

### How Can I Make the Activities in My Course More Inclusive?

Presented by:

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## **MAGNA Publications 20 Minute Mentor:**

### **“How can I make the activities in my course more inclusive?”**

**Slide 1: MAGNA Publications Presents** “How can I make the activities in my course more inclusive?”

**Slide 2: Presenter:** Elizabeth G. Harrison, Ph.D. Director, Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center’s Office of Learning Resources and Associate Director, Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center, University of Dayton [eharrison1@udayton.edu](mailto:eharrison1@udayton.edu)

**Slide 3: We ask students to engage** in class and with course materials in a variety of ways:

- Intellectually
- Physically
- Verbally
- Socially
- Emotionally

**Slide 4: What does engagement look like?**

**Slide 5: What assumptions are we making** about our students? About our course material?

**Slide 6: What is really essential** to student learning in my course or discipline?

**Slide 7: Ask yourself:**

- What are the goals for the activity?
- What am I assuming students can do?
- What is essential?
- How can I redesign to make it more inclusive?

**Slide 8: Let’s think about: A lab activity.**

Ask yourself: What are the goals for the activity? What am I assuming students can do? What is essential? How can I redesign to make it more inclusive?

**Slide 9: Let’s think about: Small group discussion.**

Ask yourself: What are the goals for the activity? What am I assuming students can do? What is essential? How can I redesign to make it more inclusive?

**Slide 10: Let’s think about: Drawing diagrams.**

Ask yourself: What are the goals for the activity? What am I assuming students can do? What is essential? How can I redesign to make it more inclusive?

**Slide 11: Let’s think about: Q & A time in class.**

Ask yourself: What are the goals for the activity? What am I assuming students can do? What is essential? How can I redesign to make it more inclusive?

**Slide 12: Talking with students with disabilities**

If a student discloses a disability: Explain how you've designed for accessibility. Invite the student to talk with you if things aren't working. Invite the student to suggest what would work. Explain what is essential to the course.

**Slide 13: Talking with students with disabilities**

If you have questions as to whether a student is able to do the work required: Examine your assumptions about what is essential. Dialogue with the student. Be flexible.

**Slide 14: Our goal** is to provide all students with equitable opportunity to participate and learn in our courses.

**Slide 15: We'd like to know what you think!**

Our evaluation form is located here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/EHmentor3>

## Using the question protocol to design activities that are accessible and inclusive

The 20 Minute Mentor presentation provided you with a set of questions to ask yourself as you are designing activities for your class:

- What are the goals for the activity?
- What am I assuming students can do?
- What is essential?
- How can I redesign to make it more inclusive?

These questions will help you think through the accessibility of the activities you are considering within the context of your particular teaching—discipline, level of class, expected type of students, etc.—more thoroughly than a checklist of things to do or not do.

If this is a new way of thinking for you, it may feel cumbersome and time consuming. But as with any new way of thinking that you might want to adopt, the more often you explicitly ask yourself these questions as you design activities for your courses, the more a part of your regular thinking they will become and designing for accessibility will become a habit. It's a good habit to have as we can expect to see more and more students who learn differently, including many with disabilities, in our classes in the future.

You may already ask yourself questions like these as you design your course activities because the whole exercise is really about good teaching. There may be something new here for you, too: You might want to keep in mind that these questions are about accessibility for students with disabilities as well as about good teaching. And while we might change what we do in our teaching as new ideas come forward, we always need to think of the accessibility of our choices.

Therein lies the rub, of course. We cannot foresee what kinds of learners we will have in a class; nor can we be sure ahead of time that our carefully designed activities will be accessible for every student in a class. So while I may have done my best to eliminate all the barriers to engagement and learning that I could imagine when I planned my class, I may still find that I have students who are not able to engage in the ways I expect.

For example, we are seeing more students today who are unable to participate fully in courses that are organized around team-based or collaborative learning. These might be international students from cultures that do not value working together in truly collaborative ways. Or students with PTSD. Or students who cannot speak due to injury or illness. Or students on the autism spectrum who cannot easily work with others. And the courses might be in Engineering or Business, where regular team-based activities are used to prepare students for the realities of professional life, or in any other discipline that has adopted active learning strategies for pedagogical reasons.

Let's follow the protocol for this situation—we'll narrow it a little bit—and see what we get. We'll take Engineering courses that are structured around team work and two types of students who may have particular difficulty working teams, international students and students on the autism spectrum.

- What are the goals for the activity?  
We'll assume a general goal of working effectively in a team as well as some activity-specific content goals.
- What am I assuming students can do?  
By structuring a course as a team work course, we're assuming students understand and buy into the need to work in teams as engineers, that they know how to organize themselves into an effective team, that they know how to comport themselves so as to be good team members, that they are able to be appropriately responsive to the others on their team, that they will carry out their responsibilities to the team. And so on.
- What is essential?  
Here's where it gets interesting. Working in teams is essential in the field of engineering. Yet international students may not know how to work effectively on teams in the educational culture of your institution; students on the autism spectrum may not know what it looks like to be a good team member and probably will not be able to read the social cues that would help them learn from their experience with team members. So the question is . . .
- How can I redesign to make it more inclusive?  
From a universal design standpoint, we need to prepare students to work with all kinds of learners (people) in team work settings. Many students already have their own assumptions about what working in groups should look and feel like, and I'd guess that we need to help them understand that each group needs to create its own model or protocol or SOPs based on its own context.

I think I would do something like this:

-- A whole class exercise (perhaps more than one) to help everyone understand and agree to some set of values that should govern groups and to help students think expansively about what each value could look and feel like. For example, having everyone in a team participate or contribute ideas is probably one of those values, but does that have to mean verbal contributions? Does it have to mean spontaneous contributions, without having to be asked?

--Then some team time spent on exploring how each person in the team thinks s/he can best contribute and communicate and how that means the group wants to work. For some students (e.g. international students from some cultures; students on the autism spectrum), having a set protocol for how their team will function and written descriptions of good team behaviors would help a lot.

--And I would want to continually check in with each team to learn how well it is working. This could be done through in many different ways that don't have to take much time, either class time or your time: quick surveys or questionnaires, short reflective writings, group descriptions of how they are doing their work, direct observation.

As I said above, in one sense this kind of development of team work skills is just good teaching. But in another sense it is essential to creating an environment in which students with disabilities (in our example, students on the autism spectrum) have an equitable opportunity to learn and to demonstrate their learning in your class.

Elizabeth G. Harrison, Ph. D.  
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## Resources Related to Universal Design

### Web sites

Center for Applied Special Technology <http://cast.org>

CAST has been working in the field for many years, and their website offers everything from definitions and explanations of Universal Design for Learning to guidelines and tools for curriculum development.

University of Connecticut Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability

<http://www.cped.uconn.edu/>

UConn's Center coined the term Universal Design for Instruction when they began to explore this area. Their website houses many specific tools for faculty under the Facultyware link.

DO-IT Center <http://www.washington.edu/doit>

The DO-IT project began as a FIPSE-funded program and has grown to house a vast array of resources related to disability at postsecondary institutions. If you want checklists for what to do for specific disabilities, this may be the site for you.

Flinders University

[http://www.flinders.edu.au/teaching/quality/teaching-methods/inclusive-teaching/inclusive-teaching\\_home.cfm](http://www.flinders.edu.au/teaching/quality/teaching-methods/inclusive-teaching/inclusive-teaching_home.cfm)

Inclusive teaching resources at an Australian university.

San Francisco State University Center for Teaching and Faculty Development

<http://ctfd.sfsu.edu/udl.htm>

Look at SFSU's take on Universal Design for Learning.

Society for Disability Studies <http://www.disstudies.org/>

Web site for the Disability Studies professional association in the US that can provide an understanding of the socially constructed nature of the concept of "disability."

Universal Design Education <http://www.udeducation.org/>

This site focuses on the roots of the concept of universal design in the physical, built environment.

University of Guelph [www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid](http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid)

Universal Instructional Design at a Canadian university.

University of Oregon Teaching Effectiveness Program

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/universaldesign/intro.html>

And a look at Universal Design in College Instruction at another US university.

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