And what is “normal”, anyway?

As a University community, we are very proud of our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. In recent years, one area of human diversity that has gathered increasing international recognition and acknowledgement is neurodiversity.

So, what is neurodiversity? Simply put, neurodiversity refers to the diversity inherent in the minds and brains of people and all of the variation in neurocognitive functioning this entails. In other words, just as diversity in general refers to the multiple ways we humans identify ourselves and are identified by others, neurodiversity specifically refers to the multiple ways in which we think and use our brains differently from one another.

When we fail to recognize the reality of neurological diversity, we can easily fall into the trap of getting carried away with assuming what and who is considered “normal.” And what is “normal”, anyway? If you’re suspicious of this term, you may be interested in learning more about neurodiversity. As a University community, being cognizant of neurodiversity brings with it a whole host of exciting ways to better serve our student population.

Diagnoses such as autism, depression, dyslexia, schizophrenia, ADHD or other conditions that affect the mind and brain present a variety of educational opportunities and challenges. It was not too long ago that many people who fit some of those categories were dismissed as uneducable early in life, let alone imagining that a college education was a realistic part of their future. Today, we live in a world where there are increased opportunities for people with neurocognitive disabilities. There are obviously still barriers. There is also still a great deal of social stigma attached to these conditions. But as diagnostic rates soar, acknowledging a neurodiverse reality helps us to focus on problem-solving, accommodation, accessibility, technological solutions and tool-building designed to help students. Rather than seeing others as needing to be solved, cured or fixed, we can start asking more productive questions: How can we provide access for our students—all of our students—to get where the world is going? A lot of wonderful possibilities are opened by educating ourselves about the diversity of the mind and the brain and abandoning antiquated notions of what is “normal.”

Please be sure to check out the marvelous LibGuide prepared by library staff with information on neurodiversity: [http://libguides.davenport.edu/udl](http://libguides.davenport.edu/udl). Also be sure to look out for an online educational event centered around neurodiversity offered by the Center for Teaching Excellence this February, part of a semester long series on disability and education!

See the website [davenport.edu/dei/calendar](http://davenport.edu/dei/calendar) and/or subscribe to the University Cultural Engagement Calendar to learn of a host of other DEI events.

The rainbow-colored infinity symbol represents the diversity of the autism spectrum as well as the greater neurodiversity movement.