# Strategies to Support Students Who are Neurodiverse

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a term used to describe the concepts that 1) the human brain is extremely complex and 2) the brains of some individuals are "wired" in ways that differ from the neurotypical brain. It encompasses a wide range of cognitive, learning, and behavioral variances. Examples of students who are considered neurodiverse include those with documented diagnoses such as ADHD, learning disabilities, and autism.

On campuses across the country and at UNO, the number of students with these formal diagnoses is increasing. The Americans with Disability Act outlines the protections and rights for these individuals. However, it is important to note that many students who are neurodiverse have not been formally diagnosed.
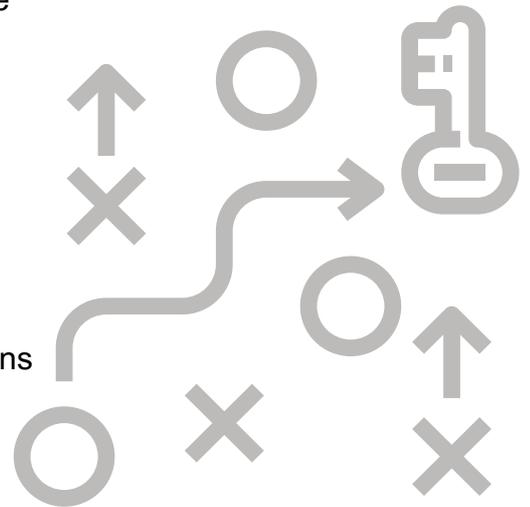
Neurodiversity is not a deficit.

Students considered neurodiverse interact with others and within their surrounding environment in unique and beneficial ways. They have a spectrum of intellect, often ranging from average to superior. They can be very passionate about their interests and career pursuits and have a wide variety of talents.

Although there is no "right" way of learning and behaving, academic and social settings can present neurodivergent students with a number of challenges related to goal-setting, organization, self-regulation, focus, flexible thinking, reading social cues, communication, and inhibitory control. In addition to the functional challenges, students who are neurodivergent can feel stigmatized, marginalized, and isolated.

UNO Students with Formal Diagnoses

Autism
2018	46
2023	106

ADHD
2018	221
2023	389

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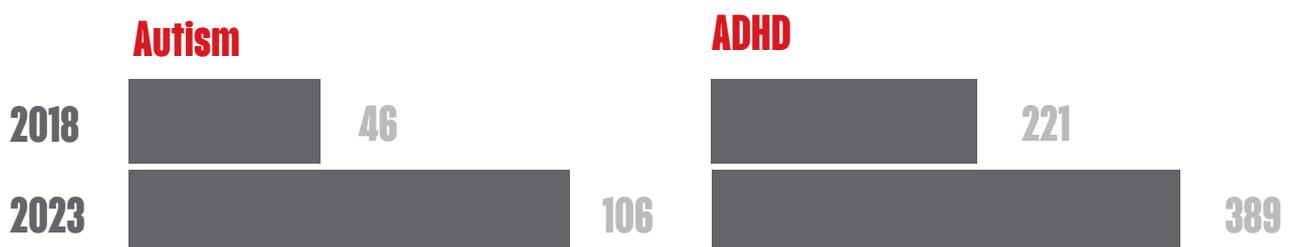
Helpful Strategies for Instructors

Incorporate Universal Design for Learning, a framework based on scientific insights into how learning processes can differ. It includes three pillars that inform strategies to support all learners (to learn more, visit cast.org).

1. Multiple Means of Engagement

- Learners differ in their preference and tolerance for engagement and social interaction in classroom environments. Some students work best with predictable routines and structure, while others enjoy spontaneity.
- Strategies: clarify and remind students of expectations, preview upcoming tasks, provide discussion prompts before class, minimize classroom distractions, structure group work, and encourage self-reflection

2. Multiple Means of Representation

- Learners differ in how they process and comprehend sensory input. Some students may have visual or hearing impairments, others may need more cognitive processing time or struggle to connect content due to language or cultural differences.
- Strategies: pair verbal directions with images; use graphic organizers/cues; share copies of slides/notes; clarify vocabulary, symbols, metaphors, and idioms; categorize information; and embed closed captioning for recorded lectures

3. Multiple Means of Expression

- Learners express themselves and demonstrate knowledge in different ways. Some students have limited access to working memory and as a result, can seem disorganized or unprepared.
- Strategies: model processes/skills; offer templates/exemplars; allow for practice, drafts, and revisions as appropriate; scaffold large projects; encourage goal setting; share/discuss grading rubrics with students; and consider options for assessment

Refer students who need support or help accessing resources to the Accessibility Service Center (ASC), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), and UNO Health Services.

The Role of ASC

- Create accommodation plans for students based on documented disabilities
- Consult with faculty related to implementing accommodations in academic settings

Learn more about ASC

bit.ly/uno-ascf