Mark Cooper: I am Mark Cooper, I have been a professor of history here at Missouri State University since 1980. Today I am going to be talking about universal design and how I use lectures in my classes. The first question is, Why universal design? Well, let's talk about it for a moment. When we give a lecture, what we want to do is impart a large amount of information in a very short time. In other words, a lecture is a very efficient way to impart information to a large group. The question though, in universal design, is whether or not, everyone in that large group gets all the material in the lecture. Some people do not have the physical capacities of others, so the question is “What's the best way to do it? If you are going to give a lecture, how can you provide that material such that every single student gets the material?” Well, consider the old way of doing it: You walk up to a podium in front of a class, pull out your notes, and speak. Occasionally, students have a question, one answers the question. And after the period is over one leaves, the lecture is disappeared. That means that the student has to take notes, and the better the notes, the more they get out of the lecture. But what about students who don't hear very well? What about students who simply are not prepared to listen well at the moment of the lecture, what about students for some good reason miss the lecture all together, or those who can't take notes because they have a physical disability. The usual answer is accommodation: bring in a note taker and record the lecture, but each of those has their own problems. A better way to do that is to do the lecture on PowerPoint, on a program like Adobe Presenter. There you can produce exactly the lecture you want, you can edit the material and produce an illustrated lecture with a good narration, presenter sets up the program such that it defaults to accessibility use- that means that a student who has disability can use disability software, and see the lecture and read it, or hear the lecture and even hear about the pictures. That way, no one needs accommodation. The lecture is worthwhile for everyone, plus students without disabilities who just happen to be asleep during the lecture can listen again and again and again. But there is something even better about Presenter lectures: You can ask students to journal them. And when students journal a lecture they address what they’ve heard, rather what what lecturers think they said. Over the years, I've given hundreds, perhaps thousands of lectures, but I never really knew what students got out of them. Until they started journaling my presenter lectures, and then I realized that sometimes I was ambiguous, sometimes students didn’t have necessary key background information necessary to understand what I was saying. The beauty of the presenter lecture is I could ask students to watch the lecture before class, journal about the lecture and then before class I would read the journals, and address the problems and questions that arose from the lecture and that way I could deal with any ambiguity that I created and the questions that students create. In fact that meant that my discussion sections were actually student driven, and in that way, the students ended up learning what they wanted to learn, as opposed to what I wanted to tell them. And that has worked out very well. I’ve seen better essays since I started using Presenter.

So, the question is, how does one design a course, any course so that all students can access it, and the answer is that one has to imagine that one has all kinds of different students with different abilities; so if you ask students to do an essay, well, most can write it, but some will have difficulty writing, but they can read so they can record their answers. In universal
design, we allow students to both write answers and to record them and treat both equally. Now, how do students use for instance, my lectures on Presenter? Well, they use them in peculiar ways, one told me that she never looked at the PowerPoints, she just listened to me, and in fact she said that she liked to turn on my lectures before she went to bed on the day before class. Another one told me he turned off the sound and just read the PowerPoints. Others like to look at the lectures on their android based telephones. One student told me she carpooled and sat in the back seat of her car with a pair of earphones and watched the lecture there. In other words, students can access these lectures any way they like. Students with disabilities using specialized software can use them too, but the interesting thing is, they don’t have to bring note takers to class, they don’t need accommodation, in fact they end up dealing with the lecture the same way other students do. They aren’t picked out; they don’t have to do anything special. And, these students don’t come to me for accommodation anymore. Every once and a while a student walks in with a piece of paper and I’m supposed to sign it, but the reality is those students have never actually needed special accommodation since I started using universal course design.

So, what’s next? Well, one aspect of Universal Course Design is flexibility. Presenter provides a great deal of flexibility in lecture, but there are other areas, for instance, generally speaking in testing we are looking for one answer rather than a multitude of possible answers, I would like to design my tests so that there are different possibilities for different students all within the universe of the course and that way I could make it more flexible and more valuable to more students depending on their interests.