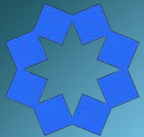


Engaging Autistic STEM Undergraduates in Creating
Supportive Learning Environments Research Team

∞ Neuroaffirming Advising Training

SPRING 2026



EDC.ORG



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for Pre-Survey



Meet the team



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Learning Outcomes

01

NEURODIVERSITY

Slide 4



Supporting neurodivergent students
at Chico State

Slide 5

02

NEUROAFFIRMING ADVISING

Slide 7



Belief, mindset, neurodivergence

Slide 9



Neuroaffirming advising
accommodations and tools

Slide 11



Equitable treatment of
neurodivergent students

Slide 20

03

CONTINUING TRAINING

Slide 21

What is Neurodiversity?

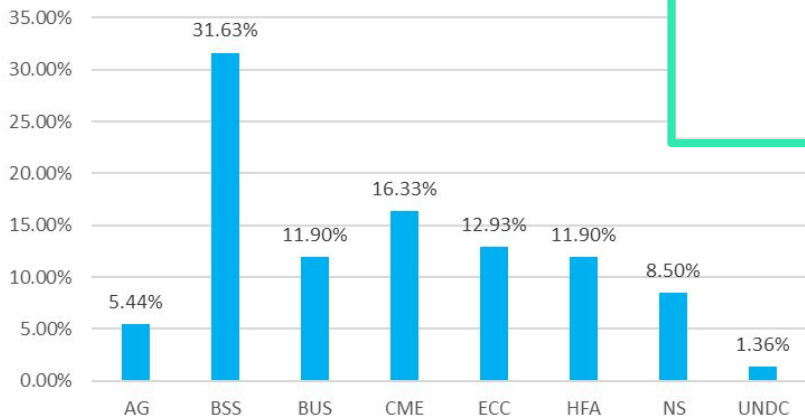
Term first coined by Judy Singer in 1998 to describe variations in mental function that may make it difficult to learn or interact under traditional expectations.

As a social justice movement, neurodiversity aims to represent neurological differences in an inclusive way, focusing both on strengths and differences.

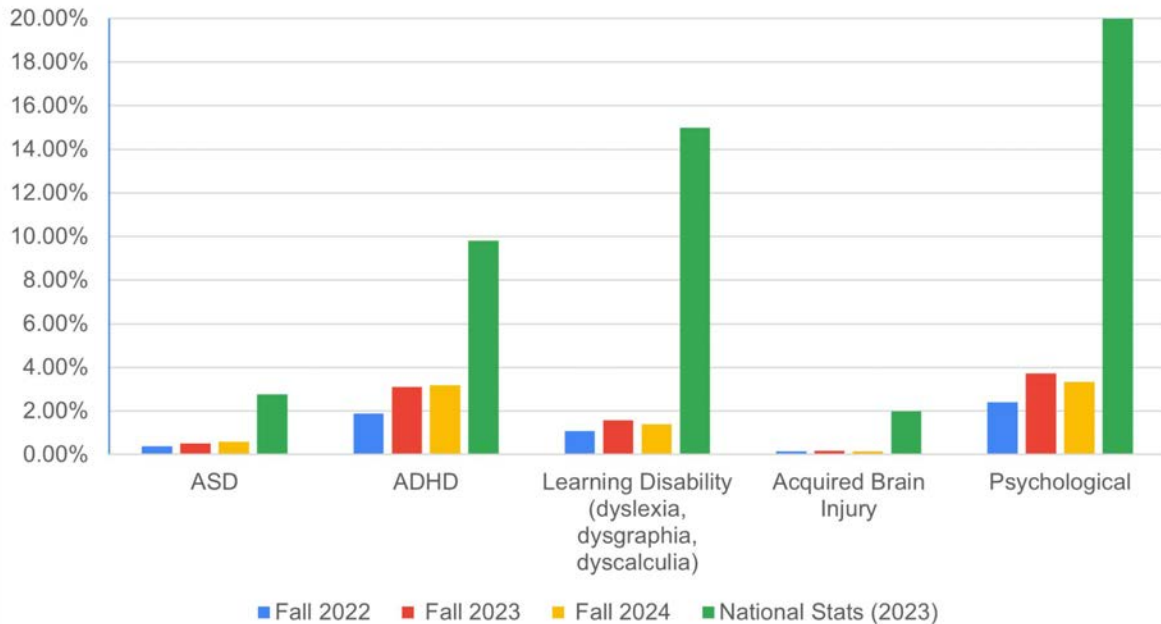


Supporting neurodivergent students at Chico State

SUMO Neurodivergent Responses



Chico State ARC



294 Responses - Summer Orientation 2025
“Do you identify as neurodivergent?”
Almost 10% of incoming students
identified as being neurodivergent.

“Campus-Wide Survey Data”

- A lack of accommodation, support, and understanding of needs
- Challenges with communication, social cues, and clarity
- Issues related to workload and pay
- Intersectional challenges
- Lack of empathy, knowledge, and acceptance by others
- Lack of community
- Not registering for ARC services due to lack of formal autism diagnosis from doctor/psychiatrist
- Bad experience with professors
- Need for workshops/training about autism for faculty/staff/students
- Need for understanding of needs, self-expression, and varied intensity of experience
- Need for accommodating facilities, outside environment, and classrooms
- Need for more sensory-friendly spaces

What is Neuroaffirming Advising?

To empower neurodivergent students by recognizing and employing their strengths, navigating their challenges, and making adjustments tailored to their unique experience and preferences.

To actively acknowledge systematic barriers, discrimination, and necessities faced by the neurodivergent community.

Neuroaffirming Advising



BELIEFS & MINDSET



NEURODIVERGENT

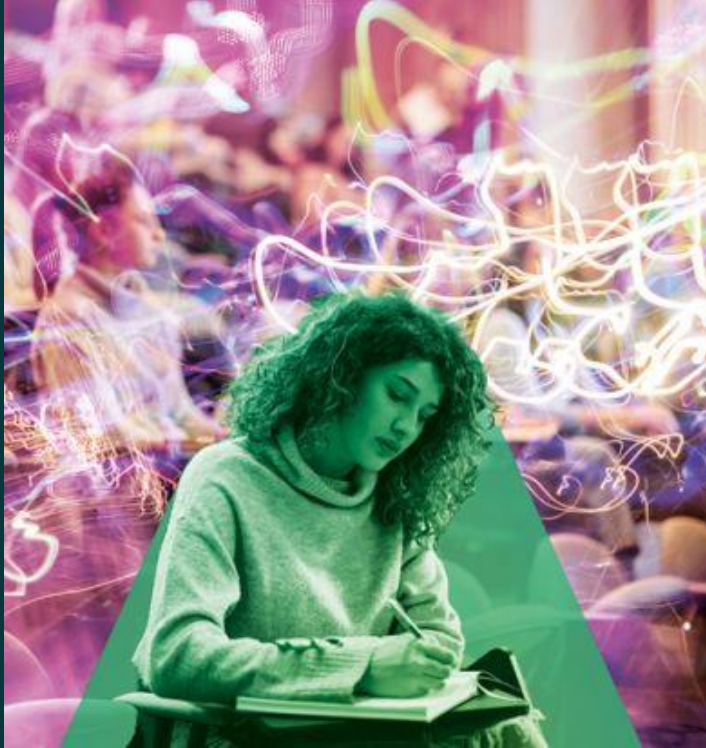


Beliefs and Mindset

1. What are your personal assumptions on what makes a good student?
2. What may you perceive as “negative” behavior in an advising session or learning environment?



Neurodivergent



- Little Eye Contact When They Speak
- Flat Affect
- Monotone Voice
- Mood Swings
- Interrupted Focus
- Hyperfocus On An Interest Or Passion
Despite The Challenges They May Be Facing
- Lack Of Hygiene
- Fidgeting
- Tics
- Difficulty In Classes
- Slower Pacing In Completing Their Program
Requirements
- Mental Health Struggles
- Increased Sensitivity To Stress
- Identifies With Another Marginalized
Community
- Asks Lots Of Questions

Neuroaffirming Advising Accommodations

Accessibility

Communication

Physical Environment

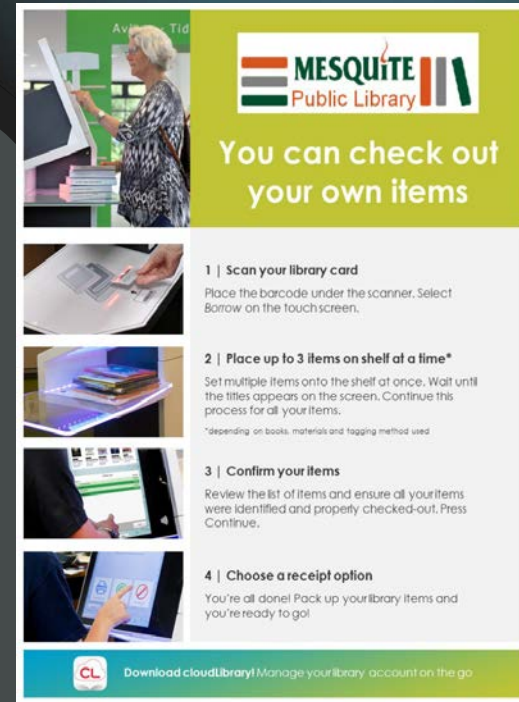
Accessibility Accommodations

Review and possibly redesign appointment scheduling process:

- Establish an open door policy
- Check in with your students regularly
- Offer extended or flexible meeting times including virtual drop ins
- Send appointment reminders
- Consider routine when rescheduling students
- Create a “support preference” form to be filled out ahead of time*
- Create checklists for students to help with task management/memory and a worksheet for notes*

Redesign intake processes to replace guesswork with clarity:

- Provide content ahead of time (i.e. agenda for sessions) and follow-up later
- Provide information on what to expect*
- Provide multiple ways to make contact (phone, email, online form, text, etc.).
- Send a short “what to expect” document before the first meeting. Keep it concrete, e.g., length of session, materials to bring, whether a support person is welcome, and what happens next (National Autistic Society, 2021).
- Allow clients to preview common intake questions so they can prepare.
- Post-session surveys with simple, plain-language items to invite feedback.



Communication Accommodations:

WRITTEN/VISUAL	BOTH	VERBAL
• Provide Neurodiversity Resource Guide, weekly schedule printouts, written recaps of sessions, checklists, templates, and digital/printed examples • Encourage checklists, digital planners, time management apps • Use sans-serif font, subtitles/closed captioning, and visuals (icons, charts, organizers) alongside text • Invite students to share communication preferences (camera on/off, chat vs. voice, written recap, recorded meeting, etc.).	• Ask about preferred ways of communicating (i.e., phone, email, online systems, chat) • Pair verbal instructions with written/visual • Use direct, concrete, and intentional language • Avoid jargon or idioms • Organize your communication • Utilize “access talk” in every form of communication • Break down tasks into smaller steps • Allow for processing time before expecting responses • Avoid phrases that might induce anxiety	• <u>Tone</u>: compassionate/adult • Model your imperfections • Offer transparency/clarity about session and guidance on the “how to” aspects of academic/university life • Balance discussions of challenges with recognitions of strengths/successes • “What can I do to best accommodate your needs?” • “Do you need me to explain ___?”

Physical Environment Accommodations

- Flexible workspaces
 - Maximize individual control over one's environment (lighting, temperature, sound, seating, etc.)
 - Quiet and non-computer space
 - Comfortable seating
 - Add more color, (student) artwork, diversity of visuals to sterile hallways and rooms
 - Address harsh fluorescent lighting with covers or filters
 - Use ambient sound generators for advising sessions
 - Make advising session areas private and confidential
 - Allow for movement
- Fidget toys and/or weighted blankets/stuffed animals
- Table-top signs ("resources will be emailed")
- Highlight student success and diversity through posters, alumni spotlights, and visual storytelling
- Add diversity-positive materials in your space
- Offer seating options, softer lighting, and reduced background noise
- Make water available and allowing fidgets or note taking in any form
- For virtual sessions: allow cameras to be kept off, encourage the use of chat, and share documents live on screen



Tools for Advisors

- Neurodiversity Resource Guide
- Neuroaffirming Advising Cheat Sheet
- Pre- and Post-Survey Questions for Neuroaffirming Advising Sessions
- Advising Flyers



Neurodiversity Resource Guide

RESOURCES FOR THE CHICO STATE COMMUNITY
Neurodiversity is a natural part of our community. Our communication and design choices affect accessibility. Existing resources at Chico State - and beyond - can support you.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Neurotype refers to the specific way(s) in which someone's brain works.

Neurodiversity refers to the natural diversity of neurotypes among people.

Neurodivergent refers to a person - or group of people - with a minority neurotype.

Neurotypical refers to a person - or group of people - with a majority neurotype.

NEURODIVERGENCE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

An individual's intersectionality (overlapping identities and experiences, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexuality) goes hand-in-hand with neurodivergence experience.

NEURODIVERGENCE IN THE CHICO STATE COMMUNITY

- Between 1,930 and 2,573 undergraduate students (out of 12,866 total)
- Between 170 and 227 graduate students (out of 1,133 total)
- Between 134 and 179 faculty members (out of 895 total)
- Between 134 and 179 staff members (out of 899 total)

CREATED SPRING 2025. PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS PRIMER SERVES AS AN INTRODUCTION TO NEURODIVERSITY. PLEASE CONTACT NOTASKFORCE@CSUCHICO.EDU FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, TRAINING, AND EDUCATION.

THE NEURODIVERGENCE PARADIGM

1. It is natural and valuable for people to have different neurotypes.
2. One neurotype is not inherently better than another.
3. Neurodiversity, like all forms of diversity, is a source of creativity and possibility.

INTEGRATING NEURODIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES

There are multiple ways to represent neurodivergent viewpoints in campus settings, such as talking about neurodivergent professionals in the field or talking more generally about neurodivergence in conversations.

Avoid ableism and outdated words or terms, such as "high-functioning/low-functioning" or "special needs."

RESPECTING NEURODIVERGENT IDENTITY

Neurodivergent and disabled individuals often use different terms to describe themselves. If you don't know someone's preferences (e.g. Autistic person, person with autism), ask!

Neuroaffirming Advising Cheat Sheet

Establish Predictable Routines



Structured routines are essential for the success of many neurodiverse students, especially for those challenged by executive function. Faculty can create predictability with specific weekly routines. Consistency in weekly routines is helpful. Begin by mapping out a weekly routine that balances various types of activities, ensuring that students know what to expect each day. This could include specific times for lectures, discussions, group work, and independent study.

Remind Your Student To Seek Support



During the semester you will likely identify those students who need extra support. It is important to communicate with them on the procedures, policies and resources that you have in place for them. Establish an open-door policy and communicate clearly to students that seeking help is a sign of strength and an essential part of the learning process. Ensure they know when to approach for academic, emotional, or social support.

Use Visual Displays



Use visual schedules prominently displayed in the classroom or learning management system. These should include time blocks and icons representing different activities, helping students manage their time and anticipate transitions.

Build Awareness and Sensitivity



Including discussions about neurodiversity promotes awareness and sensitivity. This can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that recognizes and respects the diverse mental health experiences of individual students. Remember that disclosure of neurodiversity from a student should be treated as confidential information. Be sure to thank the student for sharing any personal information with you and then prompt them with an open-ended question about how you can best support them.

Clearly Outline Expectations



Use verbal instructions along with visual aids and rubrics or checklists to ensure comprehension of the tasks and activities you're assigning inside or outside of the classroom.

Do Consistent Review Sessions



"Check-ins, particularly during the first year, could help identify neurodivergent students who are struggling, disengaged, and not seeking support."

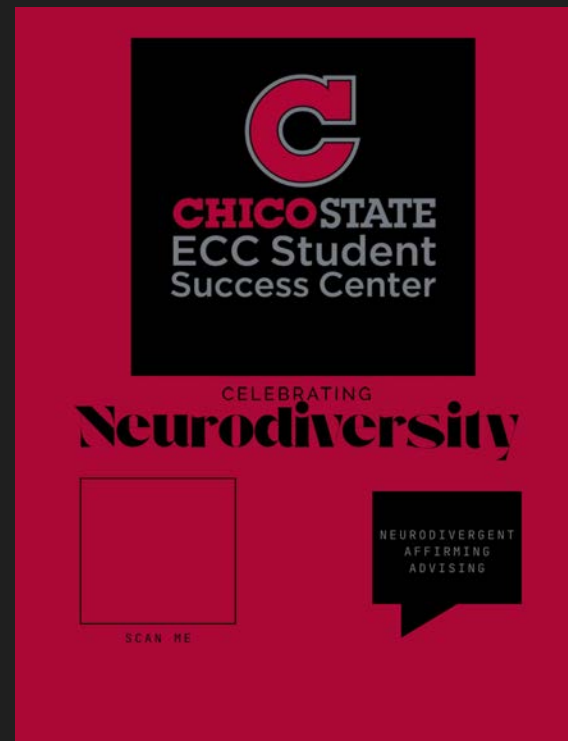
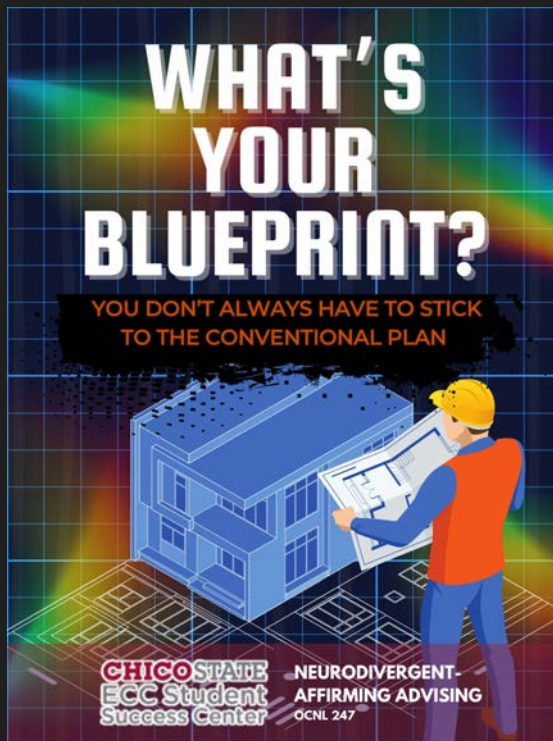
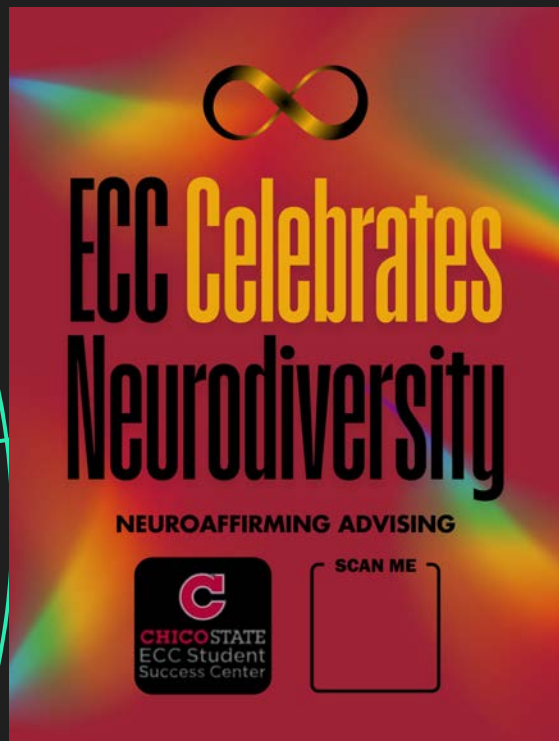
Advising Session Pre-Survey

- How do you best process information?
- Are you aware of the academic support services available to you? Have you used them?
- What accommodations do you find the most helpful?
- Would you like to bring a support person with you?

Advising Session Post-Survey

- On a scale of 1-10, how understanding and inclusive was your advisor?
- Were accommodations provided by your advisor during your meeting in a timely manner?
- Please select which option on how would you like to follow up with your advisor?

Advising Flyers



Brainstorm Activity

- What barriers do you see in the accommodations and advising tools we've provided you based on how your department and job are set up?
- How would you overcome those barriers?

Equitable treatment of neurodivergent students

INEQUITIES

- Viewing disability through a medicalized, legalistic, and deficit-based lens
- More likely to react negatively to a struggling student if you don't understand neurodiversity
- Student needs aren't being addressed due to the lack of awareness both staff and support services have

EQUITY

- Accommodating neurodiverse students in higher learning institutions
- Encouraging neurodiverse students to succeed through a social model of disability lens
- Acknowledging both their challenges and strengths
- Having open dialogue about neurodivergent and disabled experience
- Feeling safe to disclose

Continuing Supports



On-Campus

- [Accessibility Resource Center \(ARC\)](#)
- [Neurodiversity and Disability Faculty Staff Association \(NDDFSA\)](#)
- [Certificate in Neurodiversity for Educators & Professionals](#)
- WellCat Counseling Center ([Shannon Slemrod](#))
- [Neurodiversity & Disability Club](#)
- Career Center ([Diversity Career Resources](#))
- [Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#)

Off-Campus

- [NACADA eTutorial](#)
- Neurodiversity Hub's [Resources for Universities](#)
- College Autism Network's [Higher Education Professional Resources](#)

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Thank you!

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