

# IDEAS FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN LEARNING

BY MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCE CENTERS FOR STUDENTS FACULTY

Students who have disabilities that involve their learning often have certain patterns of difficulties. These same issues may be seen in other students who struggle but may not have/be diagnosed with a disability. Brainstorming feasible ideas that promote learning in your subject may help all students in the class.

## 1. Comprehension/slower processing of information

Students may have difficulty keeping up with the pace of instruction, and slowing down isn't always an option! You see this when they don't follow instructions, ask the same questions repeatedly, or go off task. Anxiety about not understanding and/or not keeping up heightens anxiety, which further decreases these skills. These students benefit from being able to easily locate additional resources to understand:

Ideas: (some may not be feasible or reasonable in all classes, and other ideas are possible)

- a. Provide materials online – Notes, PowerPoints, examples of acceptable work. Multiple types of presentation and multiple modalities are always helpful.
- b. Make videotaped (captioned) material available, whether it is your own, or from other appropriate resources (text, other colleges, sometimes even You-Tube)
- c. Provide clear and frequent reminders about all of the tutoring resources on campus for your topic. If a specific tutor can drop by your class, a familiar face at the tutoring center may entice a reluctant student.
- d. If tutoring in your subject isn't available, have a few ideas of students who previously passed with a B or better, who are still on campus, and that you can recommend to the Tutoring Center (they'll hire!)
- e. Have supplemental instructors run tutoring groups.
- f. Not always feasible, but reviews prior to exams are more helpful than introducing new material.
- g. Encourage DSPS students to use their accommodations, and facilitate their finding a notetaker.

## 2. Analyzing and Organizing

Often these students don't pick up on details that make similar questions/problems different. They also don't organize information, even into the topics or sections that were provided! As a result, they often feel there is an unwieldy *mass* of information to handle or to remember. Working memory issues make it difficult to retain the mass while they select parts to focus on. Anxiety further hinders working memory.

Ideas: (same caveat as above) These are better when students are *coached* to produce rather than given

- a. Coach through analyzing what they have been given to work with and what is wanted. Draw it out of *them*.
- b. Provide compare/contrast situations of important information, have students individually identify similarities and differences, then engage discussion.
- c. Encourage students to produce and practice sequences of steps.
- d. Coach through producing a study guide for exams. Use your review time, or do a bit each week.
- e. Encourage use of outlining, mapping, making their own handout
- f. Have students try to identify everything they feel is important for a test on a single card. It forces prioritizing as well as organizing.

### 3. Memorizing

Many of these students feel that once they understand information, they will retain it. But because they don't often analyze and/or organize it (and perhaps disability-related reasons), their memory of the material is much less than they had thought. Anxiety resulting from previous, poor test scores further compromises retrieval.

Ideas: (same caveats – both - as above)

- a. The organizing concepts above will help memory.
- b. When important information has been presented, ask for ideas about how to memorize it.
- c. Change up in activities assists students' attention, which will assist memory.
- d. Be aware of and use techniques for memorizing. Associations and stories built from concepts are useful, as is catching the first letters of materials that go together and linking them.
- e. Have students retrieve important concepts from the previous class as you start on new or related material.

### 4. Engaging

Students who have disabilities unfortunately have often been in situations where they are passive learners. Getting them to initiate and be responsible for their learning can be challenging.

Ideas: (same caveats as above)

- a. Encourage students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in the subject, and in required tasks.
- b. Encourage or even coach students to create an action plan with specific steps for how to be successful on your assignment.
- c. Hold them accountable for their actions (or lack of). Praise positive action on their part and give feedback about ways to improve as well.
- d. Let students clearly see that you care about their success, and try to be available to them frequently, especially before and after class. Students know which teachers care about how the student is doing.
- e. Consider offering some extra credit for tasks that involve initiation and engagement. (e.g. completion of review packets, creating action plans, ways they've organized information, etc.)