

Have You Been *Wondering?* WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

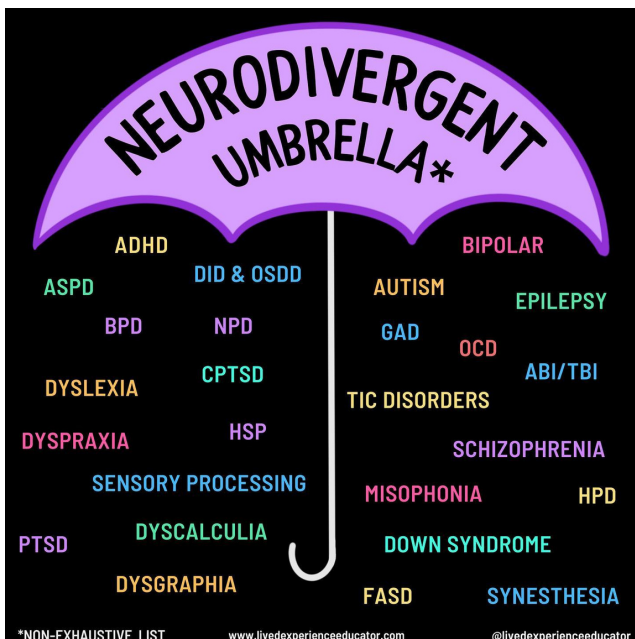
Overview and Context

Though the concept of neurodiversity has been around since the late 1990s, it has recently become more visible in educational contexts as schools work to meet the diverse needs of individual learners. Neurodiversity is the concept that everyone's brain is unique, and therefore we all have different skills, abilities, and needs. To create inclusive learning and working environments, these differences should not be viewed as deficits, but rather as strengths as they lead to multiple perspectives about the world.

Neurodiversity has gained more visibility and awareness in the last few decades and falls under the umbrella of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and initiatives. People who are neurodivergent are advocating for themselves and are striving to increase acceptance and inclusion of all people. Neurodivergent individuals have unique ways to learn and think that are valuable assets in multiple environments, whether in the classroom, the workplace, or in personal relationships. While some individuals with similar forms of neurodivergence, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), may have similar needs, such as challenges with social interaction or repetitive behaviors, no two people's brains are exactly alike and therefore individuals often have distinct needs as well. It is important to refrain from assumptions and stereotypes about neurodivergent

individuals and instead work to understand what support they might need and how to create spaces where they are valued and respected.

Sources adapted from:
[Harvard Health-What Is Neurodiversity?](#)



KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

ABILITY: To have the means or skill to do something. Ability is not permanent, and is another aspect of diversity in our communities. Disabilities do not necessarily limit people unless society imposes assumptions that do not account for the variation in abilities.

ABLEISM: The system of oppression that disadvantages people with disabilities and advantages people who do not currently have disabilities.

ACCESSIBILITY: The quality of being easily used, entered, or reached by people with disabilities; refers to the design of products, devices, services, curricula, or environments.

ACCOMMODATION: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), accommodation is an adjustment to a job, the work or learning environment, or the way things are usually done during the hiring and/or admission process. These adjustments enable an individual with a disability to have an equal opportunity not only in terms of access to employment or education, but also to be successful in meeting expectations to the same extent as people without disabilities.

ADHD: Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder is defined by unique combinations of inattentiveness, hyperactivity and/or impulsiveness, among other areas under executive functioning.

Neurodiversity Movement

The Neurodiversity Movement, also referred to as the Autistic Self-Advocacy Movement, started gaining attention in the 1990s. Judy Singer, an Australian Sociologist, is credited with coining the term “neurodiversity” in her honors thesis, written in 1998. The neurodiversity movement has created positive change over time. For instance, companies were inspired to change their hiring and talent management practices to be more mindful of neurodivergent employees. Scientists also reexamined the way brains are studied; instead of scanning the brain to search for differences, scientists looked to see if there was a pattern among brains of neurodivergent individuals. Fields such as psychology, psychiatry, archaeology, and anthropology also reframed narratives about people by shifting the focus from ‘what is wrong with this individual’ to ‘what social barriers are turning difference into disability and exclusion.’ This shift in perspective helps us understand individual differences not as deficits but as part of systemic barriers to inclusion.

Since the 1990s, neurodivergent adults have continued advocating for themselves. In 2014, a Washington-based nonprofit called the Autistic Self Advocacy Network successfully pushed Congress to rename the reauthorization bill for autism funding. Instead of the “Combating Autism Act” it was dubbed the “Autism CARES Act,” which stands for Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education and Support Act.” This group also led a successful campaign to increase the minimum wage for disabled workers at firms that receive federal contracts. Neurodiversity advocates also encourage people to think of the unique aspects of the autistic mind, such as:

- The ability to notice patterns (often valued in the technology industry)
- Being able to get deeply involved in personal interests
- The ability to experience sensations more deeply
- Being literal

Sources adapted from:

- [Washington Post - How Autistic Adults Banded Together to Start a Movement](#)
- [Congress To 'Combat' Autism No More](#)
- [Forbes - Hidden Figures In Neurodiversity: Judy Singer](#)

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

(ASD): A spectrum condition which affects how people interact and communicate with the world.

DISABILITY: A physical or mental impairment that affects movements, senses, activities or learning.

DYSLEXIA: a learning disability that affects someone’s ability to read, spell and/or write accurately and efficiently.

NEURODIVERSITY: The concept that there is great diversity in how people’s brains are wired and work, and that neurological differences should be valued in the same way we value any other human variation.

Neurodivergent: a person whose brain functions in ways that diverge from the dominant societal standards of “normal”.

NEUROTYPICAL: having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of “normal.”

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

(UDL): Universal design for learning (UDL) is a teaching approach that works to accommodate the needs and abilities of all learners and eliminates unnecessary hurdles in the learning process.

Sources adapted from:

- [Neurodiversity & Neurodivergent: Meanings, Types, & Examples](#)
- [Harvard Health: What is Neurodiversity?](#)
- [Boston University: Ability and Neurodiversity Terms to Broaden Your Understanding of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)
- [Cornell University - Universal Design for Learning](#)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a teaching approach that accommodates the needs and abilities of all learners, while minimizing unnecessary hurdles in the learning process. Some examples of UDL include creating a flexible learning environment, presenting information to students in multiple ways, engaging students in learning in a variety of ways, and providing students several options to demonstrate their learning. UDL is a framework through which many organizations, including our own, think through designing classroom environments to support all learners.

Want to see UDL in a classroom setting? Check out this video!

Seeing UDL in Action in the Classroom

Sources adapted from:

- [Cornell University - Universal Design for Learning](#)
- [What Is Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)?](#)
- [University of Illinois Chicago - Universal Design for Learning](#)
- [Georgetown - Universal Design for Learning](#)
- [Cast - About Universal Design for Learning](#)

What is Happening at Rowland Hall?

Faculty and staff at Rowland Hall are eager to meet the needs of their students. Student support teams in all divisions know each student well and are therefore able to design learning supports to help students succeed. These supports can range from in-school tutoring, small reading groups, and learning specialist visits to classrooms for our youngest learners to peer tutoring, help with executive functioning skills development during advisory or community time, and individual consultations with faculty for our Middle and Upper School students.

Across the school, students learn about human differences of all kinds, including abilities, so that they recognize the strengths their classmates bring to the classroom and school community and so that we can continue to build a respectful and inclusive community. Faculty also work closely with Academic Support Counselors and Learning Specialists to build differentiation into the classroom and identify what conditions are ideal for all learners.

Administrators and staff are continuing to work, alongside students, to raise awareness about students' needs and create accessible programs and experiences for all students. Members of the Middle and Upper School affinity groups for neurodivergent students have helped advocate for some of these changes, and they work closely with faculty and staff to continue to elevate their voices and needs. Our commitment to equity and inclusion includes ensuring all learners have the support they need to thrive within our school community, and we work closely with students and families to determine how to align students' needs with our teaching practices.

READ WATCH LISTEN

READ

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network \(ASAN\) Resource Library](#)
- [Neurodiversity: An Overview](#)
- [ECU Libraries - Neurodiversity Resources](#)
- [Valuing Differences - Neurodiversity in the Classroom](#)
- [Neurodiversity in Education](#)

WATCH

- [Neurodiversity - The Key That Unlocked My World \(Elisabeth Wiklander\)](#)

LISTEN

- [The Neurodiversity Podcast with Emily Kircher-Morris](#)

