



# Conclusion



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Universal design can be subtle. At its best, products and environments have universally usable features that are so well integrated they become indistinguishable.

The Principles of Universal Design (The Center for Universal Design, 1997) are a breakthrough in specifying concretely all aspects of the concept for all design disciplines. They are useful for evaluating existing products and environments, guiding the design process, and educating designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable designs.

The examples in Chapter 3 illustrate the intent of each guideline that accompanies the Principles. While the examples serve this purpose well, it is the authors' hope that these products, features, building elements, and spaces are only a beginning. Better examples should become increasingly easy to find as the concept of universal design gains broader acceptance and is adopted more widely.

The Principles of Universal Design are a work in progress. The next phase of development is to generate two additional levels of information. The first level is a set of design strategies that suggest ways to satisfy each guideline. The second level is a set of performance measures, or tests, that can be applied to a product or environment to assess its universal usability. Both of these additional levels of information need to be design discipline-specific, since people interact with landscapes, interior spaces, products, and communications devices and services in such different ways.

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The biggest challenge faced by universal design advocates is increasing awareness of the approach among design professionals, manufacturers and consumers. Designers can influence their clients to appreciate the relatively small cost and large benefit associated with improved usability for all users. Manufacturers can realize higher sales to a wider market and deeper customer loyalty through production of products that are easier for more people to use. Finally, consumers will benefit from environments and products that impose less demand on their physical, sensory and cognitive abilities. All three of these constituencies must be educated about the benefits of universal design to stimulate widespread demand that it be practiced.

One of the best ways to influence the future of our designed world is to educate the next generation of practitioners. The Universal Design Education Project (UDEP), funded by several government and private entities, strives to integrate universal design issues into design curricula nationwide. While this effort has been beneficial, other academic disciplines should be introduced, as well. Students studying not only design, but also engineering, business, and public policy should be taught that access is a civil rights issue, and that maximum usability of all products and environments benefits everyone, both directly and indirectly. Universal design is the best way to integrate access for everyone into any effort to serve people well in any field. Although it will never be easy to design for diverse populations, concern for people should become an expected component of the process of designing any environment, product, service, or policy.

The need for sensitivity to usability issues will only become more pressing in the coming decades as user populations become more diverse. One significant trend is the increasing longevity of the human race, worldwide. Another factor is improved medical technologies that allow more critically injured and seriously ill people to survive. At the same time, consumer markets are becoming more global, as information and goods travel the globe

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with increasing ease. These three trends combine to create markets that are more diverse in age, ability, and experience. Recent federal legislation and changing demographics have raised the visibility of the issues of accessibility and greater usability. We must maintain and build this momentum.

It is our hope that this book has increased your knowledge, stimulated your creative energies, and galvanized your commitment to the successful practice of universal design.

## References

The Center for Universal Design. (1997). *The Principles of Universal Design* (Version 2.0). Raleigh, NC: NC State University, Author.