



ELON
UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR
Engaged
Learning

Call for Applications
2024-2026 Research Seminar on
Affirming and Inclusive Engaged Learning for Neurodivergent Students

Deadline to Apply: January 16, 2024

The [Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University](#) is pleased to announce the 2024 – 2026 Research Seminar on Affirming and Inclusive Engaged Learning for Neurodivergent Students. This three-summer research seminar facilitates multi-institutional research on systems, supports, pathways, and pipelines for neurodivergent students to facilitate access to and participation in high-quality engaged learning experiences. Research teams will use a mixed-methods approach to conduct qualitative and quantitative research.

We invite interested scholars and practitioners, regardless of discipline, to apply to join a multi-institutional cohort of researchers collaborating to investigate:

- neurodivergent students' perspectives and experiences in engaged learning,
- reimagined institutional structures and processes to support more affirming and inclusive engaged learning experiences, and
- systematic change in higher education to promote affirming and inclusive engaged learning in and beyond academia.

Overview of Current Research

Engaged Learning experiences, including access to and participation in high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008), have been identified to be transformative as part of a student's college journey. Much work in the past several years has focused on how to provide equitable access to these experiences for students from historically underrepresented identity populations and populations with highly demanding responsibilities (e.g., student athletes, performing arts students, non-traditional students; e.g., Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh et al., 2017; Pascarella & Blaich, 2013; Shirley et al., 2022). Some high impact engaged learning experiences are not part of the curricular structures or occur out of a classroom experience and require students to opt-in by seeking out the opportunity (e.g., study abroad, undergraduate research, internships/work-integrated learning, on-campus employment). Additionally, these experiences may require time and commitment outside of the regular course load.

These factors may be barriers for some students, including neurodivergent identified students (e.g., ADHD, Autistic, Dyslexic), who often have organization, communication, and learning differences that

highlight bias in our systems and processes in higher education (Dwyer et al., 2023). The academic 'rules' if you will, are often unclear, ableist, and not explicitly laid out, making the pathways to these experiences complicated or unrecognizable. Furthermore, the communication style or approach of neurodivergent students may be met with resistance or misunderstanding by faculty and administrators of these experiences.

Recognizing the value of pedagogies and universal design for learning and the significant research conducted in this area often related to in-class experiences (e.g., Addy et al., 2021; Hogan and Sathy, 2022; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014; Tobin and Behling, 2018), this seminar points in an even wider direction. The overarching question for this research seminar is to understand, explore, and identify how our systems, processes, and practices can be more affirming and inclusive to set-up neurodivergent students for meaningful and transformative engagement in experiences typically outside the classroom format. Additionally, seminar participants will examine what strengths, perspectives, and experiences neurodivergent students bring to engaged learning and what we can learn from them that will make our programs and spaces more accessible and inclusive.

Research Seminar on Affirming and Inclusive Engaged Learning for Neurodivergent Students

To examine affirming and inclusive engaged learning for neurodivergent students, accepted research participants will join teams focusing on one of the following topics:

- Understanding student perspectives and experiences in engaged learning. Research questions could include:
 - What do neurodiverse learners themselves want in/from engaged learning?
 - How do we help students develop self-advocacy at transitional moments and in spaces beyond the classroom (e.g., work-integrated learning, community-based learning, etc.)?
 - How do we support students at transitional moments - into college and out of college - inclusive of system partners (k-12 systems, community partners, workplace partners, etc.)?
 - How is neurodiverse pride changing engaged learning systems?
- Reimagining institutional level experiences and policies related to affirming and inclusive engaged learning. Research questions could include:
 - Why/how are some programs attracting higher proportions of neurodiverse learners? What can we learn from their successes?
 - To support neurodivergent students' engaged learning, how are institutions creating intentional flexibility in credits, built in choice and pathways, and different paced paths to completion without increase in cost?
 - Who's doing affirming and inclusive engaged learning well - in space design and program design - and how could we learn from them? How might this multitude of good examples shape a model of best practices?

- Promoting change in engaged learning. Research questions could include:
 - How might higher education systems change to be more inclusive of neurodiverse learners in engaged learning?
 - What type of innovative and meaningful professional development opportunities will support stakeholders in facilitating affirming and inclusive engaged learning?
 - How can higher education “lead the way” via engaged learning designs in shaping other contexts (e.g., medicine, workplaces, etc.) to be more affirming and inclusive?
 - How are stakeholders considering physical space and design as part of engaged learning experiences?

Research Cohorts and Seminar Logistics

The Center for Engaged Learning Seminar will support multi-institutional research addressing and surrounding this theme over a three-year period. Selected applicants will meet on Elon’s campus during the following weeks:

- **Year 1: June 23-28, 2024:** Participants will meet on Elon’s campus to collaboratively develop and plan multi-institutional research projects to be conducted throughout the following year at the participants’ own institutions. These research cohorts will enable larger scale studies and explorations of the impact of different institutional contexts.
- **Year 2: June 22-27, 2025:** Participants will meet to share their initial multi-institutional results and to plan a more sharply focused research agenda for the research cohort for year two.
- **Year 3: June 21-26, 2026:** Participants will reconvene to share their year-two results, to plan culminations of their work, and to participate in a conference on the seminar theme.

Participants will produce significant, concrete outcomes. [Past Center for Engaged Learning research seminars](#) have generated [edited volumes, journal articles and book chapters, white papers, and conference presentations](#) – as well as local initiatives on participants’ home campuses. Participants will be well-positioned to use evidence-based assessments of student learning conducted as part of the research seminar to inform affirming and inclusive engaged learning for neurodivergent students at their institutions.

Elon University will provide lodging and meals for seminar participants during the seminar’s 2024 – 2026 summer meetings. In addition, each participant will be reimbursed up to USD \$500/year (up to USD \$1000/year for international participants) for travel to the seminar’s summer meetings at Elon University. Reimbursements are processed as checks, but wire transfers can be arranged if necessary for international participants. All reimbursements are made in U.S. dollars (USD). Full reimbursement policies will be distributed to accepted participants. Other participant expenses, including additional travel costs and any research costs, will be paid by the participants or their home institutions.

Seminar Leaders

The 2024 – 2026 Center for Engaged Learning Seminar will be led by Drs. Stephen Byrd, Caroline Ketcham, and Joana Rankin.

- **Stephen Byrd** is an Associate Professor of special education at Elon University. His research work centers on families and their perceptions of disability, information, and special education services. Stephen regularly presents at local, state, and national conferences. He mentors undergraduate research and serves as program coordinator for special education at Elon. He has also traveled to India and Uganda to share his work.
- **Caroline Ketcham** is Professor in Exercise Science at Elon University. Her disciplinary research focuses on motor control in neurodivergent populations, the management and recovery of concussions, and positive mental wellbeing advocacy. Caroline has been engaged in high-impact practice research including co-mentoring undergraduate research for student and faculty development, access and engagement for student-athletes, neurodivergent, and disabled students, and capstone experiences. She has been recognized as an outstanding teacher-scholar-mentor with college and university wide awards.
- **Joanna Rankin** is an Associate Professor in the Community Rehabilitation & Disability Studies (CRDS) at the University of Calgary. Her current work is focused on the development and piloting of a Radical Mental Health Doula model, EDI, and the systemic inequities and oppressions faced by disabled people. She draws from her background in Critical Disability Studies and her frontline work in the mental health sector. Dr. Rankin's career goals are to bridge theory and practice and to enhance the methodological and ethical considerations of grassroots approaches in which research participants are not studied using a top-down approach but are co-researchers in a collaborative process.

Seminar participants also will work with two [CEL Student Scholars](#) as partners throughout the three years.

How to Apply

To apply, submit a completed application and abbreviated curriculum vita by **January 16, 2024**. The application, available online at <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/research-seminars/affirming-and-inclusive-engaged-learning-for-neurodivergent-students/>, asks for the following information:

- Which research question above are you *most* interested in examining, and why?
- How does this topic fit with your existing scholarly work? Does it have a larger institutional context at your campus?
- What research methods do you anticipate employing to study this theme? Do you have experience using these methods?

- Are there unique demographic/background variables at your institution that are relevant to your research questions?
- What is the institutional context for your work?
- What kinds of expertise do you bring to the study of affirming and inclusive engaged learning for neurodivergent students?

More than one person per institution may apply. Although CEL Seminar projects will be multi-institutional, applicants should not form these teams before they apply; CEL Seminar leaders will create initial teams based on applicants' information, and accepted participants will have the opportunity to confirm or shift their team placement during the first summer meeting.

A review committee, including the seminar leaders, will review applications, make selections, and notify all applicants by **February 9, 2024**. Questions about the application and selection process should be directed to centerforengagedlearning@elon.edu.

To learn more about the 2024 – 2026 CEL Seminar on Affirming and Inclusive Engaged Learning for Neurodivergent Students, visit: <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/research-seminars/affirming-and-inclusive-engaged-learning-for-neurodivergent-students/>

To learn more about the Center for Engaged Learning, visit: <http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/>

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