

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

(1986, R1994, R2000, R2001, R2010)



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) believes that all people should have equal and appropriate physical access to their surroundings, through the principles of Universal Design. The term “Universal Design” indicates a design approach that creates equal use by all people via integral components of design, without separation or segregation of any users despite varying degrees of ability. These principles are essential in creating environments that can be used and enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.

Rationale

Universal design has evolved from earlier accommodations of accessible or barrier-free design, striving for inclusion, and avoiding the creation of additional and separate facilities. It works to include a diversity of individuals--with a broad range of physical abilities and limitations--within the overall design context. As Universal Design anticipates the needs of physical access, it results in design solutions that avoid designation and separation of special facilities based on abilities.

Although legislation relating to accessibility dates from the 1960s, barriers to access and use by people with varying degrees of ability persist. Accessibility in one’s chosen environment is fundamental to full participation, independence and quality of life. Historically, remediation of barriers has typically resulted in segregated facilities that were not well integrated into their context. These segregated facilities often lack creativity and flexibility, which can limit opportunities. The application of Universal Design principles can alleviate and remove barriers from existing and new facilities, to result in accessible options so interwoven into the site fabric that they do not appear as separate features. However, there may be cases when access is limited if accessible features would cause substantial harm to cultural, historic, or religious characteristics, or when severely limited by natural features. Examples include a hiking trail where accessible grades and widths are infeasible due to terrain, or where there is a need to protect a historic landmark, such as the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

The Society believes that the following actions are necessary to ensure the continued application of Universal Design:

1. Continue research to enhance and refine the body of knowledge regarding actual requirements and methods for the creation of universal access and use, utilizing input from user groups.
2. Educate the general public on the basic concepts of Universal Design and its positive impact on community and the utilization of public facilities.
3. Incorporate principles into professional programs and provide continuing education on Universal Design for all design professionals responsible for the design of both natural and built environments.
4. Educate governmental agency personnel responsible for the uniform interpretation, implementation, and enforcement of standards, guidelines, or regulations regarding universal access.