

# Neurodiversity Foundations for Higher Education: History, theory, and practice

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[Link to session slides](#)

## Session goals

- Develop foundational literacy of the vocabulary and history of neurodiversity (including the terms neurodiversity, neurotypical, neurodivergent, and the relationship between the neurodiversity movement and the autistic rights movement)
- Become familiar with experiences that fall under the umbrella of neurodiversity (Autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, dyslexia, other) and how neurodivergence is not one single experience
- Recognize general barriers that neurodivergent people face (with a focus on learning and collaborative settings) and how to work towards greater access

## Session outline and notes

Welcome and introduction (Slides 1-6): 5 minutes

- Welcome notes
- Session goals
- About the facilitator
- Questions to learn more about participants

Origins of this session (Slides 7-11): 10 minutes

- Common ways neurodiversity is used in mass media and education
- Reflection opportunity
  - How have you encountered the term neurodiversity (and neurotypical, neurodivergent) in your life as an educator? Or more generally?

- Who have you heard use the term?
- What associations do you have with the term?
- Analysis of educational artifact ([lecture invitation](#))

Neurodiversity: Defining the concept, paradigm, and movement (Slides 11-13):  
10 minutes

- Autistic Self-Advocacy
- Brief description of history and key moments of the Autistic movement
- Definition of Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity politics (Slides 14-17): 5 minutes

- Why is Neurodiversity a political term?
- What is the Neurodiversity paradigm and movement?

Neurodivergent and Neurotypical (Slides 18- 23): 10 minutes

- Neurotypical and Neurodivergent basic definitions
- Origins of Neurotypical
- Institute for the Study of the the Neurotypical highlights
- Origins of the term Neurodivergent

Takeaways and Neurodiversity Umbrella (Slides 24- 25): 5 minutes

Double empathy and Reflections (Slides 26-35): 15 minutes

Reflection Pause

Was there anything new or particularly impactful from the information presented in the first part of the workshop?

Recall that neurodivergent people often do not fit in with the assumed norms of cognition and behavior in society - what are some of the assumed norms in higher education that are likely to impact neurodivergent students?

First person perspectives

Wrap up and feedback/questions

## First-person perspectives

### Hari Srinivasan

Read this [article](#) based on an interview with Hari Srinivasan, a minimally-speaking autistic graduate student at Vanderbilt University and a graduate of UC Berkeley. In the interview, Hari reflects on his journey from segregated special education to one of the largest universities in the country, and how he was responsible for educating his teachers and peers about his disability.

#### Excerpt

“I had no idea what to expect when I came to Cal. I was going to be in this ocean of 40,000 students and I hoped I would not drown in there. During my orientation and early days of trying to join student organizations, I noticed there were lots of students from the South Bay who seemed to know each other, including students from my native Cupertino. But disability often means you grow up on parallel planets where there is very little interaction or inclusion, even if you exist in the same space or street. It is unfortunate that there is greater stigma against disability in immigrant communities (maybe other parents on my street thought my autism was catching!). The net effect was that I did not have the informal peer-support networks that many people take for granted.

I did get to know other students over time and formed many friendships. I often had to educate them on how to include me. But Cal students were open to it and reached out, which makes all the difference. I found that I was being greeted by name when I walked around campus. To actually be known as Hari to many nondisabled folks was a totally new and absolutely heartwarming experience.

At Cal, I studied psychology. I was able to engage in the most amazing conversations with every professor I had the opportunity to interact with. Disabled folks, especially significantly disabled ones like me, are not often afforded respect by educators.”

## Kira Campagna

Read this [blog post](#) by Kira Campagna, a dyslexic undergraduate student at Elon University in North Carolina. In the post, Kira describes the experience of her disability being minimized by school staff because of her conventional academic success.

### Excerpt

“I could finally attend my (planning) meeting in my sophomore year of high school. This seemed so exciting to me then, as I could finally be a part of the decisions being made for my education. Unfortunately, the high school staff had a different plan. In the meeting, they told me that my grades were above average for an individual with dyslexia and that the accommodations I had been receiving were no longer needed. At the time, I froze and didn’t know how to respond. So I didn’t. I felt invisible as if nobody had heard or seen me. Having no voice is painful, and it’s scary to feel lost in your educational journey.

That was the last time I let my voice be silenced. Once I graduated high school and began my journey at Elon, I discovered several others shared similar experiences. Unfortunately, several students feel unheard or silenced due to academic struggles. I have decided to become an educator, hoping to change these experiences. I want to end my post with the sentence I began with, hoping you, the reader, can resonate and carry on the message.”

## Kerry Pace

Kerry Pace is a staff member in higher education in Ireland, and wrote an [extended reflection](#) on her experiences having dyspraxia as both a student and staff member.

### Excerpt

“I find it difficult to explain dyspraxia because of its all-encompassing nature, and the way it affects so many aspects of life – often in an intrusive, domineering way.

An example of this can be found in a blog called [Shoes or no Shoes](#) documenting my experience of preparing to present at a conference – foremost in my mind was not presenting to an international audience or even the content of my presentation but rather how ‘simple’ considerations like footwear and travel dominated my thoughts before I set out to the conference. Travelling to it used up a great deal of mental energy, simply climbing the stairs in an unfamiliar train station, maintaining an internal monologue and (literally) a step-by-step risk assessment – how I positioned my foot on each step, making sure I kept hold of the handrail and my bag without losing balance, trying not to rush and bump into someone, or move too slowly and hold people up. In essence I have used this example to explain the challenges executive functioning - the combination of mental and physical processes that enable people to perform a task - presents to many people who have dyspraxia.”

## Resource Guide

### Books

Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities by Nick Walker

[Link to WorldCat entry](#)

The Politics of Neurodiversity: Why Public Policy Matters by Dana Lee Baker

[Link to online version](#)

Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement: Stories from the Frontline edited by Steven K. Kapp

[Link to open access version](#)

(Chapter within) Autistics.Org and Finding Our Voices as an Activist Movement by Laura A. Tisoncik

(Chapter within) From Exclusion to Acceptance: Independent Living on the Autistic Spectrum by Martijn Dekker

Mad at School: Rhetorics of mental disability and academic life by Margaret Price

[Link to WorldCat entry](#)

Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body by Lennard Davis

[Link to WorldCat entry](#)

Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna by Edith Sheffer

[Link to WorldCat entry](#)

Neurotribes: The legacy of autism and the future of neurodiversity by Steve Silberman

[Link to WorldCat entry](#)

### Posts

[The asterisk to "active learning"](#) by Sarah Silverman

[In defense of a script](#) by Sarah Silverman

[A discussion protocol for teaching communities of practice](#) by Sarah Silverman

[Neurodiversity: Some basic terms and definitions](#) by Nick Walker

[Throw away the master's tools: Liberating ourselves from the pathology paradigm](#) by Nick Walker

## Articles

[Negotiating the Neurodiversity concept](#) by Robert Chapman

[Neurodiversity: Bridging the gap between the disabled people's movement and the mental health system survivors movement?](#) By Steve Graby

[The "Ransom Notes" Affair: When the Neurodiversity Movement Came of Age](#) by Joseph F. Kras

[Don't Mourn for Us](#) by Jim Sinclair

[Compassionate Pedagogy for Neurodiversity in Higher Education: A conceptual analysis](#) by Lorna Hamilton and Stephanie Petty

[More than Accessibility: A call for disability literacy](#) by Ada Hubrig

[The Neurodiversity Concept was Developed Collectively](#) by Monique Botha et al.

[On the ontological status of autism: the "double empathy problem"](#) by Damian Milton

## Other

[Archived version](#) of the "Institute for the Study of the Neurotypical" by created by Laura A. Tisoncik

[Radical Neurodivergence Speaking](#) blog by Kassiane Asasumasu

["The history of the Neurodiversity concept"](#) Video talk by Martijn Dekker

[UDL Guidelines](#) from CAST

[UDL history and background](#)

[Exceptional Individuals](#) guide to Neurodiversity

[Think UDL Podcast](#)

[Care Work Through Course Design: Shifting the Labor of Resilience](#) by sarah currie and Ada Hubrig (an example of disability justice pedagogy written from perspectives of disabled and neurodivergent instructors)