

LANDMARK COLLEGE PRESENTS

# MANAGING A NEURODIVERSE WORKFORCE

UNDERSTANDING THE  
STRENGTHS IN OUR  
DIFFERENCES



# LANDMARK COLLEGE

PREMIERE COLLEGE FOR STUDENTS  
THAT LEARN DIFFERENTLY



- Established in 1985 to serve students with dyslexia
- Small liberal arts college, 400 students
- Neurodiversity, capacity and growth of an educational model
- Methodology, research, and innovation on the state and national level
- Baccalaureate, associate, and professional credentialing
- Universal Design for Learning
- 33% of enrolled students have disclosed an Autism diagnosis

# OVERVIEW

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The neurodiversity movement, language, and benefits in the workplace

Examining your own management style and best practices

Hiring & Interviewing

Understanding accommodations

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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After this workshop you will be able to:

- State the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce
- Describe best management and hiring practices for a neurodiverse workforce
- Define what accommodations are in the workplace

# Definitions

## "Natural Variations"

### Neurodiversity:

The concept that neurological differences are a natural part of the human genome and to be recognized and respected as normal variations in the population.

Although the term has typically been used in reference to individuals with autism, it broadly refers to learning differences (e.g. Dyslexia, ADHD).

### Neurodivergent:

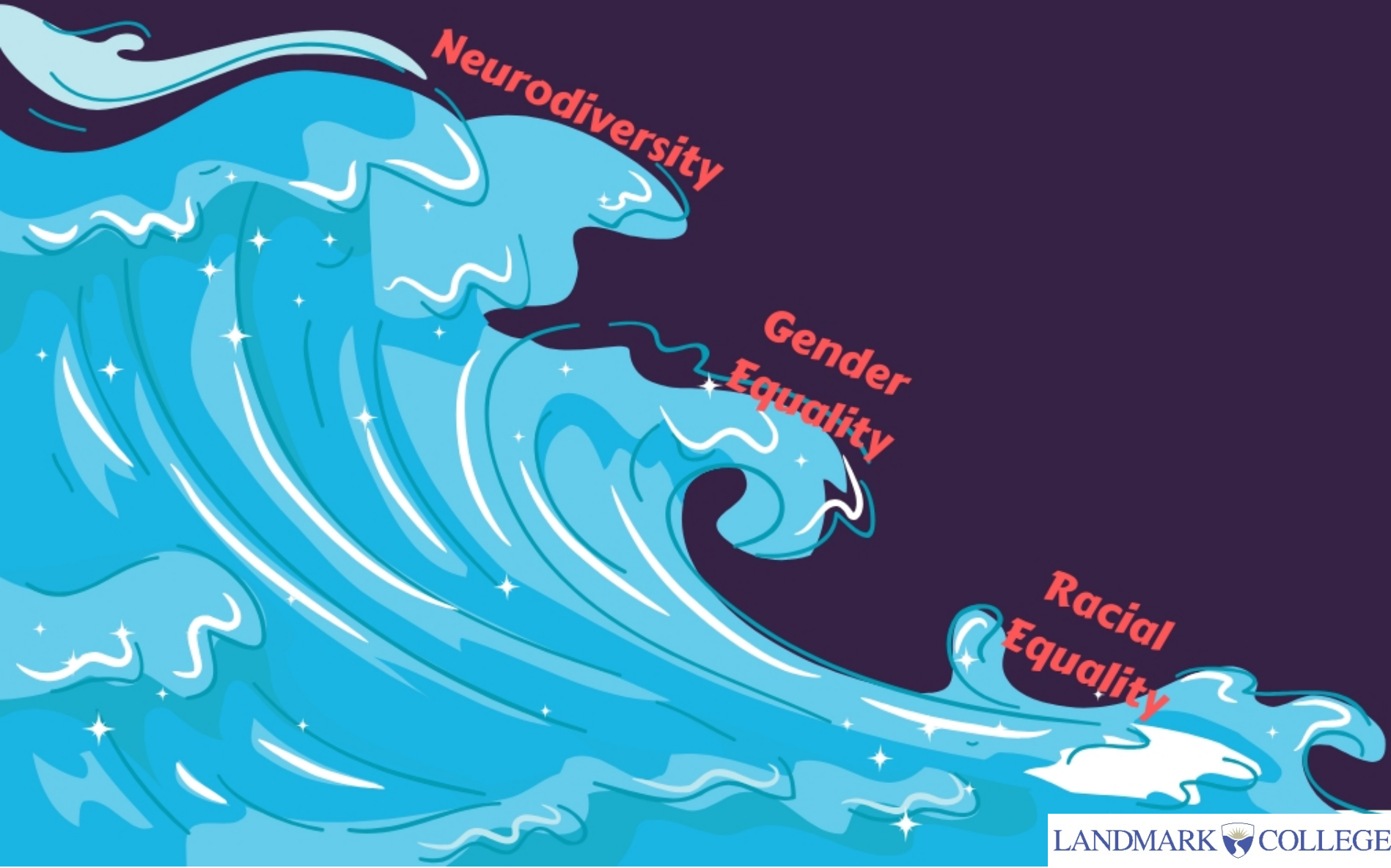
Having cognitive functioning that diverges significantly from the dominant social standards of 'normal.'

### Neurotypical:

Having cognitive functioning that falls into the social standards of 'normal.' Seen as the opposite of neurodivergent.



# Ahead of the wave





# GO BIG OR GO HOME

Fortune 500 companies with hiring practices that include neurodiversity



*"This is by no means a charity. This is about our bottom line."*

-Jamell Mitchell  
Neurodiversity Center of  
Excellence Operations  
Leader  
EY

# LEARNING

## Dyslexia/Language-based

- **Disparity between basic language skills and higher-level cognition:** reasoning, analogy, problem-solving, creativity
- **Challenges with reading,** language, writing and spelling

## ADD/ADHD

- Issues with **time management and organization**
- Inattention
- Impassivity & Hyperactivity
- Mental effort depletion
- Performance inconsistency
- **Difficulty with Executive Functions**

# DIFFERENCES

## Autism

- **Impairment in social communication,** including difficulty interpreting nonverbal communication. This can look like: **literal** interpretation of language, **being too honest** or direct, **difficulty with eye contact.**
- **Repetitive** patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (routines can be very important).
- **Hyper or Hypo-reactivity to environment**—e.g. light and sound sensitivity, indifference to temperature, issues with textures/clothing

**Neurotypicals orient towards people, individuals on the spectrum oriented towards facts and information.**



# Cool

## Dyslexia/Language-based

- Spatial reasoning and global visual processing
- Seeing the '**bigger picture**'
- Pattern recognition
- Strong visual thinking
- **Highly creative**
- **Strong problem solving** ability

## ADD/ADHD

- Creative and **highly inventive**
- Ability to **hyper-focus** on areas of interest, and can have a **high level of productivity**
- Energetic & emotional expression
- Being **perceptive and noticing changes**

# Abilities

## Autism

- **Deep passions** and interests, may be particularly skilled in one area
- Very **honest** and **loyal**
- Very **detail-oriented**
- Can engage in repetitive tasks
- **Punctual** and rarely miss work
- Strong visual thinking
- **Logical**
- Pattern recognition



# ACTIVITY

What, if anything, might you need to change about your management practices if you were supervising an individual with a sight impairment?

What, if anything, might you need to change about your management practices if you were supervising an individual on the autism spectrum?

Stranger in a  
strange land...

**What if you came to  
work one day and...**

...you didn't understand the  
language  
...the customs seemed  
foreign  
...expectations were unclear  
and vague  
...and you had no idea where  
to find the coffee maker

# GET ON BOARD

ONBOARDING NEW EMPLOYEES IN NEURODIVERGENT-FRIENDLY WAYS



**Onboarding can be overwhelming for some individuals. What can you do to minimize anxiety?**



Ideally, information should be comprehensive, provided in advance and offered in a variety of formats.



Highlight aspects that may seem 'obvious'--e.g. work hours, breaks, communication channels, dress code.



If a new hire struggles with social communication, the social aspects of onboarding can be too much. Break it up or seek other avenues.



Discover preferred modes of communication (e.g. written, verbal, images, etc.).

# NEURODIVERSITY SMART MANAGEMENT

PRACTICES THAT MAKE YOU A  
STRONGER SUPERVISOR



Willingness to be highly person-centric in your management practices, trying to deeply understand each employees strengths and challenges.



Communicate effectively--be direct, be specific, and provide as much detail as possible.



Provide clear expectations (especially about outcomes), deadlines, and try not to assume what your employee does and does not know.



Provide detailed feedback and focus on behaviors that can be measured.

# NEURODIVERSITY SMART MANAGEMENT

PRACTICES THAT MAKE YOU A  
STRONGER SUPERVISOR

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"Who can say what  
form of wiring will  
prove best at any  
given moment?"

-Harvey Blume, Journalist and  
Autism Advocate

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Consider multiple learning approaches when presenting information.



Be flexible and consider 'role adjustments' when needed and when possible.



Introduce changes slowly when possible and try to include employees in the process.

# Based on what you have learned today...

*...in what areas do you feel like you're exceling when it comes to your role as a manager?*

*...what are two aspects of your management approach that you would like to improvement upon? What are some specific changes you can implement in the coming weeks to move you in that direction?*

# HIRING PRACTICES

Do your practices bring out the strengths of ALL applicants?

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“Behaviors in many neurodiverse people run counter to the common notion of what makes a good employee- solid communication skills, being a team player, emotional intelligence, persuasiveness, sales person type personalities, the ability to network, the ability to conform to standard practices without special accommodations.

These criteria systematically screen out neurodiverse people”.

“Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage”  
Austin and Pisano, 2017  
The Harvard Business Review

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- What are your current hiring practices? How do you screen applicants?
- Does the hiring process reflect the type of work they will be doing?
- Are there adjustments you could make to make your hiring practices even more inclusive?



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: ACCOMMODATIONS

Workplace accommodations are a requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## What they are:

- For qualified individuals that meet the job requirements (e.g. edu, skills, experience)
- Reasonable accommodations allow an employee to complete the essential functions of the job
- Can range from simple seating and office arrangements to technology that will allow an individual to do their job more effectively
- Apply to all stages of an employee's employment from interviewing to firing

## What they are NOT:

- 'Special' treatment
- Always costly
- Apply only after you have hired an individual





Free advice for  
employers, employees  
and job seekers

Examples of  
Accommodations for  
Individuals with Autism



### ASK JAN

If you have a question about workplace accommodations or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and related legislation, we can help.



- Providing interview questions prior to interview
- Provide topics prior to meetings to help facilitate communication
- Noise canceling headphones
- Allow employee to use "fidgets" to provide sensory input
- Divide larger projects into smaller tasks and provide a checklist



# Case Studies