Transcript for Student Voices on Neurodiversity: A Panel Discussion
Supporting Neurodiversity in Post-Secondary Education Series
BCcampus webinar hosted on February 4, 2025
Panelists: Kaeli Sort, Hallie Brown, Alysha Gallant
Host: Britt Dzioba

BRITT DZIOBA:
So good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us. My name is Britt Dzioba, and I'm the host for today's panel, and I'm also an advisor on the Learning and Teaching team here at BCcampus. I'm so excited to have you all here today for our first event in our Neurodiversity Series, which will be running all month long. So if this is a topic that's interesting to you, please check out some of our other events which are listed on the screen as well. This is a topic that has personal significance to me as somebody with lived experience. I've been really energized by the interests we've seen so far from the community. It's great to see so many folks who work in higher ed really engage with this topic. Next slide, please, Kelsey.

All right, I'd like to start us off in a good way by locating myself. So I live on the traditional and unceded territory of hən̓q̓əmiṅəm̓ and Sḵwx̱wú7mesh snichim speaking peoples, which is so called Burnaby, B.C. There are several Indigenous nations who share territory in Burnaby. All speak hən̓q̓əmiṅəm̓ or Sḵwx̱wú7mesh snichim. The nations who share this territory are Tsleil-Waututh Squamish, Musqueam, Sto:lo, and Qayqayt. The photo I've included here is from a wooded park near my house where I go every day to reconnect with the land and calm my central nervous system. The day that I took this photo the other day was quite snowy, but that really dampened all the sounds of the city around me and it was a really great way to soothe my neurodivergent brain after a busy day. Next slide, please, Kelsey.

Without further ado, I'm so pleased to welcome our student panelists today. I just want to acknowledge how grateful I am for their participation, their courage to speak about their lived experiences, and their very thoughtful insight in planning this event. I will let each panelist introduce themselves and then we'll dive into the questions. I just want to note that the panelists were given all the questions well ahead of time and the freedom to pass on answering any of the questions. So if it seems like I've skipped somebody, it's not that I've missed them. It's that they have chosen not to answer that question. I also want to say that neurodiverse and neurodivergent are used interchangeably during this panel, depending on the panelists preferred term. All right. So first up, Kaeli, would you like to introduce yourself?

KAELI SORT:
Hi, everyone. My name is Kaeli Sort. I'm calling in today from the traditional unceded territories of Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwantlen, and Tsawwassen First Nations in what we call Surrey, B.C. I recently graduated with two masters, a master's of leadership from Royal Roads University and a master of Executive Business Administration from Quantic University. During the day I work as a caregiver support counsellor. When I'm not doing that, I'm leading the former Youth and Care

Community of Practice. We work to influence equitable policies and share wise leadership practices, and I really appreciate being invited here today. Thank you.

BRITT: Thank you. Hallie, would you like to introduce yourself?

HALLIE BROWN:
Oh, yeah, sure. Hi, everyone. My name is Hallie Brown. My pronouns are she/her, and I'm really grateful for being considered to speak for this panel. I'm currently a student at Douglas College's List Food Services Program. I'm taking the program with the hopes of further improving my skills in the food and beverage industry, and I'm hoping to bring a positive and inclusive and nice and warm, just voice to the panel. I'm hoping to be encouraging and bring the positivity. So thanks everyone for being here.

BRITT: Thanks, Hallie. And Alysha.

ALYSHA GALLANT:
I have a bachelor of science in fisheries and wildlife, and I'm a teacher candidate at UNBC in Prince George, British Columbia. I'm located on the unceded traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh. And I do a lot of things. I work for the Humane Society, I tutor, I run kids camps. I love science, and I'm currently in the teacher candidate program to be a science for high school.

BRITT:
Awesome. Thank you so much. All right. We are going to dive into the questions here. All right. Next slide,

First question. So this is a big one. But what does being neurodiverse mean to you? How has being neurodiverse impacted your academic journey, and how do you feel like it impacts the way you view and experience the world? So we're going to start with Kaeli.

KAELI:
Thank you for this question. To me, neurodiversity captures the intricate and multifaceted way that my brain and my nervous system function, highlighting the rich diversity of cognition, emotion, and behaviour. To me, this concept transcends simple labels and diagnoses, acknowledging that no brain is exactly the same and recognizing that these differences, such as ADHD, anxiety, autism, PTSD, and others. These are not deficits, but they're dynamic and interconnected variations that contribute to my resilience to creativity and innovative problem-solving. In these ways, I see neurodiversity as referring to unique neural patterns that enrich our collective understanding and capacity to navigate the world. All of this is to say, I see neurodiversity as having a neuro complex brain and a neuro complex nervous system. This has been both a challenge and a gift for me. While sometimes I've needed more time to process and rely on tools to help me prepare and feel comfortable, my ability to connect lived experience with academic theory and think outside of the box has actually been a really profound strength. And so I've been able to thrive in environments where flexibility, trauma-

informed approaches, and compassionate support have empowered me to achieve academic excellence. And so how my brain and nervous system function actually influences how I engage with the world. It fuels a deep sense of empathy for others, for social justice. There's boundless creativity and a profound appreciation for the richness of human experience. It compels me to challenge systems, to advocate fiercely for inclusion and equity, and to identify opportunities where others might see limitations. So my neurodiversity drives me to push boundaries and create spaces where differences are not only celebrated, but they're harnessed to unite us through connection, innovation, and a deeper understanding of what it actually means to be human. Lastly, I just add that I see neurodiversity as gifts, unique strengths, unique perspectives. But when overwhelmed, when an environment isn't designed for somebody with the brain and nervous system like myself, I can be disabled. And so these superpowers that I have can be enabled by environment and support, and they can be disabled and overwhelm and shut me down as well. And so I just like to highlight that environment makes a really big difference. I think that those of us that think differently or who challenge that status quo are able to kind of ring the alarm when there are challenges on the horizon because we pay attention to those patterns. I'm mindful of the time though, so I'm going to move it on to the next person. Thank you so much for this question. Thanks, Kaeli. That was a, fantastic answer, and actually reminded me of Alysha and I having a conversation about because it snowed quite a bit here in Vancouver, which is up in Prince George where it's quite snowy and icy and that connection between nervous system and your neurology, how when it gets overwhelmed, it can become so difficult to process your environment in a way that fosters mental well-being. And one of the examples is when it's icy out, and your whole body kind of seizes up and gets really, like, focuses on your environment because you're afraid you're going to slip and fall, and that kind of, like, wears you down after a while, because it's that over firing of your nervous system really overtakes your brain to some point. Awesome. So, Hallie, love for you to speak to this question.

HALLIE:

Okay. Thanks, Britt. First of all, Kaeli, I really love the point that you shared. It was a really great perspective, and I feel like it's got me to understand that everyone's experience is different and stuff. And yeah, it was just a really good point. And I look forward to hearing your point, too, Alysha. But to me, being neurodiverse means having a brain that is wired differently than those who are identified as being neurotypical. Honestly, I am more comfortable being identified as neurodivergent. So I think in this context, I'm going to use that word instead, just because it relates the most to me. So in my opinion, neurodivergence is an umbrella with different diagnoses that fall under the category. There's autism, ADHD, bipolar, and many, many others. In regards to how I feel my neurodiversity impacts my academic journey, I do think that being neurodivergent, I do feel, I do think that being neurodivergent has made it more difficult for me to manage my time efficiently, as well as my ability to focus in certain circumstances. Additionally, I feel that another way my neurodiversity has had an impact on my academic journey is for when it comes to planning and prioritizing, as well as problem-solving. As for how it impacts the way I view and experience the world. I do feel that I experience life more vividly and in colour than someone that is or identifies as being your neurotypical would. For example,

it was just the other day. I was at Winners, and I found myself noticing various pieces of purple furniture, pieces in purple, which happens to be my favourite colour. But ever since that day, I have found myself noticing more and more items that are purple, and I have since decided that it's time to give my room a makeover. Also, I feel that being neurodivergent has helped me to emphasize with others. Not just folks that identify or are neurodiverse, but neurotypical folks as well.

BRITT: Thank you, Hallie. Yeah, I know we're talking about just your astute attention to detail as well, which I think is such a strength and can really bring a lot of strength to your academic journey as well, cause when we were having our introductory conversation, you really just picked up on some of the small details of planning this event, which has been awesome.

HALLIE: Thanks, Britt.

BRITT: Alysha.

ALYSHA:
For me neurodivergent. Like Hallie, I'm going to use that word neurodivergent just because I feel like it goes so many different ways. It means processing and experiencing the world in a way that isn't exactly aligned with the default or neurotypical perspective. Like Hallie was saying, I feel like my world is slightly more vivid than those around me can see it. Means that my brain works in ways that can be really, really challenging, but also uniquely advantageous. I see patterns that other people might not. I hyperfocus on topics that ignite my curiosity and become an expert overnight, and I experience emotions and sensory input in a way that can be very intense, but deeply meaningful. My academic journey has been a mix of struggle and success. Before realizing I was neurodivergent. I often felt like I had to work twice as hard to keep up, not because I wasn't smart, not because I lacked ability, but because traditional learning structures weren't designed with my needs in mind. I would hyper focus on subjects that I loved, but I struggled with executive functioning tasks like organization, time management, and breaking large projects into smaller pieces, especially for courses that I had no love for. Once I understood how my brain worked, I was able to advocate for myself and develop strategies and create an environment where I could thrive and create a support system that understood what I was going through, something that completely transformed my academic success. Overnight in one semester, my GPA jumped to 4.33, which is the highest GPA that you can get at my university. It wasn't just a reflection of intelligence, but of learning how to work with my brain rather than against it. Being neurodivergent really shapes the way that I view and experience the world in a profound way. I notice details that others might overlook. I wouldn't beat a great detective. I can connect seemingly unrelated ideas, which seems out of left field for some people, but my neurodiverse people, they get it, they can follow my tangential thoughts. I like to find the joy in deep, meaningful learning. I am a lifelong learner and I love to pack my brain with as much information as I can as randomly as I can. It also means that I deeply understand what it's like to feel out of sync with the world, which makes

me incredibly passionate about creating inclusive spaces where everyone, especially students, feel valued and understood and supported in their own unique ways of thinking. Thank you.

BRITT:
You so much, Alysha, and thank you all for introducing yourselves and for answering the first question with just such depth and insight. Thank you. Next slide, please, Kelsey.

Question two. Can you share a moment where you felt particularly supported or conversely misunderstood by university staff or fellow students? And if you felt supported, what academic accommodations were helpful in supporting your learning? And did you have any issues accessing those supports or accommodations? So we're going to start with Hallie.

HAILLIE:
Thanks, Britt. Yes, I can think of two instances in which I had issues, accessing support and accommodations at my institution. Because of the timing of things, though, I'm just going to share the one. And this particular instance happened in September of 2023. I was beginning my post-secondary journey by enlisting in a baking program. As during the time, I was certain that baking was the field of work that I wanted to partake in. Unfortunately, there were some factors that I didn't take into account when switching from a private K–12 school to a public post-secondary institution. Factors that ended up taking a huge toll on my physical, mental, and emotional well-being. First of all, the atmosphere that I was used to being in was much smaller and had more teachers available to help me if I was ever in need of assistance with my work world. Also, my high school class never had more than 10 students, and each of us had been formerly diagnosed with a neurodivergent condition. Meanwhile, in this new environment, there were at least 18 different students and only one teacher to answer any of the questions that we had. Another thing that I feel is important to note is that not only was the pacing of our baking class fast, but the teacher was fast as well. To give an example, whenever she was giving a lesson, whether it be on the conversion of measurements or how an egg coagulates, she just kept talking really fast. And yeah, it was almost like the mother daughter duo of my favourite TV show "Gilmore Girls." But when the yapping was all said and done, she only paused for one brief second to ask if we had any questions. And then she went back to the yapping all over again. And I can remember feeling really sad and small, like I didn't belong there. Everyone else was getting the hang of things and had something in common with someone else. But me? I could only relate to two of my classmates, one of which didn't speak a lot of the same language as me. You can imagine how hard it was to communicate with my peers. For once, I was afraid to ask for help. I spent the majority of my breaks alone with my crossword puzzle book, which don't get me wrong, was fun to do sometimes, but in this particular environment, I wanted to socialize with my peers, but I was afraid of dealing with rejection. Plus, how was I supposed to know whether or not my classmates would be accepting of me and my neurodivergence? So after attending three days of classes in which I faced multiple meltdowns, I made the difficult decision to withdraw from my baking program. At first, I was relieved as I didn't have to deal with any fear or anxiety in that environment anymore. The next day, though, I felt a wave of depression raining down on me, and I couldn't get out. I kept coming close to drowning until my

parents pulled me out of the deep end of that sea of depression. I felt fine after a while, but then the depression came back, and it stayed until the end of the year. But in January of 20 let's see if this was 2023, then that would have been last year, January of 2024, I ended up taking another program at a different post-secondary institution. In a program, a program where I discovered just what my passions are and where I got the support that I needed. Thank you.

BRITT: Thank you for your vulnerability, Hallie, and sharing with us your story.

HALLIE: Yeah, of course.

BRITT: Alysha. How would you like to answer?

ALYSHA:
I went to the University of Toronto before I came to Prince George and I did four years in a forestry and conservation degree and I never had any support, and I didn't actually know that I needed them until I was diagnosed at 29, and I had started my second undergrad degree in wildlife and fisheries. So there was a moment in my undergrad where I stood up for the first time for myself. And it gave me this awesome feeling of power and of being able to tell people what I need, which is something I had never done in my whole life. We were in a class where the professor wanted us to stand in a circle and hold hands. Normally, I would mask, I would do the activity, and while the activity was happening, all I would be able to focus on was that someone was touching me and my sensory spidey senses were going crazy. I'm not focusing on what the professor is saying or the deep meaningful learning that we're doing. I'm focusing on the fact that there's someone touching me that I really don't want to be touching me. I voiced out that I was uncomfortable with this. My professor, without even missing a beat, Tess Healy, you are a gem. She told me that I could hold my own hand and that they would hold hands around me. I got to feel included and I felt like I was still participating and I was still learning, but I got to be comfortable in my own learning experience. This was the first time that I didn't try to make something uncomfortable work for me so as to not make other people feel uncomfortable. This had been my learning experience up until this point, and I had always felt out of sync with my classmates. This allowed me to be on the same page and it was such a small gesture, but it gave me the confidence to start speaking up for myself.

Once I was diagnosed, immediately, Gene Bowen and Susan Morash of the Access Resource Centre, two wonderful, wonderful human beings. They got me in and they got my accommodation set. I've had accommodations for note takers, slides ahead of time, separate areas for exams, extra time on exams, and most recently an accommodation for absences, because when I get really unwell. I become agoraphobic and I have a really hard time leaving my house. The accommodation for absences is definitely the most meaningful to me because I want to be there and I want to learn. Unfortunately, my brain just says no. Gene and Susan really made the process streamlined and they made it efficient and they made it really meaningful for me, and I was able to find a community and I was able to find support. I now have a counsellor and a psychiatrist through UNBC's wellness team and support from the

Access Resource Centre. I have a whole team that helps keep me at my best, mental health wise. I still struggle. I have flare ups, but I have a support team that's absolutely incredible and support is so essential. And I never felt connected to my U of T community because I never had that support. Whereas here at UNBC, even if I'm having a really, really bad day, and I could be crying, I could be breaking down, I could be in the depths of my depression, and I know I can walk into the Access Resource Centre. Gene and Susan will give me a big hug. They'll put me in the respite room with some Lego and some stuffed animals and dimmed lights, and I will come out feeling one million times better. Support really is so important.

BRITT: Thank you so much for sharing, Alysha. Kaeli. We'd like to hear from you.

KAELI:
Yeah. Thank you. I really appreciate everybody sharing and I can really relate to. I went through my first undergraduate degree also without any diagnosis, and didn't know what my support needs were. I didn't have accommodations in my undergrad, or formally, but I actually did have some informally that I was able to advocate for myself or through conversations with very supportive faculty. They were willing to explore with me what might help me reach success. So it wasn't until I got to my master's at Royal Roads, where I met a disability coordinator there who was extremely helpful. She helped me figure out what some of my needs were, what could be available to me, and she was really open to exploring things that hadn't been explored before, for example, I was able to bring my support cats. I've got two cats. I was able to bring them to a two-week residency at Royal Roads. It's the first time in the history of their university that they allowed, I believe, cats to come on to their usually no pet accommodations. It was such a powerful experience, not only for me, but there were a lot of people that were travelling, some from across the world, some across the country, some just from across the province or across the city. But a lot of people actually came to my suite to get the support from the support cats as well. And so that accommodation not only benefited me. There were groups of people that were coming to have that time because they were missing their cats that were back at home, or they were feeling really overwhelmed and stressed and just wanted to get on the ground and lay with them too. And it was accommodations like that that made me not only feel more comfortable and more relaxed so that I could learn. But it made me feel like I mattered that my needs were important and that the school was willing to do whatever they could to make sure that I could be successful and reach my goal, which was to be able to do my program.

I just really wanted to highlight that she really took that time to get to know me and my needs. Not just as a student, but just as somebody who is navigating these complexities. I felt like she really cared about who I was as a person, which made all the difference in getting more comfortable and advocating for my needs, because sometimes I would need to advocate to a teacher. But circling back to that person, she was always really supportive. I think one of the things that really stood out was that empathy. It was being trauma-informed, so providing choices, helping me understand how things work, helping me understand what the process would be for coming to residency, where I could get accessibility signage, all of that. It was a

transparent process, which helped me mentally and emotionally prepare for what is quite an intense experience for anybody. And so again, like those cats, they gave me a sense of grounding and comfort and safety and an otherwise extremely stressful situation where sometimes when there's overwhelm, I am overwhelmed in my senses. It's not just in my brain. Smells, taste, touch, all of those things can become too much. So having my cats really helped me stay in my body, stay grounded, and be able to learn. At Royal Roads, I didn't have any issues with accessing supports or accommodations that are coming to mind at least. I would highlight some teachers are a lot more accommodating than others. Some are really eager to walk their talk and learn and learn from you, whereas others are maybe their worldview is just a little bit more rigid or this is how it's supposed to be. Sometimes there was a little bit of challenge just getting on the same page, but for the most part, I would say everyone that I had the pleasure of working with was accommodating, interested, curious, willing to learn, and willing to co-create something that not only I would benefit from, but the whole class could benefit from. Some teachers thought, Hey, if this works for you, maybe this is something we just do for everybody, which I really valued because then also sometimes there's separation or resentment when people's needs aren't being met. And so they might have a diagnosis, but they actually share those needs. When you have teachers that can provide more accommodation, like a flexible deadline or something like that, that's something that everybody could benefit from, and it creates a lot less challenges when everybody is able to get their need met rather than some people that are like, Well, I think I have ADHD and I have those things too, but I don't have access to that support. I think that made a difference to my peers as well when the teachers were able to use my need to advocate for everybody else. Thank you.

BRITT:
Thank you. Thanks to all the panelists for being so vulnerable and sharing your stories. And I think all three stories just really highlight that not all students self-disclose that they need accommodations or have the diagnoses in writing that many accommodations require. So one small thing that people can do, but has huge impact is where can you find places that you can build in and bake in accommodations and support and flexibility so that people don't have to ask because like Kaeli said, it does benefit all students, not just neurodiverse students as well. The next question, please.

Okay. So I know three of you have kind of spoken to this a little bit in the first question, but what unique strengths or perspectives do you bring to your academic work because of your neurodiversity? So, Alysha, let's start with you.

ALYSHA:
Forgot to unmute myself. My neurodiversity gives me a unique approach to academic work that I have come to appreciate and lean into. Last semester, we had to make worldview maps. I found that a lot of people took this literally and drew maps. I built one out of Lego. That was completely 3D and a tower that I built upwards, colour coordinated, which each level meaning a different thing. I find that when I get the ability to be creative and how to showcase my knowledge, I really do shine and I come up with something completely out of left field. With

ADHD, my brain is constantly making connections that others may not see, which allows me to think outside the box, and I can approach problems with fresh angles. When something truly interests me, I can hyperfocus and dive deep. Like I said, becoming an expert overnight, I know a lot about Rasputin just because I watched a movie. I also thrive in fast-paced and engaging environments because my brain is always working on overdrive, I actually do better when I'm able to use speed to my advantage. I love engaging environments where creativity and curiosity are encouraged. That's what I hope to bring forward for my students. My autism gives me a strong ability to notice patterns and details and structures, and I love organizing information in ways that makes sense to me, and I approach problem-solving with a very logical and structured mindset. Definitely means I don't always get the joke. It goes over my head. I take things quite literally, but it can be a superpower. I also tend to be really passionate about topics that matter to me, education, social justice, things that really spark that fire. Social expectations in academic settings can sometimes be draining. But I find that having clear goals and working in environments that value deep thinking helps me to thrive and that really pushes those deep conversations because surface education is not for me. I also have borderline personality disorder, and so I experience emotions really intensely, which allow me to connect really deeply with what I'm learning. My emotional depth helps me to understand different perspectives and it makes me naturally empathetic, which makes me passionate about fairness and inclusion and creating a safe space for others. Emotional regulation can be a challenge, but I've learned that my ability to feel things so strongly also fuels my drive and my resilience. I'm grateful for it. Altogether, my neurodivergence shapes the way that I learn, think, and engage with the world. I see things through different lenses, not even just one, I use that to my advantage in my academic journey after I realized how to use it to my advantage. It's taken time to understand how my brain works, but now that I do, I wouldn't trade it for anything.

BRITT: Thank you. Kaeli.

KAELI:
Thank you so much. I really relate to everything that you guys are saying. Even where there's differences, I'm just finding it really interesting. I really appreciate it. I'm going to be saying some of those similar things too. I would say that how my neural complexity shows up is certainly in my sensitivity. I'd say I can't think of quite the right words, but I usually say along the lines of, I feel like a very specialized precise machine. And so you get some really high quality precision out of that. But it requires maintenance. It requires special parts. And so I think one of The gifts that I have, similar to the others here, is noticing those patterns. Sometimes I realized I used to think I was really fast at processing, and now I realized it depends on what it is, and just the way my brain works, I can process something really fast and then it's going to be also processing a little bit more slowly. It's hard for my brain to let go of things. I think of it again and again, my final is never my final. I will give you 17 final papers. If you let me, I will re-upload them again and again and again. It is hard for me to let things go. I think that that's a strength, but sometimes that's a challenge and when information gets changed because now we know something is better. Sometimes my brain is still, but it's been this way. Sometimes I do fixate. It can have me being stuck with the old, but also really eager to try new

things, and I can get really into exploring a lot of different things very deeply, very quickly. I make a lot of connections as well. I actually did child protection investigative social work and was very good at that. You can't make decisions based off your gut, you have to do it off facts, and I can figure out where people have discrepancies and whatnot really really quickly. I love puzzles and problem-solving, and I usually do that really quickly too. Whenever there are those puzzles with group work, I try to sit back a little bit, but it's hard for me sometimes. Again, experiencing everything so intensely, so deeply. People oftentimes say I care too much. And so over time, I learned to say, I could care less if you could care a little bit more. I could be a little bit less sensitive if perhaps you became more. Instead of just owning that I'm different and that there's an imbalance because of my difference, I offer for people to see how they show up too, and maybe how they relate or how that's different. I'd say my ways of knowing, being, and doing. They position me to approach problems from unconventional angles, often connecting ideas in creative ways that others are overlooking. It's my lived experience with ADHD, PTSD, depression, anxiety that gives me a deep sense of empathy and resilience, which informs my approach to very complex systemic issues, particularly those related to our human behaviour, our families, communities, systems, And so additionally, this neurodiversity is enhancing my capacity for innovation.

I can quickly identify those opportunities and those patterns that may not be immediately obvious to others, or others are thinking it, but they're able to keep it in. Sometimes it's really hard for me to keep these things inside me to my detriment. Oftentimes people will say, Thank you so much for trusting me. It's not that I trust you. I need to get it out. You need to know those kinds of things. And so I think I agree with Alysha. I've got an ability to see the world through multiple lenses, and I'm not sure what that is. There's that machine. I'm losing the trend but it's like that I have a lot of lenses, and so it's a matter of sometimes I feel really in control of those lenses and other times I don't feel as in control. It's like the shutter got stuck. And the bar is not moving and usually it moves really nice. Again, that machine of mine requires that maintenance and that oil and that love and care. And so yeah, I think another strength is that it helps me question established norms. I actually wonder because neural complexity, neurodiversity, neurodivergence, it all happens on a spectrum, and more and more I wonder what is neurotypical? Is there actually really or is that something that we're all conditioned and striving towards? I'm not sure that it actually really exists. Again, the more that I talk to people, the more that they relate to some of these things, it's just these intersections of our identity, our conditioning, our experience, our environment.

I've heard of people talking about having a really strong support network with family, that's amazing. People like myself might not. And so those of us that are moving through the environment without emotional support, we might have our cats and our animals, but it's going to be a lot harder because we coregulate each other. Yeah, I see it as a strength and as a challenge that I might feel something very intensely that my neighbour doesn't. But then I can help my neighbour get through something and see some problems that they wouldn't see. So we really are just better together. Yeah, I think we'll probably just leave it there. But I think there's just a lot of meaningful ways that we can all relate and that we all diverge.

BRITT: Thank you, Kaeli. And Hallie.

HALLIE:
Oh, yeah. Well, first of all, I love the points that you, Alysha, and Kaeli put together. I definitely can relate to the whole sensitivity thing. I feel like all my life, I've felt these huge emotions. I feel things so much. People have often told me, You're too sensitive. You need to toughen up. But over the years, I've realized, that's kind of an insensitive thing to say. Like, what's wrong with being sensitive? Like, we all have our feelings. It's just whether or not we feel them appropriate, right? Like, Don't be quick to blame others. We need to be kind with our words. And telling someone that you're too sensitive, that's kind of insensitive. But then again, no one's perfect. We all say some stuff sometimes that's not the nicest. We just need to learn to be kinder with our words. But, Oh, yeah, and the whole puzzle thing. I'm definitely good with crossword puzzle, Sudoku. But if you ask me, if I'm having a people puzzle, like if there's a situation that I'm in with a person, sometimes I have to ask for help with that because well, then it relates to body image, body language, and then I'm like, how am I supposed to respond to this? I don't know how they're feeling, what they're... That's one of the puzzles that. Yeah, it really depends, like you said, Kaeli, really depends and the whole processing speed too. If it's something that interests me, like murder mysteries, "Gilmore Girls," Mariana Trench, so many things that it's easy to get into stuff like that. I have found it easier though when you change your thinking from curiosity, like you guys were saying, be curious. If things are hard, don't, don't be hard on yourself. It's easy to get stuck, but, you know, we're all always learning and growing. But I'm going to try to be quick with my points because I wrote something down. Yeah, I feel that because of my neurodiversity, there are so many unique strengths that perspectives that me and well, yeah, that other people that are and identify as neurodivergent have such as. Yeah, one of my unique strengths that I have and bring to my academic work is my attention to detail. To elaborate, I am a person that notices the minor grammatical errors or misspelled words in an article or that small coffee stain that someone has on their shirt. Another unique strength that I have due to my neurodiversity is my ability to hyperfocus on stuff. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

BRITT:
Thank you, Hallie. I'm hearing the theme of puzzles and play, which, as a neurodivergent person, I also very much relate to that. I love puzzles. Puzzles are a form of learning as well. And I think that leads really well into our next question, Kelsey, if you can change a slide.

So if you were to design your dream post-secondary institutional experience, so that it can either be physical considerations, policy changes, organizational changes, curriculum, what would you include? So Kaeli, we're going to start with you.

KAELI:
Thank you. One second because my cat is eating a fake flower. Okay, I'm just going to pull up my piece of paper here. This is a good question. I really appreciated it. I had some ideas, and I

also want to say that I don't know what I don't know. And so as people talk, I might write down some more ideas just for myself because, we don't know what we don't know. And this is just based on my own experience, but I know that there's stuff missing, so I invite people to use their imagination and help connect dots for themselves as well. If I were to design my dream post-secondary institutional experience, I would focus on creating inclusive, flexible, and supportive environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students. Students being from all backgrounds from all around the world of different identities. Particularly those with neuro-complex experiences. I want to hear from everybody, and I want to hear from the people who are most impacted by an environment on either ends of those margins, being they've had the best experience, and they've had not best experience. Physically, that campus would be designed with sensory-friendly spaces, quiet areas for focus work or just resting because if you're a human alive today, you know, it's just exhausting doing all of the roles that we do. And if you have any sensitivities or any other challenges, it's so exhausting just present your good world your case to the world. Again, having those spaces that would also allow for collaboration and creativity, being comfortable.

I think for me personally, textures are really big things. Sometimes you go to university and you sit on those chairs that you stick to. That is cringe for me. And so even just like, yeah, the textures of the textiles of the carpet of the linoleum. I'm really good at designing a space for me, but I would want other people's thoughts, ideas, and opinions to be included in that because I really only know what I like. Having a flexible environment where it can change to based on the needs that flow through those spaces, and that those needs and trends do change over time. But again, just emphasizing comfortable and accessible, able to accommodate different learning styles, adaptable, seating, lighting, noise levels, those things. Policy wise, I would like to see policies where again, students are engaged. They have clear accessibility guidelines for requesting support, seeking student input, and policy development, and also being a part of opportunities to train staff and faculty. The institution would emphasize that flexibility with options for extended deadlines, alternative assignment formats. I think for me personally, there's times that I would love to do art or tell you a story. There are times when I'm much better doing written work. Then there's other times where I actually can't read or write. I could be at the top of my class in the top 1% of scholars, and yet sometimes I can't read and write. So I would love to also learn from other people that are showing their learning in diverse formats. And also more personalized learning plans. Imagine every single person just had their own personalized learning plan. Throughout their life, they update it with their teachers and their supports, and that for everybody, not just for somebody who identifies as being complex or divergent. I'd like to see regular faculty staff and student training. So people have an opportunity to learn how they could support themselves and each other because one thing that I'm learning from kind of getting connected with more people that identify as neurodiverse is, the more we learn about it, the more we see ourselves on the spectrum. And again, designing spaces that actually go to include everybody rather than designing it to be a specific way for everybody unless you've gone through the hoops to prove that that might be to your detriment. And so organizationally strong emphasis on student support services, with peer support, not just staff and faculty, with dedicated counsellors, academic advisors, disability

coordinators who are working collaboratively to ensure each student receives that individualized support. And I think it's great that we can take the lead, but sometimes if we aren't comfortable in identifying our needs, advocating for them, even fully knowing them, or some of us have brain injuries, we forget them. And so I think having a more nuanced process where there can be a question. Do you want, like there is something Alysha had given an example earlier. She had said her teacher had asked her how she wanted it to be. And so asking, is now right? Is now a time that you would like for me to choose these next steps for you, or would you like this choice? And so in this environment, students would not only be supported, but they'd be empowered. They would be able to thrive in an academic setting that values and promotes inclusivity and that values differences and sees them as ways that we actually do relate and recognizes those unique strengths that every individual brings to a table, not just somebody who identifies with neural complexity or being neurotypical, that it's just regardless of whatever label you use to help you feel empowered everybody is valued and cared for and has access to learn in the way that works for them at their own pace. That is hard to do, and I just want to acknowledge that it takes quite a skilled teacher, quite skilled leaders, staff, and faculty to do this and to do it well. It's important to acknowledge, part of the reason why it doesn't happen is not because people don't want it to. It is very challenging to shift from the way we're doing things now towards a future orientation that would work a lot better. Um, but when we all do it together, it makes holding this weight a lot lighter.

BRITT:
Thank you so much, Kaeli, for your very thoughtful and detailed response, Hallie. HAILLIE: Okay, yeah, that was a good response, Kaeli. I think we're all sharing really good responses. Yeah, like you too, Alysha. Oh, yeah, I should get into my answer. But yeah, this is a really good question. I really love. It helps you to think out of the box, and it's just it could be physical but when designing my dream post-secondary institutional experience, one of the physical considerations that I would add is check-in posters. And for those don't know, For those that don't know, check-in posters are visuals that state different things to consider, and steps to take when a person with autism is in distress or a crisis. I just found out about this resource, not that long ago. It seems like such a great resource to have because there's so much more to learn about neurodivergence and how you can be accommodating and of support to someone that is or identified as being neurodivergent. Another thing that I would add to my dream, post-secondary institutional experiences, something that Kaeli already mentioned, but sensory rooms for whenever neurodivergent students, students who need the accommodations, need a break from socializing with other students or from the regular class environment. The sensory rooms would have bean bags, weighted blankets, fidget toys, different kinds of accommodation to support us if flash win, we are in need of a chill out, safe space. It would also be good to have a club made specifically for neurodiverse students and regular seminars to encourage students and faculty members on what it means to be neurodiverse, and how to be neuroinclusive towards others.

BRITT: Thank you, Hallie. I love this suggestion about sensory rooms and toys.

HALLIE: Yeah, of course.

BRITT:
Thank you. Then Alysha. Hallie and Kaeli, you guys just took all my points because I guess we are thinking on the same wavelengths. I broke this into physical policies and organizational changes because again, my brain takes things very literally. I came up with three for each one. Physical wide, sensory-friendly spaces. It is at the top of my list. Campus should have quiet study areas with soft lighting, noise-reducing features, and comfortable seating. There would also be movement-friendly spaces for students who focus better while pacing or fidgeting or using standing desks because I know this can be unsettling to others if someone is pacing around you, but it helps others to think. Flexible classroom layouts. I do also want to say that when I was answering these, I was trying to think about my own classroom. I'm about to have my own classroom where I can implement all of these things to make my neurodivergent kids feel included. I tried to think of things that I would put into my own class to make it more inclusive. Flexible classroom layouts, I don't like rigid rows of disks. I don't like that you're staring at the back of someone's head or that there is someone at the back of the room. I like options, whether it's a U shape, so everyone can see everyone and no one's behind anybody because that actually freaks me out if someone's sitting behind me, if they're tapping or if they're eating or something, I can't focus. So like tables and couches and standing desks, so students could really choose what works best for them. Then also the integration of nature because green spaces, walking trails, outdoor learning areas, they provide grounding and calming, especially to neurodivergent students. Having a green space where we can go outside and take in the sun and breathe for a minute to ground ourselves is extremely important. At UNBC, we have a courtyard. We are also backed into the forest. So if we want to, we can walk straight into the forest and do grounding exercise. Policy wise, I would like to see more flexible attendance and deadlines. Understanding that executive dysfunction, sensory overwhelm, and mental health fluctuations can impact productivity. Students would have the ability to request extensions or alternate participation methods without stigma or without having to prove why they need those accommodations because that's always the tough part as well. How do you explain to somebody who doesn't see the world that you do that you need something? Universal design for learning. courses should be designed with multiple ways to engage, recorded lectures, written transcripts, visual aids, hands-on learning, so students can choose the format that works the best for them. Then neurodiversity-affirming support services would be great. Instead of just traditional disability accommodations, there would be advisors trained in neurodivergence who would help students create personalized learning strategies because a lot of us don't know how to use our brains effectively, even though we do have this cool superpower. Having people who can help us harness that would be really important. Then organizational changes, more project-based and hands-on learning. It's really hard to sit in a lecture for 3 hours and pay attention. The average attention span of a human being is about 7 minutes. After 7 minutes, your brain starts to do other things and you may start to fidget. This is especially true for neurodivergent people, which is why we keep things like fidgets on hand or colouring books and things like that. It's not that we're not paying attention. It's that if we don't use more of our brain, we'll get lost. I would like to see mentorship and peer support. So every

student should be paired with a mentor, either a faculty or an upper-year student who understands neurodivergence and can help navigate academic and social challenges, especially for undergrads who are starting their first or second year, who aren't comfortable yet with university life and executive function support. Like built-in coaching on time management, organization, and breaking down tasks. These are skills that are essential for success, but they're not explicitly taught. Ultimately, my ideal institution would look a bit like Google. It would recognize that intelligence and potential aren't measured by a student's ability to conform to neurotypical expectations or the academic expectations that have been placed on us for so long. Instead, it would celebrate the different ways of thinking and create an environment where all students can thrive on their own terms.

BRITT:
Amazing. I love all the creativity and thoughtfulness that has gone into planning your dream, post-secondary experience. I feel like a lot of these changes and suggestions would benefit all students regardless of whether you're neurodiverse or not. It just seems to me to create a much more inclusive and welcoming learning environment. Next slide, please, Kelsey.

KAELI:
Is it okay if I jump in really quick? Sorry. I just really wanted to build off of Alysha. You said so many good things, and so did you, Hallie. But I just wanted to say too about the deadlines. I just finished a program that let me do a lot of things early. If I was done, I could hand it in. Not for group projects, but for individual projects and all course work, but you had to wait to a certain date to be able to take your exams. I was able to finish that 14-month course, only three months into it, and then I just waited for things to open up. That really benefited me. Flexible does not always necessarily mean you need more time, but sometimes I do need more time. I just also like to add that the accommodation that I need Right now today might look different this afternoon or tomorrow, and it might be the opposite. When we're talking about designing these spaces, again, just emphasizing that flexibility for that person, not just for people, but that person might need to look different. I really wanted to emphasize the project-based experiential learning as well. It's more meaningful. It has us having that experiential learning where we embody our understanding, but we also are socializing and able to do knowledge transfer. Then I also wanted to emphasize the mentorship and peer support. All of these things that we've talked about, Royal Roads actually does. They have a space where you can move around all of the furniture and as long as it stays on the carpet, it's a very large space. People sometimes push couches together to sleep, to work together, and those kinds of spaces make a really big difference. We also did the peer mentorship and peer support, and made a very large difference to be paired up with a second year master's student in my first year. And I think that that's something that every institution should look at doing.

BRITT:
Thank you so much. I'm just looking at the time here and I want to leave some time for questions at the end. So only have two more questions for the panel. So what I might do is combine five and six if that's okay with the panelists because there is some overlap there.

Question five is changes you'd like to see to better support neurodiverse students. If we could pop to the sixth question, and that could lead into any tips or advice for educators. Are there any changes and maybe to round it off. Do you have any advice or tips for educators who want to best support neurodiverse learners? Hallie, do you want to kick us off?

HALLIE:
Sure. Well, first of all, that's a good idea to combine the questions. They're similar. So yeah, do I have any tips or advice for educators who want to best support neurodiverse learners? Yes, I do. For one thing, if you offer an accommodation, don't take it away after saying that the option is available. That happened to me once when I was starting baking school. First they said I would get a note taker and then I recall talking to them again, and suddenly, I wasn't getting one. But then again, I was only there for three days, so I guess you never know. But yeah, another thing that I think would be helpful to best support neurodiverse learners is if the professors speak at a decent pace. Not too fast, not too slow, loud or quiet, just right. Also, after you were speaking, and it's time for questions and answers, it would be great if you could pause for at least 10 to 15 seconds or even longer if possible. To give those that are still thinking of questions or aren't so comfortable in certain environments to ask questions, to come up with the questions and ask them. There's also the idea of having a question box, fidget toys, closed captions, checking in on else if it looks like we're struggling, etc. But yeah, other than that, try to give us extra time on class assignments for those who need them. A quiet space to take exams in, more PowerPoint presentations. Yeah. Those are some ideas that I have. I look forward to hearing what Alysha and Kaeli have to say.

BRITT:
Thank you so much. Kaeli, Do you want to answer? It looks like you're muted there.

KAELI:
So sorry. For some reason, I had myself down as answering this one last. So I'm just getting distracted because my cat just found a ball. Somebody I also just read asked us how we're staying focused? Not entirely. To answer your question, I would say similar to what Hallie just said there too, I love the idea of closed captioning and checking in. I actually, as you were talking, I wrote down, Tend to the emotions and the needs of the nervous systems first, and then everything else will follow. If somebody is not performing well academically, like if I wasn't, tending to my emotions first will actually help me get to the point of being able to be a high performer, not just performing but a high performer. I already mentioned the sensory-friendly spaces, accommodation, personalized assistance. We talked about mentorship, faculty receiving training on neuro complexity, and just different learning needs. One thing that I found was really profound for me. My research supervisor lives with a stutter. And so she actually provides a bio about her before, and I think that's the accommodation that she's asked for from her employer is that this information about her is provided before she does the class so that people understand what her strengths are. She's able to explain that there are some challenges with it and she asks for patience and understanding. And just seeing that representation in the faculty was huge, and I noticed a lot of people felt really safe and comfortable and gravitated

towards her because of this. And so also to Hallie, as you are talking, what came to mind when you expressed that teacher that had a hard time slowing down is, I wonder if they have neurodivergence. And so I wonder too, the more we can work to destigmatize this for people in positions of power to be comfortable enough to say, I too have lived experience, like you Britt. That's powerful. And so I think us being more comfortable with who we are, getting to know what our needs are so that we can help teach others what those are. So sometimes that looks like teachers are going to learn from their peers, other teachers. Sometimes it might mean they get some mentorship from a student too. Again, I just wanted to emphasize that all of these areas that I'm suggesting, my university Royal Roads did. Now when I was with UVic, that wasn't my experience. They may have changed now, but I had quite a contrasting experience, and if I had to choose between those universities again, I would choose Royal Roads again and again and again for how supportive they were to me as a learner. Then I'm just going to double-check. I'm just going through my list here. Fostering a structured environment, but not so structured, that it's inflexible. Reminds me of boundaries, sometimes they need to be poor, sometimes rigid, sometimes flexible. Again, that's where the skill comes in and why it's hard to meet these needs is because they do change diverse teaching methods, creating a culture of inclusivity, helping people understand themselves and each other better, and why this is important. Communicating clearly. Checking in with people because you might feel that you were clear. Maybe the people who spoke up feel comfortable saying that you were clear, but maybe the people who are quiet don't. Alternative ways to seek feedback is also important and anonymous too. It's great when we can know who said what, but sometimes people just feel a little bit more comfortable that anonymity and just practising empathy and patience. I'll leave it there. Thank you.

BRITT:
Thank you so much. Such a great concrete list too. Yeah, and Alysha to end off here.

ALYSHA:
For question five, the biggest change I would like to see is mandatory faculty training on neurodivergence, like Kaeli was saying. Professors and faculty should understand how things like ADHD, autism, trauma-informed disorders, things like that actually affect the brain and affect learning so that they can be equipped to offer reasonable accommodations. Knowing the terms like executive dysfunction and other disability related terms can help bridge the gap when a student comes to you and says, My brain doesn't want to. I want universities to be places where neurodivergent students don't have to fight to be understood or accommodated. Instead, they should be designed with us in mind from the start, so we can thrive without constantly pushing against an inflexible system. For question six, I do have some advice and tips for educators. Hallie and Kaeli both really covered a lot. I'll try not to double up on what they've already said. But as an educator and as someone who is neurodivergent myself, I believe the best way to support neurodiverse learners is through flexibility, understanding, and creating an inclusive environment where all students feel valued. Embrace flexibility. No attendance sheets for marks. This is actually a really aggressive strategy, and I wish professors knew this. Making and marking and neurodivergent on aspects of participation and attendance can deeply hinder

their ability to want to connect with you. We want to do well, we want to be in class, and sometimes we just can't. By attaching marks to this, you kick in anxiety and you can make things worse. Offer multiple ways to engage like discussion questions online Moodle, where if you're not comfortable speaking up in class and you have a participation mark, you can still write in the forum so that you can get those marks, your voice can still be heard. But maybe it's not as scary as trying to put your hand up in the middle of class. Because I know for me, the only times where I'm really really engaged and I want to put my hand up all the time are when the professor and I have a connection and I will sit in the front row and make eye contact with them as they lecture, and that's really profound. I always retain more from those professors that I feel like I have a connection with. Allow movement as well. One of my profs does movement moments. After she makes us do quiet reading or quiet reflection, she has us all stand up and shake out the wiggles. Just because these movement moments are really important for students, especially when you're asking a neurodiverse person to sit there and be quiet and to not fidget and to do that for 2 or 3 minutes, gives them the opportunity to shake it out. They need it. Allow fidgets in your classrooms. If your students are colouring in colouring books or playing with fidgets, or I have students in my class who crochet or knit. These are really important because I don't know about other people with ADHD, but I can't even watch TV without doing three other things at once and having the subtitles on so I can read because if I'm not using a certain percentage of my brain, it does weird things. So I'm constantly busy. And be open to alternative assessment essays, and exams are not always the best way to assess knowledge and neurodivergence. I do really well in an exam structure, but other friends that I have don't. So try having a conversation and you'll see that they know their stuff. Maybe they just blanked on the exam. Get to know Zoom and offer Zoom to your students who struggle in a packed environment. When I am really unwell and I'm in a flare-up, like I have been for the last two weeks, I become agoraphobic and I cannot leave my house. I want to be in class, but sometimes I physically can't. I like being able to Zoom in from home so I don't miss anything and I still feel included. I have had props do this where they'll have me on Zoom on their laptop so that I can watch from home and still be included, and it makes a world of difference. If your student has been struggling with coming to class and they make it there one day that week, don't point it out. Quietly make a note to connect with that student after class or during a break. Make sure to acknowledge their presence there in a quiet way, a head nod, a thumbs up, whatever it is. It helps neurodivergence to feel safe in your class, and it will probably result in them letting you in on what's going on for them. I have safe professors that even when I'm not in their class or around them, I feel safe in their presence and I will seek them out in my institution. I'm looking at you, Gene and Susan. Create a sensory-friendly environment, so allow the use of sunglasses. That's a really big one. Kids aren't weird for sitting in your class with sunglasses on. Ear plugs, stim toys, other sensory supports without judgment. Minimize unnecessary noise and distractions and provide noise-cancelling options. Do you notice that there is a group of students in the back that talk while you lecture? Call them out. Guaranteed, they are making another student not want to be there. Allow students breaks to decompress. All schools should have some access resource centre for students with disabilities. Ours has a respite room with a bed with dimmed lights and soft blankets and Lego and stuffed toys. As a neurodivergent student, I would not have cut through some of my days without this room.

Lastly, believe students when they express their needs. Just because something isn't a challenge for you doesn't mean it isn't real for them. It could sound utterly out of left field. I have made some very odd requests of my professors for learning. In the end, I get to participate in a way that's meaningful for me and I still get the knowledge needed. My marks are some of the top of my class. If you accommodate your neurodivergent students and you listen to them when they tell you that you need something, you will see that you have a student who wants to learn and who wants to engage and who wants to be there. They may just have some difficulties that you can't see that stops that from happening.

BRITT:
Thank you so much, Alysha, and Hallie and Kaeli for your wonderful answers today. So I just wanted to thank the three panelists again for being here today and sharing your experience and the vulnerability that you bring to the conversation. Kind of what Kaeli was talking about vulnerability can often foster a great sense of community and shared experience, which I totally agree with and relate to. So yeah, thank you all for your wonderful and insightful answers. So we have about 15 minutes left, and I did want to provide space for questions from the audience for the panelists. So you can either ask the question in the chat or unmute yourself. I did have two. There are some questions I've recorded from the chat already, and I have some questions from the form, from the registration form. And one of the things we talked about with the panelists before we started the session is, if we don't get a chance to answer everyone's questions, I can compile them if you want to put them in the chat if they don't get answered, and I can send them to the panelists and we can compile an email to send out to registrants, so some of those questions can get answered, just in case. I see Julia has their hand raised if you want to unmute.

JULIA: Hi there. Thank you all so much. There's such a wealth of information there and lived experience. I think we're all benefiting hugely from that. Thank you. My question is a little bit specific, and it's probably geared towards Kaeli because of your experience at Royal Roads. I am also at Royal Roads, and I'm a team coach. As a team coach, we're looking at trying to design neuro-inclusive experiences for neurodiverse teams with neurotypical and neurodivergent students to work together. So you've gone through that program of really working a lot of teamwork. And I believe teamwork is something in post-secondary education that's happening more and more and it's not always supported. That can be challenging. My question that I'm asking of you, Kaeli, is, what advice could you give to post-secondary education to support, whether it's faculty or support services, to support students to be in neuroinclusive team environments and cultures? How do we build cultures where people can work together more inclusively? What can we do to support students?

KAELI:
It's a really good question, and it's certainly one where I have a few things that come to mind. Then it's something where I think it takes a little bit more time and nuance to process. We have to build a culture of care and inclusivity that needs to start with leadership. Leadership needs to make better priorities. We have bottom-up and top-down processes. We need both. And so we

need peer student and faculty and leadership that at every level is working together. And how we build that culture too is there has to be education. We have to find ways that we relate and ways that we're different and ways that help people understand each other greater. And so I think you do that better by involving the people that are in that community. And so the needs are going to look a little bit different I think at each university, and so at Royal Roads, working with those students and those faculty to find what are their answers. And keeping in mind that it's right now because these things do change. I'm not sure if I'm totally answering that, but I think it has to start with leadership prioritizing this. We need to walk our talk. We need to find who our champions are at every level, and we need to start taking initiatives where people see this. When you see representation, you start to change. You know things are possible for you. And so we really just need to send these messages to students and staff in a way that doesn't separate, in a way that unites us through these differences. Thank you. JULIA: Thank you, Kaeli. That very much supplements what you said, what you all said, so thank you so much.

KAELI: Thank you.

BRITT:
Thank you. I wanted to give the other panelists a chance if you had any thoughts to answer the question. If not, I have some other questions. I wanted to pull one from the form, the registration form, which was how could libraries and librarians possibly play a role to better support neurodiverse students?

HALLIE:
Oh, I have something written down for this. Because I thought that you added the question to the doc today. Could I quickly add what I wrote down?

BRITT: Yeah, definitely.

HALLIE:
I think it's stuff that libraries already have, but just in case, it would be good if libraries could have tutoring sessions available for students to like peer one-on-one support, if that makes sense. Additionally, it would be great if you had different visuals available that go over various techniques on time management, study strategies, etc. But yeah, like I said before, I think these are already the, so maybe Alyssa or Kaeli have other amazing ideas to share, so yeah. Thank you.

ALYSHA:
Yeah. I find my university library to be quite overwhelming because you walk in on the first floor and it's chaos. Then as you go up and levels, it gets quieter. But you don't actually really see any books until you get into the upper stacks, which I think is quite normal for university libraries. This space can make it very intimidating to go in and try to figure out if I want a book, if I need a book, where do I get the book? Sometimes I don't want to talk to people. There's no way for me to check the system to figure out where it is without having to talk to somebody in

the library. I use the online library a lot, so I use our own George Weller library through UNBC because it is online. Making sure that you have lots of lots of materials online just because they're easier to access, and I can access them from home without going into a crazy space. I think there should also be a place in the library where you can go and get one-on-one support. If you are neurodivergent and maybe especially for undergrads in their first year, I think it would be really important to do a tour and to bring students around the library and to show them where they are because I never had that. I never really accessed the library through my UNBC education other than online because it was a scary place and it's really big. So I think maybe having a tour and getting first-year students in and showing them that these are where we keep the books. These are the people you ask for help, and I think that would really help get more students to use the physical library system.

BRITT:
Thank you. Yeah. I think one thing I thought of when I read this question is, most libraries do have dedicated quiet working spaces, but those aren't always when I was in university and aren't monitored very well, and as somebody who gets very distracted by sensory input. If I do go to the library, it's like, if this is saying this is a quiet, silent work space, I want to be able to trust that that's going to be enforced. And I know it's not a comfortable feeling sometimes to have to enforce that. And especially as a student, I don't want to, you know, police other students because it feels awkward, but, you know, really enforcing that that area is for silence study because there are some of us that just cannot process information if we have too many sensory inputs.

HALLIE: Wait. What if they had a sensory room in the library? Maybe that would make things more.

BRITT:
Yeah, which works really well with your dream university design. Answer: yes. Yeah. I pulled a question from the chat as well. So just for the last couple of minutes here. Somebody asked, as an instructor, I find the accessibility accommodations letters we receive are sometimes generic. When I follow up with students at the start of the semester, they often don't feel personally connected to the accommodation suggestions. They seem to be more just like a check box of options. Um, so they want to make the accommodations more personable. So does anyone have any suggestions for good questions instructors can ask students at the start of term to best support their individual needs in order to ease the burden on neurodivergent students having to advocate for themselves so hard? So does anyone have a suggestion for a question that an instructor could ask their students that would maybe personalize the accommodation process a bit better?

ALYSHA:
I think email is great, emailing your students to maybe connect with them, not so much ask them. Because they don't have to tell you, but maybe connect with them to see what those accommodations mean for them. My accommodation letters went out this semester and one of

my profs immediately responded and said, We don't have exams in this course. So obviously, my accommodation came across as I needed extra time for exams or I needed a place for exams when really my accommodation is for absences, because of my disorders. So I think it is really important to have more individuality on accessibility reports that go out to faculty. But it's also daunting because they do tell you through accessibility resource centres that it is up to you to speak with the prof to tell them your exact accommodations, and it's up to you to make that connection. That's daunting when you start a new class and you don't know that prof and you don't want to be that student that immediately is like, Oh, by the way. I think if you do get an accessibility letter, maybe reach out to your student and be like, Hey, I got this accessibility letter, what do your accommodations look like to you? And how can I support you through this journey?

HALLIE: That's such a great idea, Alysha.

KAELI:
I agree. I would just add an invitation because Alysha was talking about being relational and connecting with your students, and I totally agree. So just like a welcome. Happy to have you. This may be a learning experience for me too, and that's exciting so that I can be a better educator. Just acknowledging that this is a co-created thing. Opportunities for learning for everybody. I wanted to quickly go back to the library question though, and just add what I really like that Royal Roads did is they recorded info sessions with the library. Any sessions that people could do with the librarian could also be recorded and looked back as many times as needed. Also, we did have sessions that you could book with the librarian. That makes a big difference too. Sorry, I kind of deviated there. That's it.

HALLIE:
Oh, I have something to add. I couldn't think of a question right away, but both of your ideas got me thinking of something. What if there was, like, a sheet, like a physical sheet that went over different accommodations into more detail, like under physical accommodations, there could be, having a note taker or, like, different note taking sheets. And then, audio accommodations, like, you know what I mean? Different accommodations, and you could check mark which ones you think would be most helpful and then you could discuss it with the person to go into more detail or any others that you have?

KAELI:
I know it's the end of the time, but also one more thing that I would like to add as somebody who has had a lot of their life documented because being in foster care, going through traumas, everything's documented. I'm so tired of telling people what I need and just not getting it. It actually can be retriggering re-traumatizing to have to explain this again and again. Keeping that in mind too. Is this something you want to talk about or how can I best support you? As we go along, or do you want to chat about it before we get started? I think it's just choices.

HALLIE: True, true.

BRITT:
Yeah, I love that. Yeah, Hallie, I had the same idea as you, kind of creating a menu of options and kind of explaining what those accommodations mean, too, because not everybody always has the language. And Kaeli, what you said is we, I think really speaks to this idea of just providing as many accommodations as you can that don't need to be asked for. How many accommodations could you just build into the course so that people don't have to do the cognitive load of getting accommodations or coming and talking to you or having to self-disclose. What can you provide? What do you have control over that can provide support just from the start? Y, so I recognize we're one minute over time here. Thank you all for hanging around to the end here.

The last slide here just has my contact information. If you want to get a hold of me to chat more about this topic. I've recorded a few questions that we didn't get a chance to get to. So I'm going to send these to the panelists and record their answers, and we can send that out with the recording that will come out in a couple of weeks. But again, thank you so much to Hallie, Alysha, and Kaeli for your wonderful participation in today's panel. Truly, it was just wonderful working with all three of you. You were awesome. So thank you, and thanks to everyone.

HALLIE:
Yeah, I just wanted to say thank you as well, Britt. And for Jen, for this amazing opportunity to speak and share our insights. Thank you, everyone who, friends, family, colleagues, professors for taking the time to continue your lifelong learning. I really appreciate it.

ALYSHA: Thank you to my fellow panelists. It was an honour to meet you.

HALLIE:
Honour to meet you guys too. Thank you Britt. Good luck with everything.

ALYSHA: Yeah, thank you, Britt.

HALLIE: This has been lots of fun. I feel like we've all learned something.