IMPLEMENTING **UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING** IN CTE

PLANNING GUIDE AND DESIGN CANVAS

CTE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER OF NY

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Universal Design is the process of creating objects, environments, and experiences that can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by people with a wide range of abilities, needs, and characteristics.

The ultimate goal of **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** is to **create learning experiences that work for everyone**. By proactively building flexibility and options into the curriculum, teachers enable individual students to navigate potential barriers and customize their learning in ways that work best for them.

UDL is not about lowering expectations or "moving the goalposts" for individual students. It encourages teachers to maintain the *what* and *why* of learning while expanding *how* students access information, engage with activities and content, and demonstrate their proficiency.

This quick-reference guide boils UDL down to a simple process that you can apply ***anytime***, ***in any course***, to improve learning ***for any and all students***.

Photo: GST BOCES

NOTE: The planning guide and design canvas are not intended to provide a comprehensive introduction to Universal Design for Learning. CTE TAC offers a variety of free online resources and customized professional development that provide foundational knowledge of UDL along with strategies and best practices tailored specifically for CTE. To learn more, visit our website at: **nyctecenter.org/instruction/udl**.

USING THE DESIGN CANVAS

As you complete each step below, record your ideas in the **UDL Design Canvas**.

Download the canvas at: ctetac.us/UDLCanvas.

STEP 1: DESCRIBE THE TASK & LEARNING GOAL

Start by selecting a specific learning activity or assessment in which to implement UDL. Briefly describe ***what*** students will do. In addition to the task, also note the **learning goal(s)** associated with the task: ***Why*** are students doing this? What important knowledge, skill, or competency will the task help them acquire or develop?

STEP 2: IDENTIFY LEARNING DEMANDS

Next, consider the learning demands embedded *within* the task. What knowledge, skills, and abilities do students need in order to successfully perform the task? This step helps teachers uncover "hidden" requirements that may interfere with learning if they are not explicitly communicated, modeled, or actively taught, or if some students lack the necessary preparation, background knowledge, or experience.

TIP: Refer to the checklist on Page 2 of the design canvas to help you identify learning demands of the task.

Photo: GST BOCES

STEP 3: PREDICT VARIABILITY

Rather than planning instruction to accommodate each learner's unique combination of needs, characteristics, and circumstances, UDL encourages teachers to expect and plan for **predictable variability**.

Brainstorm some of the ways students in your CTE program reliably differ. You can record your ideas in the **Brainstorm: Learner Variability** box on Page 2 of your design canvas.

Then, consider which of these predictable differences are *most likely* to impact students' ability to engage with the learning demands and accomplish the task. List the most impactful differences in your design canvas.

STEP 4: IDENTIFY BARRIERS & SOURCES OF FRICTION

A **barrier** is any aspect of a learning experience that hinders a student's ability to access and demonstrate learning. Barriers to learning can differ from student to student, subject to subject, and activity to activity.

The UDL framework aligns with three main types of barriers:

- **Access barriers** that impede perception and comprehension.
- **Participation barriers** that may discourage active involvement in learning activities.
- **Demonstration barriers** that can interfere with students' ability to show what they know and can do.

While a barrier might completely block access or action, **friction** can slow students down in less obvious ways. By making a task harder than it needs to be, friction can lead to frustration and fatigue, draining students' energy, focus, persistence, or motivation.

TIP: It's very likely that a typical task or learning activity will involve **all three types of barriers** and/or **multiple sources of friction**. Try to think of examples of each when completing this step.

STEP 5: DISTINGUISH NON-ESSENTIAL BARRIERS FROM MEANINGFUL CHALLENGES

Students should not be prevented from demonstrating technical competence because of friction or barriers that are irrelevant to the task. Separating essential from non-essential barriers helps teachers determine where they have room to be flexible and where they need to work within constraints.

In CTE environments, some challenges are non-negotiable. However, even when CTE standards require specific forms of performance, such as operating equipment safely, performing a clinical procedure, or completing a certification task under defined conditions, **there could be multiple learning pathways leading to the final skills assessment**. For example, students might be permitted to work independently or in groups, to select from a variety of learning resources provided in different formats, or choose their own projects, when appropriate.

Photo: BT BOCES

Photo: Orleans/Niagara BOCES

STEP 6: PROVIDE FLEXIBLE SUPPORTS

UDL doesn't mean creating customized learning paths for each student's individual circumstances. The UDL principles guide teachers to plan for learner variability by offering **flexible supports and options** that empower students to tailor the learning experience for their own needs, goals, and preferences.

List some options or alternatives you could offer that might remove barriers or minimize friction you identified in Step 5. Record each proposed option in the appropriate column of Step 6. Classifying your proposed strategies provides visibility into which UDL principle(s) might be most beneficial to your students, and it can help you identify potential gaps in your UDL practice.

STEP 7: REFLECT & IMPLEMENT

After completing Steps 1 to 6, respond to the reflection questions on Page 2 of the design canvas. They will guide you to analyze patterns and identify insights that can inform your UDL implementation.

Ultimately, incorporating UDL practices will enhance all of your students' comprehension and retention of CTE content and their success in college, careers, and civic life.

LEARN MORE: Visit the CAST website (udlguidelines.cast.org) for detailed information about the UDL Guidelines.