**Why Universal Design Is Important**

Individuals learn in different ways, and teachers and learner we need to make use of a variety of methods of teaching and learning through universal design.

Additionally, Colleges and Universities in the U.S. must comply with the **Americans with Disability Act** and other pertinent policy. Therefore, instructors must implement practices in the classroom and online that do not leave students with disabilities at a disadvantage or unable to participate. Teaching practices that offer equal opportunity to learners with disabilities (e.g. alternative formats for audio and visual materials) can also be useful to others.

**Laws & Policies**

Students who report disabilities comprise a small but significant percent on our Columbia College campus. The **Americans with Disabilities Act** of 1990 (ADA) is the civil rights guarantee for persons with disabilities in the United States. Title II of the ADA upholds and extends the standards for compliance set forth in **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** to all policies, procedures, and practices that impact on the treatment of students with disabilities. This means that educational programs must be made available to students with disabilities unless doing so would substantially alter the course (e.g., it would take prohibitive changes to make a graphic design course accessible to a student who is blind.) or result in excessive financial or administrative burdens.

**Section 508** is an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act that requires federal agencies and programs that receive federal funding to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities.

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** not only provides a strategy for compliance with laws regarding students with disabilities, but can also benefit students with diverse learning styles and abilities.

**Universal Design for Learning**

The **Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008** (HEOA) includes a concise definition of UDL that emphasizes reducing barriers while providing appropriate supports without compromising rigor. "The term `universal design for learning' means a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that--

A. 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; and

B. reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient " (110th Congress, 2008, sec. 103, p. 122 stat. 3088)

In addition to publishing a wealth of resources to guide the practical application of UDL, the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) presents UDL as an "educational approach with three primary principles:

1. **Multiple means of representation,**
   to give diverse learners options for acquiring information and knowledge,

2. **Multiple means of action and expression,**
   to provide learners options for demonstrating what they know,

3. **Multiple means of engagement,**
   to tap into learners’ interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation" (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2011).

**Taking Action** Unfortunately, all too often, instructors find themselves retrofitting elements of a course to accommodate students with disabilities. At the same time, as instructors are adopting ever-evolving technologies, they are prompted to rethink the ways in which they provide course content, motivate and engage students, and assess student learning.

Take action now! There is no better time to step back, take a comprehensive view of course goals, acknowledge the diversity of abilities and learning styles, and employ the principles of UDL to enhance teaching and learning. Adapted from [http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/udl.html](http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/udl.html)