Universal Design Education
Quality Enhancement Plan

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Section 1: Vision

Share your vision of how your proposed topic has the potential to transform an issue related to student learning at the institutional level. Consider your audience of the Mason community members – why should we embrace this topic and how will it enhance student learning at Mason?

"GMU Mission Statement – George Mason University is innovative ….. Nation's capital to attract outstanding faculty, staff and students."

- The nation's capital is one of the largest areas to provide information in regard to education, disabilities, diversity, transition and the professional environment. A number of federal, state and private resources are available to the skilled faculty, staff and students of the Mason community; thus providing a unique learning experience.

"George Mason will: Educate the new generation …. shaping a global community with vision, justice and clarity."

- Using universal design principles we can shape a new generation of learners by emphasizing inclusive environment and removing barriers to education.

"Encourage freedom of thought, speech and inquiry in a tolerant, respectful academic setting that values diversity."

- Freedom of thought and expression is at the core of universal design which focuses on diversity and inclusion to the broadest extent possible of the community.

"Provide innovative and interdisciplinary….. courses of study that enable students to exercise ….. ethical decisions."

- Mason already provides superior graduate and professional training that prepares students for the transition into the workforce. Ensuring that courses appeal to the largest population of learners ensures that students continue to reach out to the Mason community (e.g., employment, donations, etc.) throughout their professional careers.

"Nurture and support ….. a broad range of intellectual and cultural insights, and is responsive to the needs of students and their communities."

- Universal design would decrease the needs of individuals regardless of cultural background, disability, language, etc. This would also enhance the learning and working environment for those individuals who do not choose to self identify.

"Maintain an international reputation of superior education and public service ….. among Northern Virginia, the nation and the world."

- With campuses located just outside the nation's capital and within the United Arab Emirates has already reached out to various community members. By providing Universal Design Mason ensures an enriched educational environment that is attractive to students, staff and faculty worldwide. Universal Design is a cutting edge strategy towards building an inclusive educational environment for a broad range of learners; George Mason could be on the forefront of this evolution.

Vision Statement: Universal Design Education is a university-wide commitment to incorporate accessible physical and information environments with multiple learning styles throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum. This venture has the potential to meet the needs of every student, faculty, staff and community member regardless of background, culture, gender, primary language, age, disability, or style of learning.

Universal Design strives for the following principles: 1) equitable use, 2) flexibility in use, 3) simple and intuitive, 4) perceptible information, 5) tolerant for error, 6) low physical effort, 7) size and space for approach and use, 8) a community of learners, and 9) instructional climate. (Scott, S.S., McGuire, J.M., & Embry, P. (2002). *Universal design for instruction fact sheet*.
http://www.facultyware.uconn.edu/udi_factsheet.cfm). While this affects obvious physical design, it also plays an integral role in electronic and non-electronic information and teaching pedagogy. UD involves a shift in how we as an institution view diversity, including disability, and meet the needs of a diverse community. It involves a shift in how we design the university environment as a whole -- spaces (office, classroom, recreational, etc.), curriculum, websites, and more. Aura M. Hirschman writes, "Scholars in the field of Disability Studies suggest that we adopt a social model of disability, recognizing that disability is another part of the institution's diversity. It is the barriers in the design of the institution and its activities that create disabling environments. A disability is only disabling to the individual if the environment does not allow for ease of access. Institutions of higher learning have in recent history approached diversity by creating welcoming environments for students of varying minorities by making it clear that diversity is welcomed and sought after" ("Reframing Disability: Multiple Intersections and Universal Design," Association on Higher Education and Disability, ALERT September 2008, http://www.ahead.org/membersarea/currentalert.php#5).

According to The University of Washington's Do-It program, "UD is a goal that puts a high value on both diversity and inclusiveness" (Universal Design: Process, Principles, and Applications," Sheryl Burgstahler, http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Programs/ud.html).   Universal Design promotes usability by all people, to the greatest extent possible. As stated previously, the concept of Universal Design

encompasses all members of the campus community and strives to meet the needs of its diverse population by promoting ease of movement, communication, and interaction. Its intent is to reduce barriers for everyone by making products, communications, and the environment more usable by anyone at little or no cost and effort. Universal Design makes life easier on campus for an athlete with an ACL injury, a visiting professor from another country, a senior citizen using the library, a faculty member rolling a laptop with her arms full of visual aids to class, a student with a hearing impairment in a distance learning class, an administrative assistant with color-blindness ordering office products, and countless others.

Section 2: Congruence with Mission and Goals

Demonstrate how your proposed topic is consistent with Mason's mission and 2014 Strategic Plan.

Universal Design and Diversity in Strategic Plan:

- The term "universal design" is borrowed from the movement in architecture and product development that calls for curb cuts, automatic doors, video captioning, speakerphones, and other features to accommodate a vast variety of users, including those with disabilities. Experience shows that all such flexible designs are less expensive and cumbersome than costly retrofits, and that, in fact, everyone benefits from universal design features, as anyone who has watched video with captions in a busy gym or airport can attest.

  Mason's 2014 Strategic Plan specifically states the goal of "Maintaining accessibility for students from various socioeconomic backgrounds and highlighting the diversity of the student body in relationship with the changing composition of the larger population, while expanding the benefits of this diversity in the educational process and in graduate instruction…" Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for designing educational environments that enable all learners to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. This is accomplished by simultaneously reducing barriers to the curriculum and providing rich supports for learning. Incorporating accessibility and diversity into the "basic planning for enrollment and into the definition of student quality…" is exactly in accordance with Mason's 2014 Strategic Plan.

- It is estimated that over 80 different languages are spoken here on Mason's campus. The 2014 Strategic Plan points to a "…diverse student body..." and "…diverse academic programming…" spread across both urban and suburban campus environments. Students come to the classroom with a variety of needs, skills, talents, and interests. For many learners, the typical curriculum— which includes goals, instructional methods, classroom materials, and assessments—is littered with barriers and roadblocks, while supports are relatively few. Faced with an inflexible curriculum, our diverse population of students and faculty are expected to make extraordinary adjustments. UDL turns this scenario around by placing the burden to adapt on the curriculum itself.

Educators can improve the educational outcomes for these diverse learners by applying some of the following UDL principles to the development of goals, instructional methods, classroom materials and assessments.

- o Provide multiple and flexible methods of presentation to give students with diverse learning styles various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.
- o Provide multiple and flexible means of expression to provide diverse students with alternatives for demonstrating what they have learned, and
- o Provide multiple and flexible means of engagement to tap into diverse learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

As stated eloquently in our 2014 Strategic Plan, the Mason community needs to "provide multiple opportunities to bring the campus community together to become enriched by our diversity." UDL grants us the opportunity to create a more inclusive educational environment for a diverse group of learners, as well as staff and faculty.

Section 3: Student Learning Outcomes

Identify at least four <u>measurable</u> student learning outcomes that your proposed topic expects to address. Specifically, if your plan were to be adopted, what would students know and be able to do as a result?

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1. Learners will be able to identify the various ways of acquiring information and knowledge that specifically meets their learning needs.
2. Learners will have alternative methods for expressing and demonstrating what they have learned.
3. Learners will be able to work with faculty to identify means of engaging them and tapping into their diverse interests. This will motivate students and challenge them appropriately by including them in their own education.
4. Learners will be able to access all aspects of the Mason curriculum and environment by the removal of all barriers to learning (e.g., physical, electronic, etc.) and the incorporation of necessary supports.

Other Resultant Outcomes from UDL -

5. Higher retention rates for various groups (i.e., learners with disabilities, English as a second language learners, older learners, veterans, etc.) within the student population that frequently encounter barriers in the curriculum.
6. Increase in distance learning initiatives, thereby increasing student enrollment.
7. Creation of a more attractive learning and research environment for students and faculty.
8. As aging and temporary disability can and will affect the entire Mason community, a universally designed environment supports changes in an individual's lifestyle while allowing them to

continue their education or maintain their employment without interruption; thus allowing Mason to retain critical assets to the university.

Section 4: Possible Avenues for Implementation

Describe how your proposed QEP topic relates to an issue where there is momentum building on campus or an issue that would be significantly strengthened through added attention and resources. Include your ideas about possible strategies for implementing this topic so that we could obtain meaningful results. Where possible, highlight opportunities to build on current institutional initiatives and resources.

Implementation Plan

1. Identify barriers/bridges to campus access as perceived by students, faculty, and administrators.

2. Establish a committee, forming subcommittees for the purpose of implementing Universal Design across all elements of the University (e.g. physical, informational, and instructional) and create policy.
   a. Example of Physical members - Equity and Diversity, Facilities Management
   b. Example of Informational and Instructional - Center for Teaching Excellence, ITU, Assistive Technology Initiative, ODS, Faculty/Staff representative from various programs within Mason.

3. Apply the concept of Universal Design to the curriculums and co-curriculums to develop approaches and view products that will ensure students a quality higher education.

4. Review products and materials that enhance education, such as distance learning technology.

5. The committee could review and evaluate products and materials through collaboration with the various Mason entities.

Implementation Phases

1. Identify current offices and programs which incorporate elements of UD. (e.g., Office of Equity and Diversity Services)

2. Identify key offices and programs which have immediate interaction with faculty, staff, and students. (e.g., Admissions)

3. Identify all other programs not yet reached. (e.g., research or schools)