Access First! Igniting a Campus-wide Universal Design Mindset
by Erin DeSilva (@edesilva) and Adam Nemeroff (@adamnem) of Dartmouth College

Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) is a set of principles meant to address the needs of all learners. A classroom that adopts these principles seeks to not only support the needs of students requiring accommodations, but the needs of all learners to allow them to learn at their best. These principles, introduced by Scott, McGuire, and Shaw (2001), are increasingly being embraced by educators across the nation.

**Needs**

- **IDs/EdTech/Faculty developers** are moving towards view of Universal Design as a separate silo to applying the principles within backwards design, LMS design, assessment design, media, classroom technologies, and student work (e.g. portfolios).
- **Faculty** are moving from a view of accommodations as a burden to being able to apply practical universal design decisions to implement large changes in their teaching practices.
- **Students** are moving from a view of only their individual learning needs to understanding what to expect and advocate for within all of their classes. They need to build the capability for metacognition and reflective practice, and request feedback for other stakeholders.
- **Administration/Leadership** are moving from supportive background to identifying opportunities to be leveraged. They are shifting from delegating all responsibilities previously assigned to the Accessibility office towards a shift where Universal Design belongs in other departments on campus.

**Define and Prototype**

- **Case management:** One challenge in the past was convening teams around supporting cases across teams. This term we are prototyping a case management solution for students with both hearing and vision impairments. We are collaborating with the students, classroom technologies, instructional designers, accessibility services, and faculty to form teams (similar to IEP teams in K12) to support the student learning needs. The case manager is responsible for convening conversations and making sure that action items are addressed to meet student needs.
- **Community of Practice vs. Operational needs** - Individuals supporting student learning and faculty development were not previously convening around either professional development and operational needs with Universal Design on campus. We identified a group of people interested in Universal Design on campus. Our work started with co-planning a day-long workshop on Universal Design and accessibility experiences targeted on educating those staff on the principles and developing empathy for our users. This then turned into a brainstorming session that lead to Team Access, our operational group that works across teams to improve the experiences of all students using Universal Design principles in designing campus services and learning experiences. Team Access has continued the work of supporting accommodation needs in the classroom and advocating for resources to administration.
- **Canvas user experience** - Consideration for accessibility and Universal Design is varying in course materials and sites on Canvas. There are often issues with web accessibility found in both site design as well as documents presented to classes. Instructional designers already have working relationships with many faculty around course design and Canvas use. We decided to prototype a tweak to this: instructional designers would work with faculty directly on incorporating Universal Design principles and web accessibility as a part of Canvas on-boarding and course design feedback. We installed UDOIT, an LTI-based content inspection tool for web accessibility, turned on in Canvas. We offer workshops on topics such as Creating Accessible Materials and Creating Accessible Assessments. We plan to iterate on this based on identified needs as we go forward.
- **Learning spaces** - As is the case on many campuses, learning spaces at Dartmouth have a variety of stakeholders involved in the design, renovation, and maintenance. To advocate for Universal Design principles to be considered, staff from Student Accessibility Services and Academic Technologies collaborate to define student and faculty needs, apply guidelines and standards, and train faculty on use of new space.

**Feedback**

We are actively seeking out feedback from all of our stakeholders. Students, faculty, staff, and administration, each have specific needs when it comes to accessibility and we are frequently checking in to see how prototypes are meeting stakeholder needs. This feedback is incorporated into future models with future programming, projects, and consultations.

**Resources**

Visit the link below to explore ideas, research, tools, and suggestions we find helpful. Please tweet us (@adamnem and @edesilva) with your favorites!

dartgo.org/teamaccess