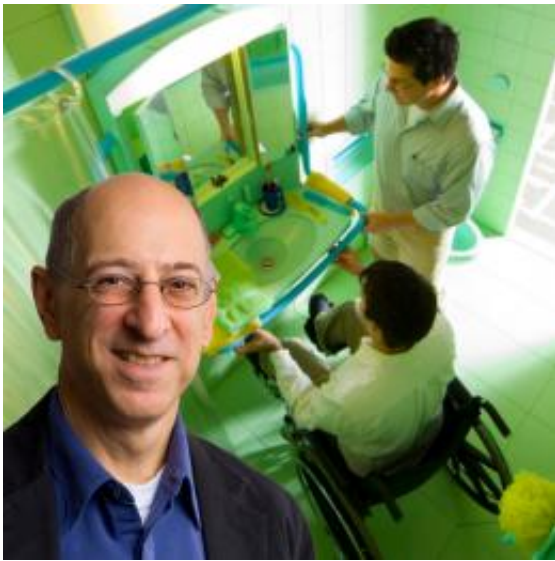


Could universal design be the next mainstream movement in architecture, planning?

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Edward Steinfeld, director of UB's Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA Center), is coauthor of a new textbook on universal design.

Universal design, which employs design to encourage health and wellness and other quality-of-life improvements, may be poised to become the next mainstream endeavor in architecture and planning, according to two leading experts in the field.

Edward Steinfeld, director of the University at Buffalo's Center for

Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDeA Center), and Jordana L. Maisel, the center's director of outreach and policy studies, are authors of a new textbook, "Universal Design: Creating Inclusive Environments."

"We believe we are close to a watershed moment," the authors write in the preface to the book, which was released on April 10 and includes chapters on housing, interior design, transportation and more. "Whether they know the term or not, the work of leading architects and design firms reflects the adoption of universal design concepts."

Universal design is design that empowers diverse populations by improving human performance, promoting health and wellness and encouraging social participation.

Thinkers and practitioners in the field consider questions such as how the design of city streets can inspire [healthy habits](#) such as walking and bicycling, or how a home can be made comfortable not just for a person with average abilities, but for a wounded soldier or aging visitor. Designers also create complex products that support multitasking without safety risks.

Just as sustainability and green design -- once the province of a few idealists -- came into vogue at the end of the 20th century, universal design is now coming of age, said Maisel, an urban planner.

Forces including [demographic change](#), a consumer-oriented and increasingly diverse culture, and the need for doing more with less are driving demand for buildings, [public spaces](#) and products that meet the needs of people of many different abilities, needs and preferences, she said.

Though universal design benefits people of all ages, the aging of the

population is an important driver of the field. Universal design enables residents to stay in their own homes and neighborhoods for as long as possible, and supports their continued participation in social life.

Universal design has roots in the disability rights movement, whose proponents fought for buildings and infrastructure to be more accessible.

Designers realized that barriers to access were often caused by the lack of a human-centered design philosophy. Because anyone can encounter barriers to safety, usability and [social participation](#), universal design seeks to provide benefits to all, rather than special provisions for a protected group.

"Universal design provides universal benefits across the life span," says Steinfeld, a professor of architecture in UB's School of Architecture and Planning. "It increases safety and security for children, reduces stress and improves wellness for those of working age, and it supports independence and social engagement in old age."

The new textbook, published by Wiley, is a useful, forward-looking resource for both students and practitioners of architecture and planning; it can also serve as a reference for researchers.

The book's production was supported in part by the UB IDeA Center and Toronto Rehabilitation Institute's Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Universal Design in the Built Environment, an effort funded by the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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