



**RESEARCH
SNAPSHOT**

**Historical, theoretical, and foundational principles
of universal instructional design in higher education.**

Pliner, S. M., & Johnson, J. R. (2004). Historical, theoretical, and foundational principles of universal instructional design in higher education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37(2), 105-113.

Purpose

This essay outlines the principles of Universal Instructional Design (UID) and argues that UID benefits all students, demonstrating “conceptual connections of UID to multicultural education and social justice education.”

What is Universal Instructional Design (UID)?

Universal Instructional Design encourages teaching and learning practices and attitudes that support versatility and flexibility in instruction methods as a means of meeting the needs of diverse students with different abilities and learning styles, focusing on nine specific principles. (Universal Instructional Design uses the concept of Architectural Universal Design as inspiration.)

What are the nine principles of UID? (p. 107)

(1) Equitable use, (2) flexibility in use, (3) simple and intuitive, (4) perceptible information, (5) tolerance for error, (6) low physical effort, (7) size and space for approach and use, (8) a community of learners, and (9) instructional climate.

Examples of teaching practices that use the nine principles (excerpt):

- Routine placement of syllabi and reading lists on computer disks or the Web (so that text can be formatted by individual students according to needs)
- Variable options for assignment and assessment of all students (multiple exam formats, flexibility in time and location, flexibility in presentation of ideas)
- Provision of supplemental materials in multiple formats, such as oral lectures with overhead projection of “key point” outlines, study guides, or prepared notes

UID, multicultural education, and social justice education:

Universal Instructional Design (UID) not only serves students with disabilities, it also serves the increasingly diverse student population at large (diversity in terms of race, class, gender identification, religion). UID, multicultural education, and social justice education all strive to make higher education accessible to students previously excluded; and “all ask that institutions and individual faculty commit to examining issues of difference, discrimination, inequity, and the exclusion of historically underrepresented populations in higher education” (p. 108). They focus on and pursue inclusion and social justice by encouraging structural changes, such making disability accommodation “a proactive process whereby educators and administrators design our curriculum and assessment strategies as well as our physical environment, support services, and student development programs, to include the learning needs of all students” (109).

Suggestions for moving forward:

- First, the authors suggest that implementation of IUD teaching involve students and essential personnel in order for transformation to be effective and long lasting.
- Second, they urge scholar-practitioners to become involved in empirical activities related to IUD effectiveness.