Universal design for instruction: Guidance from students with learning disabilities.

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Students with Disabilities

- 11% of undergraduate students have a disability\(^1\)

- Average of 1,325 students with disabilities registered with the DRC during 5-year period of 2009-2014
  - equates to 2.6% of total UF student population
  - ~ 52,000 UF students → 10% = \textbf{5200}\(^2\)

- Students with LD
  - ½ rate (21%) attendance at 4 year college versus general population (40%); 2x rate attendance at 2-year college\(^2\)
  - College completion rates: 41% (LD) versus 52% in general population\(^2\)
  - 11% of Students with LD report disability to college/university\(^3\)

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### Registered Students by college

- 37% Liberal Arts and Sciences
- 14% Engineering
- 11% Agricultural and Life Sciences
- 10% Business Administration
- 6% Journalism and Communications
- 22% all other colleges

### Percentage by primary disability

- 28% Mental Health
- 26% Attention Disorders
- 19% Learning Disorders
- 14% Medical/Chronic Health
- 6% Other: Hearing, Vision, TBI, Autism
- 6% Physical/Mobility Impairment
Learning Disabilities & Attention Disorder

- Most prevalent disorder on college campuses
  - ~60% of students reporting a disability\(^1\)
- Life long disorder; Invisible disability
  - A neurological disorder that affects the brain’s ability to receive, process, store, and respond to information\(^2\)
- Learning Disabilities = “umbrella” term
  - Specific LD diagnosis can vary from person to person
- ~31-45% of individuals with LD or AD have both\(^3\)

Challenges for Students with LD/AD

- Often unaware of how their LD symptoms impact their academic and essential life skills\(^1\) — more difficulty with:
  - Time management; maintaining effective daily routines
  - Coping with stress; communicating needs
  - Organizational skills
  - Problem solving skills

- Need strong supports; lower self-esteem\(^1\)
  - Often unaware of / under-utilize resources and support services
  - ↑ Self-efficacy, ↑ academic persistence, ↑ effectiveness of strategy use\(^2\)

**Additional Challenges**

Receiving / Synthesizing / Applying / Comprehending information & instructions

- Concrete language; word finding/confusion
- Slower processing → difficulty managing assignments within allocated timeframes
- Communicating and interacting socially
- Difficulty applying supports/strategies without a model or experience

- Lack of awareness & Stigma
  - Instructors being unaware and/or insensitive to needs and challenges
  - “cop-out” excuse, not a real disorder, disruptive, attention-seeking
Comprehensive Support for STEM Students with Learning Disabilities (CS³LD)

http://stemscholar.phhp.ufl.edu/
CS$^3$LD Activities

- **Personal**: Undergraduate Group Trainings: self-advocacy; understanding symptoms & capacities; time & stress management

- **Interpersonal**: Mentors →
  - professional enculturation: helping understand the reality of their field – guided discovery
  - social support: acknowledging their hard work
  - empowerment mentor: instilling confidence to make decisions

- **Institutional**: Faculty & Administrators →
  Institutionalization of awareness & UDL training
Scholar Group Meetings:

- **Knowledge**: LD-related topics
- **Peer Influences**: Peers share strategies & collaborate to create potential solutions
- **Vicarious Learning**: Peers share experiences & lessons learned
- **Role modeling**: Older group members model strategies/solutions for newer members
Scholars’ Perceptions of Strategies for Self-Advocacy

Themes of students’ initial perception of mastery of experiences and social persuasion trended from problem statements to strategies for improved performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mastery of Experiences</th>
<th>Social Persuasion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 2013</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spring 2014</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not efficient</td>
<td>People don’t understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do things too fast</td>
<td>Can’t express myself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misplace things</td>
<td>Don’t raise my hand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can’t concentrate</td>
<td>Don’t like to talk about it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can’t multi-task</td>
<td>Disrespectful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procrastinate</td>
<td>People can’t identify</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can’t comprehend</td>
<td>Shut down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 2014</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fall 2013</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make lists of even simple things</td>
<td>Provide education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take breaks</td>
<td>Practice speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep track</td>
<td>Ask questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on what I am good at</td>
<td>Talk to professors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use a planner</td>
<td>Be positive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finish easy things first</td>
<td>Show them how our brains work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read aloud</td>
<td>Don’t be afraid</td>
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Meaningful Discussion Topics to our Scholars

Neurology of LD/AD

Cognitive Styles Common to LD/AD$^1,2$

1. Big Picture Thinking (Interconnected Reasoning)
2. Dynamic Reasoning
3. Narrative Reasoning
4. 3-Dimensional Spatial Reasoning

Neural Differences

Dyslexia: ↓ Language Center activation

Beneventi et al., Int J Neurisci, 2010

Dysgraphia (writing)

Richards et al., 2011

Beneventi et al., Int J Neurisci, 2010

More Motor-Sensory-Cerebellum ‘Automatic’

Good Writers

Poor Writers

More Visual Monitoring
Big Picture Thinking (Interconnected Reasoning)

- Ability to spot relationships between different concepts & points of view
  - multiple points of view
  - borrows approaches from other disciplines
- Easily sees relationships of similarities or association/causation
- Strong conceptual ability in uniting disparate information into a single global view (i.e., gist)
Dynamic Reasoning

- Intuits solutions, then works backwards to check potential path(s) to solution
  - Slower, more difficult discernment of path(s)
- Uses the “best fit” cognitive processes rather than rule-based/deductive/formulaic thinking
- Career implications: cutting edge fields, inventors & researchers
  - Good reasoning for highly changeable or ambiguous situations where knowledge is incomplete
Narrative Reasoning

- Tendency to use stories to recall the past, understand the present and imagine the future
- Career implications: Great for communicating a vision as a business leader, in the courtroom
- Students: can use stories to boost memory
3-D Spatial Reasoning

- Non-verbal reasoning

- Enables reasoning about:
  - The shape, size, motion, position of objects in the physical world
  - Orientation in space
  - The way objects in physical world interact

- Spatially gifted → verbally challenged
  - Arduous process of putting thoughts into words
UDL: Universal Design for Learning/Instruction
What is UDL?

UDL Principles ➔

**Multiple Means of...**

**Representation**
Various ways of **learning the information**
(e.g., hear & see)

The “what” of learning

**Expression/Action**
Alternative or various ways of demonstrating they **know the content**

The “how” of learning

**Engagement**
Tapping into student’s interests & challenging them in **motivating ways**

The “why” of learning
Multiple means of representation: The “what” of learning

- “can you explain this in a different way?”
- “Recapping at the end of class…”
  - “…just a real quick recap”
- “..he just talks, I draw what he says.”
- “leave it on the board just a little bit longer”
Multiple means of **expression**:
The “how” of learning

- “Please bear with me... It takes me longer to understand”
- “Studying takes longer, taking my exams takes longer…”
- “Clear directions, in the right order... and all parts of the instructions in one place”
- “…looking around when I took my tests and getting accused of cheating when I wasn't. I need a small testing environment…”
Multiple means of engagement: The “why” of learning

- “Positive support is a major motivation and will be that extra support we need to succeed.”
  - “…not a copout or an excuse”
  - “I thought I wasn’t good enough for UF”
  - “I tended to just blame it on myself for being stupid”

- “I never procrastinate. I don't trust myself. I do it early.”
  - Course calendar very important
What Works for our Scholars

Examples of ways to implement Universal Design
During Lectures

- Highlight or write out: Key terms, Key concepts, Key ideas
- Be explicit: What they will learn. Why learn it. What to do with new learning.
  - Model reasoning & judgment about new ideas
- Leave things on the board just a little longer – takes longer to write when forming visual/conceptual/big picture linkages
- Visual aids, concept maps, graphs, charts
- Give the big picture before giving the new concept
  - At the end, link new concepts back to the big picture and to each other
General Classroom

- Provide slides/notes ahead – enables student to preview and create their own “big picture” of the lesson
- Clarify instructions & give additional examples
- Relate a new topic to one already learned or a real-life example
- Post lecture notes on website
- Comprehensive chronological outline: topics, required readings, assignments, exams
- Explain how to study for the kind of tests you give.
  - Sample test questions & answers
Don’t be scary...

"Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

Mark Twain

- Rushed gets mistaken for unapproachable
- Expectations for getting to the point → “shuts me down”
What our Scholars Wish Others Understood about LD/AD
The Scenic Route

“Having ADD is like always taking the scenic route. You come across a lot of cool ideas that you wouldn’t have otherwise, but there’s never the option to take the interstate.”

— Artist with a learning disability
Normality

“When we see each other, we should realize that there is something different in all of us. We should not fear the difference. We should embrace it, and educate others so that there will be no difference.”

– Artist with a learning disability
Advantages

- Most people who have ADHD have tons of energy. This can be good because they can put this energy into playing games and playing sports.

- Having ADHD also lets you focus really well on things you love, this means that you could be better at picking up details that other people would miss.

- Thinking outside the box is also something that people with ADHD are good at. You are able to look at problems differently and find new ways to fix them because your brain works differently.

References:


ADHD is a common brain disorder that causes the brain to work differently than the average persons’ brain.
Zari’s Take-Home Messages

What has worked

- Patience
- Saying it a different way
- Saying it again – I don’t listen & write well
- Asking me to help interpret accommodations

Thank you for trying, but doesn’t really help

- The walk to the DRC not always worth it
- No need to baby me
  - Don’t assume it’s going to be too much for me

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Accommodations: Why & how they help

Formal Accommodations
- Extended time
- Low distraction
- Test scribe
- Note taker
- Technology use in the classroom
- Printed course materials

My Key Strategies
- Same seat (distractions)
- 3 or 4 – pass method
  - Read before class
- Semester calendar
- Visualizing what reading
- Color coding
- Sleep
- Routine
Points to Ponder

- In what ways are principles of universal design for learning similar and different from principles of good communication?

- 64% of young adults with LD do not consider themselves to have a disability — what does that mean for the people in your classroom? (Cortiella et al., 2014)

- To what extent do LD symptoms (e.g., slow processing; disjointed verbal reasoning) get “worked into personality” → stigma?

“Everybody is a genius. but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

-Albert Einstein
It takes a village…

More of our CS3LD team:

- Sue Percival, PhD, Food Science & Human Nutrition
- CY Wu, PhD, Environmental Engineering Sciences
- Mei-Fang Lan, PhD, Counseling & Wellness Center
- Charles Byrd, PhD, Center for Assessment, Strategic Planning, Evaluation and Research
- Anthony DeSantis, PhD, Associate Dean of Students, Disability Resource Center
- William Mann, PhD; Anthony Delisle, PhD; Jim Gorske, MEd
- Consuelo Kreider, PhD, OTR/L, Occupational Therapy ckreider@ufl.edu
Acknowledgements

- HRD 1246587 National Science Foundation. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

- K12 HD055929 National Institutes of Health – National Center for Medical and Rehabilitation Research (NICHD) and National Institute for Neurological Disorders & Stroke. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

- NIH/NCATS Clinical and Translational Science Award to the University of Florida UL1TR000064 – REDCap