



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

Robert Gillespie
Academic Skills Centre



**Ready
Set
Teach**



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.



ACCESS CHECK

Access is a shared responsibility among everyone in this space. While attention has been paid to reduce barriers to participation, I encourage interventions on the following (and more!) to enhance access.

Technology

Space

Resources

Pace

“We all have bodies, hearts, and minds. We all have needs and capacities, strengths and vulnerabilities”

- *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: A Disability Justice Primer*



Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Accessibility Services
3. Language and Definitions
4. Executive Function Challenges
5. Neuro-Affirming & Asset Based Approaches
6. Proactive Design with UDL for Neuro-variability
7. Reflection



Session Learning Outcomes

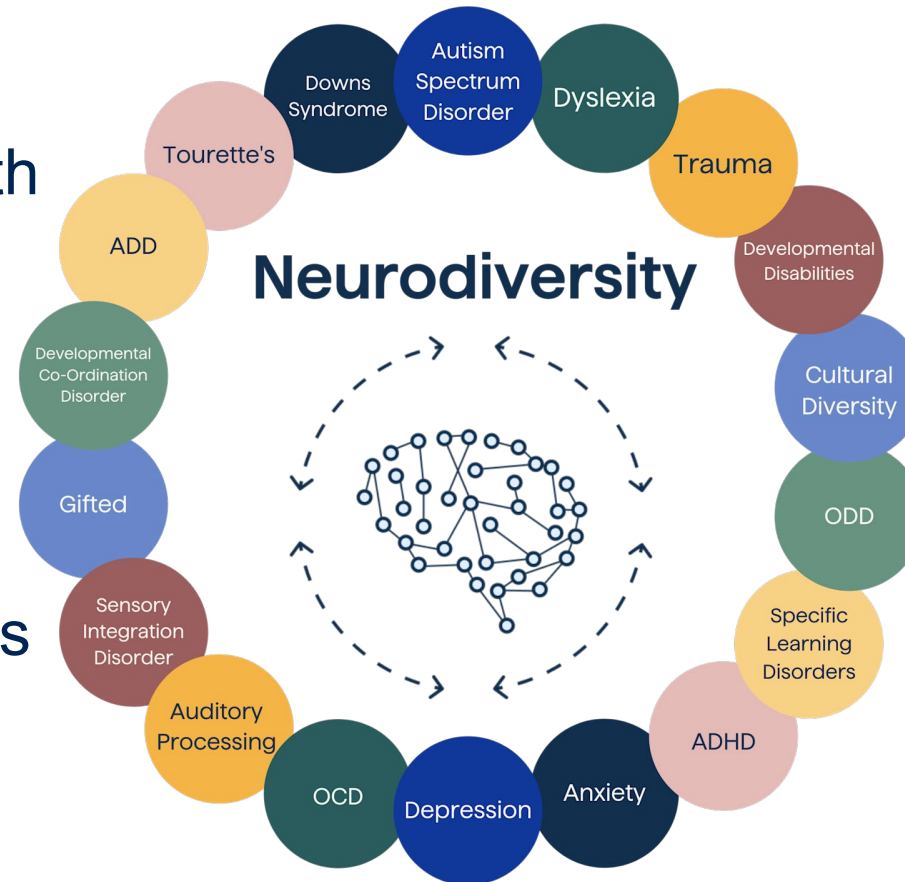


- Recognize executive function challenges and how they can show up in the classroom
- Discover neuro-affirming and asset-based approaches to skill building
- Identify and select strategies to proactively design for neuro-variability so students can thrive



What is Neurodiversity?

- People experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways
- No one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are viewed as strengths not deficits.



Accessibility Services

Our Mission at the University of Toronto, Accessibility Services is to provide students with a network of resources to succeed, where they can navigate their disability and related barriers, and provide various academic and social opportunities.

How we work:

1. Register students with our office for the provision of academic accommodations
2. Support funding applications for disability-related needs where appropriate
3. Problem-solve and help students build strategies and tool kits to support their academics
4. Provide support in adaptive technology and learning strategies
5. Offer a vibrant peer community, workshops, weekly dialogues, and special events

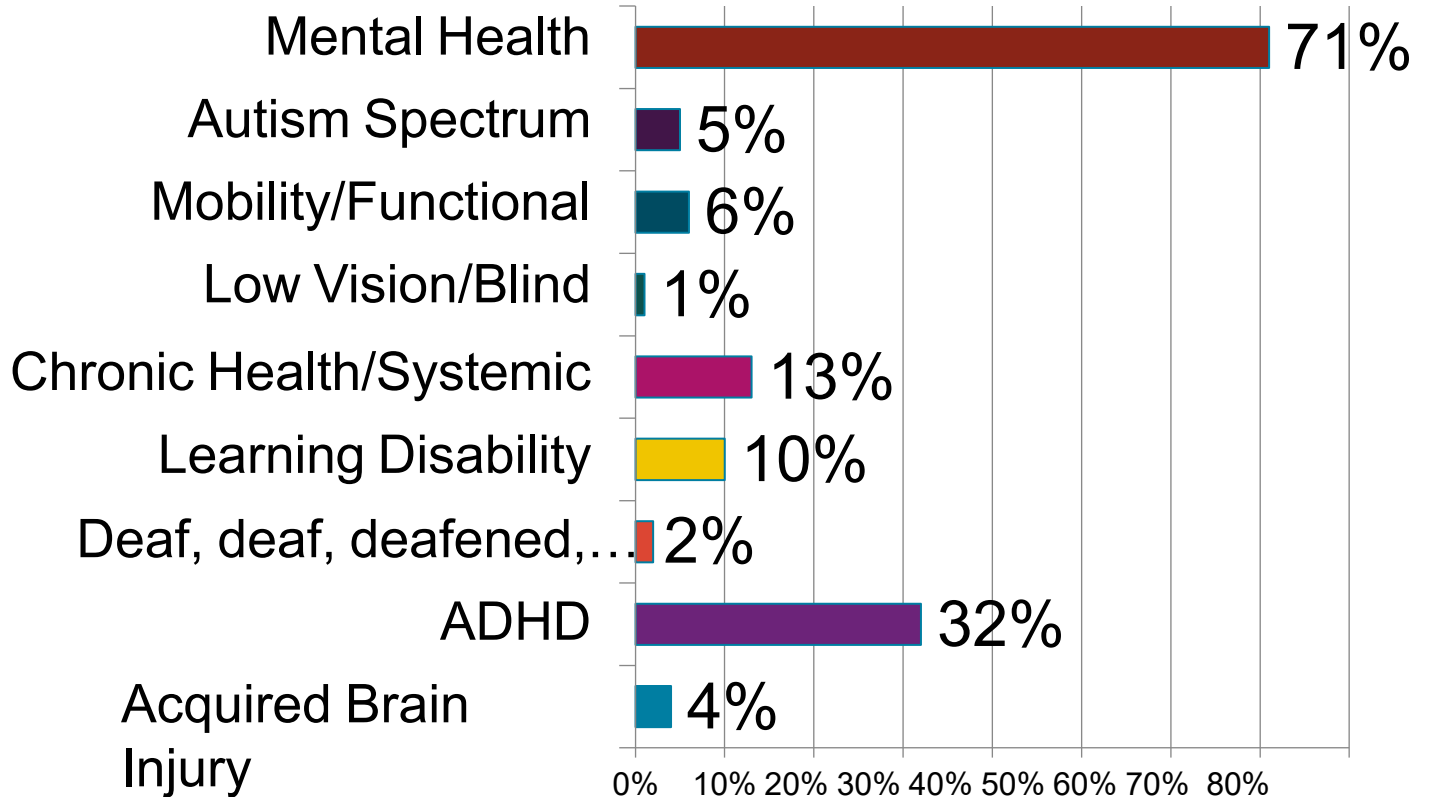
We support undergraduate, graduate and professional faculties (i.e. medicine, teaching, law, etc). We support domestic and international students from 178 countries and territories.

Why do Students Register with Accessibility Services?

2023-2024

Total # of
Registered Students

6041



Note: Numbers are from UTSG and do not add up to 100% because students may be registered with more than one disability.

Duty to Accommodate

The Ontario Human Rights Code guarantees the right to equal treatment in education without discrimination on the ground of disability. The University of Toronto has a duty and is committed to considering accommodations when:

1. Accommodations are requested by a student¹
2. We become aware of a student's accommodation needs in a reasonable time
3. Accommodations do not cause undue hardship to the University

Requests for accommodation are considered in good faith.

¹Usually through the student having documented functional limitations related to their disability that impact their ability to meet core competencies/learning outcomes of a course

**What comes to mind
when you hear
'neuroinclusive'?**

Menti Code: 3380 9703



Higher Education Context

Making the Invisible Visible: Neurodivergent Students' Experiences in Canadian Higher Education (2024)

- 1/3 of neurodivergent students do not have a formal diagnosis, which limits access to educational supports and accommodations.
- Less than 1/2 disclosed identity or diagnosis.
- Challenges w/ Executive Function reported 2-3x more often than any other challenge.



Language & Definitions

Person-First



Person with a Disability

Identity-First



Disabled Person



Executive Function Challenges



Dr Thomas Brown



Executive Function Challenges Manifesting in the Classroom

Task initiation

Working memory

Disengagement (actual or perceived)

Time Management

Prioritizing and Organizing

Switching between tasks



Neuro-Affirming & Strengths Based Approaches

- ❑ Sensory-friendly environments
- ❑ Clear communication style
- ❑ Advanced notice of and transparency around plans and changes.
- ❑ Interest-based nervous systems, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation
- ❑ NICE acronym for strengths based attention & focus (novel, interesting, challenging, extreme)
- ❑ Situational variability



Strategy	Proactive Design w/ UDL	EF Challenges Supported
Anticipate & Welcome Executive Function Variability	Allow fidget tools, flexible seating, and movement breaks. Sensory-friendly design w/ natural light, quiet spaces, optional breaks from larger group.	Emotional regulation, reducing overwhelm, sustaining focus, attention, effort
Scaffold Assignments	Break tasks into manageable steps with clear instructions, checkpoints, feedback, support.	Task initiation, sequencing, organization
Reduce Unnecessary Cognitive Load	Simplify instructions, minimize distractions, provide templates, step-by-step-guides and consistency, try to avoid overloading working memory.	Working memory limitations, reducing processing overload
Include Flexibility in Time & Location	Allow students to choose when & where they complete work w/ asynchronous participation options, flexible deadlines, or recorded lectures.	Sustained attention, energy regulation, distraction management
Invite Student Autonomy & Agency	Let students choose between writing a paper, creating a video, or designing a presentation.	Motivation, self-monitoring, engagement
Flexibility in Topics, Sources, and Formats	Let students select topics, source materials, or formats that align with their interests.	Task engagement, emotional regulation, relevance

Reflection

What's one concrete insight or neuroinclusive strategy that you will take away and/or apply to your teaching?

Can you make one immediate small change to your methods, materials or environments to enhance neuroinclusivity in your class?





**HERE
TO
SUPPORT
YOU.**

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Thank You!

utm.utoronto.ca/rgasc

References & Resources

[Brown Model of Executive Function](#)

[Making the Invisible Visible: Neurodivergent Students' Experiences in Canadian Higher Education \(2024\)](#)

