

Queries: Designing Accessible Classes

The following queries are designed to help you begin to think more in-depth about how to incorporate Universal Design into your classes, focusing on diversity and inclusiveness. (Adapted from the DO-IT program at the Univ. of Washington.)

Class Climate

- Do you create a welcoming and respectful environment for all students, encouraging the sharing of diverse perspectives?
- Are you using teaching methods/materials that are relevant to students with diverse characteristics and needs? Are your classes free of assumptions based on any perceived limitations the student may have?
- Do you invite students, both in class and via the syllabus, to discuss any disability-related accommodations or other learning needs with you? Do you discuss any concerns in an environment that is private, without drawing undue attention to the student?
- Are you approachable and available to students, welcoming questions during and after class; responding patiently when students indicate that they do not understand the information? Do you engage in an exploration of alternative means of understanding information?

Interaction

- Do you face the class, make eye contact and speak clearly, keeping your hands away from your mouth in order for someone to lip-read if necessary?
- Are your interactions flexible and accessible to everyone? (i.e. supplementing office hours with online communication.)
- Do you speak directly to the person with a disability rather than through a personal aide or interpreter?
- Do you listen carefully, repeating what you think you've heard?
- Are you providing directions both orally and in written form?
- Are you encouraging cooperative learning, using in-class discussions and small group learning?

Physical Environments and Products

- Is seating arranged to encourage participation, giving students a clear line of sight, and allowing enough space to accommodate wheelchairs, interpreters, service providers and assistive technologies?
- Do you ensure that everyone can use equipment and materials safely, that access is available from varying heights (i.e. from wheelchair). Are labels on lab equipment and other aids printed in large print, using symbols as well as words?

Delivery Methods

- Are outlines or summaries of the lecture available for students to follow?
- Do you choose textbooks and other materials that address the diverse needs of students in terms of abilities, interests and learning styles?

- Does the course content include multiple perspectives and examples that will be relevant to students from diverse backgrounds and abilities?
- Is material presented in multiple modes, keeping in mind the variety of learning styles students have? Are students allowed to choose from multiple options for learning, such as lecture, collaborative learning, small group discussions, hands-on activities, online activities and fieldwork, etc?
- Are your classroom materials printed in ways that are readable for the majority of students (i.e. high contrast: black on white, in 12 pt. Arial font)?
- Do you have materials available in an electronic format in order to send to students who may want to use assistive software or Word accessibility features to access information?
- Do you use large visual and tactile aids? (i.e. large, bold fonts, uncluttered displays, computer-enlarged images, tactile forms/examples.) Are there text descriptions available for graphic images?

Information Resources and Technology

- Are videos/DVD's captioned so that students with hearing loss can read them? (Also useful for students for whom English is a second language).
- Are websites designed so that they can be accessed by multiple users, including students who are blind and using text-to-speech software?

Feedback

- Do you provide regular feedback to students in a timely way so they know where they stand in the class?
- Do you request feedback from students regarding their understanding and course effectiveness?

Assessment

- Do you provide a syllabus with clear expectations and detailed descriptions of assignments, written in simple, consistent formats that are easy to follow and understand?
- Do you provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge, such as group, cooperative and individual work, presentations and portfolios as well as traditional tests in a variety of formats? Do you allow students options for re-submitting work or doing additional work in order to show what they've learned?
- Is there flexibility in allowing students to participate in alternate ways?
- Are time constraints minimized wherever possible, in order to test a student's knowledge rather than their ability to complete a test or project quickly?

Accommodation

- For those students who have accommodation needs not met by instructional design, are you familiar with how to assist students in obtaining accommodations on campus?
- Are student requests for accommodations honored and made available to students in a timely manner?

For more information on how to incorporate universal design principles into the classrooms, see: <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Programs/ud.html>