

Project Abstract

Title: Designing Inclusive College Teaching: Empowering Faculty to Promote Equal Educational Access for Students with Cognitive Disabilities

Project Directors: Dr. Joan McGuire, Dr. Sally Scott, and Dr. Stan Shaw
Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability, University of Connecticut

General Project Description

To provide students with cognitive disabilities (e.g., LD, ADHD, TBI, Psychiatric) a quality postsecondary education, the classroom milieu must be considered. Although faculty are required to make individual academic accommodations and modifications for the rapidly increasing number of these students with nonvisible disabilities, they are often unprepared to address students' learning needs. How do we empower faculty with the skills and supports necessary to teach these students? This project represents a new approach to this important question shaped by two concepts that can serve as mechanisms for change on college campuses: Universal Design for Instruction, and Faculty Development.

Over the last three years the Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability at the University of Connecticut has taken a leadership role in designing a new paradigm for disability access in the classroom: Universal Design for Instruction (UDI). UDI is an approach to teaching that consists of the proactive design and use of inclusive instructional strategies that benefit a broad range of learners including students with cognitive disabilities. By using inclusive instructional design features, faculty create learning environments that are responsive to diverse learners and minimize the need for special accommodations and retrofitted changes.

The essence of this project is the convergence of UDI and cutting edge practices in the field of Faculty Development. Learning Communities, an approach to faculty development designed to maximize faculty motivation and investment, will be established representing different disciplines and drawn from divergent types of institutions of higher education. These Learning Communities will develop and field-test materials to orient faculty to inclusive instruction based upon UDI principles. Widespread dissemination of orientation materials and instructional products via Facultyware, a web site specifically designed for faculty, assures their availability for postsecondary institutions committed to enhancing the instructional environment for students with cognitive disabilities and other diverse learners.

Major Project Objectives

1. To establish five to seven Learning Communities for the purpose of enhancing instruction for students with cognitive disabilities and other diverse learners by implementing Universal Design for Instruction (UDI).
2. To collaborate with the Learning Communities to identify and develop **Orientation Training Materials** and approaches to orient faculty to inclusive instruction.
3. To support each Learning Community in developing and implementing a plan of action to integrate UDI principles into faculty instruction and develop instructional products.
4. To refine, pilot, evaluate, and package **Orientation Training Materials** on inclusive instruction and UDI in a variety of formats and media produced in collaboration with the Learning Communities and targeting diverse faculty and staff at a broad range of postsecondary institutions.
5. To package **Instructional Products and Methods** developed by the Learning Communities that represent diverse disciplines in different types of postsecondary settings using high quality and easy to access state-of-the-art technologies.
6. To distribute **Orientation Training Materials** and **Instructional Products and Methods** nationally through an existing Internet resource, Facultyware, as well as through extensive outreach with constituent group professional organizations, conferences, and publications.