

USC Upstate Neurodiversity Task Force

Spring 2022

Introduction

College campuses are increasingly diverse and USC Upstate is no exception. These diversities may consist of racial and ethnic groups, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and, increasingly, neurodivergent students. This umbrella term applies to a range of neurological variations regarding learning and can include (but is not limited to) autism spectrum, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ADHD. While it is clear schools must do all they can to ensure their learning environments meet the needs of students, some higher education institutions are thriving in their support of neurodiversity while others are falling behind.

In Spring 2022, the interim Provost convened a task force to examine USC Upstate's current climate regarding neurodiversity, as well as identify best practices regarding training, planning, programming, and curriculum to achieve a more inclusive campus.

The task force reviewed scholarly research, peer and aspirant institutional websites, and initiatives undertaken over the past few years at USC-Upstate. Resources were examined to determine what practices (if any) have made institutions better for neurodivergent students without taking away students' opportunity to learn and become independent; whether neurodiversity was incorporated as a factor across different types of discipline; and if institutions created programming beyond the curriculum. Lastly, the review indicated how families and communities can be affected by the higher education systems (admissions, housing, degree planning, courses, etc) and the need for policies and procedures to achieve the aims of creating supportive structures for neurodivergence and students who learn differently.

National Trends & Data

The CDC indicates 1 in 4 adults have a disability; in South Carolina, the prevalence is higher (1 in 3). Data from the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) indicates only 1 in 5 undergraduates report a disability. The Department of Education estimates around 11% of graduates are considered neurodiverse, though as much as 30% of any student body may fall into any of the neurodiverse categories based on estimations that between 30% and 40% of the population is thought to be neurodiverse. In addition, 83% of people with a disability acquired their disability later in life, whether due to an accident, illness, or genetic condition which emphasizes the need for increased support for students within higher education.

USC Upstate Students Seeking Assistance from Disability Services

As of the 2021-2022 school year, 233 students were served by disability services (about 4% of the student population). Of these, 153 received accommodations. The largest category represented included ADHD, with psychological and medical issues a close second.

It is unclear if the discrepancy between Upstate's statistics and those reported nationally is a result of a population that truly needs less assistance or if the lack of participation in disability services is due to limited awareness of its existence and opportunities for support. These discrepancies may also be the result of the perception of Upstate as a school that is unwelcoming to students in need of additional services, especially as they pertain to neurodiversity. Simply put, neurodivergent students may not apply to Upstate, to begin with.

Task Force Findings

Respondents indicated an uninviting atmosphere in response to interactions with some faculty and services at USC Upstate. Perception from students and the outside community is directly related to a lack of faculty awareness regarding the prevalence of both visible and invisible disabilities.

Areas Identified as Needing Increased Awareness and Education

- Student/faculty relations in regard to neurodiversity, accommodations, and resources available at USC Upstate
 - Research: Providing more inclusive and accessible teaching will result in higher student opinions across the board; this includes addressing accessibility and diversity of learning styles in course materials
 - Example: [Diversity of Learning Styles](#) Resources (See Appendix at the end of this report)
- Current availability of training/support regarding creating accessible course content
 - Research: Items include closed captioning (CC) on video presentations; creating accessible documents; textbooks available in multiple formats (not just print); possible CAIFS workshops or website
 - Example: [10 Tips for Creating Accessible Course Content](#)
- Neurodiversity applying not just to faculty-student relations, but also includes faculty-faculty interactions, staff-faculty, staff-staff, etc.
- Additional concerns:

- Questions regarding the roles, responsibilities, and existence of a committee previously created to oversee Universal Design Initiatives: [Accessibility Committee Members | USC Upstate](#)
- An overwhelmed staff/faculty sensitive to “one more thing”
- Students’ lack of awareness regarding accessibility options and support already in place (such as Counseling Service grants and reduced prices for diagnosis procedures).
- It was also noted that while there are a variety of services available on campus, locating these can be difficult if not downright impossible. Several different departments offer training and resources (CAIFS and disability services, for example), however, there is no connection identified regarding these departments when conducting an internet search. Many of the available options would be challenging to locate unless one knew to specifically look for their presence. Considering that neurodivergent students (and even faculty) may be at a disadvantage already when they are looking for assistance, a more streamlined process to identify resources is needed.

Task Force Recommendations

The primary recommendations involve increasing awareness and educating faculty and staff to create a more inclusive campus.

Three primary themes regarding recommendations surfaced:

1. Faculty Buy-In

- How We Teach Students
 - Create a Lib Guide or Resources Guide that is easy to find across websites
 - Additional Development Opportunities for Faculty (workshops/training)
 - Reactivate Committee: [What is Accessibility | USC Upstate](#)
 - Universal Design
 - Active Learning
 - Inclusive Teaching: [How to Make Your Teaching More Inclusive \(chronicle.com\)](#)
 - Empowered Learning: [Articles — Designed To Learn \(designed2learn.co\)](#)
- How We Test Students

- Develop Strategies to Allow Students to Demonstrate Learning Outcomes beyond “traditional” Testing
 - [Strategies for Virtual Testing, including Testing Alternatives](#)
- How We Train Faculty
 - Required Training for Neurodiversity or Learning Differences and Annual Module Completion (similar to Mental Health First Aid and Title IX or FERPA)

2. Campus Awareness

- Summit for all Employees (Staff and Faculty)
 - Guest Speaker
 - Panels/Sessions include Experts, Students, Best Practices
- Common Read/Book Club for Faculty, Staff, and Students
- Advocacy Module in UNIV 101 (How do I advocate for my needs?)
- Creating Intentional Spaces (Quiet Zones, Sensory Calming Area, etc.)
- Mentoring for Students (Peer to Peer Support)

3. Pre-Arrival Improvements for Potential Students and Families

- Information on Resources at Upstate located on Admissions and Housing Websites (and included in mailings, emails, etc.)
- Changes to Orientation (optional specific Orientation day)

Additional Research

Further research will need to be completed, with input gathered from a variety of campus stakeholders. This will likely include the expertise of those successfully implementing assistance/accommodations on this campus, as well as recognized leaders from other college campuses

Items that are most pressing and need to be addressed/analyzed

1. Focus Groups utilizing input from staff, faculty, and students on the following:
 - Students’ experiences with disability services
 - Perceptions of “disability services” and the possibility of more inclusive terms? (ie, should the name of disability services be changed)

- Protocols for students with a diagnosis needing assistance
2. Faculty Awareness (including but not limited to the development of user-friendly handouts, information, and resource guides)

Immediate Changes or Implementations

- Inclusion of Neurodiversity in DEI planning, initiatives, and recommendations
- Updated syllabus template to include accessibility services (not ADA statement)
- Updated photos for Disability Services
- Develop an Implementation Team with members selected from **focus groups**

Task Force Members

- Amanda Karls, Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Compliance; Co-Chair
- Kara Lee, University Supervisor/Instructor, School of Education; Co-Chair
- Dr. Kenneth Barideaux, Assistant Professor, Psychology
- Victoria Lockhart, Transfer Advisor and Student Services Coordinator
- Dr. Renu Pariyadath, Professor, Communication
- Dr. Shannon Polchow, Professor of Spanish
- Amber Puckette, Academic Advisor, Student Success Center
- Dr. Kristina Randall, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Performance and Health

Additional Readings and Resources

- Books and Articles
 - [Supporting Colleges and University Students with Invisible Disabilities](#)
 - [Neurodiversity Is Diversity | AAC&U \(aacu.org\)](#)
 - [Exploring the Social Experiences of College Students Who Have Autism Spectrum Disorders: Examining Neurodiversity on Campus](#)
 - [Neurodiversity in Higher Education: A Narrative Synthesis](#)
 - [Neurodiversity Is a Competitive Advantage \(hbr.org\)](#)

- [Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Positive Responses to Specific Learning Differences](#)
- Websites
 - [Neurodiverse Universities & Initiatives | Neurodiversity Network](#)
 - [Student Support | Stanford Neurodiversity Project | Stanford Medicine](#)
 - [How Universities Can Better Welcome Neurodiverse Students \(keystoneacademic.com\)](#)
 - [Neurodiversity in higher education: Insights from qualitative research by the BRAINHE project](#)
 - [Neurodiversity Hub](#)
 - [Neurodiversity in the Workplace](#)

Diversity of Learning Styles:

Your well-being and success in this course are important to me. I want to recognize that different people learn best in different ways and that you may have challenges in your life to manage along with the responsibility of being a student. The resources listed below can be helpful in assisting you with your academic, physical, mental, and future career success. I also encourage you to discuss with me about how best to balance your individual needs and learning style with the expectations for the course.

*Please note that due to COVID-19, hours and appointment procedures for the resources listed below may vary. Additionally, *Students who show symptoms of COVID (fever, cough, shortness of breath) or who test positive for COVID-19 must inform USC Upstate Health Services (864-503-5191). Students with academic concerns while in quarantine or isolation should contact Susannah Waldrop, Executive Director of the Student Success Center (swaldrop@uscupstate.edu, 864-503-5414).*

Resource Name & Purpose	Contact Details
<u>Student Success Center</u> – provides tutoring (2 free one-hour sessions/week for each subject area), study groups facilitation, one-on-one consultations, etc.	Sign up for tutoring in Library 210 Call 864-503-5392 to make a general appointment with Academic Support
<u>Disability Services</u> - USC Upstate supports the ongoing development of an accessible university that embraces diversity through educational programming, service, resources, and facilities that are usable by all members of the campus community.	In keeping with University policy, any student with a disability who requests academic accommodations should contact Disability Services at 864-503-5199 to arrange an appointment with a Disability Service staff member. Students are encouraged to seek an appointment as early in the semester as possible, as accommodations are not provided retroactively.
<u>Writing Center</u> – assistance developing outlines and drafts, organizing drafts, learning strategies to address writing challenges, etc.	Located in Humanities and Performing Arts Center (HPAC), Room 136 Hours: M/W 9:30am-3:30pm; T/TH 11am-4pm; F 10:30am-2:30pm Contact: 864-503-5883 or writingcenter@uscupstate.edu for an appointment
<u>Information and Technology Services</u> – provides support for email, SSC, wireless access, printing, computers, mobile devices, Blackboard, etc.	Located on the first floor of the Administration Building, Suite 109. Hours: M-TH 8am-10pm; F 8am-5pm; Su 5-10pm (email only) Contact by calling 864-503-5257 or email helpdesk@uscupstate.edu
<u>Testing Center</u> – proctors tests for online classes or make-up tests for on-campus classes that have been arranged by your professor. It does not replace services provided by Disability Services.	Located in Media 218 Hours: M/T/F 8:30-11:30am & 12:30-5:30pm; W/TH 8:30am-1:30pm & 2:30-7:30pm For an appointment, call 864-503-7422 or email testingcenter@uscupstate.edu

Resource Name & Purpose	Contact Details
<p><u>Health Services</u> – assistance with physical well-being through health care & education, preventative health, acute illnesses, sexual & reproductive health, chronic disease screening & management, etc.</p>	<p>To make an appointment call 864-503-5191 or visit MyHealth at www.uscupstate.edu/myhealth</p>
<p><u>Counseling Services</u> – assistance with holistic health and education, validating personal identity, promoting self-concepts, encouraging health choices/habits. The confidential services are free to USC Upstate students.</p> <p>Offers confidential support through: individual/couples/group counseling, educational workshops, testing services, and psychiatric services.</p>	<p>Call 864-503-5195 and select option #1 for Counseling Services between 8:30am-5pm M-F or go to the Campus Life Center 224. To access a counselor after hours for an emergency call 864-503-5195 and select option #2 (on-campus) or 911 (off-campus) or Spartanburg Regional Hospital Emergency Department 864-560-6000 (off-campus) Call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Hotline; Call 1-800-273-5066 for the Safe Homes/Rape Crisis Center; Call 1-800-291-2139 for Safe Harbor</p>
<p><u>Office of Student Involvement</u> – oversees organizations that focus on providing students with a sense of belongingness and community on campus, provides learning opportunities to understand your own identity development and to educate on allyship and true civility to build an inclusive community, as well as provide opportunities for profession and interpersonal skill development.</p>	<p>Office is located in the Campus Life Center (room 212) and can also be reached by calling 864-503-5122 M-F 8:30-5pm. They can also be followed on Twitter (https://twitter.com/USCUUpstateOSI) and Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/USCUUpstateOSI/). Spartan Pantry, which provides food and basic necessities (e.g., personal hygiene items, cleaning supplies) to assist students during financial emergencies, is also located in this office.</p>
<p><u>Spartan Rec Center</u> – Offers activities and programs to facilitate health and wellness. Services are free to students and classes can be viewed on the “USC Upstate Spartan Rec” app.</p>	<p>The rec center is located in the Health Education Complex and may be contacted at 864-503-5080. Hours: M-Th 6:30am-11pm, F 6:30am-9pm, Sa 12-6pm, and Su 3-11pm.</p>

Resource Name & Purpose	Contact Details
<p><u>Office of Institutional Equity, Inclusion, and Engagement</u> – seeks to build and maintain a culture that reflects individuals’ intellectual, experiential, and cultural contributions while minimizing behaviors of harm in order to achieve equity. Incidents of discrimination, bias, and harassment should be reported here.</p>	<p>Forms to report discrimination, bias, and harassment are located at https://www.uscupstate.edu/diversity/office-of-institutional-equity-inclusion-and-engagement/</p> <p>You may also contact Alphonso R. Atkins Jr., the Equal Opportunity/Title IX Coordinator, at the Stockwell Administration Building, room 225 or 864-503-5959.</p>
<p><u>Dean of Students Office</u> – This office works with students to offer support in times of personal, family, financial, and academic crisis. It also offers protection embodied in the codes and conducts of the University. The Upstate Student Handbook can be reviewed for information of student policies and regulations.</p>	<p>Student Grievance form is located at: https://www.uscupstate.edu/current-students/dean-of-students/</p> <p>Students Emergency Fund Request form is located at: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofSCUpstate&layout_id=4</p> <p>Dr. R. Britton Katz, the Dean of Students, can be contacted at the Campus Life Center, room 222 or 864-503-5125</p>
<p><u>Public Safety</u> – seeks to promote a safe, secure, and healthy campus environment from fire and criminal incidents. A university shuttle between the Spartanburg campus and the Johnson College campus downtown is also offered to students for convenience and protection. Parking permits and fees are also handled by this office.</p>	<p>The public safety office is located at 219 North Campus Blvd. and can be reached at 864-503-7777. Services are offered 24-hours and the office is staffed by certified law enforcement officers.</p>
<p><u>Career Management</u> – assistance in every step of your career search through self-assessments, career exploration, career counseling, interview preparation, building resume and cover letter, job searches, workshops, internship assistance, graduate school preparation, etc.</p>	<p>To make an appointment call 864-503-5993. Career Services are located in Library 242 and are open M-F 8:30am-5pm.</p>