

# Neurodiversity Means Belonging: Coaching, Advising, and Mentorship for Access and Equity

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Hampshire College

We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects...

**Access and Inclusion**

and

**Civility and Respect**

...this week and in all aspects of our organization.

# Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge that the lands we move through together today are the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations and peoples. The land where we live and work in the valley of the river Kwinitekw, also called the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts, is the traditional and unceded territory of the Nipmuc, Pocumtuc, and Nonotuck peoples.

We pay our respects to these nations and to their elders, past, present, and future. We commit to transforming historical and ongoing injustices, honoring legacies of resistance and cultural resilience, and restoring balance to all our relations.

# Community Expectations

The first Community Expectation is Confidentiality. Everything shared in this space, stays in this space.

The second Community Expectation is Noticing. Please be aware of those around you. Noticing also extends to being mindful of how you're feeling, and where you are. It's about recognizing if you need a break, and trying to time that break so that it's not in the middle of someone's sharing.

Any questions about the Community Expectations?

# Agenda

- Introduction
- Framing Neurodiversity
- Coaching, Advising and Mentorship
  - Contemporary Coaching Models
  - Guiding Frameworks of Critical Coaching
  - Building our Neurodiversity Coaching Toolkits
    - Space and Time
    - Momentum and Connection
- Bringing it Home/Application
- Conclusion

- Small, private liberal arts college in Amherst, Massachusetts: 850 students
- No Majors, No Grades
  - Three Divisions & Narrative Evaluations
  - Self-designed interdisciplinary majors
  - All students design and complete year-long thesis project for final year
- Over 40% of students registered with Accessibility Services in Fall 2025
- Five College Consortium Member
  - With Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

## Hampshire College



# Presenters

Griffin Leistinger, any  
critical disability studies, accessible pedagogy, public policy, holistic learning

Parker Farthing, he/him  
dynamic advising, assistive technology, accessible instructional design

William Syldor-Severino: he/him  
transformative justice practice, restorative practices, facilitation and design

Teal Van Dyck, they/them  
disability cultures, ADA coordination, trauma-responsive systems, arts access





# Framing Neurodiversity

A Community of Diverse Desires, Paths, and Needs



## Pathology Paradigm (Walker, 2014)

Two fundamental assumptions:

- There is one “right”, “healthy”, “NORMAL” way for human brains and minds to be configured and to function.

(Or at the very least a normal, acceptable range of functioning)

- When individuals diverge from this “NORMAL” mode of being: there is something wrong with them that needs to be treated or fixed.



## Neurodiversity Paradigm (Walker, 2014)

1. Diversity of minds and brains and bodies, “body-minds” is a natural, healthy form of human diversity
2. There is no “normal” or “correct” style of brain any more than there is one “normal” or “correct” race, gender, or culture.
3. Neurodiversity is subject to the same social dynamics (e.g. oppression and systemic power inequalities) that occur around and intersect between other forms of human diversity (race, culture, gender etc..)



# Think, Pair, Share Activity One

1. Reflect on the prompts and any stories that come to mind
  2. Turn to a person next to you
  3. Take turns sharing what you wish from your own experiences and reflections, and creating space to listen and receive their thoughts
    - a. Two minutes each
  4. Express appreciation, your way!
- How do you see higher education institutions create space for and/or exclude neurodiversity as we've described it?

# Coaching, Advising, and Mentorship

Frameworks and Practices

# Current Coaching Models:

Colleges across the country have increased coaching opportunities for students as a means of retention and support. Guides have been helpful to establish coaching practices in a variety of roles in higher ed:

- From Transactional to Transformational: Coaching in Disability Resources (Ed. Fabrey and Sleeper-Triplett, 2023, AHEAD)
  - Focuses on relational approach: open questions, active listening, and being student guided to reduce shame-anxiety
  - Skill building based off of rehabilitative models of disability
  - Examines equity and cultural differences (Adams, 2023)

# Our Critical Coaching Approach



## Our Critical Coaching Approach

### Relational

- Honors student stories
- Interrogates pathologization and projection
- Trauma / Neurodiversity Responsive
- Interdependence and Community

### Structural

- Actively recognizes and deconstructs institutional harm
- Centers institutional and socio-political positionality of the coach and student

### Developmental

- We are always growing and changing
- Development feeds back into relational and structural dimensions
- Co-creating conditions for growth and change



## Our Roots: Transformative Justice

Transformative Justice employs core tenets of Restorative Justice & practices (focusing on accountability & addressing core harms, incorporating intentional facilitation & design, etc.).

However, Transformative Justice necessitates engagement on a systemic and absolute level, while Restorative Justice does not. In other words, Transformative Justice must always strive towards systems-level change.

# Disability Justice Model

"The term **disability justice** was coined out of conversations between disabled queer women of color activists in 2005, including Patty Berne of Sins Invalid (& Mia Mingus & Stacy Milbern...with Leroy Moore, Eli Clare, Sebastian Margaret [and others]) seeking to **challenge radical and progressive movements to more fully address ableism.**

Disability justice recognizes the **intersecting legacies** of white supremacy, colonial capitalism, gendered oppression and ableism in understanding how people's' bodies and minds are labelled '**deviant**', '**unproductive**', '**disposable**' and/or '**invalid**'."

– **Project LETS** - Resources and Curricula

"All bodies are unique and essential. All bodies are whole. All bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. We are powerful not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them.

We move together, with no body left behind. This is Disability Justice."

Patty Berne & Sins Invalid

# Think, Pair, Share Activity Two

1. Reflect on the prompts and any stories that come to mind
2. Turn to a person next to you
3. Take turns sharing what you wish from your own experiences and reflections, and creating space to listen and receive their thoughts
  - Three minutes each
4. Express appreciation, your way!

What coaching, advising, or mentorship practices have you found supportive to neurodivergent students?

- Where do you see some of your practices in the frameworks we shared?

# Timing and Time Perception

- Significant and complex temporal processing differences consistently found to be a key indicator in ADHD (Ptacek et al, 2019)
  - Connected with studies showing structural cerebellar differences
  - In ADHD, longer processing intervals seen to reduce impulsivity
- Temporal processing differences may also be experienced by autistic students, and in mental health disabilities such as PTSD
- We encourage accessibility professionals to examine biases and stigma about neurodiversity and “time management”
  - The barrier of temporal processing is real and evidence-based
  - This is more than a skill issue, invokes “double empathy” problem

# Neuroemergent Time

Source: [Marta Rose / Divergent Design Studio](#)

## Neuroemergent Time

can be viewed as an elliptical orbit.

Things speed up during parts of this orbit, but they *necessarily* slow down during the rest of it.

## In Neuroemergent Time

there are the "getting shit done" phases of the orbit, periods of intense concentration, energy, & productivity.

## In Neuroemergent Time

there are also *necessarily* the "spinning out in space gathering stardust" phases of the spiral orbit, periods of stillness, of staring out windows, of diving down rabbit holes.

# Momentum and Connection

## Inertia

Term used in the autistic community (and also experienced by some with ADHD, LD, mental health disabilities) stemming from Newton's first law of motion

Refers to challenges starting, stopping, or switching between tasks

## Autism Inertia Mechanisms:

- Motivational: tasks that are stressful, aversive, or anxiety inducing.
- Organizational: tasks that are complex or involve transitions.
- Movement: can affect even very simple tasks and meeting basic needs.

# Momentum and Connection

## Principles for helping with inertia

Distinguish between Mechanisms	Is the barrier motivational, organizational or movement related?
Use continuity	Avoid Interruptions and unnecessary transitions.
Use prompts carefully	Think of tone, timing, and focus on the student
Environmental Scaffolding	Dedicated spaces to specific tasks that is appealing to go to, have a routine
Lower the threshold	Small steps, have someone else do first step or do it together

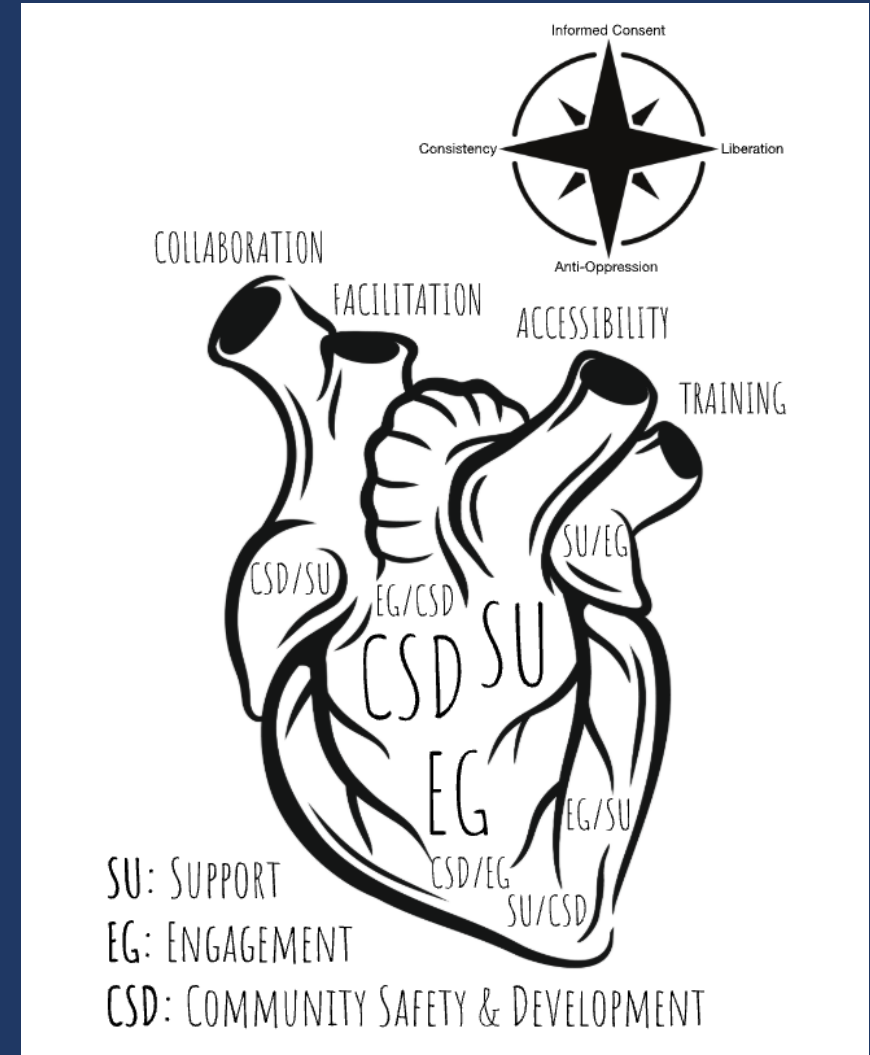


# Connection & Design

## TJAR Vectors

TJAR Vectors work to support staying “on task”, and ensuring that we’re building towards and accomplishing what we’re intending to build/accomplish.

Core elements of TJAR Vectors include: Collaboration, Facilitation, Accessibility, Training, Informed Consent, Consistency, Liberatory Practices, and Anti-Oppressive Practices.



# Connection & Design

## Access Intimacy

“Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else “gets” your access needs...Sometimes it looks like both of you trying to create access as hard as you can with no avail in an ableist world. Sometimes it is someone just sitting and holding your hand while you both stare back at an inaccessible world.” (Mingus, 2011)

*Access Intimacy requires engaging with our coaching and support practice on fundamental levels, i.e. committing to access beyond need, striving towards liberatory, anti-oppressive, and transformative practices.*

# Student Development in Coaching

Higher Education is a deeply impactful moment in a person's life

- Vulnerable
- New experiences & struggles

Neurodivergent folks may have even more challenging time navigating college as they may not fit neatly into the process that's expected of them.

Coaches, advisors, and mentors play a vital role in supporting student development and self-authorship.

- Does a coach reproduce neurotypical and deficit-focused models or do they work towards liberatory models with the student?

# Example in Student Development

## The Set Up

*A student comes in saying they are going to fail their class because of “time management” issues. Their professor said they couldn’t meet to clarify assignments and told the student they should just make a calendar and try harder. The student says it’s all too much and they blame themselves for not being able to cut it. They feel they should just drop out.*

# Example in Student Development

## The Response

*The coach talks with the student about systemic issues facing faculty and staff at the college. As it turns out, recent layoffs have decreased support for students many folks are having a tough time getting support from faculty.*

*Using neurodiversity responsive approaches, the coach also discusses techniques that involve autistic inertia, neuroemergent time, and techniques for gaining momentum in their own body-mind. They may even discuss disability culture builders who have articles or videos about similar situations.*

*The coach offers doing work in the waiting room or meeting with other students who have expressed interest in body doubling.*

# Example in Student Development

## *The Developmental Result:*

*By the end of the meeting, The student has reframed their preconceived deficit of “time management” as a product of a material relationship between themselves, their learning experience, and the school rather than an individual failure.*

*They are excited to try new tactics that go beyond skill building and deficit framings.*

*Before leaving, they ask if there are any other students working to advocate for accessible education. The coach gives the information of student groups who are organizing on campus.*

# Our Critical Coaching Approach





# Bringing it Home

Reflections, Conclusion, and Additional Resources

# Session Evaluation



[tinyurl.com/AHEADFeedback](https://tinyurl.com/AHEADFeedback)

Your feedback helps shape future programming.

Thank you for attending!

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