Supporting Neurodiverse Students

Learning & Teaching Commons
Fall 2023 Resource Packet

Compiled by Julie Levin Russo

sourced primarily from Canvas sites: Teaching at Evergreen & Educating Educators on the Neurodiverse-Friendly College

Defining Neurodiversity

All of us are differently-abled as a result of our inherent characteristics and the experiences we have, both of which shape us into who we are. Neurodiversity, originally coined in the 1990s by Judy Singer -- a sociologist diagnosed with autism, is the idea that our neurological differences, such as ADHD or autism, are the result of natural variations in the human genome and that individuals who have these features have certain strengths. In her seminal work on autism and neurodiversity, Singer (Corker, 1999) argues:

"For me, the key significance of the Autism Spectrum lies in its call for and anticipation of a politics of neurological diversity, or 'neurodiversity.' The neurologically different represent a new addition to the familiar political categories of class/gender/race and will augment the insights of the social model of disability. The rise of neurodiversity takes postmodern fragmentation one step further. Just as the postmodern era sees every once too solid belief melt into air, even our most taken-for-granted assumptions: that we all more or less see, feel, touch, hear, smell, and sort information, in more or less the same way, (unless visibly disabled) – are being dissolved."

At its core, neurodiversity stresses that autism and ADHD, for example, embody difference, not deficits, and invokes an emerging disability and civil rights movement. Furthermore, these differences are strengths, not weaknesses. While neurodiversity encompasses all neurological differences, it is most commonly linked to autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, and other learning disabilities (Baumer & Frueh, 2021).

Neurodiversity and Learning

Not all neurological differences are classified as learning disabilities. However, learning can be affected by neurological differences, especially if the structures and environments are not designed with inclusivity at the core. As with all individuals, each neurodivergent individual brings a unique set of strengths to a learning community, and may also need specific supports. The below lists explore potential strengths and barriers to learning that a neurodivergent individual might face. However, this list is by no means exhaustive.

Potential strengths include…	Potential barriers in learning include…
- Resilience - Excellent long-term and rote memory - Thinking and learning in a visual way - Ability to think logically - Precision and detail-oriented. - Exceptional honesty and reliability. - Being dependable in regards to schedules and routines.	- Executive functioning challenges (planning, reasoning, attentional control, inhibiting automatic responses and working memory) - May misread social cues or facial expressions - Challenges with social interactions/ group work

• Able to concentrate for long periods of time.	• Stress-relieving activities may make others uncomfortable
• Creative problem-solving.	• Sensory perceptions can interfere with learning
• Extensive knowledge resulting from deep study in favorite topics	• Difficulties with changes in routine or transitions
• Independent thinking	• Difficulty with self-advocacy

Executive Functioning

It's important to take a closer look at executive functioning because many neurodivergent individuals often struggle with executive functioning skills, which are crucial to postsecondary success (Hill, 2004; Stroop, 1935; Pennington, 1996; Xie et al, 2020; Unterrainer et at, 2004; Demetriou 2018).

What is executive functioning?

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, executive function is a set of skills that "underlie the capacity to plan ahead and meet goals, display self-control, follow multiple-step directions even when interrupted, and stay focused despite distractions, among others."

The below matrix defines executive function areas, related academic activities and how executive functioning challenges may present themselves:

Executive functions	Postsecondary Activities	What this might look like…
Planning	Large projects, papers, group work, voicing needs, time management	Late to class, late assignments, "rushed" assignments
Reasoning	Activities that require critical thinking	Trouble connecting previously discussed ideas to current ideas
Attentional Control	Sitting in class, reading long text documents/books	Staring off into space, unfinished assignments
Inhibiting automatic responses	Staying on task, keeping deadlines, acknowledging classroom norms	Interrupting, preoccupation with technology
Working memory	Note-taking, exams, class participation	Lack of in-class participation, difficulty holding onto what's read/seen/heard

access the complete lesson on Working with Neurodivergent Students (with citations) on the [Teaching at Evergreen Canvas site](#)

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers guidance for ways you can structure (or restructure) the learning environment to support a diverse group of learners rather than requiring the learners to change to adapt to a rigid learning environment. The Universal Design for Learning Guidelines are three useful categories that will help you think through the ways in which you can develop flexible choices and an effective learning environment.

The UDL Guidelines are designed around three primary brain networks:

1. **Affective**: The "Why" of Learning (interest, effort and persistence, and self regulation)
2. **Recognition**: The "What" of Learning (perception, language and symbols, and comprehension)
3. **Strategic**: The "How" of Learning (physical action, expression and communication, and executive function)

1: Multiple Means of Engagement (Affective Networks)

When encountering new learning, interest in a subject or particular skill will vary among students. Some students will arrive in class activated and excited to study a particular topic; others will need to build interest. Engagement can fade over time, even for those who entered the learning with a keen interest, which necessitates tools to support persistence. Ultimately, students should develop a toolbox of strategies they can use to build and sustain their own engagement. Students can be supported in these efforts by encountering opportunities for choice and autonomy in learning, drawing connections to what is relevant for them in their lives and desired futures, and developing skills in self-reflection and self-motivation.

Questions: Are students able to articulate how course content is relevant to their lives or future goals? Do students understand the skills and knowledge they will gain from course activities?

2: Multiple Means of Representation (Recognition Networks)

Representation refers to the forms through which students acquire the information and knowledge that leads to comprehension—from reading, watching, or listening. Learners differ in their ability to acquire and comprehend the information that we present to them. Choosing and preparing course materials in multiple modalities can reduce barriers experienced by students with sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, language and cultural differences, or other diverse attributes that impact learning.

For example, many courses rely on a combination of reading and in-class discussions or presentations to relay information. This approach to learning can present barriers for some students if they can't reliably read the materials provided or understand what is spoken in the classroom. We can take relatively simple steps toward improving equitable access to

information by providing written materials in accessible electronic formats and by providing access to an outline or the slide presentation prior to a lesson. This simple modification allows a student with low visual acuity or dyslexia to use a document reader to listen to the written materials and review the slides. Students who have difficulty hearing or comprehending spoken information can follow along using the outline or slides presentation. You could take one step further toward equity by making recordings of your in-class presentations available.

Making information accessible is important, but it isn't sufficient. The goal is for students to reach comprehension so they can apply new learning and transfer that learning into new contexts. This UDL principle provides guidance in supporting diverse learners' comprehension by encouraging the use of graphic organizers or note-taking techniques that help students organize and make sense of information. For example, consistently guiding students to map their learning using a concept map provides a visual cue of their learning progress over time.

Questions: Is the material accessible? Do documents support screen readers and do all videos have closed captions and transcripts? Have you provided students with what they need to decode complex language or symbols? Is content presented in multiple formats such as text, diagrams, and videos?

3: Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression (Strategic Networks)

Learner diversity includes how students navigate their learning environment and express what they know. Providing students flexibility allows students the opportunity to approach learning tasks and demonstrate what they know in different ways and sometimes at different rates.

It can be challenging to imagine how to implement this type of flexibility. Luckily, there are some simple approaches. For example, providing opportunities for students to compare responses when given a challenging problem provides an opportunity for students to explain their own thinking and hear an explanation from someone new.

Ask yourself if the projects or activities for your course could take a variety of forms. Could students equivalently demonstrate their own learning through writing or an oral presentation? What about a video or poster presentation?

Questions: Have you provided flexibility in how students will demonstrate learning? Are there multiple ways for students to interact with each other, for example, in-class discussions and online forums? Have you demonstrated ways to solve problems using a variety of strategies?

download the [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines Graphic Organizer](#)

access the complete UDL lesson (with citations) on the [Teaching at Evergreen Canvas site](#)

Common Autistic Communication Needs

SOURCE: Price, D. (2022). *Unmasking autism: Discovering the new faces of neurodiversity*. Harmony Books. [Available in the Evergreen library as an e-book](.).

Overall Need	Some Accommodations […]
Clear Expectations	- Specific plans with details about time, place, and what is likely to happen - A clear "yes" or "no"; no euphemisms like "I'll think about it" - Meeting agendas that are handed out in advance, and then adhered to - Reading materials, questions, and discussion topics being provided in advance of a panel, interview, or other high-stress public event - Step-by·step, detailed instructions on how to complete a task - Specific, measurable outcomes or goals
Explicit Messaging	- Not assuming people can use facial expression, tone of voice, posture, breathing, or tears as indicators of emotion - Giving direct explanations of feelings: "I am disappointed right now because…" - Recognition and respect of boundaries: "It doesn't sound like Sherry wants to talk about that right now." - Not punishing or judging people for failing to read between the lines - Using clarifying questions:·"What would you like me to do about this?"
Reduced Sensory/ Social Load	- Having no expectation of eye contact during intense conversations - Giving space to talk about challenging topics while driving, taking a walk, or doing something with one's hands - Allowing people to express emotions and opinions via text, email, or handwritten note - Giving people time alone to reflect on their feelings and beliefs - Learning to recognize fawning, and signs of an upcoming meltdown - Providing frequent breaks from socializing, or quiet spaces people can retreat to

Neurodiversity Is Diversity (article)

I teach at Landmark College, a private liberal arts institution located in Putney, Vermont, which is designed exclusively for students who learn differently, including those with learning disabilities (such as dyslexia), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and autism. My neurodivergent students often share stories of stigma that made them feel like they did not belong in school. They muddled through adversity while honing skills to get by, especially in environments not geared toward their strengths. At Landmark College, students learn the academic curriculum while exploring their experiences with ADHD, learning disabilities, or autism. Many reach goals they did not think possible. The college invites graduating students to speak publicly at commencement, and they tell stories about making it against the odds. A common through line of these speeches is "I did not believe in myself, but look at me now!"

This is not the outcome for all students with learning differences. For many of these students, earning college credit may take enormous effort or may not happen at all. Many of us—and our children, parents, friends, and coworkers—live with a disability that affects a major life activity, such as school, work, or social relationships. Discrimination against people with disabilities has been unlawful since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990 (it was amended in 2008 to clarify and broaden the definition of disability). Yet disparities in employment and education still exist, suggesting that more can be done to achieve the ideal of inclusion. People with disabilities are much less likely than those without disabilities to be employed (17.9 percent versus 61.8 percent) or to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher (20.6 percent versus 40 percent), according to 2020 data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Many students with disabilities have conditions that affect learning, and the neurodiversity paradigm can be helpful for working with this diverse group. Coined by sociologist Judy Singer in 1999, neurodiversity refers to the idea that all brains function differently and that this diversity is natural and beneficial for our species. Neurodiversity includes neurotypicality and neurodivergence, the latter of which refers to developmental conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia. In this paradigm, neurodiversity is a stable part of human diversity that should be accepted and valued, not a set of pathologies to be cured. The umbrella term is popular among students for its positive perspective on difference.

"Many students face bias," says Timothy Beck, an assistant professor of psychology and the codirector of the Landmark College Center for Neurodiversity, which works for social justice by amplifying neurodivergent voices and creating community both in and outside the

college. "They have been stereotyped by other people and institutions, and it's harmed them. The neurodiversity paradigm gives them a way to reframe their own learning, connect with resources, and feel confident."

"We need to normalize and humanize the concept of being neurodivergent," student advocate Holly Kasten says. "Otherwise, too many of us are on the outside."

The neurodiversity approach is not without critics. Those who have seen or experienced disability know that difficulties are real. They may fear that normalizing neurodivergence will cost them needed support, or they may view neurodiversity principles as insensitive to the difficulties they face. Critics of neurodiversity may think that looking at disability as diversity means denying challenges that make life hard.

While it is understandable to worry about the consequences of deemphasizing a medical model approach, the concern is based on a false dichotomy between diversity and disability. Neurodiversity is both. People think and act differently. Strengths associated with neurodivergence are beneficial, and cognitive diversity can make groups perform better, according to research such as a 2019 study by Ishani Aggarwal and colleagues, published in Frontiers in Psychology. On the other hand, neurodivergence can cause problems. Even the most accepting environment cannot erase disability, and legal protection remains important.

In 2019–20, 14 percent of public school students ages three to twenty-one received special education services, with neurodevelopmental conditions being the largest category of qualifying disabilities, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. About 9 percent of US children have been diagnosed with ADHD, 8 to 10 percent with a learning disability, and 2 percent with autism, according to federal statistics. All of these groups have higher rates of anxiety and depression than the general population. Students at Landmark College have these and other diagnoses, including nonverbal learning disability, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and more. Labels change, and their validity may be contested, but this collection of terms shows mental diversity. Within that diversity, students report similar challenges.

Kasten, a psychology major at Landmark College, and Nicole Yee, a design major at the Rhode Island School of Design who spent a year at Landmark College as a visiting student, spoke with me about their work as interns at the college's Center for Neurodiversity. Collaborating with other students, Kasten and Yee created programming on campus, led a student group called the Neurodiverse Brains Club, and presented on two panels at national conferences, telling their personal stories in a public setting to raise awareness. Currently, they are working on a research project with a team of students, who would like to see the concept of neurodiversity used in education because it has helped them. "Students should not have to feel ashamed," Yee says. "Disability is diversity."

Kasten and Yee outline the following problems that neurodiverse students face in college:

→ **Not feeling accepted by faculty and staff.** Yee explains that lack of acceptance is a significant barrier in the education of students like her. "Not being accepted creates isolation, feeling left out," she says. This can negatively affect academic performance. By demonstrating that they care and are willing to adapt their teaching, faculty can do a lot to remove barriers to learning.

→ **Having too much to manage.** Exercising executive function can be difficult for many college students, but it can be an even bigger hurdle for students who have a diagnosed learning difference. Executive function refers to the neurocognitive ability to manage one's thinking and effort to meet goals, and ADHD and autism often affect it. "What do I see on campus?" Kasten asks. "Students having trouble with meeting standardized deadlines, getting work in on time, initiating tasks, sustaining momentum, and keeping perfectionism at bay."

→ **Encountering bullying and engaging in masking.** Whether students have experienced overt bullying or subtler exclusion, they may adapt by expending extra energy to fit in. Hiding neurodivergence, called masking, might increase social acceptance, but it has costs, including higher levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout, according to Kasten. Examples of masking are copying social behaviors even when it feels unnatural, forcing oneself to make eye contact, or leaving the classroom to avoid reading out loud. Everyone filters their instincts in a social setting, but the difference for neurodivergent people is the degree to which they do so.

→ **Facing mental burnout.** Students report that their mental health suffers in a context of not feeling accepted, not keeping up with demands, and experiencing stigma. "Anxiety can be the result of these struggles, which affect self-worth and are often hidden," Kasten says.

"Students talk about dealing with the mental health consequences of stigma associated with neurodivergence," Beck says. "Anxiety, stress, and masking come up frequently in student stories."

Ultimately, these and other challenges make getting ahead harder. "Outcomes have improved in recent decades," says Adam Lalor, codirector of the Center for Neurodiversity and director of the Landmark College Institute for Research and Training, which conducts applied research and promotes effective educational practices. "More students with disabilities pursue postsecondary education, and that's good news for equality." Still, he cites continuing inequities, noting that neurodivergent students, compared with their neurotypical peers, complete fewer four-year degrees, earn lower salaries, and take longer to complete their education.

Many educators receive minimal training about disability, according to Lalor, and busy educators may find it hard to access disability training on the job. So what are some easy ways to make education better for neurodivergent students? Educators can play a positive

role in the experience of neurodiverse students just by being supportive. They can also learn more about neurodiversity and consider small, informed changes to their educational practices. One beneficial change educators can make is to focus more on students' strengths.

Focusing on strengths is a mindset, not a checklist of takeaways. It does not require overhauling a syllabus or studying the neurobiology of learning. It does mean paying attention to what students do well, especially those who show signs of learning differently.

Quick: identify your top five strengths and then your top five weaknesses. Both categories are important, but one may be more readily available to you than the other. For neurodivergent people, weaknesses may have been a defining feature of their experience. I regularly hear disclosures like this in class: "I have working memory problems and bad executive function." Students must know their weaknesses to identify their needs, but it is also important that they know their strengths.

That is a core insight of the neurodiversity paradigm, Beck explains. "This mindset takes the fact that everyone's brain is different and sees that as valuable, both to individuals and communities," he says. "It's a way of looking at behaviors considered 'symptoms' and exploring how they are adaptive." Neurodivergence is not a problem to be cured but a natural phenomenon that has benefited humans. Those benefits can be seen by exploring strengths associated with neurodiversity.

In a qualitative study of successful adults with ADHD, published in ADHD Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders in 2018, Jane Ann Sedgwick and coauthors interviewed six gainfully employed men recently diagnosed with ADHD. In open-ended interviews, participants talked about how ADHD shaped their lives, for better and worse. Core strengths of cognitive dynamism, courage, energy, humanity, resilience, and transcendence were thematic in the participants' stories. The central insight of the piece is that ADHD has many positives that should be understood and preserved.

Stories of successful dyslexic individuals—including performers, entrepreneurs, scientists, and many others—can be found on the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity website. With a mission "to increase awareness of dyslexia and its true nature, specifically to illuminate the creative and intellectual strengths of those with dyslexia," this organization provides an example of framing dyslexia as both a diagnosis that confers legal rights and an identity that is made visible and celebrated.

When asked about strengths, twenty-four autistic adults across a spectrum of support needs cited hyperfocus, attention to detail, good memory, and creativity in interviews that Ginny Russel and colleagues conducted for a 2019 study in Autism in Adulthood. Participants noted that these traits are not always advantageous and sometimes cause problems. For example, hyperfocus is beneficial when you're working on a single task but not if you need

to switch to something else. The authors argue that studying strengths associated with autism may help destigmatize the condition, but they also caution against being too simplistic. Strengths depend on context.

Some strengths seen among the students at Landmark College have roots in adversity rather than the specifics of their learning profiles. Students, for example, may have had to advocate for accommodations in school systems with limited resources or receptivity. "Students I work with share a passion for social justice and a willingness to jump into conversations about fairness," Beck says. "They have a desire to learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion because they've had to fight for their rights."

At an individual level, ADHD, autism, and dyslexia are linked to strengths as well as difficulties. When educators focus on strengths, they can reduce the stigma neurodiverse students face. At a community level, neurodiversity, like cultural diversity, can benefit groups and expand human potential. For example, a working group made up of people who think differently brings more ideas to the table, making problem-solving more creative. It's important, though, to be realistic about how hard having a disability can be.

"Don't talk about it in the wrong way," Yee says. "Don't idolize, and don't treat disability as delicate." Both Yee and Kasten caution against sugarcoating neurodiversity, noting that it comes with real challenges that can make life difficult and that a successful educational approach must take difficulties into account, too.

"I have sincerely brilliant friends who struggle to get assignments done on a deadline because it's so hard to start," Kasten says. "They have tremendous ideas, but they need a different way to engage. Then they will thrive."

The following teaching approaches are designed to give students a different way to engage. Some are simple; others take more time and resources.

→ **Demonstrate acceptance.** Signal that neurodivergent students belong, too. Faculty can add a short statement to the syllabus about accommodations, such as "All students learn differently, and I am open to talking about what works best for you. If you would like strategies to approach this class or are entitled to accommodations, you are welcome to come to office hours to discuss."

Other ways to show acceptance may include using the work of openly neurodivergent writers and creators in course content; putting a sticker—such as the rainbow double helix, a symbol for the neurodiversity movement—on a laptop or backpack; or even disclosing one's own disability identity if applicable. "Knowledge that others like you are out there can be incredibly powerful," Kasten says, "especially in positions of authority like teaching and supervising."

→ **Explore universal design.** The concept of universal design for learning (UDL) is to design classes that are maximally accessible at the outset, so students have different ways to engage. "Universal design for learning gives us the opportunity to succeed based on the merits of our own strengths," Kasten says. "It supports us where we are not strong, giving us the opportunity to persevere through challenges rather than cutting learning off."

Principles of UDL include offering information in different modalities, giving students multiple options to demonstrate what they know, and ensuring websites and classrooms are accessible. "Take into account modes of learning," Kasten says. "PowerPoint slides, videos, study notes, readings, and lectures are all ways to disseminate information. Use them all. Some students do better with one mode over another."

→ **Provide structure.** Establishing consistent classroom routines can help students navigate the class confidently because they know what to expect. Many college students take four or five courses concurrently, each designed differently, which puts demands on organizational ability. To lessen the energy students spend figuring out what is expected, faculty can stick to the syllabus, make sure course web pages are easy to navigate, give weekly plans, provide clearly written directions and grading criteria for assignments, be explicit about expectations for nongraded work, preview and review content at transition points, and give timely feedback. The implicit logic of a course is not always obvious to students, and more explicit structure can help them stay on track.

→ **Be flexible and listen.** "Planning and providing a structure can give students confidence and help them orient to the course," Beck says, "but it's also important to check in and encourage students to give feedback. Be ready to change course." Kasten and Yee note the importance of collaboration between faculty and students. "If the goal is to teach students, what better way than to listen to how students learn?" Kasten says. "This is far from easy, but you can change people's lives." On a practical level, this may mean giving leeway with deadlines, allowing students alternative ways to show their learning, and providing content in a variety of formats.

→ **Support self-knowledge and self-advocacy.** Neurodiversity lasts a lifetime, a few years of which may be spent in a postsecondary institution. In addition to meeting the typical goals associated with college, neurodivergent students benefit from developing self-knowledge and self-advocacy skills. Faculty and advisors can encourage this process by asking students how they learn best, posing meta-questions such as "What worked for you when writing this paper?" and "What helped you calm test anxiety?" Faculty can cue students to keep track of effective study techniques, useful technologies, productive locations, and times of day when they are most alert. Connected to self-knowledge is self-advocacy, which faculty can promote by broaching the concept with students and by being accessible.

Like other student groups, neurodivergent students can be exposed to implicit messages about their worthiness in a classroom. Over a lifetime of schooling, these messages can get

internalized, affecting self-worth and confidence. Educators, Yee says, can focus on acceptance to counter negativity: "Instructors can do tactics suggested by universal design or another pedagogy, but it's an attitude of acceptance and flexibility that really makes a difference."

The above pedagogical approaches are among those that have worked at my institution, but they may not be universally feasible. Landmark College's mission is centered on educating neurodiverse students, and it is designed to have small classes and individualized support.

For an educator who is just beginning to work on improving education for neurodiverse students, Lalor advises starting small with the goal of sustainable change. "Talk to someone, read a book, or watch films," he says. "Get to know what neurodiversity is like. Then read and soak up content about educational practices, but go slow. When you get excited by an idea, pick one small change to make."

Another theme often heard in graduation speeches at Landmark College is "I want to make the future better for neurodiverse people." Like students elsewhere, our students develop academic skills, make friends and career plans, and dream of a future when formal schooling is done. They also create knowledge about neurodiversity in society.

Like Kasten and Yee, many of our students advocate for the community by speaking publicly. Those who do not speak out contribute in other ways. For example, senior capstone projects often incorporate neurodiversity. Students can pick any research question, and they often tackle how to make life better for learners like them. Recent topics have included the transformative role of the learning disability memoir, equine therapy for autism, ableism in standardized testing, strategies for ADHD boredom, and cognitive behavioral therapy adapted for neurodivergent clients. Student work like this provides examples of the diverse priorities of neurodivergent people.

Educators can use student-friendly approaches to teaching as tools for broader inclusion, not just for neurodiverse students. When educators focus on strengths, acceptance, flexibility, and representation while exploring the lived experience of marginalized students, their work can benefit learners across identity categories. "All students have strengths and weaknesses," Yee says. "To support learning means to make class accessible for all kinds of people."

evergreen

Real Evergreen:
An Educator's Handbook

9. Accessible Pedagogy

"All community members are responsible for making sure that all material is accessible for all community members."

– Anne Carpenter

"I hadn't considered . . . that I would need to figure out . . . how to teach across significant differences in communication practices, preferred learning styles, and abilities to cognitively process spoken, written, and imaged information."

– An Evergreen faculty

What Faculty Should Know about Supporting Neurodivergent Students (2021)

Prologue

Author's note: After consulting with students from the Evergreen academic program Queer "Krip" Lit (taught by Tara Hardy and Joli Sandoz), I've incorporated identity-first language here, and eliminated person-first language.[1] Also, I replaced the terms "neurodiverse" and "neuroatypical" with "neurodivergent." While there are different perspectives held about which of these terms is considered to be most respectful by different groups within disability communities and Autism communities in particular, the changes I made represent my understanding of the most recent, and most agreed-upon best practices. I remain open to continued feedback and continued revision!

– Gratefully, Carolyn: proutyc@evergreen.edu

One of the most profound moments in my ongoing quest to learn my profession – teaching – even as I do it, was when faculty Sherry Walton (of Evergreen Masters in Teaching fame) gave me this advice: **"Teach the students you have in front of you, not the ones you wish you had."** While I've derived many meanings from that pithy morsel, the most persistent is that I must work every day to push past my default pattern of teaching to students who learn in the same ways that I do.

Given the performative nature of teaching, and the difficulties of imagining a brain that works differently from mine, I'm likely to feel that I've done a great job when I deliver a lecture that *I* found entertaining and edifying. I might appreciate the insightful questions and expansive comments from (a few) quick-thinking students. From that, I assume that my explanations were clear, my slides were decipherable, and extensive learning occurred.

Well, not so fast.

Instead, I've discovered that I must actively, continually, unlearn my assumptions about who are the students in front of me, and how they learn. I must actively strive to learn more about how to teach students who are *not* like me and who do *not* learn as I do.

My unlearning has been challenged the most in teaching disabled students, and particularly teaching and evaluating people with atypically functioning brains: people with neurodivergences such as Autism, and people on the spectrum, people with ADD and ADHD, and people with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.

In the summer of 2019, in anticipation of helping to lead an Evergreen summer Institute on this subject, I interviewed ten staff, administrators, and faculty, asking them, "How can we best support neurodivergent students?" The document below is a compilation of their answers.

Before you read on, though, there's one area I want to expand upon: the issue of "fairness" and "standards." One colleague made this striking comment: **"Consider that standards let certain types of people through and hold certain types of people back."** When we look at who historically has been excluded from academia and the rewards thereof, the list is long. What can we learn from the patterns revealed? One could argue (and Jay Dolmage does in *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education)* that the point of higher education *is* to exclude: to distinguish those who are considered "learned" by simultaneously deciding who gets to learn, and how they can demonstrate it.

But if learning is the point, doesn't it make sense to include those who learn at a different pace? Who may require certain doable accommodations to access what they need to learn? Whose learning is not demonstrated accurately or fully through social exercises (seminar, group projects) – but is better demonstrated through active listening or writing? How can we imaginatively and inclusively create access to the means of learning, and expand the standards by which we judge students' achievements, as they demonstrate their learning?

Evergreen is a perfect place to engage with these questions, and to answer them in a thousand different ways. Every quarter, we invite a wide variety of students to be part of our learning communities. Assessment of each student's learning rests in the hands of the faculty who know them best, rather than with impersonal

---

1   To learn more, read this blog post. https://ryanthea.medium.com/unpacking-two-myths-about-identity-first-language-31eaabc8a5e

and mechanistic tools that may or may not address a variety of types of knowledge and means of expression of learning. It takes the collaboration of all of us – and our specific actions – to make inclusion a reality for our neurodivergent students and colleagues.

Interview Notes

Author's note: I interviewed ten Evergreen staff and faculty on the topic of supporting learning by neurodivergent students, in conjunction with a summer institute focused on neurodivergence on campus. For the purposes of the institute, neurodivergence was defined to include folks with ADD/ADHD, folks with learning disorders such as dyslexia, and folks on the autism spectrum. Many of the suggestions and insights below were affirmed by Queer "Krip" Lit students. Ultimately, this document was written by Carolyn Prouty; the descriptions as well as decisions about what is most important are mine, as are any and all errors.

Recurrent Themes

- Clear expectations

- Transparency

- Flexibility = Equity

    » Challenge the ableist assumption that adaptations = easier! This assumption may look like an idea about "fairness," as in: It wouldn't be fair to others . . . but adaptations actually are about creating conditions in which **EVERYONE** can learn.

Help Students to Prepare and Participate

- Provide slides and lecture materials ahead of time (ideally at least one hour) or post just before the lecture if students can follow along during the lecture. At the least, post to Canvas/WordPress site after the lecture.

- Avoid in-class handouts that must

be read right away; instead, provide these before class. If something must be filled out, give time after class.

- Transparency: Yes. Mind-reading: No. If you want students to learn how to figure out what an assignment asks them to do, or to learn how to figure out which is the most important of all the material you are presenting, then teach those skills. If not, make the assignment clear and let them know what to focus on.

    » Write transparent assignments: Provide purpose, task, criteria, etc.

    » Provide study guides (key concepts, vocabulary, etc.) and example assignment submissions.

- "Chunk" information – use headers and white space between sections of information.

- Keep in mind that what works for/ makes sense to you may not work for/make sense to other folks.

Creating Seminar, Classroom Spaces with Neurodivergent Students in Mind

Be aware: **Seminar** is embedded with many cultural norms that may exclude the ways that many people on the spectrum communicate. Invoking "respect" is one way that those norms are reified: Neurodivergent students may communicate in ways that other people find disrespectful when their bluntness falls outside of norms of "respectful" communication. Are they being rude? Or being direct? Yes, it's tricky! If someone is not noticing norms of how much "space" they are taking up, direct feedback may be useful. Set agreements that acknowledge the variety of ways people communicate, including not speaking.

- **Masking/over-functioning:** Putting effort into the way we are perceived. We all do it. Yet neurodivergent people are asked to

do it more. **Imagine that you are on guard at all times and that there are penalties when you guess wrong.** It takes energy to guess, to be present, to stay sitting, to meet someone's eyes. Neurodivergent folks are over-functioning ALL the time.

- In the classroom, three things (at least) are being asked of neurodivergent students at the same time: 1) listen/pay attention, 2) take notes, 3) regulate their neurodivergent behaviors, particularly those that may be distracting to others. **It may be hard/impossible to do all three at once**, though two may be manageable. Helpful accommodations take one of these three off of the "required" list; the easiest may be to have a note-taker, or another way of recording what happens in class.

- Neurotypical people often assume flexibility in language. Neurodivergent people often need very specific language.

- CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS means a lot. Expect neurodivergent people to ask a lot of questions: Be patient, be thorough, be welcoming. When you think you aren't being heard, try something else that is more direct. It does not mean the student is dumb. Don't ever speak to a neurodivergent person as if you think they are unintelligent.

- A way of understanding anxiety used by Autism Spectrum Disorder and chronic pain folks: **counting spoons.** You have a limited number of spoons per day, and challenging social interactions use up some of those spoons. An eight-hour day that involves interactive lecture, lunch, and then seminar may use them all up. Students may not have coping strategies for situations in which they run out of "spoons;" they may have panic attacks then, for example.

- Strength-based strategies: Look for where you can recognize the

positive and make note of it to the student.

- Group work: **Not everyone needs to be doing the same thing at the same time**. Neurodivergent people may be able to hyperfocus in a group project on a specific task, and that can be leveraged if other people are doing other things. Instruct and encourage proactive planning about communication in group projects. Have students find out from each other: What do you like to do? What do you NOT like to do? Neurodivergent students may find communication during the pressure-filled end of a project especially challenging. It's legit to do more at the beginning and less or none at the end.

- Meet with students early in the quarter: Find out from them how they do their best learning. Ask them to let staff and faculty know where we're not providing opportunity for that, and remind them that we might need reminders! Most staff and faculty tend to teach in our preferred style of learning. That may not be theirs!

- Find the place in you that loves them. Yes, even if they don't always meet your definitions of "easy to work with." Model rolling with it, being compassionate, adaptive. Other students notice and learn from our flexibility. There is a payoff in knowing that we have supported students who might not otherwise have found success.

Credit Withholding

- Consider that standards let certain types of people through and hold certain types of people back.

- Notice standards that uphold evidence of learning versus standards that unnecessarily confirm neurotypical behaviors.

- **It's not about how to fail them, it's about how to help students thrive.**

Are Your Course Materials Accessible?

- **Use sans-serif fonts:** Arial, Verdana, Helvetica, Lucida Sans, Tahoma, Calibri, Century Gothic

- **Some online materials are not accessible.** Bridget Irish and Anne Carpenter can help you discern what is accessible/not. The [Evergreen Information Technology Accessibility webpage https://www.evergreen.edu/accessibility/information-technology-accessibility](https://www.evergreen.edu/accessibility/information-technology-accessibility) has links to tools.

  - » For example: Avoid auto-playing videos and music. And interactive web pages that present sudden pop-ups or a necessity to interact heavily with the page can be challenging.

- **Check your PDFs:** PDFs are generally readable by a screen reader if they are **text selectable** (i.e., you can highlight specific text). Your favorite readings that were scanned long ago may need to be converted.

- Use/provide captions, subtitles and transcripts:

  - » *Always put captioning on when playing a video.* When searching for videos to assign or show during a class session, check to see if your browser will do an advanced search. If so, configure it to search for captioned videos.

  - » Provide text for images. Make sure that your description captures why you picked the image in the context you're using it.

  - » Evergreen may pay to have materials owned by the Evergreen Library captioned. (Ask Bridget.)

- Avoid flashing images and clashing palettes. White background with black text is good (or reverse), not hot, vibrant colors.

  - » Online, **distraction-free modes** may be accessible. (Ask Bridget.)

  - » Prezi is not accessible. The swerves and swoops can induce vertigo and seizures.

- When possible, use open-source books: OpenStax, OpenWA, Open Textbook Library, for ease of use with screen readers, and for reasons of economics. The Evergreen Library also provides a collection of e-books to students, staff, and faculty.

- Good general practice recommendation: Assume there is someone in the class who can't hear well and can't read the screen.

Technology Resources for Teaching and for Access

- Resources available at/through [Assistive Technologies](https://www.evergreen.edu/access/assistive-technology-lab) at Evergreen: https://www.evergreen.edu/access/assistive-technology-lab

- Office 365 https://helpwiki.evergreen.edu/wiki/index.php/Office_365_Apps (available to ALL at Evergreen) has text-to-speech capabilities.

- DO-IT https://www.washington.edu/doit/ (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology program at the University of Washington) makes available a wide variety of helpful resources, including many STEM-specific resources such as Making Science Labs Accessible to Students with Disabilities https://www.washington.edu/doit/making-science-labs-accessible-students-disabilities.

- Read and Write Gold https://www.evergreen.edu/access/assistive-technology-lab is available to ALL at Evergreen. It's a robust software application that contains screen reading, writing and dictation capabilities, and studying and research tools. Read and Write Gold integrates with common applications such as MS Word, and Adobe PDF files.

- **Dragon Naturally Speaking**, a speech recognition program with Speech-to-Text software, is available in Evergreen's Assistive Technology Lab and on two stations in Evergreen's Computer Center in the Library building.

This information came from Evergreen interviews (July-September, 2019) with Margaret Blankenbiller (QuASR), Anne Carpenter (Assistive Technologies Services), Wendy Endress (Student Affairs), Chico Herbison (Member of the Faculty), Meredith Inocencio (Access Services), Lori Johnson (Student Rights and Responsibilities), Bridget Irish (Academic Technologies), Emily Pieper (Student Activities, TRiO), Stacia Pomerenk (TRiO), Joli Sandoz (Member of the Faculty, Learning and Teaching Commons Scholar).

– Carolyn Prouty DVM, Member of the Faculty

Crips in Class (2003)

"Crips in Class," our Washington Center conference presentation, grew out of our participation in *Disability and Chronic Illness: Psychosocial Aspects*, a four-credit course offered through Evening and Weekend Studies at The Evergreen State College. We met several times to talk about our lives as people who work with chronically ill and disabled students, and/or as chronically ill or disabled people ourselves. The five questions around which we focused our conference presentation arose from these discussions, as those most central to our classroom experiences. In what follows, Joli first frames our discussion, and then we take turns addressing each question.

Universal Design of Instruction (UDI)

Lack of experience when I began teaching about chronic illness and disability (with a class about narratives of illness in 1999) led me into some sticky places. I hadn't considered that a course on illness would draw ill and disabled people, or that I would need to figure out on the fly how to teach across significant differences in communication practices, preferred learning styles, and abilities to cognitively process spoken, written, and imaged information. After a couple of years of trying frantically to adapt learning activities and materials to individual students after the quarter began, I went looking for a better way.

The intent of the Universal Design of Instruction (UDI)[1] approach is to provide meaningful access to learning – not merely information – for every student, in part by designing learning activities and materials from inception with such access in mind. As I've experimented and consulted with students about ways to accomplish this goal, my own effort and time directed to adaptive work have lessened considerably. And all of us, including students not officially designated "disabled," have benefited. For example, our practice of reading out loud anything handed out in class that we will be using during that meeting certainly benefits learning disabled and visually impaired students, and slows down the flow of information for people affected by medications or illnesses which influence cognitive processing. It also pays dividends for not-disabled auditory learners, focuses class members on the task in hand, and reminds everyone that inclusiveness and paradigm shift are an important part of the lesson in courses centered on illness and disability.

I've found the following two websites most useful in working with universal design: Center for Applied Special Technology https://udlguidelines.cast.org/

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) University of Washington: https://www.washington.edu/doit/universal-design-instruction-udi-definition-principles-guidelines-and-examples

---

Editor's note (June 2021): "Crips in Class" first appeared in the Fall 2003 issue of the *Washington Center News* (Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education). We acknowledge that the word "crip" – a shortening and repurposing of the term "cripple" – is not universally accepted in disability circles. As it is used here, "crip" represents both claiming of identity and reference to historical discrimination and oppression associated with disability.

1   Editor's note (June 2021): Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) shares with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) the goal of supporting opportunities for full participation by the widest possible range of learners. The frameworks derive their initial principles from different starting points.

Although we didn't plan "Crips in Class" this way, each of the questions surfacing from our preliminary discussions touched on UDI, very broadly defined. Access is a universal issue.

Marie Marquart

I am Marie Marquart, one of the three students who presented in the "Crips in Class' session at The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education 2003 conference with our instructor, Joli Sandoz. In our meetings before the conference, I experienced some of the small acts necessary for composing a group presentation. One of the small acts was the development of the five questions in anticipation of what information the attendees might want or need to further their interest in disabilities and chronic illnesses (CID) in the classroom.

The questions I chose to address here are:

1. What barriers did you, or the CID people you have worked with, overcome to become college students and to stay in college?

2. Speaking from a specific CID you know well enough to represent, how are the ways people with that CID take in, understand, and remember information different from the majority of other students?

3. Are there big things that faculty might do to accommodate these learning needs?

As with the majority of students with a learning disability (LD), I am at all times confronted with the difficult task of acknowledging privately and/or publicly my learning disability. Most LD students entering college either have had experience dealing with the barriers of stigmatization and feel confident in this situation, or are still wary of acts of oppression displayed in attitudes and looks questioning whether or not they have the capacities to learn the class material.

My first attempts at receiving an education were shaded with rejection and prejudgments. I was asked to leave a business college after

three weeks for they found that I did not have a GED or the skills to read, spell, and write at the twelfth-grade level. After attaining my GED, I tried again at a community college. They said, "We do not have the faculty or the resources to teach you at the level you are starting at," adding, "You will never make it to graduation." These academic encounters were my greatest weaknesses, but became my greatest strengths.

An individual with a learning disability must first have this problem defined, and then find a solution. Either an advocate or the individual's parents must help in finding the solution; it is nearly impossible for anyone to achieve academic success on their own. Impairment from a learning disability includes difficulty recognizing characters, time and space confusion, disorganization, and/or difficulty with comprehension. Once my problem, dyslexia, was defined, I became aware of one of the critical barriers associated with a learning disability: the time factor in learning a subject or task. Some instructors may view an individual's request for extra time as criticizing their teaching. In their classes, I am faced with the difficult and risky undertaking of inviting stigmatization and sharing personal inadequacy by disclosing my LD.

For both disabled and non-disabled students, staying in college takes everything. One additional problem for LD students is finding the needed resources, as in low to high technology equipment and assistance. More significant, though, is the essential conversion of material to be learned, from a traditional linear teaching presentation to a multi-sensory approach. One of the results of this conversion is that to the instructor it looks as if students with LD are one or two weeks behind the scheduled agenda. In defense of others and myself with a learning disability, being lazy is not the reason.

We must take the information presented in class and re-present it to ourselves in a format of multi-sensory experience. This multi-sensory learning style may require all of an individual's body and mind senses; some adaptations are physically tracing the word(s) with a finger for comprehension, enlarging words for better recognition, and sensing the word for an emotional meaning and connection, then merging that meaning into an object for visualization. For instance, if I was having a problem comprehending the word "leadership" I

would break the word into sections and find an emotional connection with the first part: leader. The feelings I experienced as a little girl when I would watch my Dad, at his then-current duty station, lead his troops in their weekend exercise drills gives me a familiarity with the sense of the word. Then adding the suffix "ship" to make the complete word "leadership" connected the visualization of my Dad to the function, or position, or the ability to lead. Subsequently, when I read the word "leadership" I have not only the definition of the word, but an emotional connection and can visualize the meaning. This conversion process in total often results in doubling the learning time. Completing the writing and reading homework assignments demands different skills and techniques as well. With reading, some LD students, including myself, struggle with putting the sounds and letters together to decode words and must reread a sentence several times in order to comprehend the meaning.

Another decoding learning difficulty arises when I read long articles without the assistance of my computer-reading program; as a consequence of not being able to hear the word, I must sound it out. Once I understand all the words in a written sentence, I make sure the sentence itself makes sense and the meaning of the sentence supports the meaning of the paragraph; this process may, at times, apply to every sentence in an article, chapter, and/or book. A similar process takes place when writing a response to the readings. In writing, some of the characteristics of a learning disability may involve disorganized thought patterns, poor word choices, misuse of words, and/or not being able to recognize writing mistakes.

The reading and writing process functions in a sequence: in order and one sequence at a time. In some extreme cases, an interruption may disorient LD individuals so that they would not be able to pick up where they left off. They are unable to comprehend starting in the middle of a sequence, and must begin the writing/reading process completely over. The process of starting over may result in all or some of the emotions leading to the feelings of humiliation, frustration, confusion, and isolation.

Are there big things that faculty might do to accommodate these learning needs? When I hear this question, my mind wants to scream,

"No, there are not big things anyone can do!" However, there are many little things everyone and anyone can do to accommodate these learning needs. Creating a socially-accepting environment, especially in the classroom, is one of the most essential small acts needed.

I had a positive experience while attending one of my first classes at The Evergreen State College. The instructor noticed I was having difficulty with my writing. Within our discussion, she expressed her concern and shared that even though she is a published author, she was still unsure of how to help. I specifically remember her words, which were, "I would like for us to teach each other, but I will wait for your lead." This was a turning point, the thought had never occurred to me that I might have knowledge, experience, or a point of view that someone would want to learn. The other aspects of this conversation were her physical gestures and voice tones: they both expressed respect. Most individuals with a learning disability have learned to appraise a situation or task with prudence, using a high degree of awareness, intuitiveness, and insight regarding the individuals and the environment of the situation, employing the old adage, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

An example of when words and behaviors do not support each other is one common practice associated with the accessibility compliance statement some instructors add at the end of their class syllabus. As the instructors go over the required readings and expectations of the students, they make a caring statement about those who need special accommodations. They may say something like, "If you need help please see me during my office hours." Unfortunately, many instructors do not use eye contact while making this statement. When caring statements are made but do not match physical behaviors or words written, it implies something is misaligned.

The above approach is different from an approach that invites sharing of a nonlinear learning style. Another small act is adding an invitation – or challenge – to the non-disabled students to learn about and respect different learning styles. I must pose a question, "How can we genuinely implement universal design in the classroom without understanding and respecting the need for universal design?" If

we are to make a change then all participants – faculty and students – need to engage in the small acts of creating an environment of openness, understanding, and sharing the need for universal design in our classrooms. The answer to the question, "Are there big things that faculty might do to accommodate. . .?" can only be answered by evidence of small doable acts.

Lynette Y. Romero

I am proud to be identified as one of the "Crips in Class" presenters. I am visually impaired and I use a white cane. My mobility instructors have told me that I have just enough vision to get myself in trouble, because when I feel acclimated to an environment I choose not to use my cane. It is an interesting situation because people can distinguish the fact that I have some vision, but they have no way of determining how much I don't see. My experiences are vastly different than those having a "hidden" disability.

The first question I focused on was: If someone said to you, "I don't think CID people should ask for or receive special favors or accommodations in college," what would your response be, speaking from your own experience as a person with CID or a person who had worked with CID students?

I have experienced this situation numerous times in the past and unfortunately my response has not always taken the position I embrace today. I am grateful for the opportunity to give a proactive response versus a reactive response to this question.

I believe the first thing I would try to do is educate the person about the various types of disabilities that require accommodation for the student to succeed in a college setting. I would give examples of the barriers that students with CID face, and the auxiliary aids and accommodations needed to make the classroom accessible for them. I would explain that there are no "special favors" given; these services provide an equal ground or equal playing field for people with disabilities. Consider it our handicap, no different than the golfer who tees off at the handicap line. I would tell that person, if it were not for the technical support and the auxiliary aids that I have received as a person with a disability, I know that I would not be in college today. For me, providing an education

for people with disabilities means that we will be able to support ourselves and become more independent. I would ask the person asking the question to consider the alternative, saying "I could live off my social security disability for the rest of my life and let YOU, the taxpayer, support me, or I could take advantage of the rehabilitation programs available to me and persevere."

I will never forget my first quarter back at college after a twenty-five-year absence when this scenario first happened to me. I was still struggling with my adjustment and acceptance of my vision loss. In the rush of finding a good seat, with the best view of the board and the professor and next to my note-taker, another student plopped down beside me and asked, "Why do you get a note-taker, and the rest of us don't?" I realized at that point that the shallow inclusiveness required by law is often used to force normalization, creating the image that we are a "melting pot" of identities. But unfortunately, as long as society continues to create separations between people who live with disabilities and those who don't, equality can never really be achieved just by granting accommodations. Individual attitudes must also change. My understanding of truly inclusive education is that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. When the student made that remark to me, I lost my feeling of belonging in that classroom.

The last point I would make is to explain that providing auxiliary aids to students with disabilities is the law. There are two major pieces of legislation that impact the provision of services and accommodations for students with disabilities in a post-secondary institution. They are the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Sections 501 and 505, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.[2] If you would like to find out more about these laws, these are web sites that you can access:

Americans with Disabilities Act, U.S. Department of Justice: https://www.ada.gov/

Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html?src=mr

---

2   Editor's note (June 2021): Also the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 at https://www.ada.gov/regs2016/adaaa.html.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Sections 501 and 505, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/rehabilitation-act-1973

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and 1990: https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/titles-i-and-v-americans-disabilities-act-1990-ada

The second question I addressed is also one I have had personal experience with: *Have you been in programs and courses in which CID was ignored or put down? How are class experiences and learning different when CID is an acknowledged part of the valid or acceptable "differences" in the classroom, and when it is not?*

When a professor acknowledges the fact that I have a disability, I try not to internalize the implication that I am different from any other member in the classroom. I need to do this because I want to be considered equal to any other student in that classroom environment. Acknowledging a disability is a sensitive circumstance. It is important for the instructor to check with the student to make sure that they want to disclose the fact that they have a disability, simply because some students do not want their disabilities known to the other members of class. Protecting privacy is important and should be part of policies and procedures of the institution for the students' confidentiality and constitutional rights. Unfortunately, in my case the instructor looked directly at my white cane and before asking my permission said, "I noticed you have a white cane, you must have special needs. Does anyone else in the class have special needs that need to be addressed?" By announcing my vision loss in this manner, the instructor literally took away my control, my power to present myself to my peers in the manner that I preferred. Full inclusion in this situation would have been letting me decide whether or not to disclose my disability to the group as a whole. Unfortunately, the instructor's attitude reinforced the bias that people with disabilities deviate from the normative part of society. If there was a

universal method of acceptance or inclusion similar to the universal design of instruction model, and the instructor chose to use it, stigmas and stereotypes about people with disabilities would start to evaporate. An attitude of acceptance has a rippling affect that spreads throughout the classroom like a rock dropped in the middle of a pond.

Joli Sandoz

What specifically can faculty do to make CID people welcome in the classroom, and an accepted part of the class community? First, I assume that at least 9 percent of the students in any class (the national figure among US postsecondary enrollees in 1999-2001[3]) will be living with illness or disabilities that result in functional impairments, and that I will not know who they are.[4] My personal observation has been that another 10 to 15 percent, or more, will be working with and around less intrusive conditions, or the CID of a family member.

I try to model openness to differences in preferred learning styles, and to chronic illness and disability, in several ways: brief statements about universal design and Evergreen's air quality policy (which asks that people not wear scented products on campus) are part of a letter I send to students before the first class session and part of my introductory talk at our first meeting; I make a general announcement several times in class specifically asking people with particular learning needs to talk to me about what I can do to facilitate their learning; my attendance policy suggests that people not come to class when they are contagious, as members of the class (any class) may have compromised immune status. (Anyone who misses is, of course, required to initiate a conversation with me about providing evidence of learning in lieu of attendance.) In addition, I do my best to make texts genuinely accessible to people who need to arrange for readers, scanning, etc., by making a detailed week-by-week reading and assignment plan available at least six weeks before the quarter begins.

Few chronically ill or disabled students of my acquaintance have had their experiences

---

3   National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, National Center for Education Statistics, US Dept of Education. "Profile of Undergraduates in US PostsecondaryEducation Institutions: 1999-2000." Executive summary available at: https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002168.

4   Editor's note (June 2021): The number of students who identified themselves as disabled, during contacts with Evergreen's Access Services office in the 2020-2021 academic year, added up to roughly fifteen percent of the undergraduate student body. The proportion of Evergreen students who are disabled is probably higher, since not all get in touch with Access Services (Inocencio).

as CID people taken seriously in classrooms. (Or, quite often, ever in public before.) This is especially the case with students who acquired their conditions after high school. Because their voices are often ignored or silenced, it seems important to create an environment in which people living with chronic illness or disability can choose to speak from their lives. Part of this involves communal exploration of the roles of emotion, risk-taking, and personal experience in learning, and of personal experience as an acceptable source in making general knowledge. This discussion also engages definitions of confidentiality, and the value of connecting concepts and theories (the general) to the personal (the particular). As faculty, I try to model acceptance of CID, and work to create opportunities for others to perform openness (at a minimum, suspension of disbelief). One of the ways I do this is by acknowledging public disclosures of illness or disability during class discussions, and – if no one else does – by voicing illness and disability issues when diversities and differences are being listed or addressed. My required reading and film lists for any course or program include materials by people who openly claim illness or disability speaking from their own experience.

Always, one question remains: Whose responsibility is it to learn? We at Evergreen rely on the Access Services office to arrange for needed technology and accommodations requiring expenditures. As a classroom teacher, I can't go very far beyond what I've outlined above, except in the way I pace and pitch specific learning activities. Diluting the difficulty and complexity of academic content is out of the question (and students have rarely asked for that). I do, however, take care to be clear about how what we are addressing each day fits with overall themes of the course; to plan a variety of content engagement approaches for each class meeting; to conduct frequent and varied assessments of concept comprehension; and to summarize key points often. Not-ill or -disabled students tend to find these "learning aids" just as useful as do the others. Inclusive teaching is about small, doable practices that foster learning, which is what we're all trying to do, together.

– **Marie Marquart**
– **Lynette Y. Romero**
– **Joli Sandoz**

Works Cited

Inocencio, Meredith. "Re: Questions about Updating Info about Disability Laws and Statistics." Received by Joli Sandoz, 2 Jul. 2021.