

# Supporting Students with Disabilities Through Inclusive Practices

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# Discussion Topics

- Office of Educational Accessibility
- Counseling Center
- Warning signs - students in crisis
- Challenges students encounter
- Disability and Inclusion
- UDL / inclusive practices
- Neurodiversity
- Autism characteristics and strategies to support students

# Educational Accessibility

# Office of Educational Accessibility

Facilitates accommodation plans in accordance with laws

- Helps determine what is reasonable and appropriate by course standards/design

Promotes self-advocacy among students

- Communicates student responsibilities in accommodation process

Keeps current around case law and changes in field

Provides one on one academic support to students

Collaborates across departments to promote inclusive practices

# Students with disabilities

300 cases with registrations on-going, increasing 15% year to year

- Psychological, emotional
- Learning disabilities (written expression; reading; processing)
- ADHD
- Physical, medical, chronic health conditions
- Autism spectrum disorder

Number of registration is not the whole picture of needs at UArts  
Our general population of diverse learners

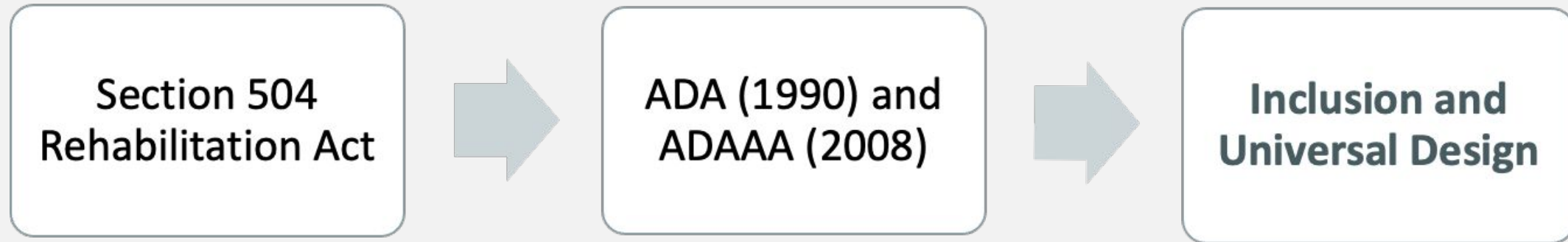
# High school versus college

<b>STAGE</b>	<b>Responsibility in High School</b>	<b>Responsibility in College</b>
Identifying Need	School	Student
Assessing Need	School	Student
Designing Accommodations	School/Parent	Student/Institution
Advocacy	School/Parent	Student
Decision Making	Placement Team	Student
Transition Planning	Placement Team	Student

# Diverse student learners w/ needs

- Some students are registered and choose not to have Course Access Memo distributed
- Some students don't have adequate documentation, but have known disability
- Some students don't have protectable disability, but would benefit from accommodations
- Circumstances of our environment right now
  - What our offices are observing

# Inclusion and the Social Model of Disability



Medical Model	Social Model
The disability is within the person	The environment / attitudes create(s) the disability
Diagnosis and labelling	Barriers are identified and creative solutions applied
Society stuck and unchanged	Society evolves with an effort to do better



# Shifting Perspective

From a medical model to a social model of disability which looks to the environment as the problem, instead of the individual

To inaccessibility as a problem caused by inaccessible design

Toward recognizing variability and diversity in learning and applying universal design principles



# DSM-5 versus Strength-based Criteria

<b>DSM-5 (medical model)</b>	<b>Strengths-based</b>
Abnormal social approach	Tendency to talk passionately about topics and limited small talk
Deficits in nonverbal communication	Differences in non-verbal communication
Deficits in developing, maintaining and understanding relationships	Due to differences in communication, tend to be shunned or excluded
Insistence on adherence to routines	Security and comfort in routines
Highly restricted and fixated interests that are abnormal	Due to hyperconnected brains, neurodivergent people often feel passionately about what they love.

# UDL Benefits Everyone

- Clear, explicit instructions and objectives
- Multiple modes of presenting information
  - Audio recordings, transcripts, subtitles
- Multiple ways of assessing student learning
- Repetition and summarization
- Checks for understanding and feedback early and often
- Verbal and written instructions
- Preview and forecasting of the lecture topics
- Options in meeting learning outcomes
- Review syllabus often and provide syllabus early



# UDL in a nutshell

- 1) Consider where you deliver content in a single stream approach
- 2) Where are your pinch/pain points?  
(where do you get the same question over and over)
- 3) Apply [plus-one thinking](#)

**“Reach Everyone; Teach Everyone” (2021)**

**Thomas Tobin and Kirsten Behling**



# Support For Faculty

## Office of Educational Accessibility

[Guidelines for Faculty](#) – **New**  
[OEA Faculty Resources page](#)

## Center for Teaching and Learning Design

- [“How to” Guides](#) for Accessible Materials
- [Universal Digital Practices](#)
- [Resource Center](#) (log-in credentials)



- [Disability Etiquette Guide](#) United Spinal Association
- [How to speak respectfully about Autism](#)
- National Deaf Center – [Resources, videos, guides](#)
- Article: [We Have All Been Disabled](#)
- Lillian Nave's [Think UDL and Learner Variability](#) podcast
- University of Washington's [Do-It Center](#)
- Elise Roy – [When We Design for Disability, We All Benefit](#)  
(TedX)

# Counseling Center

# Counseling Center

- The Counseling Center is free to all enrolled students.
- The Counseling Center will only break confidentiality in 4 circumstances: serious risk of major harm to a student, risk of harm to others, harm/neglect of a child, or a court order.
- What we do: brief walk-in screenings (triage), short-term individual counseling, group counseling, crisis intervention, referrals to outside providers, psychiatry and med management.
- What we see: STRESS! School/academic problems, anxiety, depression, homesickness, relationship issues, family problems.
- The Counseling Center is seeing increasing numbers of neurodivergent students (most frequently ASD). These students often struggle with social isolation, feeling misunderstood and/or rejected, stress, and overwhelm.



# Masking and Autistic Burnout

- Masking/Camouflaging: A coping strategy people with autism use to navigate a world that is largely geared toward neurotypical people. Masking can involve trying to behave as a neurotypical person might—sometimes using scripted language, forcing one’s self to make eye contact even if it is uncomfortable, avoiding stimming behaviors, etc.
- Masking can help autistic folks “get by” in society—at school, work, etc.--but takes a lot of effort. It is difficult to sustain for long periods of time and can take a strong toll on a person’s physical, mental, and emotional health.
- Autistic burnout: the intense physical, mental, or emotional exhaustion, often accompanied by a loss of skills, that some autistic adults experience.
- Autistic burnout is known to be especially prevalent in autistic people who go to school/work with neurotypical people and have strong language and cognitive abilities.

## **Some common warnings signs a student is in crisis:**

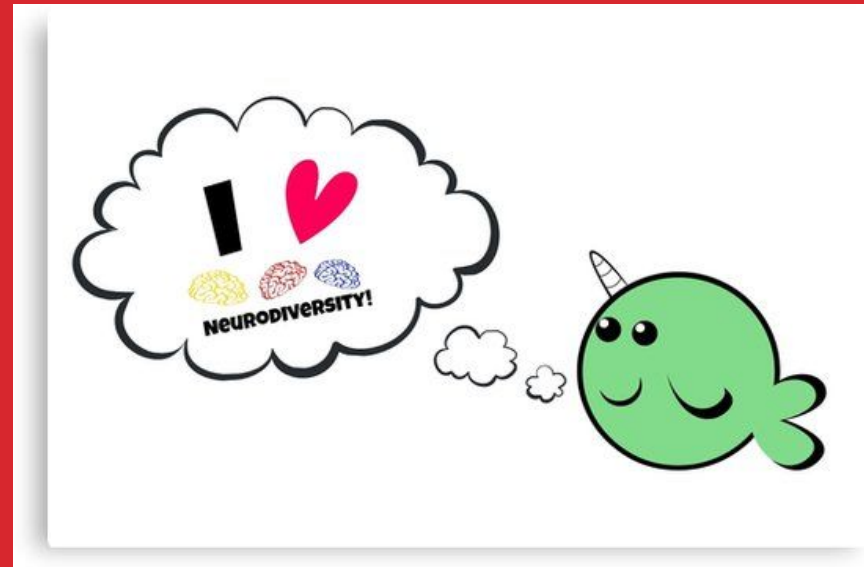
- Student is habitually absent or misses classes or appointments due to increasing life stressors
- Student shares that he/she/they are experiencing life turmoil
- Student presents as severely depressed
- Student is having panic attacks
- Student is excessively disruptive or acting out in class/on the hall
- Student is habitually falling asleep in class and/or appears disoriented
- Student is frequently under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Student displays significant visual signs of self-harm
- Student expresses grief and loss of family or friend
- Student displays a shift in hygienic practices
- Student exhibits significant/rapid weight loss/gain

# Challenges students with disabilities encounter

- Hidden Disabilities
- Typical academic adjustment is magnified
- Family involvement or lack of involvement
- Multiple disabilities
- Self-advocating and disclosing (when, how)
- Questioning need for accommodations
- Unpredictability of symptoms
- Caught between needing help and desire for independence



# Supporting our Neurodivergent Students



# Autism characteristics and/or stereotypes

- Doesn't readily understand nonverbal/social cues
- Avoids eye contact
- Has a flat affect
- Exhibits poor reciprocal conversational skills
- Has unusual prosody
- Has sensory sensitivity
- Exhibits an unusual, awkward gait
- Is a loner
- Has concrete thinking
- Is verbose on focused issues
- Has central coherence difficulties

## Strengths:

- Resiliency
- Focus
- Creativity
- Empathy
- Sensory Awareness
- Honesty and Authenticity

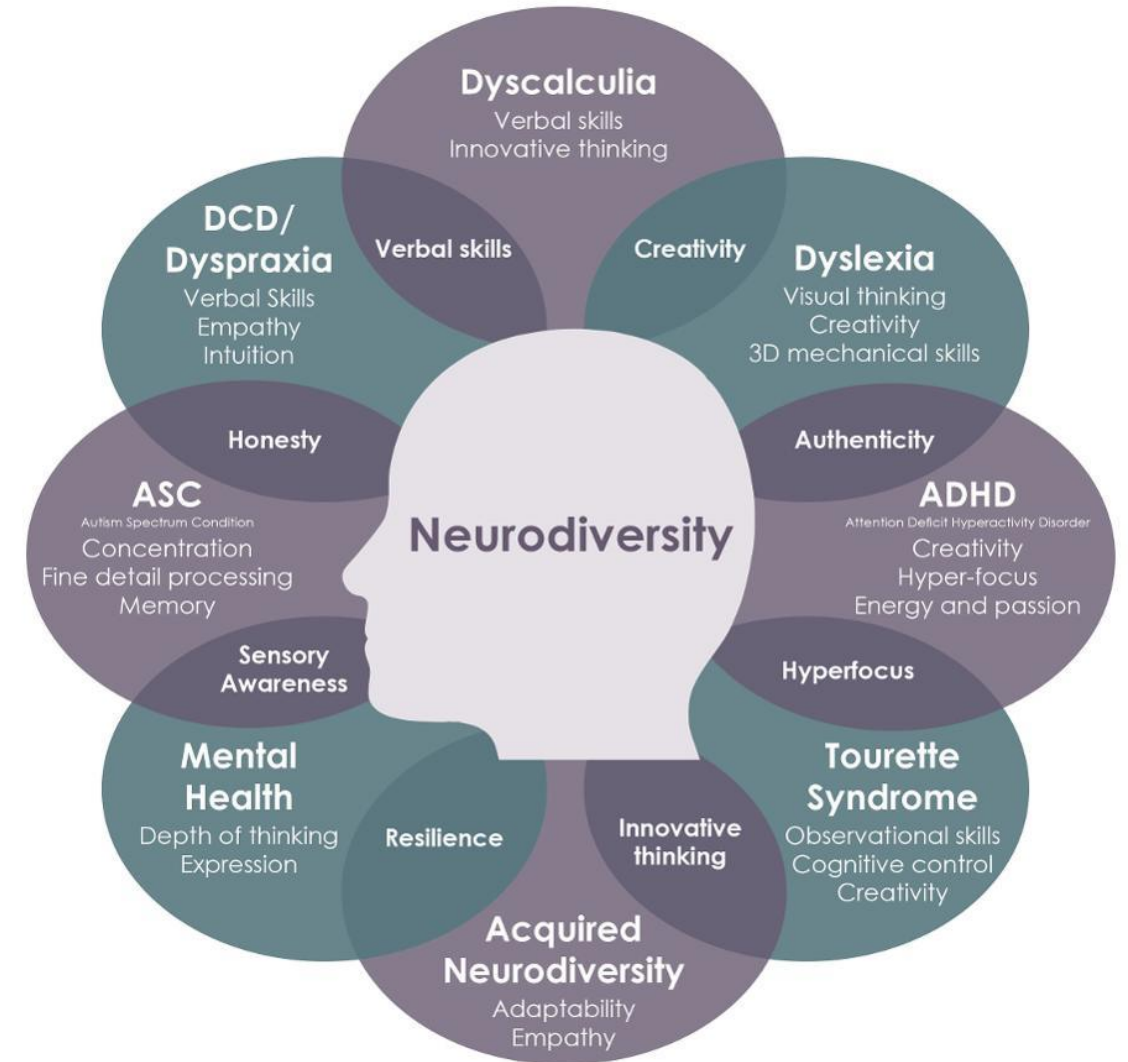
**Neurodiverse folks, just like neurotypical folks, are all different.**

# Your brain is amazing

Neurodiversity is a celebration of the unique neurological differences that are an important part of human variation and necessary for resilience within our population.

It focuses on strengths rather than problems that need to be fixed.

[https://youtu.be/7\\_LIC-9rEi0](https://youtu.be/7_LIC-9rEi0)

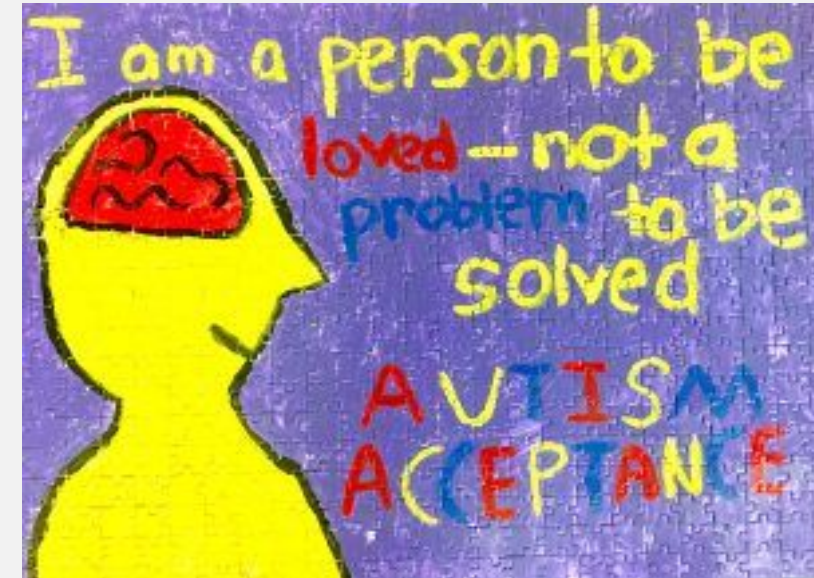


# Students with Autism

- ❖ May have problems with abstract and conceptual thinking. - Avoid vague questions and be as concrete as possible
- ❖ May have trouble with organizational skills, regardless of their intelligence. Lecturing on organization does not help, but praise does! Stick to clear and explicit communications and guidelines.
- ❖ May use and interpret speech literally. Avoid using idioms, nicknames, words/phrases with double meanings, and sarcasm when possible.

# Supporting Students on the Spectrum

- An increase in unusual behaviors probably indicates an increase in stress.
- Do not take behavior personally.
- Facial expressions and other social cues may not work. People with ASD often have trouble interpreting body language.
- Apply UDL thinking and inclusive strategies for learning





# Supporting Students on the Spectrum

- If the student doesn't seem to be learning a task, break it down into smaller steps, or present the task in several ways (eg., visually, verbally, physically).
- Avoid verbal overload. Be clear. Use shorter sentences. The student may have difficulty understanding your main point and identifying important information.
- If possible, prepare the student for environmental and/or changes in routine.

# General tips and strategies

- Focus on the behavior
  - Try to understand the “why” or rationale behind the behavior
- Be genuine and forthright in your engagement
- Recognize defense modes
  - “Fight or flight” response changes the student’s physical status and sometimes shuts down the ability of sound reasoning

# General tips ...

- Give very clear directions; ask the student to write them down or repeat back information
- Follow up in writing
- Give ample time for processing a response
- Consider the design of the environment (space, lighting, options)

# Language matters

- Person-first: the current best practice is to acknowledge the person before their disability, but always go with what the person actually prefers.

<b>Do's</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
High Support / Low Support	Low functioning / High functioning
Low vision, vision loss, blind / deaf	Vision- <i>impaired</i> / hearing impaired
Disability / Person with a disability	Special / Difference / Disabled
Consider "another option is..."	Instead of "If you can't do...."
Consider "Keep eyes open closed or whatever is comfortable for you"	Instead of "close your eyes for the meditation"
"Experience" or "Share"	Instead of watch, see, discuss, talk
Wheelchair user, person with a wheelchair	Wheelchair-bound, crippled, handicapped

# Awareness versus Acceptance

## Autism Awareness versus Autism Acceptance

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epidemic  
struggling symptoms  
lost  
syndrome behaviour  
deficit  
disorder tragedy  
tantrums

**Words typically used when people are aware of Autism**

suffering challenging  
therapy  
burden cure  
hopeless  
treatment puzzle  
compliance

diversity value  
support  
community belong  
strengths identity  
achieve accommodations

**Words typically used when Autistic people are accepted**

competence self care  
advocacy  
love  
celebrate unique  
understand  
worth goals  
respect

**Which words do you use when speaking about Autistic people?**

# Takeaways

- Avoid language that assumes an individual with a disability is having a negative experience (victim, challenged, suffers, problem)
- Avoid language that sensationalizes an individual with a disability (superhuman, brave, inspirational, courageous)
- Shift perspective to focus on the disabling environment (barriers and attitudes), not the person
- Provide options and multiple approaches and multiple opportunities to reach a wide net of diverse student learners' needs

# Learn More

## Books:

- Be Different, John Elder Robison
- Look Me In the Eye, John Elder Robison
- NeuroTribes, Steve Silberman
- Loud Hands: Autistic People Speaking
  
- Autism Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)
- Disability Etiquette Guide
- TEDx on Education + Neurodiversity: Playing to Our Strengths
- Spectrum News

# Additional References

- Harpur, Lawlor, Fitzgerald. Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome (2002)
- Bedrossina, Pennamon. College Students with Asperger Syndrome: Practical Strategies for Academic and Social Success (2007)
- Organization for Autism Research
- NeurodiversityLibrary.org
- Sutton, Michelle. [www.michellesuttonwrites.blogspot.com](http://www.michellesuttonwrites.blogspot.com)



# Comments and Questions?

