

Neurological Diversity Statement

The purpose of this statement is to introduce laboratory members to the concept of neurodiversity as well as inform on the ways to help and accommodate neurodiverse members. We, the Hargrove lab, pledge to not discriminate and to accommodate the needs of neurodiverse members and strive to create a stress and judgment free environment. Neurodiverse members are in no way required to disclose their diversity and special needs to other laboratory members.

What is Neurodiversity?

Source: National Symposium of Neurodiversity at Syracuse University

“Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labeled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, Tourette Syndrome, and others. For many autistic people, neurodiversity is viewed as a concept and social movement that advocates for viewing autism as a variation of human wiring, rather than a disease. As such, neurodiversity activists reject the idea that autism should be cured, advocating instead for celebrating autistic forms of communication and self-expression, and for promoting support systems that allow autistic people to live as autistic people.”

Overall, neurodiversity is a term utilized and coined to shift the perspective from ‘learning disabilities’ to ‘learning differences’ so that people can express their learning and working needs without the label of ‘deficit’ or the need for a doctor certification. In practical terms, every person is most productive and efficient in their own self-optimized way; for example, some work best with many people around and some need to isolate themselves to focus or maximize their productivity and attention, others need to listen to music or an audio book.

Source: Harvard Business Review (<https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage>)

*“Neurodiverse people frequently need workplace accommodations, such as headphones to prevent auditory overstimulation, to activate or maximally leverage their abilities. Sometimes they exhibit challenging eccentricities. In many cases the accommodations and challenges are manageable and the potential returns are great [...] Everyone is to some extent **differently abled** (an expression favored by many neurodiverse people), because we are all born different and raised differently. Our ways of thinking result from both our inherent ‘machinery’ and the experiences that have ‘programmed’ us.”*

Accepting neurodiversity means accepting the concept that people work and need different situations and environments and doing so without judgment or prejudice. In this laboratory we are committed to provide and support conditions that allow people to work efficiently, in a judgmental stress-free environment as long as all safety rules are observed. If any individual needs or feel like the strategies adopted by current members do not align or allow the individual to perform at their best, all efforts will be made to meet everyone's' needs without compromising other members' productivity. The first step is to discuss such needs with Dr. Hargrove and to know that individuals can reach out to any member without fear of being judged/criticized.

As a helpful tip to avoid unintentionally criticizing or offending members of the lab try and stay away from sentences like the following:

“Studies have shown that X noise is detrimental to focus” or “Studies have shown that X is the best way to be focused/efficient/productive”. Keep in mind that studies are often performed on groups of people without a learning disability or on a group with the same diagnosis. Therefore, psychological studies cannot encompass the wonderful array of neurodiversity represented within a lab, or an entire university. Consequently, generalizing statements such the ones listed above could be taken as a criticism for not being normalized to that study group or taken as a demonstration that your neurodiversity does not allow you to be maximally productive in the conditions presented by the study. Psychological and behavioral studies should instead be presented and taken as a list of possible strategies to maximize attention and efficiency and they might work or not based on each individual.

“Only music is considered white noise” this is a rather common statement (see resource #10 below). Keep in mind that we all got to graduate school by getting to know and optimizing our learning style and, while still being a work in progress, the strategies we use work for us.

Some (but not all) common strategies may include:

- Condensing lab work at the least full/trafficked times as the intermittent talking and background noise is at a minimum
- Playing music, audiobooks, talks etc.
- Working when no one is in the laboratory and only in the office or the lab next door (clear with Dr. Hargrove what procedures are allowed or not allowed for this specific environment)
- Performing computer work in the office or in quiet conference rooms
- Utilizing a yoga ball, jelly fish chair, fidget spinners, anti-anxiety tools or spinner rings that improves focus or helps deal with distractions.

Many experts of neurodiversity will classify 'white noise' differently based on the individuals. For some people there is no such thing as white noise and music, like intermittent talking, may be as disruptive to their focus. For others music may be

distracting but an audiobook they already listened to, a motivational speech, a show in a foreign language, or a movie they have already seen may all be classified as white noise.

Some resources with tips and experiences of maximizing your productivity and attention span.

“Hacking Graduate School for Neurodiverse Learners: Part 1 of 3”

<https://scholarstudioblog.wordpress.com/2015/11/14/hacking-graduate-school-with-learning-differences/>

“Advising Neurodiverse Thesis and Dissertation Students: Part 2 of 3”

<https://scholarstudioblog.wordpress.com/2015/11/15/working-with-neurodiverse-graduate-students-ideas-for-faculty/>

“Resources for Neurodiverse Grad Student and the Faculty Who Advise Them:

Part 3 of 3” <https://scholarstudioblog.wordpress.com/2015/11/15/part-3-tools-and-resources-for-neurodiverse-graduate-students/>

“4 Strategies to Sharpen Your Focus”

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/225569>

“Secrets to Thriving in Graduate School”

<https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2015/01/secrets-thriving-graduate-school>

“10 Ways to Foster Happiness and Productivity in Graduate School”

<http://sprightlyinnovations.com/leafandleisure/2013/11/18/10-ways-stay-happy-productive-in-graduate-school/>

“Succeeding with Adult ADHD” <https://www.amazon.com/Succeeding-Adult-ADHD-Strategies-Lifetools/dp/1433811251>

“15 Ways to Maximize Productivity at Work” <https://www.inc.com/john-rampton/15-ways-to-increase-productivity-at-work.html>

“How Background Noise Affects the Way you Work”

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3051835/how-background-noise-affects-the-way-you-work>

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