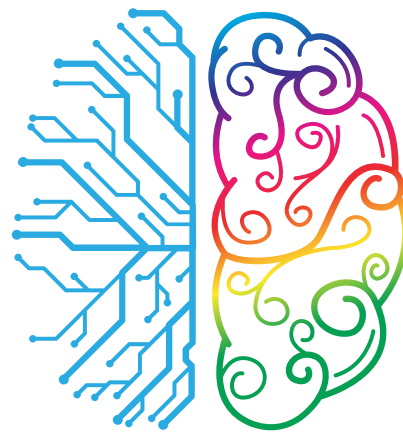


Neurodiversity & Belonging:

Reflections and Actions to Shape Your Student Experience

What is Neurodiversity?

College can be a challenging experience for anyone, and neurodivergent (e.g., ADHD, dyscalculia, dyslexia, ASD) students may face unique obstacles. It is estimated that almost 20% of all U.S. undergraduates have a disability and about 6% are neurodivergent. While it is understood that most students do not report their disability and/or neurodivergent status, this toolkit provides strategies and resources to help you feel supported, create connections, and facilitate a sense of belonging to thrive in your college environment.



Belonging means feeling safe, supported, accepted, and connected with people or in places. It can also mean that you identify as a member of a group that shares your values, beliefs, and experiences.

Neurodivergence refers to everybody - it is a range or spectrum of processes of brain functioning, thought processes, learning styles, social interactions, and emotional engagement. Neurodivergent individuals are those situated on the neurodivergence spectrum who are outside of the societal expectations of neurotypicality for "the average," which reflects stereotypical norms of a particular system/setting.

Advocacy, or taking action to effect change, can occur within systems, for the benefit of others, and/or in support of self. Individual advocacy can refer to asking for support or changes that one needs in order to be and feel included within a setting. Naming an experience and asking a question is a powerful means of advocacy, especially when we know that every person across the neurodivergence spectrum(s) learns and engages in different ways.

Reflect

Take time to think about the following prompts and then spend a few minutes writing out your answer to each.

- What and who makes you feel accepted?
- Think about people at school, people at home, actions or comments from others, policies and procedures, etc.
- What spaces and places have you felt most comfortable and/or focused in?
- Think about specific rooms or settings, and what about them made you feel cozy (e.g. warm, comfortable, welcome, invited)
- What or who support your learning or educational experiences?
- When have you felt most supported by your favorite advisor/mentor/supervisor/instructor/boss?
- Think about how they made you feel, what they did to make you feel that way, and how you might identify these attributes or actions in others.



PRACTICE

We can engage and sustain a sense of belonging in college by reflecting on our needs and advocating for ourselves. Take the personal reflections and insights gained and apply them to your academic settings and relationships, considering the many roles and identities you hold, and how they can serve you as well as the others involved.

01.

Identify three sensory-friendly study environments or things you might need in your environment.

- Consider Wellness Spaces, Quiet Rooms, Libraries, your own desk/office
- Consider sounds, smells, temperatures, visuals, consumables, tools



02.

Rehearse conversations around neurodivergence & accommodation needs in preparation for discussing with your instructors.

- Consider friends, family, peers, advisors, and resource offices on campus
- Consider how and what you'll share about your neuro-divergence, what supports you need, what questions might come up, and how you might be direct and concise



03.

Attend groups for neurodivergent students, community members, and peers to share experiences, tips, supports, & resources.

- At UW-Madison, consider attending a meeting or joining CHAMPS or the Undergraduate Disability Justice Society, and/or spending time at and the Disability Cultural Center
- More broadly, consider online groups, local agencies, & advocacy groups



Contact the Disability Resource Center* to discuss and update potential accommodations and explore avenues for advocacy.

04.

- Consider flexibility with assignments, engagement, and classroom modifications
- Consider an accommodation plan/letter, what options you might have if things become overwhelming, and what resources and processes are already in place



*At UW-Madison, the disability Resource Center is called the McBurney Disability Resource Center.

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