ACCESS Universal Design with Julie Cortez

00:00:00 **Julie**

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00:00:19 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:23 **Sun**

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00:00:27 **Christina**

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00:00:43 **Sun**

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00:00:48 **Speaker 1**

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00:00:52 **Speaker 2**

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00:00:52 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time-

00:01:02 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:08 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:11 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:15 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:26 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:31 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:32 **Christina**

Hi, this is Christina. And in this episode, Sun Ezzell talks with Julie Cortez who works at ACCESS as a writing strategy professor. She shares with us some ideas and steps that we can take to create strategies in the classroom to be an effective student. She emphasizes that the goal for universal design or UDL is to be inclusive. And the way we do that, is to take baby steps.

00:02:04 **Sun**

Hi, well, good morning, Julie. I'm so glad to have you here on the podcast today to talk with us about universal design for learning. And welcome, and congratulations, you are a first-year full-time faculty.

00:02:17 **Julie**

Hi Sun, it's nice to be here, and thank you so much. I was just hired in the winter, so I'm really excited and I've been learning a lot from everyone. So, thank you for that.

00:02:28 **Sun**

We're so glad to have you here with us. Can you tell a little bit about your role on campus?

00:02:34 **Julie**

Sure. I work in the ACES department as a writing strategy professor. So, I link up with different professors and I help students be able to learn different writing strategies or just strategies to be an effective student, to be able to pass their courses.

00:02:50 **Julie**

And right now, I'm just working in the English department. So, I don't have a lot of experience and I don't have a lot of knowledge of the professors out there. So, hopefully, if anybody wants to link up with me, they're welcome to. And my courses are ACES 34 and ACES 30. And those are the ones that help students take like a support class for their main subject.

00:03:15 **Sun**

Well, thank you for your really important work that you're doing to support students with their writing. I was wondering, could you tell us a little bit about universal design for learning?

00:03:25 **Julie**

So, universal design, in my perspective, there's such a big definition to it, but it's just an inclusive pedagogical practice that you can do in your classroom. And it all starts off with the professor's philosophy, and how you present the course, the different techniques that you use, the different ways of setting up the class that will allow all students to be able to ACCESS resources and participate in class as effectively as possible so that they could be successful. So, that's like in a nutshell what it is.

00:04:01 **Julie**

And there's so many different ways to do it. I think it's overwhelming to think about the right way, but there isn't a right way. It all depends on your style as a professor. And then also, your students, the type of students that you're getting into your class.

00:04:15 **Sun**

Well, that sounds really fantastic for students and then low pressure for instructors, that there are many ways to approach universal design. Could you share a little bit like what are some things that you might do in your class if you are approaching with a universal design philosophy?

00:04:33 **Julie**

So, just to start off, we're on Canvas right now. So, everything is done on Canvas. And something super easy that we can do is number our assignments and our weeks. So, for example, in modules for week one, give it a title. What do students learn in week one? Is it maybe you have like a little text header that tells them the objectives of the week?

00:04:55 **Julie**

As professors, we understand why we put all these assignments together into one week, but students don't see that all the time. But if you tell them from the beginning, then they'll have a specific goal and they'll know exactly what you're looking for and what they should be looking for and learning. And then underneath that, you can label it, for example, "Week one, assignment one; 1.1," and that should help the student know all the stuff that is numbered has to be turned in.

00:05:22 **Julie**

Then underneath that, if you have any extra resources or links, you don't have to number those. But number the assignments that they have to turn in. So, maybe you have 1.1, introduce yourself. And underneath, you have a link to how to do a YouTube video, where you introduce yourself to a class. But then you have another assignment (1.2), where students get to write an autobiography or a paragraph about who they are.

00:05:49 **Julie**

And those 1.1 and 1.2 are the stuff that they have to turn in, but the extra stuff doesn't need to be numbered. And that doesn't just help the students, it helps us too, when we're trying to figure out, "Okay, how do I tell the students what to turn in?" Sometimes just the numbering is enough and it helps them. So, that's one very, very easy way to do it.

00:06:09 **Sun**

Well, that sounds like being really explicit about how the course is organized, but also really explicit about the purpose of what you're asking students to do. It sounds very doable. So, folks who are interested in incorporating some universal design into their courses, what are some other easy-to-implement practices that you have found to be successful in your courses?

00:06:31 **Julie**

Another one is when we upload different handouts, try doing it in various ways. So, not just work documents, but also PDF files. Because students will have readers who have difficulty seeing different things. They might need to have like a machine kind of read through the text for them, and word document doesn't always work for all of them, but PDF doesn't work for all of them either. So, having one or two versions of the different handouts is very helpful. So, that's another way.

00:07:08 **Julie**

Then on those handouts, I know we try to just limit everything to one page, but I've noticed that if you upload things in size 14 font, it helps us all; not just the students with difficulty seeing, but then older adults who also have difficulty seeing or older students.

00:07:26 **Julie**

Even as a professor, when you're trying to share your screen and you're trying to look at Zoom and trying to look at your handout, if something is size 10 or 12, it's so small and it's difficult to read. You have to zoom in and out. But if the document is already in size 14 font, then it's helpful as well.

00:07:44 **Sun**

And for those of us who have been staring at our screens all day long, and our vision is getting a little fuzzy.

00:07:50 **Julie**

Yes, definitely. And then I would also suggest color-coding or using different font styles because there are students who are color blind. So, color coding wouldn't help. But if you bold something or if you go from Arial to (and I know this is terrible) - but Comic Sans, people will be able to tell the difference in the font types. So, you can do color coding or just changing the font styles for things that need to stand out.

00:08:21 **Julie**

So, I know, especially, due dates. For students, we kind of skim through it and we're like, "Oh, it's bolded, it should be important." But if you change the font style, it also catches their attention. They're like, "Wait, why is this looking different?" And they'll pay a little more attention to that.

00:08:37 **Julie**

And again, that's not just for ACCESS students. It helps all students in general, when they see something different, it catches their attention and they pay a little bit more attention to it and they think it's important too.

00:08:51 **Sun**

Well, that sounds really doable as well and like something that could have an immediate impact in a student's experience. So, those are great. Thank you so much for sharing those.

00:08:59 **Sun**

I know that people are really thinking a lot these days about their syllabi and making their syllabi equitable, friendly. Can you talk a little bit about the syllabus for your class and what are some universal design principles that you're using in your syllabus?

00:09:15 **Julie**

Of course. I think that when you create a syllabus, there's so many layers to it. First of all, you want to make sure you have the content correct and the due dates, and all the different types of rules and laws and regulations in there. But more than anything, it's the language that we use to share the information.

00:09:34 **Julie**

So, for example, in mine, I do start off by sharing a little bit about me and then a picture of myself. And it gets a little bit personal, like where I went to school, my family, what we're doing; but then it gives them like this is how to reach me. And hopefully, it gives them a little bit of insight of my personality so that they feel a little bit more comfortable reaching out. And I think that's one of the bigger things. Not just one type of student, but all students need to feel comfortable and that we're approachable, and that we're out there to help them.

00:10:07 **Julie**

One of the things I do is I make sure that I use different types of formatting on the syllabus. So, on page one, there's a column on the right side where you can put the title of your course, contact, email, things like that. So, using the formatting in Word document or Google Docs can actually help you change around the way, aesthetically, a syllabus looks, and that's helpful for all students.

00:10:31 **Julie**

And I do use color, so I color code everything. And the different expectations and objectives of the course are also in charts. I try to use as many charts as possible because it's said that we remember things that are in tables and bullet-pointed. So, I use as many charts as possible when it comes to the different goals of the class.

00:10:54 **Julie**

I'm still working on how to get the friendly language across, especially when it comes to due dates and things that cannot be changed like attendance and things like that.

00:11:05 **Julie**

But I do use positive language as much as possible. So, instead of saying, "Do not do this," it's more of being a little bit more open and saying, "Even though life happens, these are the expectations in order to help you be a more effective student." So, it might take a little bit of thinking. It does take a little longer to change up the syllabus, but it is helpful.

00:11:28 **Julie**

Another thing that we could do in syllabus is the grading. I know we have percentages and points and all that. If we could do a pie chart and make it visual for the students, that also helps them understand that maybe essays or finals are worth a little bit more than other things. Even though they are important, we do want them to participate in discussions and class attendance, but maybe there are certain activities or projects that are worth a lot more, and we need them to focus on those a little bit more.

00:11:58 **Julie**

So, creating pie charts helps them look at the weight and idea of our assignments. And that's kind of like a hard concept for some of our students. They think that every single assignment is worth a million points when in reality, they're practice and it should help them get to the final goal of a project or an essay. So, pie charts are very helpful or just charts in general and tables.

00:12:23 **Julie**

Then at the very end, of course, making sure that they know that when we are open to different types of students and having like a clause or a paragraph where we make sure we tell them if you're a student part of ACCESS and need to reach out, please email me. Or if you want to share anything about yourself, about your identity, that might help me understand your participation in class, please let me know. And that lets students feel a little bit more comfortable and makes us a little bit more approachable as well.

00:12:55 **Julie**

So, all this positive open language and more empathetic language actually helps all our students, and it's part of UDL, which is something we don't really think about. But going back to this idea that it's a philosophy that professors come with and that we implement through our syllabus and our class, and the different ways we present our information or our content.

00:13:17 **Sun**

Thank you so much. You talked about kind of approaching your class with a universal design philosophy. Are there any bigger changes that you've made in your courses or kind of your approach to teaching that maybe took a little bit longer to implement or you can kind of see the students progress throughout the semester?

00:13:39 **Julie**

Yes. And I'm still kind of working on it and this is like the closed captioning. That is so tough to get because Otter and Zoom, don't always translate everything you're saying directly, as you said it. And tone is lost and spelling is lost, and there's so many things that just get lost when you're doing the closed captioning. And I'm having a hard time with that one.

00:14:03 **Julie**

The other one is creating videos for my students. I personally have a hard time creating them myself, but, I know where to find the resources on YouTube and other places that help me get my point across as well.

00:14:18 **Julie**

So, those have been very difficult for me. And I know that there's so much work that can be done under universal design. But because my class is a support class, I follow what the professor is going through. So, I don't have too much freedom on what I want to implement as in content, but I know that there are other professors that do.

00:14:40 **Julie**

So, for example, being a little bit more gender-equitable and race equitable, so the type of authors that they include in their content, are they all one race or one gender, or one class - because each one of those gives a different worldview. Is there any way that they can include other perspectives?

00:14:58 **Julie**

Especially like I know in the sciences, it's very hard, but to have female people of color who they include would be amazing. And it would help a lot of our students who feel a little bit more marginalized to feel included in the content, and also to see others that they can look up to would be great.

00:15:18 **Julie**

There's a lot that could go into UDL and it becomes overwhelming. And I think just the little steps are key. Just that idea, I want to be empathetic with my students, I want to be open to them; how do I bring them all in? And what are some of the tools that I can do? And it all starts off with baby steps.

00:15:35 **Julie**

I know I still have a lot to grow in this area, but I know at the same time, that there are certain small techniques and changes that can make a big difference.

00:15:47 **Sun**

I'm so glad you said that because I think it can be a little intimidating to try something new in class. And you know, if we're already having kind of a stressful semester, it's easy to say, "Well, maybe I'll try that next time." So, I'm so glad that you shared some really doable, small ways that we could make changes in our classes that will better support our students.

00:16:07 **Sun**

So, you've mentioned a couple of times that universal design supports all students. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that.

00:16:18 **Julie**

Sure. So, I'll talk about a strategy I use in my class, Socratic seminars. So, I love Socratic seminars, it takes away the pressure from the professor. We're kind of like watching TV and taking notes and giving grades, so that's a little bit of fun. But it puts all the pressure on the students to create knowledge and content.

00:16:38 **Julie**

In Socratic seminars, students have discussions around whatever topic you choose for them. And at this point, there are some students that are a little shy and introverted, but because we're on Zoom, chat boxes work great. So, they can participate through chat boxes. And then there are students that are a little bit more extroverted and want to rule the whole conversation, but they also learn to pull back and they learn to listen, and to be a little bit more open to other people's perspectives.

00:17:09 **Julie**

And so, the different types of students have the opportunity to participate in this one activity. And the ultimate goal of Socratic seminars is to build knowledge together, to question and build, and that's it. Not to attack, not to put each other down.

00:17:26 **Julie**

So, in this one activity, you can have a student who may feel shy, who may be a little bit more outspoken, or who might be from ACCESS, or might be marginalized all the time, never turn on their camera. But because you're giving points, they all of a sudden, feel compelled to participate.

00:17:46 **Julie**

I usually block myself out and mute myself. And so, they feel as if I'm not even there sometimes and students get to take leadership. So, you get to see the students who really understand or don't understand the content. And it gives you a lot of feedback as a professor. Like, okay, I definitely need to review this one concept or their understanding, or maybe I need to do a little bit more practice or show a couple of videos or something like that.

00:18:14 **Julie**

So, Socratic seminars opens it up to different, a variety of students. And the more you do them, I notice that there are certain students that will learn every time. And I also ask them for a reflection after; "How did you do, what would you change?" Different types of questions.

00:18:30 **Julie**

But it allows students who are typically quiet or typically just kind of sit in the background to take a step and almost like a stab at trying to participate in different ways. And so, some students who typically don't participate at least will say, "Hey, somebody wrote something in the chatbox" and that's the first time you ever heard them in the whole semester.

00:18:51 **Julie**

When the professor is "not there," they don't feel judged either. Even though you just are there and giving points on the side for talking, I've noticed that some of the students who I have never heard before or saw before, started popping up on the screens, and then the students would also call each other out like, "Hey, we've never seen you. How about you say something right now so at least we know you're there." Or, "Hey, how about you like put an emoji or something?" And so the students will give each other ideas on how to participate.

00:19:26 **Julie**

That kind of takes off the pressure from the professor where we feel like we're always telling them, "You have to talk, you have to say something." They will push each other to be more proactive in their education. And in this case, Socratic seminars are really great at bringing in students, but it's not the only way. You could do breakout rooms, chat boxes, you could do polls. You could do "raise your hand if ..." or "draw something on a paper and put it up to the screen." So, that makes them turn on their camera but their faces don't show for those shy students.

00:20:02 **Julie**

So, the more variety you have like if you're doing synchronous classes, the easier it is for students to feel compelled to participate. And it could be on discussions as well - take a picture of something and upload it. But for me, I've found that Socratic seminars can be very easy, and an easy way to be inclusive to all students.

00:20:28 **Sun**

It sounds like students are creating a really nice community too when they engage in Socratic seminar. And it sounds like what I'm hearing you say is the many points of entry for students is really important. Maybe someone is shy to have their camera on or shy to say something out loud, but they're comfortable with the chat or with the drawing or putting in an emoji.

00:20:46 **Sun**

And there's something really lovely too, about a classroom community, where students are drawing each other in and encouraging each other and offering suggestions to each other. That's a wonderful way for them to practice exactly what we hope they'll do when we're not around.

00:21:00 **Julie**

Exactly.

00:21:00 **Sun**

I've experienced myself that sometimes I feel comfortable to put something in a chat in a big committee meeting, and maybe there are 60 people and I don't want to interrupt the flow of the conversation. But it's a way to engage in the conversation in a different mode.

00:21:19 **Julie**

It is, and I think "engagement" is the keyword. Sometimes, the students have the camera off and I always wonder, "What are they doing behind the camera? Are they paying attention to me?" But the different like you said, points of entry is what helps students feel like, "Okay, I have to do or say something." It's that participation.

00:21:41 **Sun**

The different examples that you shared (participating in the chat or holding something up to the camera), it's making me think about maybe how online teaching and learning and using Canvas might be opening up more points of entry for students to engage than they might have if we were together on campus, which is really interesting.

00:22:03 **Julie**

And then there's always three, four students who want to kind of push the conversation a certain way. But once you're in a situation like Zoom, there are so many ways we can do it. And it's difficult because you're trying to manage a class, share screen, do a poll, look at the chatbox, listen to everyone. So, it could start slow.

00:22:25 **Julie**

Like every day I start off with a poll and it's always anonymous. And it's always about something like I wonder if they actually did this assignment, or I wonder what I have to review. And I'll put it up in the poll and I'll be like, "How many of you did assignment 1.5?"

00:22:41 **Julie**

And so, even though I know I kind of want them to put themselves out there and participate one way or another, and make sure that they are also looking at everyone else's work, because sometimes we ask them to respond on a discussion board and you don't know if they've read all of them or just whichever one popped up first, that's the one they've responded to. So, that's another way, just those anonymous polls are very helpful.

00:23:09 **Julie**

And going back to what you said, it is about just engaging students and giving them various opportunities to feel like they are being productive. Because at the end of the day, we want them to take something from our course, and the question is, what is that? If we got to choose one thing, what is it, what do we wish for them to take away from this class?

00:23:31 **Julie**

For me, again, I'm a support class, so I hope that they learn at least one strategy in writing that they can use in a math or a science or a history class, even though it's English. They should be able to do paragraphs and include evidence and citation and MLA formatting. But that might be a lot for some of our students. But if they know where to reach out, go to the different centers, the writing centers that are available, maybe that might help them be more successful in the future.

00:24:01 **Sun**

And it sounds like part of what you're talking about too, with the different ways to engage students in the class, they're also having many opportunities to reflect on themselves as a learner; what works well for them when they're learning, are they participating? How are they participating? So, in addition to the content of the class, hopefully, it sounds like they're learning something about themselves and how they learn best.

00:24:26 **Julie**

Yes. And as a professor, I think that's overwhelming. You're like, "Okay, I have to try a new strategy?" Not really. You could choose just the one and stick with that one for the whole semester, see how it works. And you can do, like I said, the polls or a chat question, or a discussion or label, and number your assignments or try something different on your syllabus. Or maybe one semester do a chart for the grades. And then the next semester, do another chart for something else or a table for something else, and kind of keep adding to it.

00:24:59 **Julie**

Every semester, try just one new thing. It could be something small, maybe color-coding one day, it's up to you. And for students - students can see, students can feel when the professor is trying and when they're trying to be empathetic and inclusive and open to everyone. And I think that's the goal, especially online that the connections are so key. And if we can just start off with something small and then build from there.

00:25:29 **Sun**

Well, that sounds very doable.

00:25:32 **Julie**

I hope so, because it's a lot. I feel like UDL, every time I hear it, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I have to change up everything I do in my class." And I don't think it's like that. It could be something as small as every day, put in an emoji, "How do you feel today?" Starting off with that simple. Just a way that students can connect and can feel a part of. And that's it.

00:25:54 **Julie**

The goal for UDL is to be inclusive as much as possible with as many students as possible. So, how do we do that? And it's baby steps.

00:26:06 **Sun**

So, when you want to learn more about universal design, do you have any go-to spots like a favorite website or a book that you really love, or another resource that you could share?

00:26:17 **Julie**

I do. So, Edutopia is great. And there are so many websites for K-12. I know we teach them at community college, but K-12 has these great activities, just strategies on what to do in the classroom to become more inclusive. And I really haven't found too much in the higher ed area, but I have found things in K-12 that are helpful, especially the middle school, high school arena.

00:26:49 **Julie**

And Edutopia's one of them. There's also a bunch of other websites. Once you start just researching strategies to be inclusive or discussion strategies, or just strategies in general; we're not looking for philosophy or content, but strategies. Then all these different types of websites will pop up.

00:27:10 **Julie**

Edutopia has one very specific like strand or box that opens up with about 50 different things it could do on Canvas or Google Classroom that will be inclusive of our students, and that will help them. And they're all going back to the same; how do you include as many students as possible and how do you keep them active? And active doesn't just mean like talking. It could be their brains connecting or their ideas, their drawing, standing up, taking a break, playing Kahoot - different ways to just engage students.

00:27:47 **Julie**

And even though they are a little bit on the younger group - for some reason, community college students really enjoy Kahoot, and just games and participating in different ways. So, I would start off there and then slowly, as soon as you type in that one website, a bunch of other websites will come up and there's different people and ideas that are out there that really, really do share great activities and strategies to implement in our classroom.

00:28:18 **Julie**

And again, UDL are strategies, that's it. It's not a one- way and you can choose the ones that fit you and your personality and your teaching style.

00:28:28 **Sun**

Wonderful. Thank you so much. And we'll include those links in the show notes for the episode for folks who are interested. Well, Julie, is there anything that you would like to share that I forgot to ask you about?

00:28:39 **Julie**

No, just I hope everyone just understands that the point is to help our students be successful. How do we do that, and what's the best way. And that's where UDL begins. They're just strategies to implement in our classrooms to help students feel more comfortable and hopefully engage with the content a little better so that they could be successful.

00:29:02 **Sun**

Sounds wonderful. Thank you so much for talking with me today and for your wonderful work, supporting Mt. SAC students. We're so glad to welcome you aboard as a full-time faculty member.

00:29:14 **Julie**

Thank you. It was nice being here and talking to all of you.

00:29:16 **Christina**

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00:29:32 **Christina**

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