

# Universal Instructional Design (UID): A Workbook for Faculty Teaching at a Distance



## An Overview

A core concept of *Universal Design* is that by anticipating and planning for the diverse needs of potential users during the design process, the resulting product or outcome will better suit the needs of all users. Common examples are the use of ramps into buildings, automatic doors and curb cuts in sidewalks. Though originally designed for the disabled, they are in fact helpful for many, including parents pushing strollers, people carrying packages and children on bikes.

When applying the concept of Universal Design to instruction, the benefits are much the same. Anticipating and planning for the diverse needs of students, including but not limited to students with disabilities, results in a better learning experience for *all* students. In addition, because fewer individual accommodations are needed when the principles of Universal Instructional Design (UID) are applied, UID can be more time efficient for instructors, reduce the stigma that can be associated with asking for special accommodation, and provide a greater sense of equity and fairness for all students. The seven Principles of UID are listed to the right.

### 7 Principles of UID

Instructional materials and activities should...

1. Be accessible and fair.
2. Be straightforward and consistent.
3. Provide flexibility in use, participation and presentation.
4. Be explicitly presented and readily perceived.
5. Provide a supportive learning environment.
6. Minimize unnecessary physical effort or requirements.
7. Ensure a learning space that accommodates both students and instructional methods.

# Universal Instructional Design: A Workbook for Faculty Teaching at a Distance

Key: [2,3,7 etc.] – Related UID Principles

This workbook is for faculty and instructional developers who are in the process of planning or revising a predominantly “distance” course and are interested in making it more consistent with UID principles. As such, it is structured to follow a basic course design and delivery framework. **Section A** deals with issues associated with course planning including course goals, course outlines, assessments, course materials, and learning activities. **Section B** deals with issues associated with course delivery including orientation, organization, student prior knowledge, the development of learning skills, feedback, and content delivery. The issues contained within each section are presented as goal statements, which embody the principles of UID as follows:

## A Planning Your Course

- Goal 1. Clearly articulate your learning objectives and create a **guiding framework**.
- Goal 2. Ensure that your **course outline** clearly communicates what the students will be expected to learn and do in the course and what resources are available to them in completing this work.
- Goal 3. Ensure **assessments** are congruent with stated learning objectives and flexible in application, and that the criteria by which student work will be assessed are clear.
- Goal 4. Make **course materials** as accessible as possible.
- Goal 5. Make the **course website** as accessible as possible.
- Goal 6. Plan **learning activities** to maximize student learning through on-line and real-world resources.

## B Course Delivery

- Goal 7. Provide students with an effective **orientation** to the course.
- Goal 8. Bring **organization** and structure to the learning experience and to every resource used.
- Goal 9. Assess and adapt to students’ **prior knowledge**, experience and learning preferences.
- Goal 10. Help students to develop their **learning skills**.
- Goal 11. Provide students with **clear feedback** on their performance throughout the course.
- Goal 12. In the presentation of material, use an **interactive approach** that is accessible to all students.

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Total this goal: √ = tried/worked\_\_\_; \* = would like to try \_\_\_; X= tried/didn't work\_\_\_; ? = not sure what this means\_\_\_

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## Completing the Workbook

Accompanying each of the 12 goals are ten concrete examples of how the principles of UID *might* be incorporated into a course. The specific UID principles (1-7) that each goal relates to are presented in parentheses following the goal statement. While these examples arguably represent sound instructional practice, they have been found to be of particular benefit in helping meet the learning needs of students with disabilities. These examples are *not* intended to represent an exhaustive list, but rather focus on those aspects of instructional design and delivery that are particularly relevant for UID practice. Neither are they intended to be prescriptive; many of the examples provided will not be appropriate or possible in every instructional context. Rather, they are offered as potential ideas - a starting point - for faculty and program developers who are interested in creating a more **inclusive** teaching and learning environment.

In completing this workbook, begin by identifying which of your courses you would like to make more UID-friendly. Then, assess the examples under each goal and indicate which of the following statements best applies to your course.

- (√) I **already use** this approach (in whole or in part); it works
  - (\* ) Sounds interesting; I'd like to **try** this approach
  - (X) I **don't think I'd try** this idea (again); it wouldn't/didn't work in my course
  - (?) I'm **not sure what this means**
- 
- Use the table on page 17 and the summary provided at the bottom of each page to help keep track of the total number of √'s, \*'s, X's, and ?'s that you have indicated for each goal.
  - Under each goal, record any other ideas you have for incorporating UID principles into your course.
  - When you have finished assessing all 12 goals, follow the instructions on page 18 to help you with further analysis.

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## SECTION A. PLANNING YOUR COURSE

### GOAL 1: Clearly articulate your learning objectives and create an integrative guiding framework. [2,4]

- Begin by identifying the learning objectives for your course. Consider the contribution your course makes to the broader curriculum.
- Be explicit about the generic skills your course is intended to foster (e.g., research skills, written and oral communication skills, computational skills, team skills, leadership skills, computer skills). You can use the University's or your college/department learning objectives as a guide.
- Be clear about the intended depth for each learning objective (i.e., is the objective to be introduced, reinforced or mastered?). Is the objective at an appropriate level of sophistication according to Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives?
- Create a guiding framework or conceptual model (i.e., concept map, graphic syllabus) that visually links all of the major learning objectives of the course together. Consider including this visual on the course website and dynamically link from it to various course components. Refer back to this framework throughout the course.
- Timeline the requirements and deadlines for the students, your TAs and yourself. Are they reasonable and fair?
- Ensure congruency among the learning objectives, learning activities, and methods of assessment. Use hyperlinks to "drill down" through levels of details.
- Develop learning and assessment activities that 1) require students to acquire essential building blocks or core concepts and then focus on their application and extension and/or 2) expose students to broad concepts and then require them to explore the various sub-components of the concept.
- Structure the course so that there are weekly activities (e.g., readings, quizzes, postings etc.) that are required in order that students keep pace with the material (rather than waiting until the end of the semester).
- Consider how instructors of pre- or post-requisite courses organize and present their course material (e.g., websites, manuals, course outlines) so that presentation is reasonably consistent from one course to the next.
- Talk to a colleague or instructional designer about your course plans. Ask for feedback on the clarity of your framework as well as the appropriateness of the learning activities and assessments.
- Your ideas:

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## **GOAL 2: Ensure that your course outline clearly communicates what the students will be expected to learn and do in the course and what resources are available to them in completing this work. [1,2,4,5]**

- Personalize your outline by providing a summary of your teaching philosophy and indicating how it is reflected in the design of the course. Be explicit about your commitment to your students' learning and what you expect of them in support of their own learning. Use a conversational tone, write in the first person, and provide a link to your personal website.
- Be clear about any prerequisite knowledge and/or skill requirements for the course.
- List the learning objectives for the course, including relevant generic or discipline based skills.
- Include a schedule of dates with class topics, reading assignments, in-class activities and assessments. Present the information chronologically as well as topically (e.g., organized by assignment type).
- Indicate the evaluation scheme for each assessment. Provide explicit instructions and expectations (i.e., grading rubrics). Indicate if and where examples of old exams/assignments are available (e.g., on reserve/course website).
- List the contact information and types of assistance and/or supports that are available from the faculty member, TAs, and student peers (e.g., e-mail / phone mail - specify response time, e.g., within 48 hours; office hours - specify protocol for making appointments outside of office hours; synchronous ("live") on-line chats held specific times each week; asynchronous on-line conferences; Listserv for broadcast communications; face to face conferences – for exploring major assignments; conference calls).
- List any non-course specific assistance and/or resources that are appropriate for completing course requirements (e.g., help labs, peer helper programs, learning and writing services) and are available by distance.
- List the required text(s) and supplementary reading materials (e.g., books, journals, web sites) and whether or not electronic versions are available.
- Provide on the home page some instructions for using the course website and suggestions about how to get maximum benefit from the resources provided.
- Clearly state relevant course policies (e.g., late assignments, class attendance/participation, missed tests/exams, academic misconduct, referencing protocols). Include a hyperlink to your school's Academic Misconduct policy.
- Your ideas:

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## **GOAL 3: Ensure assessments are congruent with stated learning objectives and flexible in application and that the criteria by which student work will be assessed are clear. [1,2,3,4,5]**

- Ensure assessment activities are a deliberate consequence of the stated course objectives and not simply a reflection of personal preference or common practice.
- Provide detailed grading criteria/rubrics (or have students help develop them) so students know exactly what is expected of them and can make informed decisions about their learning approach.
- Allow sufficient time for students to complete assignments and exams so that their grades reflect what they've learned and not their ability to work quickly.
- Allow students to use appropriate support materials (e.g., formulas, calculators, review notes) when assessing higher order thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, application) so that grades reflect what they've learned and not their ability to memorize.
- Use a variety of assessment activities (e.g., papers, learning journals, projects, presentations, tests, quizzes, oral exams) so as not to disadvantage students with a particular learning preference.
- Within the parameters of the course, allow students input into how they are assessed (e.g., type of assessment, topic, weighting). Announce the options in the on-line syllabus so that students can consider their choices even before the course begins.
- Ensure an appropriate balance between individual work and group work.
- Use assessments to foster student growth and learning. Create activities and assignments that are iterative and/or provide opportunities for feedback as knowledge and skills are developing. Count the best results (e.g., worst result won't count) on a particular type of assignment.
- Accurately describe the format of the test or exam in advance and the material it covers. Provide opportunities for self-directed practice quizzes and drills within the course website.
- Provide clear wording on tests or exams. Avoid complex sentence structures, double negatives and imbedded questions.
- Your ideas:

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## GOAL 4. Make course materials as accessible as possible. [1,2,3,5,6,7]

- Have your course materials available in advance of the official start of the course so that students using screen readers can begin their preparations.
- Incorporate required material directly into the learning activities. Ensure that each resource whether it is purchased by students or available through the course website, is explicitly referenced and serves a particular purpose.
- Create study guides and course notes specific to your course. Use a hyperlinked index for easy navigation.
- Ensure documents are well laid out, including clearly labeled elements, easily read fonts (sans serif usually recommended), a minimum of visual clutter, and ample white space.
- Provide a glossary of technical terms – even if provided in the course textbook.
- Make hardcopies of supplementary print materials and copies of audio-visual materials available through the Library reserve desk. Ensure audio-visual materials are accessible by using captioned video or providing transcripts. Work with the Library to ensure that appropriate on-line journals and resources are also readily accessible.
- Consider whether or not potential course texts are available in electronic and/or audio format.
- Provide essential course materials (e.g., course outline, class schedule, lecture notes, study guide/course manual, required and supplementary readings, assignments) in a variety of electronic formats.
- Ensure electronic materials are readily converted to audio by screen reading software such as *Jaws*:
  - RTF: Fully accessible, but lacks stability of formatting when opened with different word processing software packages and creates larger files (slower to download than other formats).
  - PDF: To be fully accessible pdf files should be created using Adobe version 5 with the accessibility feature turned on. Ensure that the source documents have consistent styles for creating bookmarks in Acrobat.
  - HTML: Accessible if you minimize the use of tables, ensure all graphics have <alt> tags and follow consistent formatting.
  - PowerPoint: Not accessible by screen readers but can be converted to PDF or accessible HTML with minimal loss of presentation features.
- Specifically ask students about any difficulties they may be having in accessing course materials.
- Your ideas:

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## GOAL 5. Make the course website as accessible as possible. [1,2,3,5,6,7]

- Provide a comprehensive course website. Possible items/features include:
  - course outline
  - detailed information about how the course will be conducted
  - direct access to all required and supplementary course materials
  - note-taking aids in advance of each class (e.g., a lecture outline)
  - detailed information about course assignments (including due dates, rubrics and examples of past work)
  - on-line discussion groups (asynchronous)
  - summary of student grades
  - regular course updates
  - link to the faculty member's and TA's e-mail
- Keep the navigation simple and straightforward. Be consistent in your use of labels and icons and provide either a site map, a "search" function, or both. Ensure all links are well-sized, clearly labeled, active and correct.
- Avoid horizontal scrolling and try to minimize vertical scrolling (i.e., try to make each page no longer than a screen or two). Create shorter pages and link them with navigational icons (e.g., "Forward", "Back", "Main").
- Ensure ease of readability by using appropriate font sizes, colours, and high contrast between text and background colour.
- Accompany any video or audio material with descriptive captions.
- Format all web materials so that they can be used with screen reading software (i.e. audio output of text often used by visually and learning disabled students) such as Jaws.
  - Ensure that course web pages coded with HTML and use sufficiently descriptive <alt> tags for all graphics.
  - Format heading levels using the automated feature of your web page editing software. This makes your document easier for screen readers to interpret and ensures the creation of bookmarks within pdf files.
- Test accessibility of your web site (and those to which your site links) by:
  - Specifically ask students about any difficulties they may be having in accessing web materials.
  - Turn off the graphics feature on your web browser and test its readability and functionality.

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- If using a course management system such as WebCT, use the resources provided. See for example the “WebCT Accessibility Checklist” <http://webct.com/accessibility/home>, which contains excellent suggestions, most of which are applicable to other programs.
- Use free web-based accessibility checking tools, such as Bobby and A-Prompt. For further information on these tools, see <http://www.cast.org> or the Adaptive Technology Resource Centre SNOW Project at U of T <http://snow.utoronto.ca/>.
- ☐ On the homepage provide suggestion about how to use the course website. Highlight items such as distinctive features of your own course site, the various resources available through the course site, the advantages of various file formats and how to get further assistance.
- ☐ Have students complete an exercise during the first few weeks of class that requires them to visit all aspects of the website and allows you to verify that all students are able to access the materials fully.
- ☐ Discuss netiquette for on-line conferencing, including the need to put new comments at the top of replies, so that students using a screen reader do not have to re-listen to old information.
- ☐ Your ideas:

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## **GOAL 6: Plan learning activities to maximize student learning through on-line and real-world resources.**

**[1,2,4,6,7]**

- Structure learning activities so that students progress through the course at approximately the same rate as other students, thus increasing the sense of community.
- Provide questions to help direct/focus student reading (e.g., ask students to explain key concepts, summarize main arguments, compare two articles).
- Use clearly articulated expectations for on-line conferencing or the assignment of grades to encourage the completion of pre-class work. Use on-line quizzes and discussion groups to enable students to assess their own level of comprehension of assigned material prior to class.
- If you plan to have any synchronous events, use that time to focus on identified points of difficulty with the pre-class work and to apply and extend course concepts.
- Simulate on-line a variety of active learning strategies (e.g., discussion, think/pair/share, role-play, case studies, debates, student led seminars, demonstrations, problem-based learning). Ensure students clearly understand what is expected of them with respect to each type of learning activity.
- Recommend an amount of time for each learning activity that reflects its relative importance and complexity.
- Design several pedagogical approaches to optimize student attention and motivation.
- Create within the course conferencing area an unstructured area to accommodate the unexpected (e.g., discussion of a relevant current event, student questions, reviewing points of difficulty from a previous class).
- Incorporate real world learning activities (individual and/or group) that promote reflection and application of course concepts (e.g., learning journals, research papers, community-based projects).
- Your ideas:

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## SECTION B. COURSE DELIVERY

### GOAL 7. Provide students with an effective orientation to the course. [1,2,4,5]

- Introduce yourself to the class through a personal statement on the homepage, a link to your personal website, a portion of the conferencing area, an email, or a video clip. Tell students about your excitement for the subject, your background and your research interests.
- Describe your teaching philosophy and your commitment to your students' learning. Explain your expectations of them.
- Present yourself as approachable and accessible. Encourage students with special learning needs or course concerns to meet with you privately (if feasible) or through a personal, confidential email.
- Indicate your commitment to learning your students' names and to helping them learn each others' names and interests. You can do this on-line through a game such as "email tag" or uploading photographs to a secure area of the course site.
- Establish ground rules for "netiquette" (online behaviour) that reinforce tolerance and respect.
- Provide your syllabus on-line and ask students to review all of its elements. Foster an on-line discussion about the content of the syllabus (e.g., course requirements, resources and policies) to check for comprehension .
- Present a visual representation of the course's guiding framework/conceptual model when explaining the intent of the course and the sequencing and integration of course components.
- Connect your stated learning objectives with what they already know, what they'll learn in other courses and what they need to know for their chosen careers. Emphasize why the course material is important, relevant and interesting.
- Explain how the stated learning objectives connect with the course's learning activities and methods of assessment.
- Invite students who took the class the previous year/semester to participate as "guest speakers" in an on-line conference toward the beginning of the course to provide their reactions and advice for getting the most out of the course.
- Your ideas:

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## **GOAL 8. Bring organization and structure to the learning experience and every resource used within the course. [1,2,3,4,5,6,7]**

- In the course outline, provide a calendar-based scheme for progress through the course.
- Signal the beginning of each segment of the course by using a consistent cue, such as a graphical icon.
- Present an outline for each learning activity (i.e., focusing on key concepts and the work that is to be done).
- Explain – and visually demonstrate - how each learning activity connects to the guiding framework for the course.
- Use a structured approach for exploring material. Present core concepts and then involve students in their application; present broad concepts and ask students to explore supporting detail; present two concepts and ask students to compare and contrast them.
- Reinforce key points using multiple formats (e.g., verbally, graphically, by demonstration) and explain why they are important / relevant / interesting.
- After each major "chunk" of content, summarize what has been covered. You can also use your conferencing system or email to do this -- or ask for student volunteers to provide the summary.
- Use visual cues (special fonts, for example) to emphasize key information.
- Make available through the library reserve desk and/or a course web site materials such as: course notes, overheads, PowerPoint slides (hardcopy, PowerPoint and HTML).
- Include on the website partial (summarizing) notes and provocative questions rather than complete notes in order to encourage active learning); add audio or video recordings as appropriate.
- Your ideas:

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## **GOAL 9. Assess and adapt to students' prior knowledge, experience and learning preferences. [3,5,7]**

- Assess students' incoming level of knowledge (e.g., review the course outlines for all pre-requisite courses, have students complete a quiz, ask students to brainstorm everything they know about a topic). Use this information to determine what level to teach to and where “catch-up” and “advanced” materials may be required.
- Explicitly recognize commonly held faulty knowledge and work to dispel all identified mistruths (e.g., create a handout or web site of “myths and realities”).
- Provide optional remedial activities (i.e., readings, quizzes, exercises, etc.) to compensate for missing fundamentals.
- In the first week, ask students to introduce themselves to the class and to share relevant experiences. Have students post a brief biography (along with a picture). Review this information and incorporate it into conferencing as appropriate.
- Have students assess their own learning preferences and analyze the implications of these preferences for completing course activities/assignments. Explain to students the importance of sometimes working outside of their comfort zone.
- Have students form heterogeneous on-line groups for completing collaborative work, in order to benefit from the diversity of experience and learning preferences represented. Provide groups with the tools and training for resolving group conflicts that will inevitably arise.
- Use language at a level appropriate for the students – avoid technical jargon or formal language not required for an understanding of the subject matter.
- Provide assignments and examination questions that explicitly ask students to apply course concepts to their own experiences.
- If you use examples for explaining course concepts that reflect popular culture (e.g., TV shows, music) provide a hyperlink to related websites to reduce the possibility that no one is marginalized.
- Formalize a process for gathering student feedback during the course. Appoint ombudspople or conduct a mid-semester evaluation in order to ascertain how the course could better meet the learning needs of its students.
- Your ideas:

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## GOAL 10. Help students to develop their learning skills. [5,7]

- At the beginning of the course have students articulate their personal goals for the course and why they are important to them. Have them identify the learning skills that their goals will require them to develop.
- Have students assess their current skill level in areas of relevance to the course and record any concerns they might have for completing course work. Ask them to share this with you in-person or through a private, confidential email.
- Ask students to write a paragraph describing how they learn best and to share their responses. Generate a list of “best learning practices” for the class.
- Describe your own (or have the course TA describe) strategies for learning difficult course concepts. Provide students with suggestions for overcoming conceptual hurdles.
- Model how academics approach and solve problems in your field. Discuss the research process and share personal examples of both successful and unsuccessful projects. Provide hyperlinks to websites that explore ethical academic standards.
- If requiring a research paper, discuss how you typically approach writing a research paper. Include a discussion of citation protocol (e.g., its history, why its important, the conventions for your discipline) and hyperlinks to websites explaining the rules of proper citations.
- Include hyperlinks to providers of various learning services (e.g., researching, writing, time/stress management) to connect students with support for accessing their services. Make online and print support resources available.
- If using group work, teach students about group dynamics and how to be successful group members. Have students analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of their groups as well as their own contributions and behaviours. Especially if your group activities are entirely on-line, make specific suggestions for students in effective online collaboration.
- Develop activities that provide students with the opportunity to develop learning skills in preparation for testing situations (e.g., review games that encourage integration of course concepts or spend time reviewing questions of a similar format to those that will be on the exam).
- Personally follow-up with students who appear to be struggling and encourage them to seek support if applicable.
- Your ideas:

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## **GOAL 11. Provide students with clear feedback on their performance throughout the course.**

**[1,2,4,5,6]**

- When grading written work, use rubrics to ensure consistency of assessment criteria and feedback. Include these rubrics on the course website from the start of the semester.
- Provide clear, informative and prompt feedback on both the students' demonstrated strengths and areas for improvement. Ensure the privacy of this feedback.
- When using multi-part assignments, require students to build upon past work and take formative feedback into account.
- Try to either meet or email privately any student who doesn't do well on graded work to explore potential reasons and strategies for overcoming the problems identified.
- Involve students in self and peer assessment on both learning processes and outcomes. Use online conferencing, email or file exchange (e.g., tools such as <http://www.Turnitin.com> to facilitate this) to facilitate peer review for assignments.
- Use your course password-protected website for posting student grades.
- Use web-based practice exercises/quizzes with automated marking for students to self-assess their understanding.
- When designing computer-generated feedback, write it so that it provides an explanation for both the right and wrong responses.
- Use email or the course web site to facilitate the submission and return of assignments.
- Use an exam review game to demonstrate the type of questions that will be asked and to give students feedback on how well they have learned the material.
- Your ideas:

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## **GOAL 12. In the presentation of material, use an interactive approach that is accessible to all students.** **[1,2,3,6,7]**

- Avoid course elements that require special software in order to operate properly. Remember that some of your students may be on slow dial-up connections or working from computers that they do not own or control.
- Develop a clear framework for your content delivery and provide this framework to your students in multiple formats (e.g., orally, partial lecture notes).
- Limit the number of concepts/topics covered to three or four main ideas to your communications (don't overload the students with facts). Use bullets and numbering for summarizing key points.
- Include graphics, not just text, for variety and to appeal to different learning styles.
- Highlight key concepts and associated terms, emphasize the reason for their importance and clarify their spelling.
- Clearly label major sections so that students can understand the relative importance as well as sequence of topics.
- Provide examples or analogies for each concept. Have students participate in defining, illustrating and/or applying the concepts/terms using pre-class work, prior experience/knowledge and/or current events.
- Use open-ended questions to check for comprehension. If you use synchronous conferencing, allow all students the opportunity to formulate a response by: 1) pausing – for a count of 10 or 2) having students record their responses.
- Use a variety of presentation media (e.g. PowerPoint slides, captioned audio and video) and not just HTML pages.
- Encourage students to ask questions throughout the semester in order to clear up points of confusion as they arise.
- Your ideas:

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## Worksheet Summary- Planning and Delivering Your Course

Goals 1 – 12	√	*	X	?	Total
Goal 1: Objectives/Framework					10+
Goal 2: Course outline					10+
Goal 3: Assessments					10+
Goal 4: Course materials					10+
Goal 5: Course website					10+
Goal 6: Learning activities					10+
Goal 7: Orientation					10+
Goal 8: Organization					10+
Goal 9: Prior knowledge					10+
Goal 10: Skill development					10+
Goal 11: Feedback					10+
Goal 12: Interactive					10+

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Total this goal: √ = tried/worked\_\_\_; \* = would like to try \_\_\_; X= tried/didn't work\_\_\_; ? = not sure what this means\_\_\_

# Universal Instructional Design: A Workbook for Faculty Teaching at a Distance

Key: [2,3,7 etc.] – Related UID Principles

## Follow-up Questions:

1. In which goals is your course the most UID-friendly? (most √'s) Why might this be the case?
2. In which goals is your course the least UID-friendly? (least number of check marks) Why might this be the case?
3. Which goal areas/examples am you most interested in trying? (most \*'s)
4. Which goals/examples are you most interested in learning more about? (most ?'s)
5. What barriers might you encounter in trying to make your course more UID-friendly? What, if anything, can be done about these barriers?

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Total this goal: √ = tried/worked\_\_\_; \* = would like to try \_\_\_; X= tried/didn't work\_\_\_; ? = not sure what this means\_\_\_