# NC-NET News

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## Raising Awareness of UDL and Making It Possible in Your Institution

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There was a time when we thought that everyone learned in the same way and that any accommodations made for students with specific needs helped that small group only. Now we realize that:

"Individuals bring a huge variety of skills, needs, and interests to learning. Neuroscience reveals that these differences are as varied and unique as our DNA or fingerprints."
http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl

It is from this realization that the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) grew. UDL is a set of principles based on neuroscience that are designed to develop learning that reaches every learner regardless of skills and abilities.

These guidelines fall under three headings:
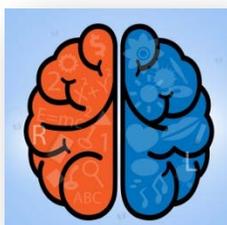
**Multiple Means of Representation** – The 'what' of learning

**Multiple Means of Engagements** – The 'why' of learning

**Multiple Means of Action and Expressions** – The 'how' of learning

By applying these guidelines, instructors and teachers can create learning experiences that reach far more students and consequently set more individuals on paths to success. In the world of career-technical education (CTE), UDL has great potential for application. In many career and technical subjects students are required to learn processes and skills that can be quite specific and rigid. That doesn't mean however, that the path to learning these processes and skills can't take multiple forms.

Let's look at some examples of how UDL is applicable to CTE.

**Multiple Means of Representation**

If we take as an example, the subject of Veterinarian Technology, the terminology that students must learn and remember is extensive. Activities can be designed to create multiple ways for students to learn and remember necessary terms, from simple gap fills or cross words to producing their definitions, or playing Jeopardy games.

**Multiple Means of Engagement**

People have different motivations for learning. This guideline addresses the need for learners and educators to examine and leverage those motivations. Students should have the opportunity to identify what their goals are for learning and can be encouraged by instructors to assess their own areas of strength and areas that need work. From this assessment students can develop study plans that put them in control of their learning.

**Multiple Means of Action and Expression**

In a nursing program, students may have to learn the process of triage in the ER. An activity to practice this process could give students opportunities to explain how to triage a patient in any way they prefer. Some ideas include: giving a verbal description, drawing a diagram, writing the stages out in steps, creating a video. Through these methods, students can still learn the importance of triage without being penalized for not being verbally confident or awkward in the way they write.

UDL is still a new idea to many. At AB Tech we are working on three-phase approach.

**Phase 1 – The 'what' of learning:**

To educate instructors on the 'what' of UDL we chose to host monthly UDL lunch 'n' learn sessions lasting no more than about 30 minutes. If instructors feel this is something they wish to pursue, then we have a more detailed training workshop that they can access. We offer this training online and are also currently working on a face-to-face equivalent.

**Phase 2 – The 'why' of learning:**

In our training course on UDL we begin with addressing why UDL is of benefit to our students by examining our own experiences of learning, both positive and negative. Participants are given numerous opportunities to share their reflections in whatever format best suits them (slide presentations, notes, diagrams, etc.). Through these reflections, especially of learning experiences that were negative, participants begin to see how UDL could have helped them in those areas where they struggled and also examine how they might have adapted their ways of learning in order to succeed. Through these exercises we attempt to shift our perspective on learning and debunk the notion that the status quo is fine with regard to learning.

**Phase 3 – The 'how' of learning:**

Once instructors have completed the training they are encouraged to continue to share with other participants from the course their methods and ideas. We have an online resource center where instructors can participate in forums and share learning objects and articles. We also encourage them to share what they have learned about UDL with their peers and coworkers.

Integrating UDL into an institution requires a culture shift, and this shift doesn't occur overnight. Equally applying all guidelines can seem like an overwhelming prospect in the beginning. Small changes can make a world of difference and can result in a great sense of empowerment for both students and instructors.

**To learn more** about AB Tech's approach to UDL, contact Elizabeth Watkin.

*For more resources on UDL, visit:*

National Center for Universal Design for Learning
http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/postsecondary

Universal Design in College Instruction (University of Oregon)
http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/universaldesign/intro.html

UDL on Campus
http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/planning_syllabus#.VtWnwX0rJdg