**Ian Shadrick**: Hi, my name is Ian Shadrick and I’m the program coordinator for programs in visual impairment and orientation and mobility here at Missouri State. I wanted to talk to you a little bit today about how I use universal design and how I use that in my courses for our graduate students who are apparently all online students. Mainly just a couple of the methods I use to incorporate Universal Design. One of the things that people sometimes ask is “why go about incorporating universal design, and why is it important?” And it really used as a way to ensure that all the students, whether they have disabilities or not, are able to fully access as much of the material as possible. And that’s really the genesis of where my incorporation of UD and it allows students the opportunity for student to access as much of the information as consistently as possible and it gives them the ability to have access to all aspects of the course as much as possible. A couple of the things that I do to incorporate Universal Design into the course, I try to set things up as much as possible with consistent language and a consistency in layout, and that’s one of the primary things especially for online learners that really seems to help. So, for example when posting something for each week, I’m going to make sure that each week has a very similar heading so that under each folder it’ll give the week and the given title and that information will carry through throughout the semester and throughout each module. That’s something to really help students from a universal design perspective but also from an organizational perspective, it really gives them a clear example of how things are going to be laid out. A couple of the specific methods I was going to talk about today are the use of descriptive video services when possible, and also group work. And those are the two methods I use in addition to basic organization and layout for universal design.

So, with descriptive video service a lot of people who may not be familiar with that, it sounds like a foreign thing, but it’s really simplistic in nature in terms of what it really does is gives description about key elements of a film or other words key components that might otherwise be missed by a student with blindness or low vision. And descriptive videos provide essentially an additional audio description that gets worked into pauses in a film or overdubbed slightly in some cases into other sounds or other environments within a film. So, for instance it might say “an individual walked into a room”, it may give you a facial description, gestures or things of that nature. But it really gives someone access to info that is otherwise strictly information that is seen to be a key element. And it’s important to have access to those things especially when you are talking about documentaries or educationally related material that you are showing in your classroom and throughout your course and it’s something that is actually increasing in availability. Descriptive services are becoming more available both commercially and through documentaries and educational material. One thing to look for if you are looking at purchasing a dvd, especially if its commercially made, on the back many times near the bottom you are going to find the closed captioning symbol, and additionally you look for the descriptive service symbol which basically looks like a capitol D with sound waves being emitted from it. And within your resources, you’ll see a picture for that as well, and that will tell you that descriptive services are available for that film and in most cases it’ll be a menu option similar to subtitles. But the availability of those descriptive services really allow equal access to the materials you are going to be presenting in your class. Okay, and as you can see from the
clip that was provided, the description really adds valuable information that otherwise may have been missed by a student with blindness or low-vision. Films are really also useful for the remainder of your class for especially educating those students about these services and that they can potentially use them in their own environments, so in my case a lot of my students are practicing teachers so this a service they can then look for using in their own classroom and with their own students.

The next area I’d like to briefly talk about is that of Group Work. It sounds like something that could be simplistic in nature with regard to course design, but it’s something that can really help incorporate universal design into your course and also allow for alternative methods of learning styles and interactions that your students may not have otherwise. In my case I use group work especially when we have material that may not otherwise be available accessibly. So for instance one example where I utilize group work, we have an assignment that I make students do, and that is to interpret reports that are medical eye reports from either optometrists or ophthalmologists and in a lot of cases those are handwritten reports and it is usually difficult to translate that material back or interpret that material back into a typewritten report if it has been handwritten. So this is one instance where we’ll utilize the option of group work and essentially the groups are formed small groups usually 2-3 students are asked to interpret those reports but what that also allows them to do is to hear that report read back to them if they are a student with vision loss, but they are also getting the ability to then work in a group, and they are collaborating. That’s something that they are going to be asked to do throughout their career as an educator to begin with, but in addition they are also getting asked to interpret these reports quite frequently so they need to be able to understand what questions they would need to ask of someone else; so it actually helps them build those skills as well. If it is something that is inaccessible to them, it gives them the opportunity to learn those collaboration skills and the ability to really interpret that material. In addition it helps peers, because they are being forced to collaborate in this project; it really helps them step out of strictly providing a written response, it lets them work in the group to formulate that interpretation it could be that they interpreted something differently from someone else, and they are getting the ability to really learn from that group member based on that. It also gives group members an opportunity to work together and really learn from one another in a way that especially in online learning is not available it’s not the static environment with discussion boards and it is really easier to navigate and usually much more accessible than a chat room or things of that nature we might regularly use for especially distance ed.

One of the issues with that too, it the group work allows the students to gather their own information so they are not strictly relying on another person for the group work. They may rely that individual to read the report, but they can again go back ask questions and make sure that they receive the information as they interpret it, so that when they write up their interpretation for example they are actually doing that based on the way they interpreted that report so they are not reliant on the end result being someone else’s work.
Both of these examples of universal design are something that students tend to have very good reactions to, especially with descriptive video, for those students who utilize that descriptive video based on need it really does give them key elements of films and documentaries that they might not otherwise get and it allows them to fully participate within group discussions and responses to things like discussion boards or reaction papers; whereas prior to using descriptive video students were often limited in their ability to fully incorporate that information into any kind of response. And again, additional students within the classes tend to find it helpful as an awareness factor and giving them more resources to utilize for their own students or in their own environments. And likewise with group work, students tend to really appreciate the opportunity to work together and collaborate and also to really learn from one another have access to students and colleagues in a way that they might not otherwise, it gives them the ability to also build their professional standards and their concepts of collaboration and what that will look like, things that they will be expected to do once they enter the field. And it also gives them, from both perspectives, both the student with the disability and the student without, an ability to hear other viewpoints and hear from other students how they interpreted something.

In terms of universal design for the future one of the things that I always try to look to is the incorporating of new technology, and it’s something that as we all know is ever changing and evolving and it’s that much more important for universal design to try to incorporate those new technologies as much as possible because they are things that are often being utilized either in a field environment or within other classes, so universal design lets us look to those new technologies. And, that’s my intent for the future for my courses is to really look to the way technology is adapting and trying to incorporate those new changes as much as possible.