Neurodiverse students are estimated to represent 11-30% of currently enrolled college students. Since 2019, neurodivergent and disabled students at many universities and colleges (including Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, Penn, and Yale) have written about the challenges they've faced on their campuses, especially not feeling as if they belong and, related, difficulties in registering and obtaining accommodations.

Our conference keynote speaker has a strong commitment to addressing such concerns. Award-winning author, speaker, and expert in mental health and neurodiversity Katie Rose Guest Pryal writes:

*As a teacher, it can be easy to feel put-upon to have to accommodate a student with a disability. You have your way of teaching, and it works for you. You're good at your job. Then suddenly a student shows up who is hearing impaired, visually impaired, cognitively impaired, or what have you, and suddenly you must accommodate that student's impairment.*

*At least, that's what it seems like from the outside.*

Our October gathering will explore how to invite disability in, to make our practices and policies truly inclusive and accessible – better for us all, our students, tutors, instructors, programs and centers.
Registration and Lodging Information

Conference Registration:

- Please register for the conference by August 31st for an early bird rate of $125 ($150 thereafter).

Lodging:

- A select number of rooms have also been reserved at The Inn at Penn at a conference rate of $309.00 per night. Please book your room using this link by September 3rd to receive the conference rate.
- A select number of rooms have been reserved at The Study @ University City at a conference rate of $239.00 per night. Please book your room using this link by September 6th to receive the conference rate.

Conference Schedule at a Glance

Friday, October 6th
Location: Van Pelt - Dietrich Library at 3420 Walnut Street, 6th Floor
Note: To enter the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library, visitors must show a current, valid government or school-issued photo ID that contains an expiration date
Schedule:
- 4:00-5:00 Steering Committee Meeting (Seminar Room 627)
- 5:30-6:30 Registration and Welcome Cocktail Reception (Moelis Reading Terrace)
- 6:30-7:30 Plated Dinner and Keynote Address with Katie Rose Guest Pryal, “Neurodiversity and Teaching Writing” (Class of 1978 Pavilion)
- 7:30-8:00 Book Signing

Saturday, October 7th
Location: McNeil Building at 3718 Locust Walk, 1st Floor
Schedule:
- 8:45-9:15: Registration and Breakfast (Suite 110)
- 9:15-9:30: Welcome (Room 150)
- 9:30-10:20: “Forging Opportunities for Neurodiverse Students in the Writing Classroom” (Room 150)
- 10:30-11:20: “Designed with Access in Mind” (Room 150)
- 11:30-12:30: “Accessibility without Accommodations in the Writing Center” (Room 150)
- 12:30: Boxed Lunch (Suite 110)
We have neurodivergent students in our classrooms: students with ADHD, autism, anxiety disorders, depression, and more. Despite the differences among them, these students all frequently struggle with focus, concentration, planning, reading, processing, and feeling overwhelmed — what psychologists call “executive function.” And yet, most neurodivergent students never come to professors for accommodations.

Fortunately, it’s easier than you think to create an accessible classroom for your students. Dr. Pryal will explain what “neurodiversity” means, what it is like for neurodivergent students in higher education, and provide advice for how to teach accessibly in a writing classroom.

Katie Rose Guest Pryal, J.D., Ph.D., is a bipolar-autistic author, speaker, lawyer, and law professor. With a law degree and a doctorate in rhetoric, she is an expert in public discourse and how it influences policy. She has spent nearly two decades researching neurodiversity and how to make the world more accessible to all people.


Dr. Pryal is a frequent speaker, writer, and media guest for venues such as The New York Times, Slate, Al-Jazeera, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and more, and she publishes research on neurodiversity and mental health. An avid equestrian, she founded NeuroEq, an organization dedicated to inclusion of neurodiversity in the equestrian community. She lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
Saturday Sessions
McNeil Building at 3718 Locust Walk, 1st Floor

8:45-9:15: Registration and Breakfast (Suite 110)

9:15-9:30: Welcome (Room 150)
Matthew Osborn, Director of the Critical Writing Program, Marks Family Center for Excellence in Writing

9:30-10:20: “Forging Opportunities for Neurodiverse Students in the Writing Classroom” (Room 150)
Jon Argaman, Lecturer in Critical Writing
Amanda DiLodovico, Lecturer in Critical Writing

In keeping with current research and advocacy, the Critical Writing Program at the University of Pennsylvania has been transforming from what we once called a “disability-centered writing program” (Ross, Browning 2019) to one continuously poised to identify and address impairments, broadly conceived: not just impairments often labeled disabilities, but also those that arise from the social, academic, technological, or built environments. We have in recent years focused intensively on addressing impairments related to neurodiverse students, finding that most are social and academic. We are deepening our understanding of such impairments by working collaboratively with writing faculty to design processes and curricula that embrace pedagogical, social, and technological ways to facilitate inclusion and academic success for all students. This panel will discuss our efforts to identify, analyze, and, where possible, transform aspects of our curriculum and approach to teaching, so that we can expand our sense of “universal design” to include neurodiversity, an as yet underexplored aspect of inclusivity in higher education. We will discuss our findings and also how we have found ways to address academic and social impairments that serve as unnecessary and dispiriting barriers to the success of students with, for example, slower processing speed, forgetfulness, social anxiety, or reading difficulties. Our aim – our ideal – is to create classes that are so inclusive that neurodiverse students will not require diagnoses or special accommodations because such diverse needs have already been anticipated and addressed in our curriculum, our teaching practices, our technology, and our social environment.
10:30-11:20: “Designed with Access in Mind” (Room 150)
Marjan Osman Gartland, Director of Creative Strategy and Design at Penn University Life
Simuelle "Simmee" Myers, Director of Instructional Design for Integrated Care, Weingarten Center
Aaron Spector, Director of Disability Services, Weingarten Center
Hannah Urkowitz, UX Web Designer for Wharton External Affairs

Does the term “web accessibility” bring to mind a jumble of confusing guidelines and unnecessary red tape? This panel of disability and design experts reveal that accessible design is simply, good design. Learn why accessibility matters to a broad base of audience members and take away a practical understanding of design principles that meet accessibility standards while helping your content communicate more clearly to all end-users. The panel will also discuss how this applies to learning experiences for students though the concept of universal design for learning. Designing with accessibility in mind does not have to be an extra burden. In fact, accessibility is a pathway to better, more user-friendly design.

11:30-12:20: “Accessibility without Accommodations in the Writing Center” (Room 150)
Ahmed Ahmed, Undergraduate Writing Fellow
Emma Søndergaard Jensen, Undergraduate Writing Fellow
Stacy Kastner, Director of the Marks Family Writing Center
Dana Walker, Lecturer in Critical Writing
Anthony Wong, Undergraduate Writing Fellow
Fayyaz Vellani, Lecturer in Critical Writing

This rapidfire roundtable introduces two approaches the Marks Family Writing Center is experimenting with to facilitate accessible writing support. The first, aligned with Universal Design, is a pedagogical model that provides in-class writing support from both critical writing faculty and course-embedded undergraduate writing fellows for students who self-place into our Craft of Prose classes. In response to the time and capacity challenges a range of students face, but especially neurodiverse students, our course-embedded initiative purposefully splits from plus models where students have to manage their schedules and make time beyond class meetings in order to access writing support. The second, aligned with writing center researchers’ critiques of accommodation models (Rinaldi, 2017; Hitt, 2021), is an ongoing project to revise our writing center appointment request forms and rapport-building conversations to invite dialogue about accessibility needs in one-to-one conferences, particularly focusing on the potential sensory challenges posed by our space. We’ll close our panel by inviting our audience to briefly ponder the question of the AI tutor and the future of differentiated instruction. This roundtable is for administrators who are interested in learning how writing programs and centers can work together to support neurodiverse students with course-embedded writing support. This roundtable is also for administrators, tutors, and faculty who are interested in learning how to invite students to dialogue with us about one-to-one conference environments and strategies that truly feel supportive.
Presenter Bios

**Ahmed Abdelhamid Ahmed** is a student, writer, and organizer from Alexandria, Egypt. He is currently a junior at the University of Pennsylvania studying Comparative Politics and History and has been a fellow at the Marks Family Center for Excellence in Writing since 2022. Ahmed served as a course-embedded tutor for a Writing Seminar on Global Environmental Politics with Dr. Fayaz Vellani and is currently working in a Craft of Prose Writing Seminar with Dr. Patrick Wehner. Additionally, he works in one-to-one writing consultations collaborating with Penn students to improve their writing. Beyond the classroom, Ahmed serves as the managing editor of *Fenjan*, The University of Pennsylvania’s undergraduate journal on the Middle East and North Africa, and his writing for *Fenjan* won him first place in the Samuel P. and Ida S. Mandell Prize for Best Critical Writing Publication in a Penn Undergraduate Journal.

**Jon Argaman** is a Lecturer in Critical Writing whose research and teaching practice focuses on neurodiversity in college-level writing. Since joining the Critical Writing Program in 2014, he has worked to build tools and strategies for creating more accessible, differentiated classroom environments for a neurologically diverse range of students. He currently serves as faculty co-advisor of the student organization, Advocates for NeuroDiversity. His other research interests include strategies for universal design, and the intersection of executive function and the writing process.

**Amanda DiLodovico** is a Lecturer in Critical Writing in the Critical Writing Program at the University of Pennsylvania. Her teaching practice focuses on neurodiversity in the writing classroom and the creation of equitable learning outcomes for all undergraduate writers. She currently serves as faculty co-advisor of the student organization, Advocates for NeuroDiversity. Since coming to Penn in 2018, she has created disability-centered pedagogical strategies for the writing classroom that stem from prior research in Disability Studies, as well as Dance Studies and dance pedagogy. Her other research interests include crip theory in the classroom and embodied writing practices.

**Marjan Osman Gartland** is the Director of Creative Strategy and Design at Penn University Life. Marjan contributes to the Penn community as a visual strategist – understanding the value of leadership, collaboration, and communication. She leads with intention and a relevant mindset. In her current position, she communicates the divisional story through print/digital platforms and trains staff members on design principles, web accessibility, and brand identity best practices.

**Emma Søndergaard Jensen** is a senior studying philosophy and medical ethics. She is primarily interested in advancing the field of the philosophy of disability. Emma recently published a philosophy book (*How to Excel in Undergraduate Philosophy*), which was named a #1 New Release in Philosophy Reference on Amazon. She also hosts a regular philosophy podcast that includes over 60 episodes that tie current events with philosophical theories. Emma enjoys tutoring her peers as a Writing Fellow in the Marks Family Center for Excellence in Writing and is currently enjoying applying her experience from being a Writing Fellow to her Undergraduate Teaching Assistant work for Bioethics (PHIL1432) this fall. Inspired by her work in the Writing Center, she wrote her book and
continues her podcast with the aim of providing an undergraduate student's perspective on strengthening analytic and writing skills in philosophical study.

**Stacy Kastner** is the Director of the Marks Family Writing Center and Associate Director of the Marks Family Center for Excellence in Writing. Stacy has spent a decade and a half championing equitable and accessible pathways to and through institutions of higher education. As an administrator-researcher, the goals of Stacy’s praxis are to design and assess the impact of educational interventions on underrepresented students and to amplify classroom- and program-based labor as intellectual work. Stacy’s current research focuses on cross-disciplinary writing assignments and pedagogies; ongoing professional development for educators teaching with digital tools; and the personal and political textures of academic literacy acquisition. Her work has appeared in a number of edited collections and journals such as *CEA Forum, Educational Studies, Feminist Teacher, Pedagogy, Praxis, and Writing Center Journal*.

**Simuelle "Simmee" Myers** is the Director of Instructional Design for Integrated Care at the Weingarten Center. In this new role, she will serve as a guiding voice within The University for instructional design and technology strategies that can improve learning environments for students and faculty alike. Simmee’s professional background includes leadership in teaching and learning, faculty development, diversity, equity and inclusion, and student success. By discipline, Simmee is a sociologist, and brings a prosocial lens to every project she takes on.

**Matthew Osborn**, Director of The Critical Writing Program at University of Pennsylvania, holds a Ph.D. in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design. In addition to Critical Writing Seminars, Matthew teaches courses in Social Media Writing for the Professional Writing Certificate in Penn's School of Liberal and Professional Studies. His research explores the rhetorical dynamics among art criticism, writing, and aesthetic innovation.

**Valerie Ross** is the founder and the Marks Family Senior Director of the Marks Family Center for Excellence in Writing, including the Critical Writing Program, which provides writing courses to all Penn undergraduates, and the Marks Family Writing Center, which provides writing support to Penn students. The Marks Family Center for Excellence has a strong commitment to inclusionary teaching and research and strives to be a disability-centered organization. See, for example, Ross and Browning (2018), *From Difference to Difference: Developing a Disability-Centered Program*. Along with a focus on disabilities, Ross's other research interests include fairness in writing assessment, writing in the disciplines, and theories of organizational change.

**Aaron Spector** serves as the Director of Disability Services at the Weingarten Center. His work is guided by a commitment to access and opportunity through education. Aaron earned a graduate certificate in Disability Studies at Temple University.

**Hannah Urkowitz** is the UX Web Designer for Wharton External Affairs, the alumni-facing division of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. With a creative spirit and deep commitment to accessible and inclusive design, Hannah plays a major role in shaping the online experiences of Wharton alumni. Hannah focuses on ensuring that her digital designs provide a positive experience
for all end users. Hannah is a strong advocate for user-centered design principles. Her work at the Wharton School reflects her dedication to creating seamless and enjoyable digital experiences that resonate with diverse audiences, from recent alumni to members of the Wharton Emeritus Society, who graduated decades ago.

**Fayyaz Vellani** is a Lecturer in Critical Writing, Faculty Director of the College House Research Program, and Hill College House Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a geographer specializing in geopolitics, disability studies, writing studies, and sustainable development. Fayyaz’s book *Understanding Disability Discrimination Law Through Geography* was published by Ashgate in 2013 and Routledge in 2016, and his novel *Tea With Ms. Tanzania* was published by Africa World Press in 2022.

**Dana Walker**, who holds a PhD in Information Science, is a Lecturer of Critical Writing. Having taught in the Writing Program since 2011, Walker has experience working with a range of writers. She teaches undergraduate writing seminars in communications, food studies, and psychology. Walker also works with professional writers and has developed a course on writing with data. Her current research focuses on information literacy and writing, specifically the role of information and digital literacy in source-based work. She has co-authored work on community writing for the *Community Literacy Journal* as well as writing pedagogy and information literacy for the book *Teaching Information Literacy and Writing Studies: Vol 1*. Walker’s research has been informed by practice. She led an effort to develop a community writing project in the city. A partnership with the Free Library of Philadelphia, the project’s aim was to create a space for community members to work on their writing in their own neighborhoods.

**Anthony Wong** is a junior at Penn studying Urban Studies and Spanish. He has served as a writing fellow and course-embedded writing fellow since fall 2022. Throughout his time at the Marks Family Writing Center, he has worked with numerous Critical Writing professors and has tutored a wide range of undergraduate peers, including both upper-class and first-year writing seminar students. Since joining the center, Anthony has been passionate about the unique role that peer tutoring can play in building writers’ confidence. Outside of tutoring, Anthony enjoys public speaking, serving as a competitor on Penn Mock Trial and a campus tour guide for the Kite and Key Society. He is interested in pursuing a career in law and public policy.