduate School for an additional fee.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Describe the importance of the Universal Design for Learning concepts of offering various ways of representing concepts, various ways to engage students, and various formats for students to express their learning.
- Discuss legal requirements for accessibility in online courses and ways in which it is reasonable for online courses to be modified to be accessible for a range of student needs.
- Modify existing online curriculum to allow students with various learning needs to access the class, including students with 504 or IEPs.
- Adapt instruction to improve access for a diverse population, including both those students with different learning styles as well as special needs.
- Modify existing assessments and create new assessments to monitor and evaluate student learning among a diverse population of students.

Standards:

This course addresses the following iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Teaching:

- **Standard F:** The online teacher is cognizant of the diversity of student academic needs and incorporates accommodations into the online environment.

Prerequisites

Participants are expected to be either experienced teachers or currently enrolled and in good standing in a teacher preparation program. Participants are expected to have regular access to online computers and be proficient with email and current Internet browsers.

Participants can not receive credit for both Methods 1 and 2, and this course.

Course Requirements

In order to successfully complete this course, participant must meet the following requirements:

1. **Discussion Postings.** Participants are expected to participate in each module's discussion forum by responding to the discussion prompt and responding to at least two other participants posts. At least one of the three posts should be during the first half of the module.
2. **Readings and Activities.** Participants are expected to complete the readings and activities given in each of the modules.
3. **Quizzes.** Participants must complete and pass quizzes in Modules 1 and 2.
4. **Short Essays.** Participants must complete the short essays in Modules 1, 2, 3 . Essays should be between one and three pages in length.
5. **Creating Content.** Participants must modify existing content to improve access for all students as well as create new extended content for interested students in Module 3. Participants must also modify an existing assessment to improve access for all students as well as create an alternative format assessment for one assignment that offers students a choice in how to express learning in Module 4.

Module Outline

Module 1: Universal Design for Learning

Our first module goes into an in-depth look at Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an educational framework that gives guidelines on how to develop learning environments for all students. We make our classes more accessible to all students, including those with special needs, when we use UDL to develop a variety of ways to present information and content, to stimulate motivation and interest in learning, and to give students different ways to express what they know.

Module 2: Online Accessibility

Our second module looks at what accessibility means in an online environment. In particular we will look at the various federal and state laws that deal with accessibility, including Section 508 and Section 504. We will review some of the research that has been published in the area of accessibility in online classes. Finally we will discuss unusual issues that may occur around accessibility when working in an online environment and possible solutions.

Module 3: Modifying Online Curriculum and Instruction

For the second part of the class we will provide participants with one module of a canned curriculum in an their endorsement area. We will review this module to look for ways in which UDL principles are being followed and for places where we can modify the curriculum or instructional methods to improve access for all students. We will implement a subset of the possible improvements we find in our sample module. Additionally we will add optional content for gifted learners.

Module 4: Modifying Online Assessments

Our final module will focus on modifying and creating a range of online assessments for students to demonstrate learning. Participants will both modify existing assessments in their sample module as well as create new ones. The focus will be on creating a range of assessment types so that students have different ways to express their understanding of the class content. Finally we will discuss how to review online assessment results to look for ways to continually improve accessibility in curriculum, instruction, and assessments.