



The Uniquely Abled Academy® Program

The human body is incredible. Typically, when one capability is impaired, other capabilities improve. For example, individuals who are deaf often have increased visual and tactile acuity. Because the words we use shape how and what we see, when looking through the lens of the word "disabled," we tend to see what's missing. As a result, we often miss seeing the unique capabilities of people - how they are "uniquely abled".

The purposes of The Uniquely Abled Project are:

- Shift the societal paradigm from "disabled" to "uniquely abled."
- Provide vocational opportunities to uniquely abled folks by matching unique abilities to the requirements of jobs in demand.

The Uniquely Abled Academy Program provides training and support for jobs where specialized advance training is required, e.g., CNC machine operator

It has been observed that jobs requiring individuals with a high degree of focused attention to detailed repetitive processes, able to follow clear objective instructions, and familiarity with computers are well suited for a person with high functioning autism. Indeed, these characteristics are a perfect match for the duties of a CNC (computer numerical controlled) machine operator, of which there is a huge shortage in the manufacturing industry today.

In June 2016 the pilot Glendale Community College (GCC) Uniquely Abled Academy (UAA) targeted this shortage through a groundbreaking 16-week CNC training course offered for 15-20 students, with work experience and job placement support included in the program. We expect 100% placement for those deciding to have CNC machinist careers.

Employers of the initial GCC UAA students report remarkable results:

- "In 2 months he is now equal to the best CNC operator I ever had."
- "They learned in weeks where others have taken months."
- "They are almost ideal employees – they show up on time, no absenteeism, and their work area is always clean and organized."

A second UAA started in February 2018 at College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita, CA. By the end of 2023 at least 16 licensed UAAs will have opened across the county.



Why a specific program for the uniquely abled? Almost all standard job training is generally not suitable for the uniquely abled population.

All of the following components are required for success and are included in the UAA Program:

- Selection of students – to ensure they have the target uniquely abled skills.
- Financial support for the program and students.
- Skills training, e.g., how to program and operate a CNC machine.
- Training instructors on how to teach this population.
- Job readiness (soft skills) training.
- Support for job search and placement.
- Work experience (internships, apprenticeships, OJT).
- Coach potential employers how to select (individuals with autism often fail the HR job interview).
- Coach employers how to on-board and manage UAA graduates.
- Post-hire support (job coach, internship, etc.).

Students in the UA Academy program are exposed to various CNC and manual machines and related equipment. Specific skills they learn typically include:

- Introduction to manual mill and lathe machinery, vertical and horizontal band saws and proper use of hand tools in machining
- Proper use of measuring tools, i.e.; calipers, micrometers, etc.
- Interpreting and translating basic industry print reading and GD&T
- Manual data entry
- Understanding G&M codes
- Understanding programming formats for both mill and lathe
- Basic MasterCAM (or equivalent software) geometry creation and toolpaths
- Understanding safety procedures and guidelines used in machine operations
- Setup and operation of CNC mills and lathes

These individuals are also on a path to further improve their career and knowledge to develop into setup persons and or programmers as they have been introduced to the basic skills in setup and programming on which to build.



The Uniquely Abled Project encourages the implementation of other Uniquely Abled Academies. If interested and for questions go to the “Contact Us” tab on the UAP website: <http://uniquelyabledproject.org/contact-us/> or e-mail IRosenberg@UniquelyAbledProject.org.