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Digital Teaching Symposium 2026

Interdisciplinary Learning and Universal Design: Building a Collaborative Leadership Academy

PRESENTED BY:

Jaclyn Polk, PT, DPT, DHSc, OCS
LaSonya DeCessard, DSW, MSW
Karen Friel, PT, DHS
Wendy Sellers, PhD, MSW, MA

Wingate University-Levine College of Health Sciences

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Today’s Presenters



Dr. Jaclyn Polk

PT, DPT, DHSc, OCS

Director of Clinical Education and Assistant Professor, Physical Therapy
Wingate University



Dr. LaSonya DeCessard

DSW, MSW

Assistant Professor, Social Work
Wingate University

Agenda

01 Contextual Factors and Diverse Learners at Wingate University
02 History of Universal Design
03 Building the Leadership Academy with Universal Design for Learning
04 Module Demonstration
05 Lessons Learned for Future Collaborations

Learning Objectives

By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

01

Understand contextual and learner characteristics relevant to the Leadership Academy

02

Connect design features to principles of Universal Design for Learning

03

Select one collaborative step to improve access and participation in a future module



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01

Contextual Factors and Diverse Learners

Contextual Factors at Wingate University

- Wingate, NC: Intersection of urban and rural (ACS 5-year Data, 2024)
- NC-second largest rural population in the country

Wingate, NC

(U.S. Census Bureau/ACS 5-year Estimates, 2024)

45% White, 23% Black, 26% Hispanic

4% of children live in poverty

44% of older adults live in poverty

Anson County

44% White, 45% Black, 4% Hispanic

32% of children live in poverty

as compared to 16.6% in NC

(U.S. Census Bureau/ACS 5-year Estimates, 2024)

Diverse Learners at Wingate University

40% White, 20% Black, 10% Hispanic/Latino
(College Navigator, 2023-2024)

48% of students receive Pell Grants
(College Navigator, 2023-2024)

41% first-in-family to graduate from college
(Wingate University, 2025)

72% of graduate students enrolled in all or some distance education
(College Navigator, 2023-2024)

21% of baccalaureate and 11% of post-baccalaureate students reported having a disability nationwide
(NCES, 2019-2020)





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02 · 03

Universal Design and the Leadership Academy

History of Universal Design

- **Ron Mace (1970s):** “Usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” Grew out of disabilities movement.
- **Center for Applied Special Technology (1984):** concept of universal design applied to learning environments
- **U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.):** Application of universal design to workplace settings in physical design, communications, and technology
- **APA (2019):** Resolution in support of universal design in education, training, and practice



Strategies for Interdisciplinary Learning and Collaboration

- Development of the Levine College of Health Sciences Leadership Academy
- Multidisciplinary approach with eight graduate programs in health sciences
- Existing connections with universal design
  - Chunking of information into 8 monthly modules, created by 7 different instructors (required consistency)
  - Variability in selection process of diverse learners
  - Development of a sense of community in online space



Universal Design for Online Learning

CAST. (2024). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0

Engagement

Offer meaningful choices and ways to connect with peers. Provide real-time feedback.

Academy Example

Offer a choice of reflection prompts, provide timely feedback, and build peer connection through live or asynchronous discussion.

Representation

Present content in consistent, accessible formats and a clear structure.

Academy Example

Use captions or transcripts, descriptive alt text, headings, plain language, consistent navigation, and short, clearly organized modules.

Action & Expression

Make expectations clear and allow flexible ways to participate when course outcomes permit.

Academy Example

Offer a written reflection, recorded response, or discussion contribution when each demonstrates the same learning outcome.

Opportunities for Pedagogical Growth

Development of accessible formats

- Alt-Text
- Closed-captioning and/or written transcripts
- Screen-reader compatibility

- Importance of built-in templates for slides and visuals
- Implementation of consistency across modules
- University-wide training on WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)
- Application of Accessibility Checker in Canvas and Microsoft Suite





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Module Demonstration

Lessons Learned for Future Collaborations

01 Shift in thinking on content delivery → delay in production

02 Connections with instructional design and accessibility services

03 Mindfulness of diverse ways of learning

04 Humility and openness to new ways of instruction

05 Reframing from a “necessity” to a commitment to inclusion and belonging

06 Paradigm transformation in pedagogical approaches across disciplines



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Thank You

Questions & Discussion

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