







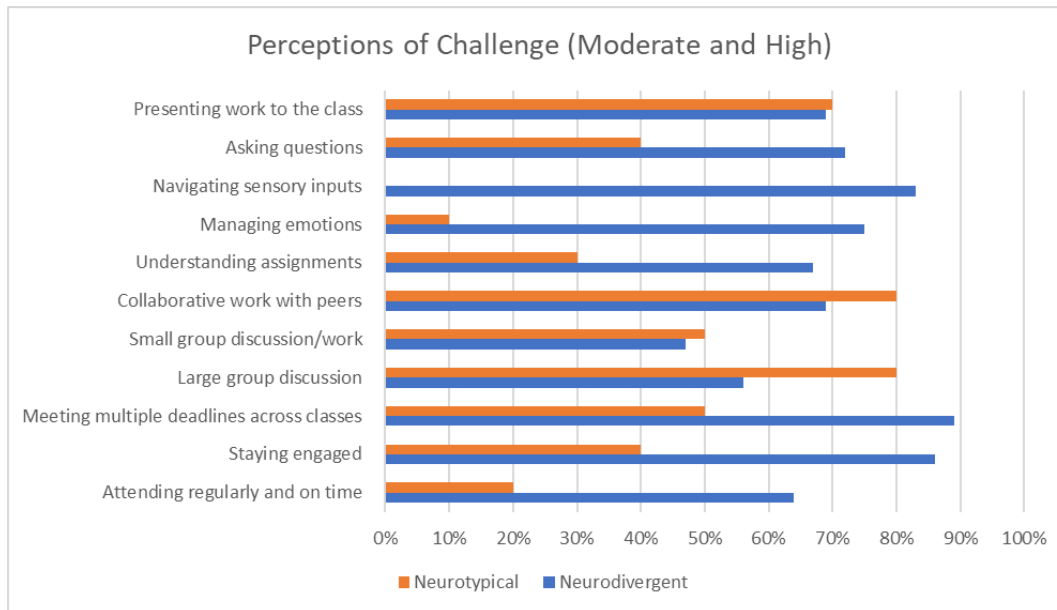


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## ND STUDENTS HAVE HEIGHTENED CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY WITH INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

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Combining the data on both moderate and high challenge illuminates how ND students experience heightened challenges in comparison to NT students, particularly for individual experiences. **ND students reported greater perceptions of moderate-to-high challenge in individual experiences** than their neurotypical peers, particularly in the following areas: meeting multiple deadlines across classes (89%), staying engaged in class (86%), navigating sensory inputs (83%), and navigating emotions (75%).



Students provided important context for these challenges. They explained that their **ability to engage** relies heavily on the conditions of the specific class, day, and population. One student noted the importance of representation of neurodivergent peers:

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“FOR MANY OF THE TOPICS THAT INVOLVE SOCIAL INTERACTION DURING CLASS, IT HEAVILY DEPENDS ON WHO IS IN THE ROOM WITH ME/WHO MY AUDIENCE IS. **IF THERE ARE MOSTLY OTHER NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE, MOST SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ARE NOT A PROBLEM AT ALL.** IF THERE ARE MOSTLY NEUROTYPICAL PEOPLE, I AM MUCH LESS COMFORTABLE SHARING, BECAUSE I AM AFRAID OF CAUSING MISCOMMUNICATIONS.”

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Students also noted the **unique experience of critique** citing a need for more resources and help preparing for how critiques will go. In general, feedback was provided about a desire for clearer instructions, guidelines, and expectations for classroom practices:

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“I FIND IT VERY CHALLENGING TO SPEAK IN CRITIQUES BECAUSE IT IS UNCOMFORTABLE AND AWKWARD. WE ALSO HAD **NO RESOURCES TO LEARN HOW CRITIQUES SHOULD GO.**”

“I STRUGGLE **UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS TRULY NEEDED FOR A PROJECT** SOMETIMES AND HAVE A HARD TIME GETTING THINGS DONE FOR THAT REASON.”

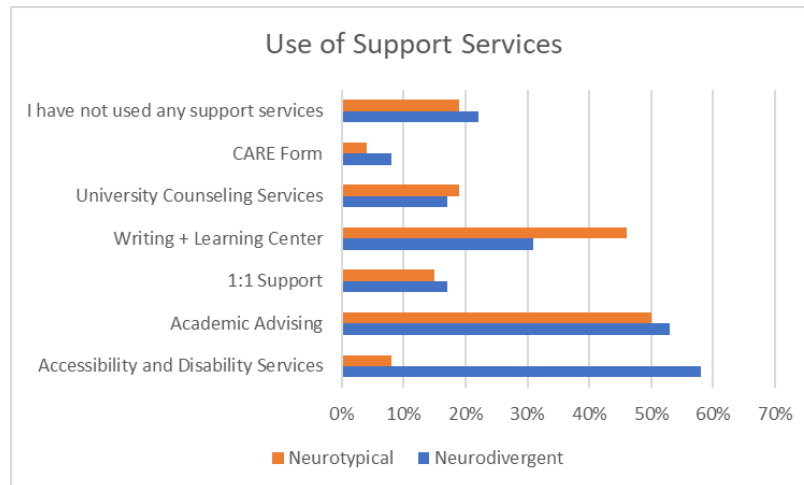
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## USE OF SUPPORT SERVICES AT CIA

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Students were asked about support services they have used while at CIA. These included accessibility and disability services, academic advising, the Writing + Learning Center, university counseling services (through Case Western Reserve University), the CARE form, and 1:1, personalized academic support (time management, perfectionism, procrastination, note-taking).



All respondents reported using a range of support services at CIA. Only 20% of respondents had not used ANY of the support services listed on the survey. The most-utilized support service reported was Academic Advising.

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## STUDENT SENTIMENT ABOUT SUPPORT SERVICE EXPERIENCES

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Respondents were asked to rate the quality of support received through CIA support services. While only 4% rated their experiences with support services as entirely negative, half rated their experience as mixed, pointing to inconsistency in the efficacy of utilized support services.

For ND students, the act of seeking support can entail additional challenges due to experiences of executive dysfunction. Executive function is a term describing skills of goal-directed behaviors and regulated thinking, such as planning, time management, emotional regulation, task initiation, and self-awareness. Executive dysfunction can mean that even the task of knowing where to begin a process can be a major challenge, as described by one respondent:

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**“OFTEN, GETTING SUPPORT REQUIRES A LOT OF PLANNING AND SCHEDULING THINGS IN ADVANCE. THAT IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR SOMEONE WITH ADHD WHO ALSO HAS TO THINK ABOUT KEEPING UP WITH CLASSWORK.”**

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Understanding these aspects of neurodivergence can be helpful in both seeking and offering support. The Cleveland Clinic provides helpful guidelines for understanding [Executive Dysfunction](#).

Respondents also described a need for greater or modified support services to address the unique need of ND individuals:

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“NOT EVERYBODY IS CAPABLE OF LEARNING THE SAME WAY OTHERS DO—AND ONE OF THE POINTS OF EVEN HAVING ACCOMMODATIONS IS TO HELP YOU LEARN IN WAY YOUR UNIQUE BRAIN UNDERSTANDS”

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Several students agreed that faculty and staff are mostly well-intentioned and care about their wellbeing but wanted greater consistency and impact of support offered. Many comments pointed at systems being under supported and overtaxed, noting that they felt staff were working with the “bare minimum,” and leading to challenges in making appointments, particular for counseling services.

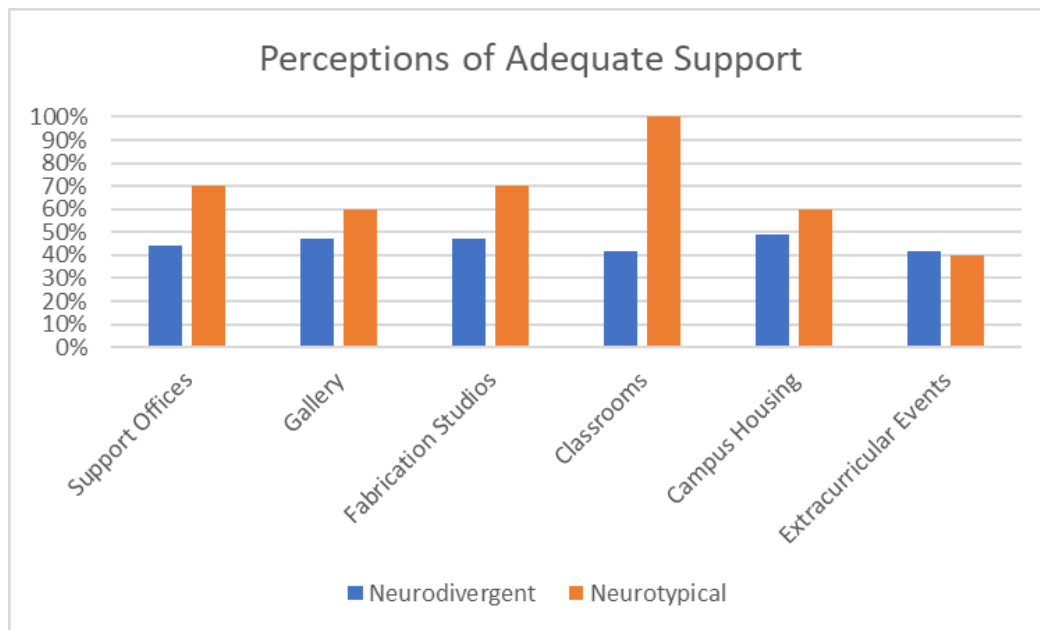
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“THE INTENTIONS WERE GOOD BUT SOMETIMES THE AID MISSED THE MARK”

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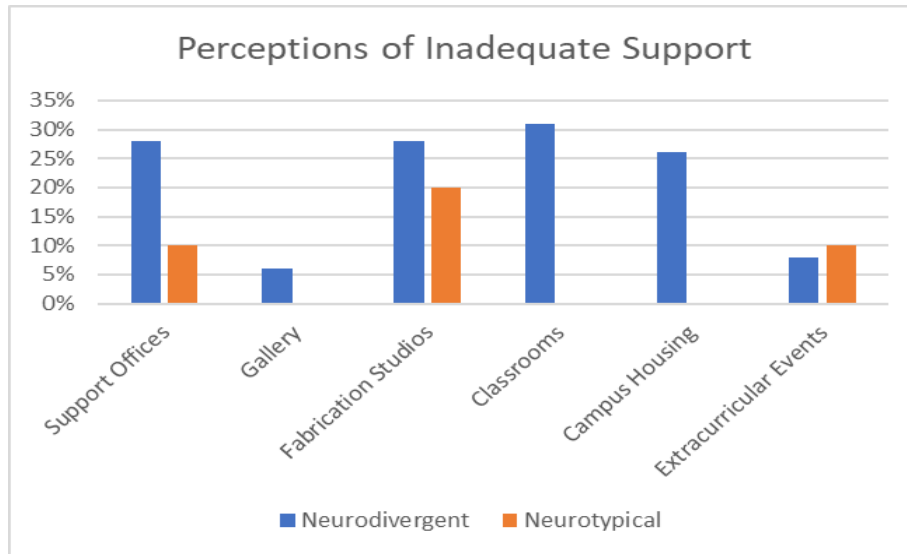
## CAMPUS SPACES AND PERCEPTION OF SUPPORT

Students report mixed experiences of support in different environments. They were asked to indicate feelings about their level of support (adequate, inadequate, unsure) about campus spaces.



Neurotypical students reported greater perceptions of adequate support in most environments, **with 100% feeling adequately supported in the classroom, compared to only 42% of their neurodivergent peers.**

Neurodivergent students reported much higher rates of inadequate support across several areas. More than a quarter of neurodivergent students reported perceptions of inadequate support in fabrication studios, classrooms, support offices, and campus housing.



Student respondents provided important context for these inadequate ratings, with many noting sensory issues (particularly lighting and noise) and navigating challenging tasks or new technologies.

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#### AWARENESS OF AND ABILITY TO RESPOND TO NEURODIVERGENT NEEDS INCLUDING MELTDOWN OR SHUTDOWN

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In addition to questions about support in academic and campus spaces, the survey asked respondents a series of questions about support for ND needs in the event of meltdown or shutdown.

**When asked about their personal knowledge of meltdown or shutdown, nearly all (both ND and NT) respondents reported that they have some understanding of these needs and about half indicated that they understand these needs very well.**

While students felt mostly knowledgeable about meltdown and shutdown, when asked if they felt faculty was prepared to support students in these scenarios, respondents demonstrated less confidence.

- **Over half of respondents answered “No,” they didn’t think faculty were prepared to support students with meltdown or shutdown.**
- Only 16% answered “Yes,” they believe faculty was prepared to support ND student needs.

Neurodivergent students were also asked if they feel safe/supported at school if they experience meltdown or shutdown.

- **30% said “No,” they didn’t feel safe or supported in the event of meltdown or shutdown.**
- 41% were “Unsure” if they were safe or supported in the event of meltdown or shutdown.
- Others (about 17%) said they don’t experience these issues and 11% said “Yes.”

Responses to these questions point to a need for greater education about how to respond to meltdown or shutdown both on an individual level and among faculty and staff.



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## OVERALL CALL FOR INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

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The responses to this survey point to a call for initiatives in favor of inclusivity and accessibility across CIA. During the 2023-2024 academic year, The Nord Center for Teaching and Learning has:

- Built a learning community (LC) of faculty and staff to investigate neurodiversity. LC is working on programming for 2024-2025 that will address some of the needs that have been uncovered because of the findings reported here.
- Held a ND-focused TRI conversation this spring (2024) to encourage sharing and connection across populations at CIA.
- Facilitated two focus groups to expand on survey data in the areas of sensory experiences and accommodations

Overall, this report points to some specific opportunities for continued growth and education including:

- **Review and/or revision of the accommodations process** to provide greater access to accommodations to students without the burden of a formal diagnosis.
  - **Greater education** for both faculty and staff and students about the scope of support available through accommodations.
  - **Partnership across departments** to provide programming for neurodiverse students to learn better coping strategies and self-advocacy.
  - **Increased visibility of ND experiences** through continued education sessions in partnership with both the Nord Center and external artists/creators.
  - **Overall increased empathy** for the needs and realities of ND individuals (both students and faculty and staff).
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## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> Badesch, Scott. "The State of Pediatric Autism Diagnosis in the U.S.: Gridlocks, Inequities and Missed Opportunities Persist," Cognoa <https://cognoa.com/waitlist-crisis-report/>

<sup>ii</sup> *Adult Diagnosis*. (n.d.). Autistic Adults NYC. Retrieved March 24, 2024, from <https://www.autisticadultsnyc.org/diagnosis>

<sup>iii</sup> The Spectrum. (n.d.). *The differences in autism based on gender*. The Spectrum. <https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-diagnosis/gender-differences/>

<sup>iv</sup> Burgstahler, S. (n.d.). *Accommodations and Universal Design | DO-IT*. [www.washington.edu](http://www.washington.edu). <https://www.washington.edu/doiit/accommodations-and-universal-design>