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On Behalf Of Center for Faculty Innovation
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To: TEACHING-TOOLBOX@LISTSERV.JMU.EDU
Subject: Teaching Toolbox: Teach for Minds of All Kinds

Teach for Minds of All Kinds by Daisy Breneman

The theme of this year's upcoming [Disability Advocacy Week](#) (DAW) is "Minds for All Kinds," which celebrates the value of [neurodiversity](#)—in other words, the wide range of ways that individuals think. Events, including a [CFI Faculty Workshop](#) and a keynote by [Temple Grandin](#) on Thursday, March 28, will focus on employment opportunities and justice for "Minds of All Kinds." The DAW organizers highlight the importance of the following:

Justice for Minds of All Kinds
Equity for Minds of All Kinds
Design for Minds of All Kinds
Advocate for Minds of All Kinds
Care for Minds of All Kinds
Teach for Minds of All Kinds

Grandin, an autistic activist and writer, emphasizes that [diversity in how individuals think is a good thing](#)—for innovation, problem-solving, effective teams, and more. As many in the neurodiversity community argue, we need to [stop asking individuals to change](#) and instead create more access, and a world in which minds of all kinds can thrive. Such a world [benefits everyone](#).

Career advocacy is one important way that we can work toward access and justice for all our students. Faculty play an important, but often underrecognized, role in [career readiness for students](#). This doesn't undermine the inherent value of learning for learning's sake, or mean that we have to give in to what Matthew T. Hora (2023) calls the "[vocationalist turn](#)" in higher education. In fact, Hora argues that embedding career readiness into our classrooms actually enhances student disciplinary knowledge, as well as transferable skills like critical thinking, which are essential to "dealing with problems like climate change, misinformation and threats to democracy."

We can at the same time encourage students to embrace the joy of learning, while also seeking to prepare our students, especially our marginalized students, for life beyond college. Incorporating career readiness into our classrooms is part of an [equity-minded approach](#) to teaching. When we don't talk about career readiness and pathways, we can actually widen [career equity](#) gaps. Here are some ways we might be able to contribute to employment justice for neurodiverse, and all, students:

- Discuss career preparation holistically. I teach a course focused on offering students opportunities to engage in career exploration and preparation, alongside thinking about future educational, civic and community engagement, and other pathways. After all, [JMU's mission](#) is to prepare students "to be educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives," which involves helping them set and meet a wide range of personal and professional goals.
- Offer [experiential learning](#) opportunities and other [High-Impact Practices](#), such as [community engagement](#), which can help students build networks, gain valuable experience for their careers (and more), and learn about what they do, or do not, enjoy doing.
- Encourage students to think about how the skills and habits of mind they are building support [career readiness competencies](#), such as leadership and teamwork. Make clear links between learning activities and skills. For example, when my students work on multimedia projects, I mention that communication and technology are key competencies—and that these skills will help them in the future, regardless of whatever career (and personal, civic, and community) goals they pursue.
- Help students bridge the gap between the classroom and what's beyond. Create [space for them to dream](#). Consider building in [assignments](#) and opportunities where students can explore [career pathways](#) and apply what they are learning to their future.
- Support students in networking efforts. Networking is part of the [hidden curriculum](#) that we can make visible, including by talking about how to network and providing scaffolded opportunities. For example, consider inviting a wide range of alumni and other guest speakers working in related career fields into your classroom. Have those guests talk about how they actively applied what they learned in the classroom to their career, and encourage students to ask good questions, such as what the alumni might wish they had known when they were in college.
- [Celebrate diversity](#) of all kinds, including neurodiversity, and help students discover and highlight their strengths. For example, give students opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their own work, and help them frame [differences as](#)

[beneficial](#). This might be especially important for neurodiverse students, who are, unfortunately, too often approached through a deficit lens and who are likely to experience [employment discrimination](#).

- Connect with the [University Career Center](#), which offers resources for students, alumni, and [faculty](#). Share those resources with students. Encourage, incentivize, or require participation in career events, such as [Career Fairs](#), as well as other events on campus that allow students to network and prepare for their lives beyond college.

Please join us next week at [Disability Advocacy Week](#), and always feel free to contact me to keep the conversation going. Let's all work together to prepare students for their future pathways and to create more welcoming, inclusive, and just spaces for minds of all kinds.

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