
Teaching College History Using Universal Instructional Design

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Abstract

This chapter provides a practical model for social science teachers to integrate the best practices of Universal Instructional Design (UID). The approach was used in a developmental education context where academic skill training has been embedded in introductory courses in American history and world history. Use of UID principles not only reduced classroom barriers for students with disabilities, but enhanced the learning of a much larger student group, those who have academic preparation issues for rigorous college courses. In some cases, the same practices had utility for both student groups as well as improving outcomes for the general student population.

Implementing Universal Instructional Design (UID) at a major research university not only supports higher learning outcomes for students with disabilities, but fosters an improved learning environment for all students within the class. The mission of the Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (PsTL) in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota requires instructors to be innovative and varied in their teaching methodology while systematically embedding best learning principles to widen access to a diverse study body. PsTL courses retain the rigorous content standards and high performance expectations of college-level courses while integrating activities and assignments that enhance the access of students and support their ability to perform college-level work. This goal requires a transformative approach to course design, including the revision of course procedures, classroom activities, written assignments, evaluation methods, and feedback to students. This chapter explores our experience in teaching history in PsTL and provides a practical model as well as specific activities for incorporating the best practices of UID into these and other social science courses.

The Challenge of Embedding UID Within Core Curriculum Courses

Historically access to postsecondary education has generally increased in the United States, even though in recent years the choice among specific institutions may have become more restricted (Barton, 2002; Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). A variety of factors have fostered this increased access: growth in the number of postsecondary institutions and satellite campuses, expanded financial aid offerings, and more aggressive marketing of public and private institutions for tuition revenue (Shaw, 1997). This increased access has been accompanied by an increased diversity of the students attending postsecondary education institutions, such as students who are the first generation in their families to attend college and students from historically-underrepresented groups

(Kipp, Price, & Wohlford, 2002). These increases in access and diversity have occurred despite the concurrent rise of admissions standards at many institutions. It is difficult to maintain both increasing academic standards and access to more students simultaneously with improvements in student outcomes like course material mastery, reenrollment rates, persistence in the academic major, scores on examinations administered upon exit from the institution, and graduation rates.

The student body of PsTL has changed recently due to the merging of the old General College (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005) with three other academic units to form the new College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. The academic preparation level of the students admitted to PsTL has risen, with most graduating in the top quartile of their high school class. In the old General College students generally ranked in the top half of their graduating class. Best practices of developmental education and learning assistance were integrated throughout the old college's approach in academic and student affairs to meet the needs of the students who often had academic preparation issues in one or more of their college courses. Rather than providing the traditional stand-alone, developmental-level courses in reading, study skills, and writing, the instructional staff employed an enriched pedagogy that benefited all students, not merely those considered "underprepared" by the institution (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale). The student affairs component of the old college also provided a variety of services that met the needs of the students. Because PsTL's current mission is directed toward the first year experience, many of these same strategies can be used to enhance all students' transitions from high school to college. The ethnic diversity of the students remains nearly the same with about half of those admitted to PsTL being students of color. The students continue to be predominately the first generation in their families to attend college.

It appears that the percentage of students in PsTL with invisible and visible disabilities mirrors that of the general student population at the University of Minnesota. The University's Disabilities Services, a unit of the Office of Equity and Diversity, states that more than 9% of the University's students have one or more disabilities (Disability Services, 2007). In a recent annual report, the rate of expenditures for providing individual accommodations for students has escalated nearly every year for more than a decade. The budget grew by more than 11% in the most recent reporting year (Disability Services, 2005).

These statistics from the University of Minnesota appear to mirror national statistics concerning students with disabilities. Historically the faculty from the old General College and the new PsTL Department have believed that the classroom must provide seamless integration of both teaching and learning mastery with the professor as a catalyst for both. Enhancing the learning environment within an introductory core curriculum course such as history is a viable alternative to requiring students with academic preparation issues to enroll in separate courses or students with disabilities to receive separate accommodations as needed to meet special learning needs. The transformation of the classroom learning experience to meet the needs of these two student populations often enriches the experience for all other students enrolled in the class. This decision requires

a reengineering of the course and a significant change in the learning culture. Previous publications have presented models for enriching the core curriculum course (Arendale & Ghere, 2005; Ghere, 2000; 2001; 2003; Wilcox, delMas, Stewart, Johnson, & Ghere, 1997). This chapter offers practical suggestions that instructors could utilize to implement UID in a wide variety of courses.

Educational Theory Supporting UID in the Classroom

Universal Instructional Design is an approach to education in which systemic changes are made to the learning environment to accommodate the needs of students with a disability (Higbee, 2003). There has been considerable debate within education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels about the mainstreaming of these students. Advocates for UID argue that a dramatic cultural transformation is mandated in the learning environment for all students. They state that an expansion in learning modalities will result in the creation of an enriched learning environment that meets the needs of not only those with disabilities, but of all students (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn 1998).

Through spirited dialogue and review of educational outcomes, it has been clearly demonstrated that all students within the classroom benefit from these changes, which increase the accessibility of knowledge and the environment in which learning activities occur. Burgstahler (2005) stated that, “In terms of learning, universal design means the design of instructional materials and activities that make the learning goals achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember. Universal design for learning is achieved by means of flexible curricular materials and activities that provide alternatives for students with differing abilities.”

UID provides a fresh approach to the issue of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. It is practically impossible, cost-prohibitive, and counterproductive to provide separate programs to meet the needs of each student subgroup. As educators have increasingly come to understand, placing students within categories and subcategories has had unanticipated outcomes. By implementing UID, the institutional culture creates a more inclusive and enriched learning environment (Pliner & Johnson, 2004). This pedagogical approach is based on a core set of premises that affirm high academic expectations for students while providing a transformed learning environment more conducive to learning by a broader range of students, including those with a disability. These premises include:

1. Student academic success is achieved most effectively when the classroom learning experience is enriched in rigorous, core curriculum courses, rather than providing services in isolation outside of the course.
2. The institution must adapt itself to the entering students rather than expecting them to join the student body quickly and quietly.
3. Students with a disability are best served when mainstreamed with all students within the classroom.
4. Activities and services originally designed to meet the needs of those with a disability often have high utility for all students within the class.

The educational practices contained within this chapter were selected first because of their grounding in educational theory and second for their utility within the classroom. We followed a set of guiding principles for Universal Design identified by Scott, McGuire and, Shaw (2003) with our history courses. The nine elements are (a) equitable use, (b) flexibility in use, (c) simple and intuitive, (d) perceptible information, (e) tolerance for error, (f) low physical effort, (g) size and space for approach and use, (h) a community of learners, and (i) instructional climate (pp. 375–376). A full discussion of the similarities and differences among the terms Universal Design for Learning, Universal Instructional Design, and Universal Design for Instruction are provided elsewhere in this book.

UID (Higbee, 2003) was originally conceptualized as a transformation of the classroom environment for mainstreaming of students with disabilities (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn, 1998). The approach has now been extended for the transformation of the classroom experience to increase learning and outcomes for all students. The same practices that benefited the newly mainstreamed students with disabilities also enhanced the learning environment for all other students within the same class (Higbee, Chung, & Hsu, 2004). This paradigm requires the institution to present a transformed learning environment that capitalizes on existing student strengths and builds upon them throughout the course.

Finally, it is recognized that most students learn best as a member of a cohort of peers (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2002; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). The unique traits of students—demographic, cultural, intellectual—are important ingredients and resources for their learning experiences. In this sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky stated that the education enterprise should be viewed as a learning community dependent upon the active participation of all members. Various educational activities associated with the course encourage extensive student dialogue, various ways to express mastery of academic content and demonstration of acquired skills, and small peer-group cooperative learning activities.

Overview of the PsTL Introductory History Courses

The Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning has implemented this integrated and embedded approach to UID in many of its courses. To help set the context for the use of UID within the introductory history courses, some background information about the courses follows. One course is Perspectives in American History (PsTL 1231), a one-semester survey of American history, and the other history course is World Civilization Since 1500 (PsTL 1251). Both classes enroll from 35 to 45 students per section. Both courses fulfill the same liberal education requirement for graduation from the University—Historical Perspectives. In addition, PsTL 1231 fulfills the University's Cultural Diversity graduation requirement while PsTL 1251 fulfills the International Perspectives requirement.

PsTL 1231 is also a writing-intensive course as determined by the University. These courses develop students' writing ability, particularly in research papers, beyond the level provided by the required freshman-level composition courses. Students must successfully

pass four writing-intensive courses in order to graduate from the University. In PsTL 1231 students need to complete three different types of writing assignments: (a) short five-to-seven-sentence essays in the form of 12 weekly writing assignments and six questions on each of three exams, (b) a long essay question on each of three major exams, and (c) a 10- to 12-page formal paper. Because the course is writing intensive, a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) is available to critique and grade the weekly writing assignments and provide a detailed critique of the first draft of the formal paper. These scores are then confirmed or adjusted by the instructor, who grades all the long essays and the final draft of the paper. A review sheet is distributed one week before each test containing study questions and announcing the long essay question.

Writing assignments also occur throughout PsTL 1251, but not at the same intensity and frequency as in the other history course. Each of the four major exams requires completing three essay questions. In advance of each exam a number of potential essay questions are placed on a study guide. A short paper of one to two pages is required concerning a “field trip” to a historically-related event or film from a list provided by the course instructor. Finally, eight short in-class writing assignments occur during class sessions to allow students to summarize major components of course material or to reflect on a learning activity that occurred during class. Because of the class size and course expectations, an undergraduate teaching assistant (UGTA) facilitates optional study review sessions outside of class 3 days per week. These sessions are called Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Groups and follow similar procedures as other peer cooperative learning programs such as the Emerging Scholars Program (Treisman, 1985); Peer-Led Team Learning (Dreyfus, 2004); Structured Learning Assistance (Doyle & Kowalczyk, 1999); and Supplemental Instruction (Arendale, 1998).

Universal Instructional Design requires the instructor to determine the essential components of each particular course so that it can be redesigned without impacting the quality of the course. PsTL 1231 and PsTL 1251 have the same essential components. Students will become more knowledgeable about historical vocabulary, concepts, personalities, and perspectives. Students will gain a better understanding of historical cause and effect situations, of relationships between individual events and their historical context, and of how these circumstances change over time. Students will engage in student-centered learning giving voice to student concerns and choice in student actions as they actively engage in the construction of knowledge. Students will develop improved writing and critical thinking skills as well as the ability to view individuals, events, and circumstances from multiple perspectives.

Learning Experiences Before and After the Class Session

Due to the time constraints of the class session, speed of learning activities, and complexity of the varying learning situations, it is critical for many students with a disability or those with academic preparation issues to be prepared before the beginning of the class session and then to reflect carefully on what occurred during the session. Before the integration of UID within the courses, some of these activities or resources would have

been provided in a confidential manner only to those students who presented an official letter from the University's Disability Services unit. Students who were academically underprepared might not have been admitted to the University and instead directed to a local community college to enroll in developmental-level courses. After retooling of the course through UID, these activities are available for all students within the course. The following activities have been used in one or both of the history courses.

Web-Based Access to Knowledge

Accessing Web-based course-related materials, whether created by the instructor or provided by the textbook publisher, provides an opportunity for the student to study and practice with the material in privacy and to decide how much time to invest in the activity. Syllabi, course calendars, assignment guidelines, review sheets, topic outlines, and discussion questions are placed on the course Web site, as well as links to documents, maps, charts, images, resource sites, and PowerPoint lecture slides. Students with visual impairments as well as some other disabilities can more easily use the material through text readers, enlarged print, and other adaptive technology. All students have an opportunity to be better prepared for class sessions and to be more confident in participating in small-group and class-wide discussions.

For teachers who seek to include Web-based resources, especially those provided by the textbook publisher, it is critical to practice extensively with accessing the materials from a computer and to explore all components of the package. Sometimes the test banks are heavily focused on knowledge-level questions of material that is obscure, even for course instructors. Encouraging students to test themselves with this type of material can be demoralizing and counterproductive. Secondly, the difficulty in accessing Web-based materials can be challenging, even for experienced computer users. It is best to demonstrate the use of such Internet resources in class. It would be a mistake to assume that today's students are equally savvy concerning use of computing resources. A cautionary note about relying upon Web resources is that not all Web sites have been modified to allow their use by students with vision or hearing disabilities. In such cases the material needs to be made available in an accessible format or it should be eliminated so as not to provide an unfair disadvantage for some students who are using screen readers and other adaptive technologies.

Preparation for Lectures and Learning

A challenge for some students is the difficulty of navigating a rich, fast-moving, and sometimes complicated college classroom learning environment. Student completion and comprehension of assigned readings could be enhanced by providing questions to be answered or key points to be identified in class discussion. Furthermore, instructors could expect students to be prepared for class discussion over those questions or key points. Providing lecture outlines ahead of time or hiring a fellow student to provide copies of notes are not uncommon practices for accommodating some students with a disability. The introduction of PowerPoint slide presentations to accompany class lectures has accentuated this problem for other students within the class as well because

the amount of content information presented is often larger and the class moves at a faster pace.

PowerPoint lecture notes. In the world history course the instructor provides an incomplete copy of the upcoming PowerPoint lecture slides ahead of time. The slides are provided through the course WebVista site. The slides are provided in the Acrobat PDF format. The slides are printed in the format that places three slides on the left side of the page with the right side of the page blank for the addition of student notes. Use of the PDF format alleviates the need for students to need the PowerPoint software. Instead, a free copy of the Acrobat PDF reader software must be downloaded onto the student's computer. The course Web site has Internet links for this and other free software packages. The PowerPoint slides provided are incomplete; only the major points of the slide are visible. The secondary and tertiary material is only displayed during class to encourage more student interaction with the lecture material. Experience in the history class with providing complete sets of PowerPoint slides has revealed that some first-year students make the assumption that this is the only relevant material presented during class and therefore they attend class infrequently, much to their academic detriment.

For students with a diagnosed disability, the complete set of PowerPoint slides with all secondary and tertiary points is provided ahead of time. During a previous academic term, a student with severe sight impairment was able to use this complete set of slides on his computer in advance of the class lecture. Using the PowerPoint software program, he first converted the slides into the outline view and then used the adaptive software installed on his computer to convert the written outline into an audio narration of the complete slides. Similarly, students who are deaf must divide their attention between the text and images on the PowerPoint slides, the gestures and facial expressions of the instructor, and the sign language interpreter conveying the instructor's words. These students can benefit greatly from examining the PowerPoint slides in advance.

Wiki Web page study guide. In the world history course the students create an online study guide to prepare for the major exams. Each student in the class is assigned to write a one-page outline of an answer for one of the potential essay questions or create a narrative summary of the chapter. Because there are more students than questions or chapters, there are up to six responses for each. This practice provides a great opportunity for student voice in the class by observing how they value the course materials and express them through the writing assignment. After being assigned their task and the completion date, students work at their own pace independently outside of class on creating their section of the wiki Web page. The course instructor monitors the student contributions and edits as necessary to eliminate major factual errors. Course evaluations rate this activity very high in usefulness.

Weekly course podcasts. Students in the world history course are assigned various roles with a weekly Internet radio show that serves as a course supplement and study guide for upcoming exams. While a common approach to the use of podcasting is to record the

class lectures, this use of the technology was for the students, course instructor, and others to co-create meaningful content from the students' point of view. The course instructor audio recorded student contributions for the 30-minute show. The financial investment was relatively modest with a microphone and use of a computer with GarageBand, a program within the inexpensive iLife (Apple, 2007a) software suite from Apple Computer, Inc. The episodes were made available free of charge through the iTunes Web Internet site (Apple, 2007b).

Students had choices regarding their contributions. Some students provided chapter summaries for the weekly episodes. Others selected music from different parts of the world and provided an overview of the music and how it related to contemporary culture for the country that was being studied during the class sessions. The course instructor contributed an analysis of the potential exam essay questions and suggestions on how best to respond to them. The teaching assistants for the course provided suggestions for study strategies that they had found useful in their own college studies. The student assistant who helped to edit the episodes and place them on the Internet also contributed a short piece on tips for using free software tools and programs available through the Internet. To add some more variety and student interest in the weekly episodes, one student added one or two songs from an independent music artist who provided music cleared for this purpose. This audio format could be listened to through visiting the course Web site (Arendale, 2007) or by downloading the episode to a portable MP3 device like an iPod, iRiver, or similar. Written transcripts of the shows were available by use of inexpensive speech-to-text translation computer software. End of course evaluations revealed that students found the podcasts useful as a study aid.

Out-of-class Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) groups. A frequently used support for some students with disabilities is providing private tutors to assist with processing the course material. This unfortunately can create a socially isolating environment and can be fairly expensive for supporting just one person. The same funds and efforts can be used to create an out-of-class peer cooperative learning group. In both history courses the undergraduate teaching assistants hold multiple weekly study review sessions for all students in the class. The PAL sessions provide typical activities that might be experienced in other nationally-known programs such as Supplemental Instruction and Peer-led Team Learning (Arendale, 2004). The PAL groups supported the students with academic preparation issues as well as the general students in their mastery of rigorous course material.

Modifications of the Classroom Learning Environment

Following is a sample of the activities and modifications to the classroom learning environment for either or both the American history and world history courses. The wide variety of activities is incorporated into the class sessions to provide a rich selection of ways for students to interact with the course material, with one another, and to have multiple ways to express their mastery of rigorous course material. Although the activities were initially promoted to accommodate students with disabilities, class evaluations suggest widespread support for these varied approaches by most students in the class.

Classroom Questioning Techniques

The instructor needs to recognize the effects of various questioning techniques in the classroom. Questions addressed to the whole class usually result in responses from the same small group of students. This allows other students to avoid contemplating the question because the answer will be provided by that small group of students. However, if the instructor systematically calls on other students, then all students can be actively involved in the class discussion. Students who are unprepared for class or confused about the course material, as well as those who are naturally shy, introverted, or lacking confidence can all be included in class discussion. Moreover, once students become familiar with the instructor's questioning methods, students should come to class better prepared and should consider each question as it is posed, because the instructor may call on them. The pauses between the asking of each question and the selection of the student to answer each question may become the most intellectually-stimulating moments in the class.

The previous paragraph provides an illustration of the benefits for students who have academic preparation issues or the general student population. These questioning techniques also benefit students with disabilities. Students utilizing sign language interpreters or augmentative communication devices may be left out of typical class discussions due to the delay in the communication of the questions and the communication of the student's answers. A brief pause after each question would enable those students to participate actively in the discussion and access to questions before class would further facilitate this outcome. Students with learning disabilities, for example, need time to consider each question and formulate a thoughtful answer. Past experience may have made some of these students reluctant to participate in class, but a thoughtful instructor, questioning students systematically, can create positive engagement of students with disabilities in the class activities and discussion. Other students have experienced frustration in the past, and will be excited by the opportunity to participate in class discussion offered by these questioning techniques.

Valuing the Textbook and Course Materials

Students sometimes act on the maxim that the amount of time that an instructor spends on an issue in class is related to its overall relative importance. This mismatch of expectations is especially profound regarding the use of the course syllabus, textbook, ancillary course materials, and associated Web-based resources. Instructors need to value such materials and procedures throughout the course term so that students understand that the material is important, relevant, and meets their learning needs (Martin, Blanc, & Arendale, 1994). One of the most important resources for the course is the syllabus. Instructors often spend large amounts of time carefully crafting course syllabus documents and then quickly rush through them on the first day of class so that the first lecture can be delivered. From an instructor's point of view it might seem reasonable to instruct students by telling them to read the syllabus on their own. In both the American and world history classes the instructors bring the syllabus to class daily, and frequently consult it in front of class when questions arise about assignments, due dates, grading criteria, or all the other issues that have been carefully addressed.

The same comments from the previous paragraph also apply to the textbook. In both the American and world history courses, textbooks are valued continually throughout the academic term by the course instructor in a variety of ways. First, the instructor always brings the textbook with him to class each day and finds ways to refer to material on specific pages. Examples for use of the textbook include drawing attention to specific questions listed in the chapter overview designed to guide the reading; moderating discussion concerning the meaning of maps, charts, illustrations, or brief historical primary documents in the book that are sometimes overlooked by the reader; illustrating the utility of the glossary or index in the back of the book to locate information quickly; or other activities.

In both history courses nongraded classroom assessment techniques (Angelo & Cross, 1993) are frequently used to build metacognitive awareness and motivation for academic behavior changes. Helping students to see the link between their behavior and grades is a difficult task. The goal is for students not to be surprised with results from their major examinations. Sometimes this is still a surprise, so in the world history course an activity is used in class on the day that the exams are returned to students. Students are asked to respond to a survey that lists nearly 30 activities that they might have completed before the exam; for example, studied with a friend or reread the textbook. Some of the questions ask how long they engaged in the activity. The instructor then summarizes the data and shares the results with the students during the next class period to allow them to compare themselves with others in the class regarding their study habits. In American history, an exam is critiqued on the day it is returned to the students. The discussion addresses which multiple choice questions were missed most often and why, what arguments and content were frequently or effectively used in the essays, and what arguments and content were not used that could have improved the essays.

Many first-year students report difficulty with the shift from secondary school testing procedures, methods, and vocabulary to those at the college level. Instructors can eliminate this concern by discussing the types of questions on the tests, the level of preparation needed for that type of question, and the instructor's expectations for breadth and depth and specificity for the essay questions. In the world history course, a handout details the recommended strategies for answering different question types: true or false, multiple choice, and essay. Opportunities to practice with questions that emulate the style and format of those on the exams are provided during class time with mock examinations. Instructors help students identify key language in directions, common terms used with essay questions and their specific meanings, and methods for using one part of the exam (i.e., vocabulary matching and multiple choice) to help answer the essay and short-answer questions. Other instruction regarding test-taking strategies occurs by using the frequent classroom assessment techniques as an opportunity also to analyze the strategies used for completing them.

In-Class Peer Cooperative Learning Activities

Previously in this chapter the use of out-of-class peer cooperative learning groups was

described. These groups are also an integral part of the in-class activities as well. Such activities play a vital part of the class learning environment for the following reasons. Small group learning engages students in their own intellectual, personal, and professional development. Student content knowledge, depth of understanding, frequency of class participation, and level of course involvement are enhanced by the interpersonal and interactive nature of cooperative learning groups (Fry, Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2003). Group learning benefits good students who must formulate their understanding of course concepts to present them to others while students who are underprepared benefit from the reiteration of those concepts from a student perspective (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005). Interactive student activities increase student engagement, build learning networks, encourage students to see one another as learning resources, and increase content mastery of challenging material (Astin, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Cooper, Prescott, Cook, Smith, & Mueck, 1990; Light, 2001).

Peer cooperative learning groups are frequently formed for short-term tasks in each of the history classes. These activities include identifying the key points in a section of the text, examining a newspaper article, analyzing a historical document, or discussing a historical documentary shown during class. Students are more likely to engage the material and have increased confidence to participate in class discussion through use of carefully assigned and monitored peer cooperative learning activities (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). “There is a large amount of empirical evidence that small groups of peers learning together have advantages for academic achievement, motivation, and satisfaction” (Barkley et al., 2005, p. 25).

Cooperative learning methods can be especially effective for students with disabilities (Johnson & Johnson, 1986; O’Connor & Jenkins, 1995). Small-group peer learning may be especially important for students who may need a more interactive and slower pace of learning than with an instructor-led, fast-paced lecture presentation. Students with learning disabilities can remain actively engaged with the course content material in peer cooperative learning activities while students with speech, hearing, or sight impairments can have more opportunity to contribute their ideas in the context of the small group. A special application of this pedagogy is illustrated through fostering the development of critical thinking skills that maintain high intellectual engagement with the course material (Adams & Hamm, 1990; Chaffee, 1992; Higbee & Dwinell, 1998; Paul & Elder, 1999; Stone, 1990).

Fostering Critical Thinking Through Historical Decision-Making Simulations

Classroom simulations provide teachers with powerful learning opportunities by creating “a realistic experience in a controlled environment” (Fry et al., 2003, p. 137). They can help stimulate critical thinking skills as students confront the same issues and options from the perspective of historical decision makers. An additional benefit of this strategy is that it provides more engagement for the students because most report that they find it interesting and relevant, and they have the opportunity to work in small groups. These are just some of the many educational benefits from simulations for students. Research suggests

that this increased involvement results in significantly greater retention of the content material, an enhanced interest in related topics, and a more positive attitude toward the general subject matter (Bennett, Leibman, & Fetter, 1997; Bredemeier & Greenblat, 1981; Druckman, 1995; Randell, Morris, Welzel, & Whitehall, 1992).

All simulations involve the students in active learning situations requiring some level of role playing. These roles can be very specific, such as a historical individual; more general as a representative of a country, region, or state; or very generic as a decision maker assessing the historical options that might have been available. Simulation handouts provide the background material necessary for each student to evaluate the various decision options in the historical situation and to play the role assigned. Sometimes a reward system is utilized to create a situation, which fosters competition between groups and cooperation within each group. In these “game” simulations, students articulate their positions, negotiate with other students, and compromise when necessary to reach a consensus decision or political bargain that achieves their goals. Other simulations employ maps to convey information to the students, to designate various territorial options, and ultimately to display student decisions. Following is an example of a simulation activity: “As a United Nations commission, what political organization and degree of autonomy would you recommend for a specific region based on the data provided concerning its ethnic and religious composition?” Students must analyze the question based on historical events in different geographic locations of the world that encompass different cultures and traditions: West Bank, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, and Bosnia. In this case, natural interests of role playing, competitive play, and intellectual curiosity are channeled into an educational activity that helps to foster students’ critical thinking skills.

Diverse Methods and Means to Demonstrate Mastery of Course Material

There are a variety of learning disabilities that make it difficult for students to demonstrate mastery of the course material on standardized exams with a time limit that rewards students who can complete the examination quickly. The following strategies have been implemented in both history courses to uphold rigorous mastery of the course material and also to provide a variety of means for assessment of learning.

Assessment of knowledge. The most common accommodation request received from the University’s Disability Services unit is extended time on major exams. Our purpose is to assess the students’ knowledge and understanding of the course material, not the speed with which the students can compose their thoughts in written essays. While real time or limited time tests are appropriate in some academic disciplines, they are not part of the essential elements of the history courses. Tests with time limits advantage the free-flowing writer and disadvantage the thoughtful, meticulous writer while imposing unnecessary limits on the student’s demonstration of course content mastery. Why should any students be penalized for taking time to think deeply about an essay question and to organize their answer logically? Why should a student who is an English language learner (ELL) utilizing a dictionary, a student with severe vision challenges using materials written in Braille, or a student experiencing test anxiety be rushed to answer multiple-choice questions due to a time limit?

In both the American and world history courses, tests are designed to require 60 to 75 minutes, but at the end of the 2-hour class session students are allowed to finish their work in the professor's office. The typical accommodation for students with learning disabilities (usually time-and-a-half on tests) is not needed because all students have the time necessary to convey fully their comprehension of the course material. As a result, the requests for this accommodation have diminished, and some students never need to disclose their disabilities. However, one or two students each term are approved by the University's Disability Services—a unit of the Office of Multicultural & Academic Affairs—to take their exams at Disability Services to provide an isolated environment for those who may become aurally or visually distracted by others in the room.

The provision of additional time benefits all students. It helps alleviate one source of test anxiety by eliminating time pressure. It helps students in being more reflective about taking the exam, more careful in reading exam questions, more practiced in writing short outlines for essay questions, and more proficient in gathering information from the vocabulary and multiple-choice sections of the exam that could be useful for supporting the essay question responses. Expectations can be raised by the instructor because students will have the time needed to create more reflective and analytical responses to essay questions. When quality work is not produced, the reason for the failure, whether lack of ability or lack of preparation or effort, is more apparent and the appropriate solutions more obvious to both instructor and student.

Alternative formal assessment measures. While the diversity of entering students has continued to rise, the use of diverse measures for assessing student mastery often has not changed significantly. Too often, for instance, students are expected to navigate multiple-choice examinations expertly. In addition to providing some multiple-choice questions on exams, the two history courses have employed a mix of short and long essay questions, matching exercises, short answer, and identity questions. Other formal assessment methods have included journals, short in-class or homework writing assignments, reaction papers, short and long research papers, written reviews of history Web sites, PowerPoint presentations, historically-related films, guest speakers, and museum exhibitions. In-class activities and student presentations can be evaluated by the instructor or assessed through peer review and self-review.

In the American history course, students are expected each week to answer one homework question by composing a paragraph of six or seven sentences. These questions are constructed so that the answer cannot simply be copied from the text and are of two basic types. The first type requires students to identify key points or summarize events from a 2- to 3-page section of the text. For example, "what local factors determined the work and living conditions of slaves in various areas of the English colonies?" Students must consider issues such as field hand versus household servant, labor difficulties for specific crops, and the percentage of slaves in the local population, among others. This ability to recognize the key points in a piece of text and condense the information into a short, concise paragraph will be invaluable to students throughout their lives. The second type

of question asks students to assume a particular role given the background information from the assigned reading and reflect on what their actions or decisions would be in that situation. For example, “would you prefer to be a woman in colonial New England or colonial Virginia? Why?” Students must consider the issues of health concerns, property rights, and various social issues. These writing exercises gradually enhance the students’ organization and analysis skills, as well as their critical thinking and creativity.

American history students take three major exams during the academic term, each including a question to be answered in a lengthy essay encompassing four to eight pages in a test booklet (i.e., “blue book”). Essay questions focus on broad themes that require students to consolidate and compare information and ideas over the span of a historical period. Essay questions are announced one week in advance of the exam so students can organize their thoughts and look for evidence to support their arguments. This practice not only develops the students’ writing skills, but it also enables the instructor to have much higher expectations about the preparation for the essay and the quality of the arguments. Poor performance can be dealt with appropriately because the problem, whether the students’ lack of understanding or lack of motivation to study, can be more easily determined. Essays are written in class without notes, and the bluebooks are marked to prevent students from bringing a previously written essay into class.

The basic philosophy of UID is that mainstreaming learning activities that are helpful for many students with disabilities, special needs, or academic preparation issues will also be beneficial for the entire group of students enrolled in a course. For a discussion of specific practices keyed to specific disabilities, refer to Ghery’s (2003) previously published chapter “Best Practices and Students With Disabilities: Experience in a College History Course.” We also previously published an extensive chapter that explored the practical means of meeting the needs of students considered academically-underprepared within introductory history courses (Arendale & Ghery, 2005).

Summary and Recommendations for Further Investigation

This chapter has been about transforming a college course so that all students, including those with disabilities and those with academic preparation issues, could maximize their benefit and have a learning environment with few, if any, barriers. The educational practices contained within this chapter can be used in whole or in part by classroom instructors in a variety of ways. Instructors of history or other academic content courses could select activities from this chapter that are appropriate to the academic preparation level of the students and the academic expectations for the particular institution. Another variable that comes into play is the resources made available to the instructor by the institution. Is there a campus faculty development center the faculty member can consult for embedding effective UID practices? Most of the recommended practices in this chapter do not require extensive preparation or formal coursework.

Embedding the best practices of UID within core curriculum subjects in PsTL has shown some elements of success. Some students with severe visible and invisible disabilities need

more accommodations to the learning environment to increase their academic success. Not all students with academic preparation issues need to enroll in prerequisite developmental-level courses in reading, study skills, and writing. The old General College was able to meet the needs of students who were less academically prepared than others who were admitted to the University (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005). Those patterns have continued with the new PsTL.

The practices described in this chapter expand the margins of academic success for a wider range of students, but still more powerful transformations of the course learning experience are needed. Not all students who could benefit from the PsTL experience are successful. One element that needs further investigation is why some students opt out of availing themselves of these resources and opportunities. Additional research and investigation concerning deeper issues of student motivation are needed. Research partnerships among cognitive psychologists, disability specialists, and content-area classroom instructors can illuminate the complicated nature of student motivation and guide institutions to adapt themselves to the needs of their students regarding the optimum learning environment.

Previous research and scholarship has often focused on the utility of UID for groups of students as illustrated in this article, such as students with disabilities and students with academic preparation issues, with an extension to the entire student group. So much of previous work has focused on increasing recognition, sensitivity, and meeting the needs of groups within the larger student body. The future for UID is to serve as a catalyst and guide for educators to understand that all students are different, individual, and unique. The reason for implementing UID will not be to meet the needs of a variety of groups within the class: rather, it will be to meet the unique needs posed by each individual learner within the classroom. A transformed classroom learning experience will be essential to help learners to reach their full potential.

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