



Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

NEWSLETTER

April
2024

April is
Celebrate Diversity Month



April 2024 marks the twentieth anniversary of Celebrate Diversity Month here in the United States (*Global Diversity Awareness Month* is in October). This month gives us an opportunity to acknowledge and pay tribute to the rich tapestry of diversity in our college community—our unique cultures, backgrounds, and rich traditions. Through commemorating both distinctions and commonalities throughout this month, we can foster a deeper appreciation of our shared diversity.

It seems more important than ever to celebrate diversity. In times of extreme uncertainty, our natural response can be to lean into unconscious biases and throw up barriers between us and those we perceive as different. It is an understandable reaction—one many of us have had at one point or another—but it is important to recognize and understand that it is a reaction born out of fear. Instead of leaning into that fear, freeze and flight reactions, we can instead work consciously and with intention to build ourselves up—together—and reaffirm our collective commitment to our community. As faculty and staff, we can do that by taking this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to diversity and inclusion by creating meaningful interactions, opportunities, and means for the inclusion for all members of our community. We collectively stand at the intersectionality of race, ethnic origin and nationality, religion, spirituality and creed, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, ability, sizes, shapes, etc. Our strength arguably lies in what unites us at that point of intersectionality.

There are also a number of holidays celebrated by different faiths. For Islam, there is Laylat al-Qadr—the Night of Power, when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the prophet Muhammad (April 6th), and Eid Al-Fitr, the “Holiday of Breaking the Fast”, the end of the month-long dawn to sunset fasting of Ramadan (April 9th-10th). For Judaism, there is Pesach, or Passover, which celebrates the Israelites’ escape from bondage in Egypt (April 22nd-30th). For Sikhism, there is Vaisakhi, a harvest festival of great of great importance (April 13th). For the Bahá’í Faith, there is Ridván, a twelve-day festival (April 21st to May 3rd this year), the most sacred festival that celebrates the beginning of the faith itself as it commemorates the Bahá’í Faith’s founder Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration that he was the Manifestation of God. For Buddhism, April 24th is also the Theravada New Year, a time for spiritual growth and enlightenment.

April also happens to be a month when we celebrate a number of specific communities: it is Arab American Heritage Month, Autism Acceptance Month, and National Deaf History Month. Join us in celebrating the diversity of our college community and help build an even better, stronger, more united MACC.

DEI Bookshelf

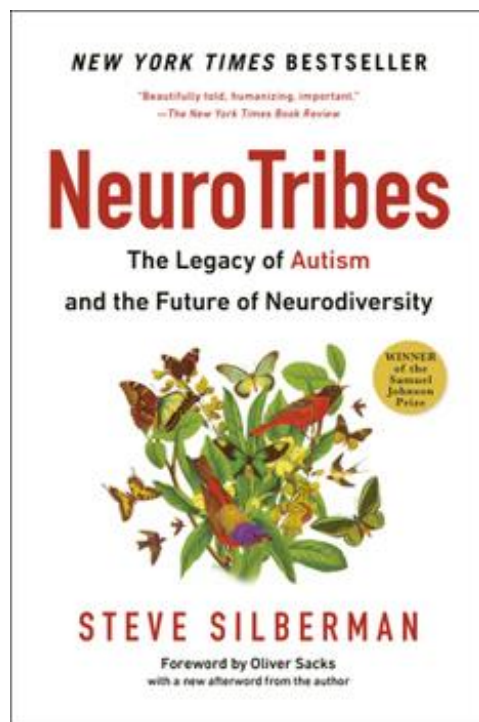
Recently, I have become curious about the history of autism and neurodiversity because of the ways those ideas have changed so much in the last ten, twenty, and forty years, and that brought me to the book *Neurotribes*, by Steve Silberman. *Neurotribes* talks in depth about how mental health was viewed and treated from about the 1900s to the present in Europe and the US. Silberman understood that historical context was necessary to have a better understanding of how mental health was treated and viewed by society and how different historical figures, researchers, or psychiatrists would make groundbreaking research on Autism while managing the pitfalls in their research.

After I read the book, I realized I was confused, and that left me feeling frustrated. I loved the book in that the author did a good job covering everything that he felt was within the scope of the topic. However, I was frustrated in that many of the topics are not something that would get covered in a K-12 education beyond a footnote, and, at the same time, I felt as if they should be core to understanding what led to current society's knowledge of neurodiversity. The book discusses important topics like how the Nazi's in large part got the inspiration of eugenics from the US, how mental facilities were closed for valid reasons but without a solid plan in place for patient treatment after they were closed which left a lot of people on the street, and how society has long misunderstood the causes of autism.

Being almost six hundred pages, *Neurotribes* was not an easy read, but it was exactly what I was looking for as an interesting and informative guide on understanding of neurodiversity in recent history. Therefore, I believe it can be useful in helping other readers develop their ideas about neurodiversity. It is worth the exploration.

As further research, I also looked up other reviews of *Neurotribes* to see what people thought about different parts of the book, especially with the controversy surrounding Hans Asperger in mind. Some online reviews had complaints about the author retrospectively diagnosing historical figures, but commonly, Silberman would only state the person had autistic tendencies, rather than officially trying to present a diagnosis. Henry Cavendish was the main person he retrospectively diagnosed and that diagnosis seems to be commonly accepted by many others; furthermore, the book has a plethora of examples or stories about Cavendish to show how he presented autistic tendencies. The last type of complaint I saw about the book was how some of the historical figures, such as Hans Asperger, were portrayed. The book portrays Asperger in a mostly positive light as someone who tried to save autistic people while reluctantly working with Nazis. In "On Hans Asperger, The Nazis, and Autism: A Conversation Across Necrologies," published on *Thinkingautismguide.com*, Silberman does mention trying to get early access to new information that Herwig Czech was developing about Hans Asperger, but Czech decided not to share it with Silberman before his own publication deadline. While that is unfortunate, Silberman claims he was still proud of the history he was able to uncover, even if it might have been incomplete.

-Alex Schmitt. Security Officer. MACC Columbia



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What DEI Means to Me

At first glance, unless you know, you might not know. You might not see the occasional slight limp or stumble, or the way I hold tightly to every railing on a staircase we go down. You might think that my pauses in speech mean I'm done with my thoughts or that my stumbles over my words mean I haven't really thought about them. You might think that my tiredness just means I didn't get enough sleep the night before, just like anyone else.

At first glance, it doesn't seem as though DEI would "include" me, your friendly neighborhood English professor who's been around here with a smile and enthusiasm for going on 16 years now. But, part of why equity and inclusion is significant is because the work includes not just what we can see about each other and our students, but also what we can't.

What you may not know is that, for 13 years (more counting when I didn't know), I've lived with multiple sclerosis, a chronic degenerative disease of the central nervous system that can potentially affect every aspect of someone's body and brain. I do not use a wheelchair or walk with a cane (yet). I still run 20-25 miles a week, though on a left leg that's significantly weaker than it used to be thanks to the damage. If you didn't know, most of the time, you wouldn't know.

You wouldn't know how hard it is for me to get through some classes, or some conversations with students, or some department or committee meetings where my brain seems like it can't keep up with where I want it to be, or when I lose my words with no explanation for why. Some days, thankfully, I am fine. Other days I want to go back to bed by 11 a.m. The fatigue alone can be, in a word, debilitating – both physically and cognitively.

There are treatments, which I am fortunate enough to be able to access, but there is no cure. No matter how stubborn I am, no matter how much I fight, no matter how many miles I can cover or half-marathons I can still complete, I will never be able to outrun this disease. It won't be without trying.

Sixty percent of people diagnosed with MS leave full-time work within 10 years of diagnosis. I'm lucky. I'm still here.

Part of equity and inclusion, though, is accounting for what we can't always see. For me, that equity has come through deans and site directors who schedule me for classes at times in the morning when I'm at my least tired. The inclusion has come through the kindness of administrators who regularly tell me how much they care about me, despite what I know are my limitations, and insist that I "have nothing to prove" to anyone. In turn, I demonstrate this equity and inclusion to my students, with whom I am open about my diagnosis and the effects it has on my life and teaching – and that yet, I keep going anyway, somehow, still. I am still teaching. I am still running. I am still here.

When we create equitable, inclusive classrooms that account not just for what we can see about our students, but what we can't see, that makes a difference for us all. We can't see their autism or their ADHD. We can't see their past experiences or their anxiety. We can't know what they deal with every day. We can, though, still hold them to high standards while demonstrating equitable practices that can include everyone in all their diversity, what we can see and what we can't. When we organize our classes consistently and well, when we provide students with resources, when our readings reflect a variety of voices, when we let them know that we see them and care about them and their learning – I want to believe that's where intentional DEI work and consideration makes a difference.

There was once a world where people with physical and mental disabilities were discouraged from pursuing a college education or were segregated completely into “special” classrooms where their abilities and skills went undeveloped and unnoticed. There was once a world where many thought that people with autism were “defective,” incapable of higher-order thinking or problem-solving. There was once a world where multiple sclerosis was essentially a death sentence, and people weren’t expected to keep living their lives in a visible, meaningful way. But many people have worked to make a better, more inclusive world for people with disabilities. Many people have fought for inclusion, access, therapies, research, and accommodations so that people with disabilities can have and keep meaningful work and live meaningful lives, fully in the world, not hidden away from it. And many people, simply by sharing their stories and their perspectives, have put faces to disabilities, both visible and invisible.

I am one of them.

--Beth Marchbanks, Professor of English and Humanities/fine arts Division Chair, Columbia campus

Ambassador Corner

The Value of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

by Miyuki Thacker

Hi all! My name is Miyuki Thacker. I’m an education major student at MACC and a DEI Ambassador. I was born and raised in Kagoshima, Japan. I’m married to a handsome Missourian whom I met while he was teaching English in Japan. I have lived in Columbia, Missouri for about 15 years. I have a 4th-grade son and a 3rd-grade daughter. Through raising my own children, I realized my strong passion for early childhood education and want to work at a preschool in the near future. When I decided to take classes at MACC, I was terrified and so stressed about whether I could understand lectures or communicate well with teachers and students because of my English ability. (You may think, "You are married to a native English speaker; don’t you speak English every day?" Well, daily conversation with someone who is used to my accent and participating in college lectures are completely different levels of usage). However, as I spent more time at MACC, I noticed my worries were unnecessary because all MACC instructors and staff are kind and patient when listening to me. Whenever I asked them to repeat or clarify what they said, they never hesitated to take more time to explain. I love the welcoming environment we have here! MACC’s students and staff represent racial diversity, different age groups, and backgrounds. I have one message for someone out there who might have the same struggle as me: “I understand that you are worried if your English is enough or not, but the only way to improve your English is by using it. Say hello to someone who sits next to you in class and raise your hand to ask questions of your instructors or email them. Read books aside from what is required in class and write reports about those books or tell someone about them. It takes time and hard work, but it will broaden your horizons.”

As a mother of two children and a teacher candidate, I must continue to refine not only my English skills but also my understanding of the importance of DEI. Each individual has unique experiences and beliefs, all of which warrant respect and acknowledgment. A poem I recently encountered in my Children’s Literature class, “Black Lives Matter” by Janet Wong, sums up the value of diversity, equity and inclusion. It can be found on the author’s website: <https://janet-wong.com/printables>.