



**DEMYSTIFYING UNIVERSAL DESIGN:**  
Turning a Buzzword into Impactful Action

**CLARK CONDON**

## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN?

The concept of “**universal**” or “**inclusive**” design means that the design of products and environments should make them usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

*National Recreation and Park Association*

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**15%** OF  
THE TOTAL  
POPULATION

OR

**1B** PEOPLE  
WORLDWIDE

**experience  
a disability**



75 MILLION PEOPLE  
REQUIRE A WHEELCHAIR



16 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE  
COGNITIVE DISABILITY



1.3 BILLION PEOPLE HAVE  
A VISUAL DISABILITY



466 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE  
A HEARING DISABILITY

# UNDERSTAND THE TERMINOLOGY

## ACCESSIBLE

All public spaces should be physically accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical, cognitive, or mental ability. Specific areas of public spaces should be designed for people with specific disabilities; all public space should work for everyone.



## ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is achieved when people with disabilities can “acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services’ as people who do not have disabilities” in “an equally effective and equally integrated manner with substantially equivalent ease of use.”

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**Accessible - Can physically access the space**



**Accessibility - Can engage with the space equally**

# UNDERSTAND THE TERMINOLOGY

## DISABILITY

People who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may prevent them from participating fully, effectively, and equally in society.



## IMPAIRMENT

any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical function, such as a missing arm, a chronic illness, limited vision, or similar.

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**Disability - Society  
engagement & barriers**



**Impairment - Focus  
on physical aspect of  
disability**

# UNDERSTAND THE TERMINOLOGY

## EQUITY

The process of assessing needs, correcting historical inequalities, and creating conditions for optimal outcomes by members of all social identity groups.



## INCLUSION

An environment that offers affirmation, celebration, and appreciation of different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences

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» **Equity - Ensuring fairness & equal opportunity**

» **Inclusion - Creating a welcoming environment**

# UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

“...Universal Design has the potential to change the way we view access to the public realm, far beyond the ADA.”

- ALEXA VAUGHN, ASLA, FAAR

## 7 PRINCIPLES CREATED BY RONALD MACE, A DISABLED ARCHITECT

- 1 Equitable use
- 2 Flexibility in use
- 3 Simple & intuitive use
- 4 Perceptible information
- 5 Tolerance for error
- 6 Low physical effort
- 7 Size and space for approach and use





An aerial photograph of a park area. In the foreground, there is a large, dense cluster of green trees. A winding concrete path curves through the trees and grass. In the middle ground, a calm lake reflects the sky. To the right of the lake, there is a small concrete bridge or structure. In the background, a residential neighborhood with many houses is visible under a clear sky.

**INCLUSIVE PARK DESIGN**

AND

**THE OVERALL PARK-GOERS  
EXPERIENCE**

# PARK AND PLAZAS



- » CONNECTION TO STREET
- » SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING
- » PROVIDE OPTIONS
- » EASY ACCESS TO RESTROOMS
- » MIX OF SPACES
- » PREVIEW OF SPACES
- » COMFORTABLE AND ACCESSIBLE SEATING
- » COMFORT

# PLAYGROUND



- » BASELINE ADA
- » USABLE BY ALL
- » NO ADAPTATION
- » ALL DISABILITIES
- » MAXIMIZE ACCESS
- » VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES
- » APPEAL TO ALL 5 SENSES
- » NEEDS TO BE FUN!

# ACCESS TO THE PARK



# RIGHT PAVING RIGHT PLACE



**DECOMPOSED  
GRANITE**



**PAVERS**



**CONCRETE**

# SITE FURNISHINGS

- » Mobility Impairments
- » Ages & Abilities
- » Design Function
- » Security
- » Maintenance



## UNIVERSAL DESIGN (NRPA)

- » The goal of designing inclusive playgrounds is to **maximize** each facility's **usability** by individuals with a wide variety of characteristics. Whether we are talking about learning strategies or physical space, inclusive design operates by a distinct set of principles designed to maximize access and everyone's enjoyment of a space.
- » As with many aspects of our daily lives, **one size does not fit all**. Well-designed outdoor play environments must include a **variety of experiences**, be accessible to people with varying skill sets, and, most importantly, they should be fun!

## UNIVERSAL DESIGN RECAP

Universal Design shouldn't be seen as a hindrance, but an opportunity to imagine new and innovative ways to enhance the user experience and make a space accessible and enjoyable for all.

» KNOW THE VALUE  
AND IMPORTANCE

» UNDERSTAND THE  
TERMINOLOGY

» INCORPORATE UNIVERSAL  
DESIGN PRINCIPLES

» CONSIDER THE PARK-  
GOER EXPERIENCE



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A large, white, sans-serif number '40' is the central focus. The top portion of the '40' is set against a green rectangular background with white, wavy, topographic-style lines. The rest of the '40' is white and set against the dark teal background of the entire graphic.

40

YEARS OF  
IMPACT