Retaining Students with Disabilities Through Universal Design & Barrier Reduction

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Students with Disabilities
- Represent 10% of college students
- Number has doubled in past two years at NIU
- Represent broad spectrum of disabilities
  - Visible – such as d/Deaf, Blind, Physical
  - Invisible – such as Learning Disabilities, ADHD, Mental Health, Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury, Health
- Have varied learning styles
- Benefit from Universal Design
- Are qualified; have met admission criteria
- Need accommodations when educational environment and/or materials are not accessible

Institutional Responsibilities
- Provide accessible education
  - Includes classrooms, technology, residential facilities, co-curricular activities, extra-curricular activities...
- Decrease barriers
- Do not discriminate
- Promote reasonable and accessible policies and procedures
- Provide grievance process

Student Responsibilities
- Let faculty know about barriers
- Register with Center for Access-Ability Resources (CAAR) for accommodations
- Share accommodation information with faculty
- Know that accommodations are not retroactive and should not require alteration of the “essential elements” of the curriculum

Faculty Responsibilities
- Acknowledge that every student cannot access education in the same way
- Make education and related materials accessible
- Infuse universal design into coursework on the front end
- Work with students to provide accommodations
- Consult with CAAR staff as needed

Center for Access-Ability Resources
- Resources for students include but are not limited to:
  - Assistance with identifying barriers and ways to reduce barriers
  - Identifying accommodations to create access
  - Developing advocacy skills
  - Exam testing services
- Resources for faculty/staff include but are not limited to:
  - Consultation
  - Presentations
  - Assistance with UD & accessible educational materials
Actions for Institutions of Higher Education

- Create an inclusive environment that includes disability as a component of diversity
- Support the recruitment and retention of individuals with disabilities
- Integrate disability and social justice in individual courses and across the curriculum
- Create supportive and safe environments
- Identify barriers for access and inclusion, and seek to reduce those barriers
- Infuse Universal Design into education

Actions for Individuals

- Identify own perspective through which you view disability
- Review use of language
  - People first, "wheelchair bound," "retarded"
- Use narratives over simulations
- Be aware of privilege associated with varying levels of ability
- Reduce barriers
- Incorporate principles of universal design

Universal Design

The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Also applied to learning (UDL) and instruction (UDI).

- UD – 7 principles
  1. Equitable use
  2. Flexibility in use
  3. Simple and intuitive use
  4. Perceptible information
  5. Tolerance for error
  6. Low physical effort
  7. Size and space for approach and use

- UDL – 3 principles
  1. Multiple means of representation
  2. Multiple means of expression
  3. Multiple means of engagement

Examples of Universal Design

- Equitable use
- Flexibility in use
- Simple and intuitive
- Perceptible information
- Tolerance for error
- Low physical effort
- Size and space for approach and use
- Electronic materials readable by screen reader
- Adjustable tables in computer lab
- Clickers have text, symbols, Braille on buttons; results vocalised
- Videos include captions
- Instructional software provides guidance when student makes mistake
- Class materials selected early and shared, so students can read ahead, acquire alternative text
- Room for wheelchairs, personal care assistants, interpreters to navigate without having to ask for help

Barrier Reduction

- Physical/Environmental Barriers
  - Classroom location and set up
  - Out of class experiences
- Attitudinal/Societal Barriers
  - Assumptions about students’ abilities
  - Accommodations are a nuisance or unfair advantage
  - Lower expectations
- Content Barriers
  - Printed materials
  - Alternate formats, length of time to convert or create
  - Multimedia sources
  - Captioned, screen readable, lag time when using speech to text, font, presentation materials...

Assessment

- Clearly articulate decisions you want to make about students’ skills and knowledge from tests or assignments
- Identify how students can best demonstrate their skills and knowledge in a way that will help you make decisions (assess).
- Identify skills needed to successfully interpret and respond to assessment items and share those.
- Being clear initially about what it is that you want students to learn while acknowledging that students may learn and demonstrate knowledge in various ways, will lay foundation for access and inclusion.
Additional Resources

- Blackboard Accessibility: www.blackboard.com/Teaching-Learning/Learn-Resources/Accessibility.aspx
- Creating Accessible Documents and Websites: www.cew.wisc.edu/accessibility/tutorials/
  www.webaim.org/articles/
- Faculty Specific: www.washington.edu/doit/Faculty
- Legal Components: www.ada.gov
- Universal Design: www.cast.org/research/udl/index.html

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