Supporting Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Workshop (Part 1)
Introduction to Neurodiversity in Higher Education: History, Theory, and First-Person Perspectives
BCcampus workshop hosted on February 13, 2025
Facilitator: Sarah Silverman
Host: Britt Dzioba
ASL Interpreting team: Debbie Miyashita and Karly Sandboe

BRITT DZIOBA:
I'm Britt Dzioba. I'm an advisor on the learning and teaching team here at BCcampus. And it's my pleasure to welcome Dr. Sarah Silverman here today for part one of this two part workshop series, Supporting Neurodiversity in Higher Education. Just a reminder that the next part of the series will be on Thursday, February 27, from 9:30 to 11:00 am PST. I also want to welcome our two ASL interpreters, Debbie Miyashita and Karly Sandboe. I just want to start us off in a good way by locating myself. So I live on the traditional and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ and Sḵwx̱wú7mesh snichim speaking peoples, which is so called Burnaby, B.C. There are several Indigenous nations who share territory in Burnaby. All speak hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ or Sḵwx̱wú7mesh snichim. The central Coast Salish Nations who share this territory are Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, Musqueam, Sto:lo, and Qayqayt. And I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to live on these lands. I'm going to pass it over now to Sarah to begin the session.

SARAH SILVERMAN:
Thank you so much. Welcome, everybody. I'm really happy to be here with you. I'm going to share my screen in a moment. There's two materials that we're going to use today, and I want to make sure that everybody is able to access them. So we just had in the chat, the links to these slides and the handout. So I'm going to just show you a little bit about those before we begin officially.

So the slides, you'll see on my screen right now. I'll be sharing my screen and showing these to you while I speak, and we interact for most of the session. You also have this Google document, which I call it the handout. And the important things to know about this document are that, number one, it has all of the ways that you can contact me. I'll tell you in a little bit about why you might want to contact me after this session. It also has the link to the session slides in case you ever lose that link for any reason. And it has a little bit of an outline of the session. Then later on, we're going to be looking at a couple of first person perspectives of neurodivergent students and staff. So beginning on page 3 is where you will see those. I'll just scroll down for one moment. And now I'm on page 6. Page 6 begins the resource guide. So everything that I refer to during the workshop today is referenced somewhere on this list. So you start off with a list of different books that are of interest. So posts that are of interest, articles, and other materials. So I encourage you to take a look at this list of resource resources if that interests you, or you're specifically interested in looking for the reference for something that I talk about during the workshop.

Okay. Wow, we're up to 90 people. It's really wonderful to be here talking with all of you today. So the title of this workshop is An Introduction to Neurodiversity in Higher Ed: History, Theory, and First-Person Perspectives, and I am Sarah Silverman. This is part one of a two-part workshop series. We could talk about that in a little bit. But I just wanted to kind of situate us of the two workshops that I'm facilitating as part of this Neurodiversity Month. The workshop today is really designed to introduce you to the context of the neurodiversity concept and what it might mean for us as educators and staff and faculty members in higher education or post-secondary education. The next workshop that I will be doing focuses a lot more on classroom teaching broadly defined, so it could be online teaching, could be in-person teaching and some ways to navigate neurodiversity in the classroom. I'm very excited to learn with you today.

This session is going to last around an hour and a half, 1.5 hours, and we'll have opportunities for you to participate and ask questions. You can use your time, space, and technology, however you want today. Cameras can be on or off. That either option is great for me. You can move around your space. You can leave the session and come back if that's what you need to do. None of those things will bother me in the slightest. You are invited to use the slides and handout, however, you would like. So you can share it with other people, and you can also reuse the information as long as you credit me. And I also did prepare some tiny URL shortened links. So to get the slides, you can go to tinyurl.com/ BCcampusND-Slides And for the handout, tinyurl.com/BCcampusND-HO So that's how you can access those documents, if you would like to.

Okay, so I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself. So, my name is Sarah, and I use she/her pronouns. My description is a white woman with short brown hair and metal glasses frames. Today, I'm also wearing a brown and tan sweater, and my background is blurred in my Zoom video view. I teach instructional design and disability studies, but I also do a lot of faculty development work. So I work with faculty on ways to reflect on their teaching, on ways to improve their teaching. And I've done that sort of work for about eight years primarily in the US. I am personally autistic, so I have a personal connection to neurodiversity. And I mentioned that to kind of highlight that I am drawing a lot on my experiences as a neurodivergent faculty member and staff member, but also prior experiences as a neurodivergent student in my work. My own research interests include accessible and feminist pedagogy, universal design for learning, and increasingly the history of the neurodiversity movement, the history of how the neurodiversity concepts emerged, and how they have been used to advocate for greater inclusion for neurodivergent people. In terms of how to participate today and after today,

I just want to highlight that there's lots of ways to participate with no hierarchy of better or worse ways. So some options include contributing your thoughts using the chat in this Zoom. You could also write your own notes with pen or paper or on an electronic device notes in terms of text, but also pictures or any other mode of expression. And then I also fully recognize thinking without recording anything could also be a way of participating. And not all of your

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participation will be visible to me, but I still very much acknowledge it. Um, I have a plan for maximum accessibility, but I also know that live presentation may not be everyone's favourite format. So we do have ASL interpretation. You can turn on the captioning to get captions on your screen, and I have made the slides and handout as accessible as I'm able to. But also I just also recognize that you may want to process this information, ask questions later. I do invite feedback on the use of these materials after today's session, and I'm happy to talk one-on-one about this content after today, as well. I'll provide you with my email address at the end of the workshop, but it's also available at the top of the handout. That is just to say that if there's any learning that didn't happen for you today that you're interested in continuing, I totally expect that some of that will happen after our hour and a half today.

So, on that note, I would love to learn a little bit more about you. There are 95 people in the chat. So if you would like to introduce yourself, I'd greatly appreciate it. If you could consider sharing your choice of name and your institution and your role. And then what interested you about this session. We will have an opportunity in a moment to talk about our prior knowledge of neurodiversity coming into this session. So you could share a reason for your interest in coming, but you could also decide to share some of your prior knowledge of neurodiversity for a future question. So I would love to hear a little bit more about who's here in the Zoom today. Hi, Kristina, some people are an employment facilitator, which is wonderful, as well. We'll have a moment to touch on how neurodiversity interacts with employment sometime during this session as well. Sessional instructors, welcome. Welcome to all part-time and sessional instructors as well. Hi, Dave. Okay, this is lovely. Thank you, everyone, for your extremely generous introductions. I'll keep looking at this as we go on. I also see that a couple of you know each other. So I feel free to say hi to any friends or acquaintances in the chat. That's I think a lovely use of this time. There may be opportunities just to connect with people that you know or haven't seen in a while in addition to the content that we're going to discuss today. Okay, lovely. Okay.

So, here's some of the goals that I hope that we can kind of achieve during our time today. Um, I'm hoping that we can develop foundational literacy of the vocabulary and history of neurodiversity. And this includes the terms neurodiversity, neurotypical, neurodivergent, and also know a little bit more about the relationship between the neurodiversity movement and the autistic rights movement. So neurodiversity came out of a community of autistic adults who convened online in the 1990s. We're going to learn a little bit about how that gave rise to the neurodiversity concept. We'll also become familiar with the idea of neurodiversity as an umbrella concept, not just one experience. And maybe complicate a little bit about the way that neurodivergent is sometimes used as a stand-in for one single experience, but that's not necessarily the best usage. We'll also recognize some general barriers that neurodivergent people face in how to work towards greater access, and as part of that, engage with several first-person experiences of neurodivergent students and staff. And just one more note on that. I mentioned that I myself am neurodivergent. I'm really excited about conversations about neurodiversity in higher education that consider neurodiversity within both students and

faculty and staff groups. I think there's often a strong focus on neurodivergent students, who are a great group to support, super in favour of that, but also sometimes less attention paid to neurodivergent staff and faculty. So that's always something that I'm interested in here.

So, I'm going to provide us with an opportunity for a little introductory reflection. And I also sometimes call this a prior knowledge activation. So anytime we're going to encounter new material or new ideas or reflections, it's useful to identify what we already know and then see how either that's going to change or how we can add to that. So, I am curious from all of you. How have you encountered the term neurodiversity? And you could also include the terms neurotypical and neurodivergent, in your life as an educator or more generally, Who have you heard use the term? And what associations do you have with the term coming in today? And you can use the chat for this. Ordinarily, I would say, maybe it's okay to also hand raise and speak into the mic. But 95 people is quite a large number of people to manage. So I'm going to stick with the chat for today. And again, as with all my reflection questions, it's that your participation is invited, but not demanded or required in any way. So Katherine said: Less so in higher ed, but often in regards to K–12 in my role as a parent. Okay. Interesting. So it hasn't permeated your higher-ed experience as much. Lena shared that they had an autistic brother who passed away. I'm sorry to hear that. And you've started learning about neurodiversity and neurodivergence as I became an educator. So from personal life, and also as a student teacher. Wonderful. Thank you for sharing your experience. And have worked with students who are neurodivergent. Encountered it, Allison saying, encountered it in your personal life. Emily is also sharing that it comes up a lot with friends, kids, and interactions with children. Bruce is saying that it feels like it has come to be another way of talking about students with disabilities and particularly learning disabilities. Christina is saying, I grew up with a brother that had autism, but neurodiversity is newer. One trend I'm seeing today, and this doesn't always happen, but a lot of times, people are increasingly hearing the terms neurodiversity and neurodivergent from younger people. So, children, like kids in school age or discussions about kids, and then it's only just starting to creep into the higher-education conversation. So that's really interesting to hear. Julia, thank you so much for saying more and more students are declaring or questioning their neuro state and impact on learning. This is also another common experience, at least in North America, that students are increasingly identifying themselves as neurodivergent and sharing that openly with experience, and Crissa is agreeing with Julia's observation here. Joe, saying, I am autistic, so I use it as shorthand, and neurotypical people seem to react better is also helpful, shorthand to use for the facet one planning to improve accessibility, right? Okay. So it's a good term to indicate we're looking for accessibility for a kind of a larger group here. Other people that are neurodivergent, as well as their partner and kids. Okay, wonderful. I really appreciate everybody's kind of sharing their own prior knowledge activation. Megan is now sharing that TikTok was influential in bringing the term. And I think that is absolutely true. You can go all over social media today and find tons of content created by and for neurodivergent people. So this also may be an element of how younger folks are kind of understanding this language and taking it up as well. And I think all of the wonderful responses that people are sharing here shows that it's complex, and even if you didn't already know that

neurodiversity and neurodivergence are still emerging very young concepts. You could probably guess it from these responses as well, because there's so many different interpretations, realms of life where people are hearing these terms. So that's really interesting to see, as well. You could still put in your prior knowledge activation into the chat. I'm going to go on, but I really appreciate everybody who is sharing, and I encourage you to reply to each other as well.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about how I started doing this work to contextualize what neurodiversity is and where it came from, for educators. So, I'm curious if you have seen or read headlines and titles that are kind of similar to these ones. These are just two that I found that relate to higher education. So one or actually, one relates to business. One was "6 Strategies to Help Neurodiverse Students Fully Engage in Class," and that was from a popular education blog Eutopia. And another "Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage: Why You Should Embrace It in Your Workforce." And that was from "Harvard Business Review," in fact. And I'm curious. You can just take a moment. See, what do you notice about these headlines and the way that they use these terms? So Alice said, Needing help implies weakness. The second headline asserts strength. Okay, so they're a little bit different. Alison saying they seem to be written to a neurotypical audience, right? So they assume that the reader is neurotypical. And Debra saying they reflect a kind of otherness. I think that's one potential assessment as well. Second one seems more positive. I always thought of ADHD as a gift. Okay. Interesting. So it definitely seems to be offering that neurodiversity could be an advantage in some way. And identifying a whole group of people with an adjective, that's neurodiverse, okay? So it's an odd use of the term neurodiverse. Joe, saying the second one assumes businesses need to be to profit from. There has to be some upside for the business beyond itself. Okay, great. Gretchen saying there's a vagueness and broadness to both of them. Both are targeted towards success, but not necessarily other aspects of life, like, you know, well-being or flourishing. Wonderful. Okay, those are really good. Those are really good ways of understanding these. I think they both stick out to me as they seem to be so different that if you just looked at both of these together, you would not know what neurodiversity meant, especially just as many people have pointed out that the first one seems to be entirely deficit based, and the second one seems to view neurodiversity as a strength, even though it does contain this element of, like, Okay, well, this will be, you know, a competitive advantage for the business itself. And, so I'm going to show you one more artifact. If anyone has ever come to one of my workshops or talks before, you might have seen this one, as well.

So this was an advertisement for a faculty program at a university that's not too far from where I live. And I blocked out the names and images of the people involved because it's not really about the individuals. It's just an interesting artifact to me. So I'll describe this whole image for maximum accessibility. So it says Centre for Teaching Excellence presents, Supporting Neurodivergent Students, Staff, and Faculty Training. And then it tells you when the training is going to be. And then there's a description, which I'll read. "Through this workshop, attendees will learn more about autism spectrum disorder, presenting issues at the college level, and specific strategies to support students in the classroom and beyond Principles of universal

design for learning, parentheses, UDL will be discussed in implementations of these strategies and design aspects will be presented. Faculty and staff will be actively invited through virtual learning platform features to engage with one another and reflect on experiences working with autistic students. So again, I will ask anyone who is interested in contributing or sharing, what do you notice about this artifact? Allison says, it doesn't appear to include deliberately any neurodivergent voices. Lena, do you want to turn on your mic and share something?

LENA: Yeah, thank you, Sarah. I think it's quicker than writing.

SARAH: That's fine. That works for me.

LENA:
What I notice is that it's using the term neurodivergent in the title, which, to me, is very appealing. Especially if I'm not someone who's familiar with it. But then when I go into the actual content of the training, it's mainly focusing on autism, which could lead me to ask myself, Okay, so if it's using neurodivergent as a title like an umbrella term, is autism the only neurodivergent condition that we would be looking at? Wonderful. Okay, so there's a clear equation of the term neurodivergent with autism in this. So I think you're very correct to point that out. A few other people are sharing similar ideas in the chat that they don't seem to. The writers of this advertisement don't seem to understand or realize or that there's a difference between the term neurodivergent and autistic. And some other people are noting that it does not seem to include any kind of discussion with students. It's about students. So it's for faculty and staff, who, I suppose, are assumed to be neurotypical or not autistic themselves. And it sort of takes that very removed approach. And yeah, that kind of summarizes what most of the comments in the chat. Let me just take a look. I like what Gretchen shared. It seems to be about students rather than centring students' voices and experience. Great. Okay, so, those are all wonderful things to notice. I think that those are great things to wonder about. I'm going to share one more thing that kind of launches us into a little bit of the history of the neurodiversity movement here. And this is the thing that caught my attention. Indeed, neurodivergent is not equivalent to autistic. So we can just kind of get that out of the way. That's something that's something that a lot of people are offering here. The thing that seemed incongruous, or a little bit interesting to me is the term neurodivergent and referencing the language of neurodiversity. But then also through this workshop, attendees will learn more about autism spectrum disorder. And they do go on to speak in a kind of more inclusive, less pathological way, talking about inclusive design, universal design for learning, and things like that. In some, when I teach about the history of the neurodiversity movement, what I like to offer is that the context and history of neurodiversity was primarily about thinking about alternative ways of thinking about neurological differences and neurodivergence other than disorder. And I think that there has been quite a conflation between the term neurodivergent and basically different medical diagnoses. And I think that it's really useful to go into a little bit of the history of where the neurodiversity concept came from so that we can situate our use of these terms in a context aware way.

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So, I came up with this kind of framing. After I read about a concept from disabled scholar, Ada Hubrig, and they wrote about a need for a disability literacy, and they were kind of thinking, a lot of people want to be responsive to disability in different contexts; that they want to provide accommodations or use inclusive approaches, but they are not always that fluent or interested in disability history or how the concepts of inclusion or accessibility really came about. And they wrote that "Disability literacy would mean not just understanding what disabled people are saying and organizing for, but also understanding the nuances and contexts of how and why we say these things." And that piece is linked in the, um, in the handout. And this got me wondering, what would a neurodiversity literacy look like if we extended this concept of disability to neurodiversity? I think it would be a good start would be to think about how we can, especially as educators use some of these terms and concepts in a way that honours their roots.

So some of the key texts and figures that I'll be referring to, and those who I'm drawing on in this work. So on the left side of the screen is an image, which is the cover of "Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement: Stories from the Frontline," edited by Stephen Kapp. And there's a colour illustration of a rainbow and a sun, and a bunch of different people walking down a road towards the rainbow. And on the right side of the screen is the cover of the book "Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Post-Normal Possibilities," by Nick Walker. The cover of that book is purple with turquoise writing, and it has an image of a butterfly with a brain in the middle of it. So those two texts are really important to the sort of concept of neurodiversity and the way that it has emerged and been filled up with meaning. And Nick Walker is the author of the second book, but other kinds of key figures in this movement are Ari Ne'eman, Lydia Brown, Shane Neumeier. Uh, Eric Garcia, Donna Williams, Jim Sinclair, Stephen Kapp, and Damien Milton. I'll refer to a couple of these people throughout the rest of the presentation, but this is just kind of to give credit to many of the people who came up with some of these ideas and brought them into the public conversation.

So before we go into a bit of that history, we need some kind of working definition of neurodiversity. And I want to provide this just in case somebody is totally new to this concept. I don't think anybody in our prior knowledge activation section said that they were completely new to the concept, but just to make sure we're all on the same page. We can say that neurodiversity "is the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population." So, at its most basic level, neurodiversity is kind of a neutral fact about humans that people vary in their cognition. You could say much the same way, people vary in their height, for example. There's diversity among humans in this respect.

Okay, so, where did this concept come from? Concept of neurodiversity has its roots in autistic self-advocacy, so a movement of autistic people for the rights of autistic people. Much of this

community formed online in the 1990s when the internet became available to regular people. It is kind of my paraphrase of a bunch of definitions that are out there. Julia is asking this in the chat. If you will permit me, when we are doing an activity later, let me just double check if it has been used by anybody else before you cite me, and I'll provide you with that citation. I kind of paraphrase it from a number of different places. So I just want to double-check if there's somebody better to cite than me for that. I don't want to take credit. Okay, so, autistic self-advocacy movement formed online in the 1990s. What was really important about the early 1990s is that the internet became available to regular people, not just specialists, and it became possible to have email lists. If you hate being on some of the listservs for your work today where you get emails every day and reply all and all of those things, it's true. Sometimes listservs can be a little bit annoying. But in the early 1990s, it was pretty much the only way that a large group of people could be connected via the internet. And a bunch of listservs were born around this time to connect autistic people who had previously been very isolated. There weren't a lot of social opportunities for autistic people to talk to one another. And this culture of autistic self-advocacy was born. Some of this draws on the legacy of deinstitutionalization, which primarily happened in the 1970s and 1980s when at least in the US, Um, a lot of disabled people began living in their own communities rather than in institutions. And this was the result of activist movements and self-advocacy of people with disabilities. So autistic rights and self-advocacy is basically based on the core principle that autism is not necessarily a disorder, but a difference. Even so, it can still be a disability because of the way that society is less accessible and accepting of autistic people, but that is not by definition, a disorder. The focus of this movement has largely been on acceptance rather than cure of autistic people. So shifting the focus from searching for a medical treatment or cure for autism to accepting and supporting autistic people. So some of those elements have been opposition to particularly abusive treatments, such as different shock therapies, and many types of behavioural modification therapy that autistic advocates feel aim to make the person less autistic rather than improve their quality of life. Um, another key element of this movement is it being led by autistic adults. And this represented a huge shift because the entire conversation about autism had been controlled by parents of autistic people and medical professionals up until this point. And so that's kind of how you get the term self-advocacy. Autistic people advocating for themselves. The key American organization today is Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, ASAN. But previously, there were more international organizations and loose groupings of folks. One was called Autism Network International, which I think is largely considered to be the first autistic-run organization about autism, and the INLV, which is the Independent Living Listserv. We'll talk about that more in a second.

So the actual term neurodiversity originated on the Independent Living Listserv in the 1990s. And this listserv was started by a Dutch autistic man named Martin Decker, and it grew into a fairly large community. And the concept of neurodiversity kind of first emerged on that listserv. It was also mentioned in "Time Magazine" by the writer Harvey Blume, but he had been a participant in the listserv and likely started to understand the concept from there. There are a bunch of different people who could be credited for the first introduction of the term. I think

largely the consensus has started to be that there's no single person who is responsible for the term neurodiversity, but it was discussed concurrently by multiple thinkers and activists. Just one small example is that one poster on the Independent Living listserv named Tony Langdon wrote about a neurological diversity of people. I.e., the atypical among a society could provide the different perspectives needed to generate new ideas and advances, whether they be technological, cultural, artistic, or otherwise. And so, one thing that you will see from some of the artifacts of the original listserv where this concept emerged is that it's a little bit of a different flavour of understanding of neurodiversity than the very neutral definition I presented at the beginning. You can see here that Tony Langdon was writing about neurodiversity as something clearly positive. That maybe important contributions are made to society by people who are and think a little bit differently than other people. And really, the reason for this is because the idea of neurodiversity came out of autistic people searching for an alternative understanding of their differences. Besides, autism is a horrible disorder or disease that nobody would want to ever have and should be cured to the greatest extent possible. And so neurodiversity was really a response to the extreme pathologization of autism. Okay. So that's a little bit about the term.

Later on, neurodiversity was kind of rethought into more of a paradigm or a kind of political set of values. And so just check in for a moment about what a paradigm actually is. So a paradigm is a set of assumptions. And sometimes a society will move from one paradigm to another. That's sometimes called the paradigm shift. So, one example of that in terms of a scientific paradigm is the emergence of heliocentrism. So, uh. Oh, sorry, Yeah, or another way of saying that is the sense that the sun is the centre of our solar system. Prior to that, a number of people thought that the Earth was the centre of the solar system. And that obviously is a major paradigm shift if you're going to be thinking of the Earth rather than the sun as the centre. It requires you to reinterpret a lot of your prior understandings of things. So, Nick Walker is the person who introduced what's called the neurodiversity paradigm, or we'll talk about that in a second. But a true paradigm shift whenever one is made is very destabilizing, because, as she says, it's going to be a shift in our fundamental assumptions that requires us to redefine our terms, recalibrate our language, rephrase our questions, reinterpret our data, and completely rethink our basic concepts and approaches. In the case of neurodiversity, the shift that we're going through is a shift from a pathology paradigm, which might say that there's one type of normal brain, and there's also pathological brains to one of diversity.

So Nick Walker formulated the neurodiversity paradigm, which, like I said, is a way of formulating some of the concepts about neurodiversity that had emerged into kind of a set of assumptions about how we could view the world. So neurodiversity paradigm has three different components. One is that neurodiversity, the diversity among minds, is a natural, healthy, and valuable form of human diversity. So it's kind of explicitly stating that neurodiversity could be a good thing. Secondly, there's no normal or right style of human mind, any more than there is a normal or right ethnicity, gender, or culture. So this is basically saying there's no absolute best or right, cognitive, cognitive style and is kind of picking up on social

justice and civil rights concepts to oppose the idea that there's any one group that is naturally superior to another one. So, no normal or right style of human mind, any more than one normal or right ethnicity, gender or culture. The last principle, which I'll just paraphrase is that the social dynamics that we have with neurodiversity are quite similar to other forms of diversity. So obviously, we have gender diversity, and that could be viewed as a positive, a good thing, and that there's no one right gender. Yet, we do still have forms of gender discrimination or sexism. So the last principle of the neurodiversity paradigm is, indeed, we do see social dynamics that are negative, but when neurodiversity is embraced as the valuable and beneficial thing that it is, that can be a great source of creative potential. I see that there's a bunch of chat happening in the chat. Because of our limited time today, I'm going to go ahead in the workshop, and then when we do break for another activity, I'll check in with the chat and see if there's anything I can contribute. I just want to just say that because I do see that there's some stuff happening in the chat.

One more term to know is the neurodiversity movement. And this is useful to know because there have been a lot of advocacy and activities that relate to neurodiversity that are sometimes grouped under this heading: neurodiversity movement. So we could say that it is a social justice movement that seeks civil rights, equality, respect, and full societal inclusion for neurodivergent people. Um, and I think it's great to think about it as, like, you know, if you replace the neurodiversity movement with any other movement, this is kind of just the basic picture of what a social justice movement might mean. Civil rights, equality, respect, and full society societal inclusion for a certain group. It began with the autism rights and self-advocacy movement, but it's now much larger and includes many different experiences other than just autism. The neurodiversity movement is not, you know, a single organized group, but it is a collection of groups and individuals that do social justice activism using the neurodiversity paradigm. That idea that there's no inherently disordered or pathological mind. And much of the terminology that we are exploring and will now explore kind of comes from different corners of the neurodiversity movement. I was reading a book the other day that had some interesting facts about neurodiversity movement activities, and it really highlighted that so much of this work has happened on the internet, on social media, in email groups, and different things like that. So just to mention again how critical the internet has been here.

So one way we could understand the kind of beginning of the neurodiversity movement is through a talk that was later turned into an essay called "Don't Mourn for Us." And this is largely considered to be the first neurodiversity manifesto. So if you haven't heard of this before, it's a really interesting essay to look up. I linked to it in the handout, and it's really worth reading in full. So, Jim Sinclair was an autistic activist, and Sinclair wrote a speech that was delivered in 1993 at the International Conference on Autism in Toronto. And it was later turned into this essay. It was kind of a letter to parents of autistic children, in which Sinclair wanted the parents to start to understand that their grief over not having a normal child was potentially getting in the way of forming a relationship with their child and figuring out how to effectively support their child. So um, Sinclair wrote, continuing to focus on the child's autism as a source

of grief is damaging for both the parents and the child and precludes the development of an accepting and authentic relationship between them. And the overall message was, what the autistic community needs is not people mourning for them or for the typical child that doesn't exist, but an embrace and acceptance of autistic children who do exist and need loving parents, need support, need advocacy. This was often viewed as the first neurodiversity manifesto, even though the term neurodiversity didn't exist quite at this point, and it wasn't in the original speech, but because of its focus on acceptance rather than a kind of grief, mourning, or cure.

Okay, so there's some a little bit of humour in here. So I hope that the next section will be a little bit funny. So let's talk about where the terms neurotypical and neurodivergent come from and how they can kind of be used in a context of where way. So, I first just want to say, yes, these terms are contested. I see that some people are discussing what neurotypical and neurodivergent might mean in the chat right now. Um, and people do use them in different ways. I'm just providing one perspective on the history of the terms and how I think that might help us think about how to use them. But my perspective is not the only perspective. There might be people you know who use these terms in different ways. And to a certain extent, that's okay. I recognize the limitations of my own knowledge and information here. But this is what I do have to share. So before we get into the history, some definitions we could use to get started here is that neurotypical would mean having a style of neurocognitive functioning that does fall within dominant societal standards. And neurodivergent means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that does not conform to societal expectations. Someone who's neurodivergent might have a diagnosis of some of the conditions that you already know, like autism, ADHD, learning disability, another mental disability or a mental illness, but they also may not. One of the most important things to know about these terms, I would say, is that these are not biomedical terms at all. They do not refer to any diagnosis or really anything biologically based. They refer to society. So there's sociopolitical terms about how well somebody's cognition, and to a certain extent communication and behaviour, align with society's expectations or do not align with society's expectations. This might help a little bit to understand why some students may identify as neurodivergent, or, you know, colleagues or friends might identify as neurodivergent despite not having any diagnosis of a mental disability or condition at all. It may be that they experience themselves as neurodivergent, based on the way that they think or communicate, not really aligning with societal expectations. So I think that it's really useful to think of these terms as not euphemisms for different diagnoses. They provide an alternative way of thinking about these issues.

So funnily enough, the origins of the term neurotypical were actually a complete satire and spoof of the medical community. The term was popularized by autistic activists, Laura Tisoncik, and other activists on a satirical website, which was called the Institute for the Study of the Neurotypical. It doesn't happen to be online anymore, but it is archived. So I'll present some archival stuff from that website. But as Laura recalled, this was a spoof project designed to turn the tables on the dehumanization, which was often done to autistic people by autistic by autism researchers. So, neurotypical was not initially intended just to mean a kind of alternative

to normal, but it was a fake diagnosis with which to satirize the very infantilizing and pathologizing of attitude of a lot of people towards the autistic community. Neurotypical is thus a way to refer to people who do not fall into one of these minority neurotype groups such as autistic, ADHD, or dyslexic, or some others. So it's a way of saying somebody who is not in one of these neurological minority groups. So, what was up with this website? I would love to tell you more about it. So because it came about as part of this joke website, it was a complete neologism, meaning a new word that didn't previously exist. And it was described in Steve Silberman's book "Neurotribes" as really one of the enduring contributions of this larger organization Autism Network International. And he wrote that it "turned the diagnostic gaze back on the psychiatric establishment." And additionally, because it was part of this kind of humour or satire project, "it registered the fact that people on the spectrum were capable of irony and sarcasm at a time when it was widely believed that autistic people didn't really 'get' humor at all."

Okay. So let's see a couple of highlights from this original website that coined the term neurotypical. So there was an FAQ about this so- called neurotypical disorder or syndrome. So it said, you know, "What is neurotypical? Neurotypical syndrome is a neurobiological disorder characterized by preoccupation with social concerns, delusions of superiority, and obsession with conformity. How common is it? Tragically, as many as 9,625 out of every 10,000 individuals could be neurotypical." And what that is satirizing is kind of around this time period. There was a mainstream media narrative that there was an autism epidemic, and that it was a huge crisis. So many people were being diagnosed with autism, and that kind of needed to be stopped. And um, other questions. Sorry. "Is there a cure for neurotypical syndrome? There's no known cure for neurotypical syndrome. However, many neurotypicals have learned to compensate for their disabilities and interact normally with autistic persons. Could I be neurotypical? You can take their online neurotypical screening test." And so what you can start to see is the entire kind of orientation of this satire is to ask non-autistic people, what would it feel like if you were spoken about as a condition or as a disorder and occasionally as a crisis? Probably would not feel very good to have an important part of your being treated in this way.

So this is an image of the online neurotypical screening test, which has a bunch of different questions on it. So some of the questions read, A friend has brought you to a party. What do you do? Your boss is giving you instructions for an important task that must be finished by the end of the day. What do you do? Your computer won't start. What do you do? Someone hands you the channel changer. You change the channel on the TV set to blink. Your mother walks into the room and asks you what you think of her new dress. What do you do? And I believe that this is actually set, satirizing what an autism evaluation is, I have actually done an autism evaluation. And there are, in fact, questionnaires about, you know, social behaviours and how you act or interpret social situations. And it's kind of showing how absurd it is to reduce complex social interactions to one right answer and one wrong answer or a situation where if you answer the wrong thing, that means you have a disorder and to kind of ask people to say, you know, what if your behaviours were interrogated in this way?

And the last artifact that I have is that they had these fake articles by self-styled neurotypical specialists, which is satirizing the autism specialists of the time. And this one reads, "I have always wondered about the neurotypical mind— how it functions, what stimuli triggers the characteristic aspect of socializing, along with the diverse social delusion that is encountered when one neurotypical meets another and sees and greets them." And this is satirizing the way that autistic people were often written about as extremely exotic, unknowable, almost like animals in a zoo. And trying to kind of prompt the readers of this website to understand that autistic people are deserving of empathy and being viewed as human beings first. So that's where the term neurotypical came from. It now is kind of used as a way to refer to somebody whose cognitive style and functioning does align with societal norms, and it came out of this satire.

I will say one thing that's interesting is this kind of satire 20 to 25 years later is still being done today, albeit in a very slightly different form, which is that, yes, much of the conversation about autism and other neurodivergences has moved on from this extremely pathologizing language, but it is sometimes still very paternalistic. Since we have time for it, I thought I would play a very quick clip from a comedian named Joe Wells. And once we start, you'll see that he is going to be doing a bit about his brother who is "not autistic," and how much he knows about non-autistic people because of that. So, it's midway through the comedy special. And he's going to start doing the bit about his brother who is not autistic, and the captions are turned on.

[VIDEO STARTS]
Relax, enjoy the show the way you need to enjoy the show. It's completely fine. The show is about my brother. Now, my brother is not autistic, but he's very severely not autistic. You know? He's got all the symptoms. He can't have a conversation unless he's making eye contact. He can't relax unless you put him in a loud, crowded place. Shit at maths. Last one is stereotype isn't it. The stereotype, non-autistic people are all bad at maths. I know that a lot of you can be really good at maths with the right support, you can achieve anything you want. You're amazing, non-autistic people. You inspire me, everyone. I think, in many ways, not being autistic is like a superpower. I do think that. My brother is not autistic. Like he went to university, which, I think that's incredible achievement for a non-autistic person to go to university. Obviously, he had to have, like, a specialist course that was adapted to meet his needs. It was called film and media studies. Isn't aware of himself. See that there is the best bit of material that I have or whatever.
[VIDEO ENDS].

SARAH:
So, this is a kind of updated version of the satire, which is sometimes people have moved on from extremely pathological language, but have moved on to a kind of infantilizing or paternalistic type of language, you know, as he says, you know, I think being non autistic is kind of a superpower. I think it's an amazing achievement for a non-autistic person to go to a

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university. And kind of he kind of highlights how things have changed, but there's still a lot of room for improvement, I would say. Right. Thanks. There we go.

Now, the origins of the term neurodivergent are a little bit different. This term was coined by an activist Kassiane Asasumasu, who goes by "Neurodivergent K" online. And when it was introduced, it really means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of normal. And it was developed to be more inclusive of a range of experiences than just autism and kind of expand the neurodiversity conversation beyond autism. So here's a couple of ways that I think that it does this. One, the term neurodivergent can refer to more experiences and conditions than autism. It typically is understood, I think, to refer to neurodevelopmental differences, so that would include things like ADHD, learning disabilities, dyslexia, dyspraxia, but also when this first came into use, it was also to help people name their experiences if just one condition, you know, didn't apply to them. Some people are what we might call, multiply neurodivergent. They may have multiple conditions or experiences that affect their cognition, communication, and behaviour. It thinks that it also comes to include people who have no diagnosis at all, and potentially offers an alternative to diagnoses that have historical biases associated with who is diagnosed with them at all. So especially for neurodevelopmental differences like autism and ADHD so much of the diagnostic criteria was based on white boys. And there appears to have been a significant bias in how the diagnostic criteria were applied such that people of colour, and women and non-binary people are much less frequently diagnosed with autism. And so not that that doesn't deserve to be rectified on its own, but neurodivergent is a term that can include a lot of different people who do and do not have various diagnoses. Um, so in some ways, it is also sort of a political term in that, I think it aims to form some sort of coalition among people whose brains are considered pathological in society, and to try to kind of reframe and redirect that assumption to the fact that people's brains aren't instead neurodivergent. They don't align with society's expectations, but are not necessarily inherently disordered.

One way of thinking about neurodivergence is that they are experiences under an umbrella, not just one condition. And this image shows a blue umbrella with a couple of different labels under it that include autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia, intellectual disability, ADHD, other mental disabilities, learning disability, and anxiety. All of these, according to some definitions, could fall under the heading of neurodivergence. One resource that I do personally really like is the Exceptional Individuals Guide to Neurodiversity. It's from an employment organization in the UK. But the way that they present each of these different conditions is a nice balance between some of the challenges people experiences and people experience and some of the strengths as well. And that's one that I definitely do recommend. The link is here on the slides, if you open the slides.

So in terms of takeaways from the first part of this workshop, here's what I do hope that you take away. Number one: Neurodiversity, neurotypical, and neurodivergent are sociopolitical rather than biomedical terms. Additionally, neurodivergent is not a euphemism for autism or

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ADHD or some other disability, rather, it's an umbrella term that brings together a lot of different experiences of cognitive diversity that differ from social norms. Accordingly, there's no test for net neurotypicality or neurodivergence if we're using those terms in a context aware way, other than, you know, the experience of or identification with one of these groups. Okay. Another takeaway is how the neurodiversity paradigm, which is that there's no one right type of mind, comes to replace the prevailing pathology paradigm, which is that there is one normal human mind. And lastly, the neurodiversity movement has focused on self-advocacy, the leadership of neurodivergent people, and opposition to pathologizing language and coercive treatments. I think when I am just looking at these takeaways for myself now, I come back to that original artifact of the program for instructors on teaching neurodivergent students, and that the. If we were to take the lessons of the neurodiversity movement seriously, I think that that program would ideally involve some neurodivergent people or at least engage with the writings of neurodivergent people or the experiences of neurodivergent people. And would also consider not using the most pathologizing language available when it's not really needed. You know, there's probably no reason in terms of talking about, you know, speaking to, speaking about classroom teaching practices to refer to "autism spectrum disorder." Even though that is a real diagnosis, of course, that many people have. But why wouldn't just "autistic students" suffice in that situation? They'd also, I recall refer to, like, issues or symptoms that the students had. So I think that's a potentially interesting application. Okay, so those are some key takeaways.

I'm going to bring us into a reflection opportunity here. So I have two questions. Encourage you to reflect on your own, and then you're welcome, invited, but not required to share in the chat, or by raising your hand if you'd like to share any responses. So one is, was there anything new or particularly impactful from the information presented in the first part of this workshop? The second is that I'd like you to first recall that neurodivergent people often do not fit in with the assumed norms of cognition and behaviour in society. So a question is, what are some of the assumed norms in higher education that are likely to impact neurodivergent students? I'll give everybody a couple of minutes to think about this and to share in the chat, if you would like. Lena, go ahead. LENA: Thanks, Sarah. Thinking about my practice. Well, thank you, first of all, for all the information you presented. Thinking about my personal practice and experience both as an instructor and as a student, I think that one of the assumed norms that we could find ourselves up against in higher education, and I'm using "up against" because it's difficult is maybe this pre-assumption that if the student I'm going to say something that sounds not very nice, but I think this is the kind of conversation that makes it worth the while, right. If the student has made it this far, do they really need accommodation? I think that's one of the assumed norms, right? If they made it past elementary school, secondary school, and now they're entering university post-secondary, I don't think they really need that kind of support. And that's very negative. That's something that can really hinder the progress and the efficiency with which an individual, a neurodiverse individual, can actually take everything in. Does that make sense?

SARAH:
Yes. Okay, so one of the assumed norms, basically, is that If somebody has had enough success in their kind of elementary, secondary education, made it to the university level, then that probably means that if they're neurodivergent, any challenges or struggles that they have, they are not that significant. They might not, probably don't impact. Yeah. Yeah.

LENA:
They don't really need that help, right? If they made it this far. And I'm talking about people who have little experience or little knowledge on the topic, which may be quite a lot of people who are teaching. And I'm in the Continuing Studies department. So a lot of the instructors that we have in the continuing studies section of schools, both here in Canada. I'm originally from Mexico. And in Mexico are people that maybe haven't had some kind of teaching or pedagogical education before. So there are people who know how to do something, and they enter the educational context, or the educational field without necessarily knowing how to teach or how people learn. So yeah, I'm maybe not so much in the public sector because you need to have a teaching degree, you need to have you need to be a certified educator. But what about higher education in irregular, non-regular studies?

SARAH:
Right. Okay, so a couple of things to pick up on. So it's interesting. Basically what you identified. One of the norms you could say of higher education is that people don't come in the same with a standard preparation.

LENA: Correct. Yeah. Yeah.

SARAH: And so that may lead people to have certain biases or ways of thinking about things that could lead them to have certain biases about neurodivergent students.

LENA: Yes. In a negative way.

SARAH:
Okay, so I'm going to read. Thank you. I'm going to read a couple ideas from the chat that people came up with. So definitely a bunch of people said they like the history of the term. So I'm really glad to hear that. Some of the norms people identified are that sometimes there's stereotypes of what neurodivergence is supposed to look like, and that there's interactions between trauma and neurodivergence, and that's often overlooked. Yeah, absolutely. So sometimes neurodivergent students are facing significant assumptions and generalizations about how they will behave, which if they don't even meet those expectations about how neurodivergent people behave, that's going to be difficult. Um, Alice said some of the norms are the classroom setups, group work, lighting and the environmental factors, content format, delivery, and quality, right? So there's a lot of environmental and logistical factors in higher education that may be challenging for neurodivergent people to navigate. A lot of

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neurodivergent people of different experiences do have sensory sensitivities. So thanks for highlighting that. Christina said, I feel like higher education has an expectation that everyone can just get it done, and if they do not get it done, that is a failing of the student rather than the system, right? So there's a high kind of expectation of pacing, I would say, in higher education. Julia said, I have instructors say their assignment instructions are intentionally ambiguous, pointing out that that's master's level learning, right? So there might be a lot of assumptions about how people interpret social information or directions, and that if you don't do that in the way the instructor expects, then that's your own personal failing. Other norms might be things about what learner engagement looks like and paying attention. A bunch of people mentioned that. And then Jane also said, Some people think that lazy people use accommodations to take things easy or that we as the educators are the authority of who gets to be in our industry or area, or area of expertise, that could be considered gatekeeping. Yeah, I think that's a really interesting point. One of the most common things that I hear from people who are encountering neurodivergent students for the first time is they're sort of like, Well, they're actually a good student. I'm very satisfied by their work. I'm just not sure if they're prepared to enter the workplace that I think that I'm preparing them for. And one thing that I often say is that neurodivergent students may also be taking, like, a different trajectory in their education and career than you're familiar with. So, for example, I know a lot of neurodivergent students who don't kind of make the jump directly from their education to a career in the way that a lot of their instructors are expecting them to. And so there may be actually kind of a lack of understanding on the instructor's point that's, like, Oh, this person may end up doing a job that their education didn't prepare them for, like, something like retail or child care or something for a while, because they may be working on their independence in other areas, like living alone, gaining independence from their family, social things. And it may be that their exact trajectory just isn't going to look exactly like you expect. And talking to your instructors about that has definitely helped me definitely helped them think a little bit differently about this anxiety that a student won't be able to succeed immediately in the workplace. I think a lot of people also mentioned the idea of group work. There is a huge norm in higher education that you should be able to work productively in a group with little to no guidance. And this can be very difficult, as well. Julia said, Accommodations don't address group work and can even create a mismatch, for example, if different deadlines, if there are different deadlines for different students or things like that. A further norm that Katherine mentions is that you need a diagnosis and supporting material to access accommodations in post-secondary. Yep, definitely true. And I thank you for mentioning that. Okay, so I want to thank you for coming up with so many examples of the norms of higher education. As you know, this workshop is designed to kind of link to the next workshop that's going to be a lot about classroom teaching practices and negotiating different needs in the classroom with respect to neurodiversity.

So I just want to provide one little tease or taste of that, which is I think a lot about how we could apply the neurodiversity paradigm, I.e., that there is not one right way to do something or to think in our teaching. And many of these things are ways that we can move away from views that we find in higher education where there is one right way to thinking about multiple ways

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to do something. And this may be very reminiscent of UDL. I think one thing that the neurodiversity paradigm helps us that is slightly distinct from UDL is to try to identify ways in which there are stated or unstated norms that there is a right way to do something and to kind of disrupt that hierarchy of good and bad ways to do things. So, like, one example would be to consider moving away from verbal participation being expected or required towards multiple ways of participation are encouraged and respected, so, like, written, spoken, synchronous, asynchronous. As some people mentioned, students being expected to just work productively in groups with little to no guidance. Instead, we could think about how collaborative learning is expected to require some scaffolding, development of mutual understanding, and also sharing of communication needs. So there's a lot of different ways that people communicate and that we don't expect people to be able to work in a group magically or naturally, however you want to think about that on their own. And kind of lastly, that students might request accommodations. The kind of one right way that people think about things as students request accommodations if certain course policies don't work for them. But if we think about they're not being one right way, you might say that accommodations are a tool that some students will use, but not all students will use, and that flexibility with different ways of doing things is going to be important. And so another way that I think the neurodiversity paradigm can help us beyond UDL is that it can also take us away but outside the realm, purely, of course design, but to other logistical issues, you know, that affect the classroom. So environmental things like lighting or other sensory issues, dealing with other offices like disability services, different things like that.

For our final activity, I prepared what I thought were three really interesting first-person perspectives from students and staff with disabilities. So I want to invite you to go over to the handout for our last activity and to pick one of them. And I'll just give you a quick intro to the ones that we have available in 1 second. But for the perspective that you choose, the questions that I'm hoping to get your perspective on or to have you think about, or how could the neurodiversity paradigm, meaning there's no one right way to think behaviour communicate, help reshape this person's experience in higher education or more generally. And second, in what ways do the norms of higher education potentially make it more difficult for this person to participate? So, what I'll do is I'll stop sharing for a second. And I'll ask you if you would like to participate in this activity to go over to the handout and go to page 3. Here are the questions. So starting on page 3, we have the first person perspective of Hari Srinivasan, who is a minimally speaking autistic graduate student right now, but was a graduate of UC Berkeley. And he talks about his journey a little bit in that article. I excerpted it, if you would like to just read the excerpt. On page 4 is an excerpt from a blog post by an undergraduate student named Kira Campagna, who is a dyslexic undergraduate student. And she's actually talking a little bit about her high school experience, but also how it crosses over to her higher ed experience. And then the fifth on page 5 is Kerry Pace, who's a staff member, and who has dyspraxia. And she talks a little bit about her experience of what it's like to travel for work. So I encourage you to pick one of those and then consider the questions. How could the neurodiversity paradigm help reshape this person's experience? And what are some of the norms of higher education that make it

more difficult for this person to participate? And if after you read, there's anything you'd like to share in the chat, that would be welcome.

So since we're going to the end of our time together, what I thought I would do is pause to wrap up the formal part of this workshop. And then I'm happy to use the remainder of the time for questions or to discuss some of those first-person perspectives. So this is the first part of a two-part series. The next one is going to be February 27 from 9:30 to 11:00 in the morning, Pacific Time. And the topic will be applying your knowledge of neurodiversity in teaching, learning, and advising. And we're going to discuss practical topics such as differences between legal compliance and inclusion with respect to neurodiversity. Navigating complex teaching and advising situations that involve neurodiversity and how diagnosis interacts with neurodivergent identity, and more. I'd really love to see you there.

Before we get to questions, I just want to circle back around and say, I'm happy to talk one on one if you do want to email me about these things. And here's some other ways to contact me. The QR code goes to my newsletter, if you're interested in subscribing to that. And then you also have my email, a link to my LinkedIn profile, and my website. With that, I would be happy to see, hear any other reactions to the first-person narratives or questions in general. And thank you so much to everybody who attended today. I really enjoyed hearing all of your perspectives. You were all so generous with your contributions. Hey, I love this comment. Knowledge and awareness, but acceptance of abilities coming from younger people. I couldn't agree more. Thank you. Let's see. I'm going to just scroll up to see if there were any questions that came in in the chat that I didn't see yet. Oh, yeah, Julia. Julia is asking about how can we work towards greater inclusion for team work? So this is something that I'm hoping to address more specifically in the next workshop. But my kind of headline is, I think that a lot of this work will be about developing a greater understanding of neurodiversity among all students. I think that it's going to be hard to just kind of implement a checklist mentality saying, Oh, like, well, here's how you can create an inclusive group experience. I think it's also going to be useful for people to consider just being more accepting and embracing of the fact that there will be neurodiversity within their group, and that it's going to be a negotiation, basically. You know, It's not typically that easy to navigate neurodiverse group environments. But if we start from that point, that there could be friction, it's going to require negotiation. I think that you're actually starting off on a much better foot than the assumption that well, anyone who's kind of a good student and motivated will work together in their group easily. Like, maybe that's not a reasonable assumption to start from. Yes. Thank you, interpreters and thank you to the organizers as well. Much appreciation.