

Abbreviated Course Syllabus

OT-370 Understanding Autism and Neurodiversity: Participation Across the Lifespan Spring 2025 (Section 48021)

Class Day: Monday & Wednesday

Class Time: 9.30– 10.50am

Location: SOS B48

Instructor: Christine Turnbull, OTD, OTR/L, BCP

Email: cturnbull@chla.usc.edu

Office: THH B4 or Zoom

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from a neurodevelopmental & neurodiversity perspective, with a focus on lived experience and occupational participation. Students will be provided with an overview of current perspectives on etiology and interventions, as well as a comprehensive overview of the strengths and challenges of autistic individuals. There will be a focus on the occupational participation of autistic individuals along the developmental trajectory, including engagement in family life, education, leisure, employment and advocacy. Students will engage in reflective activities about representations of ASD in the media, film and TV, and group discussions about health disparities, autistic self-advocacy, neurodiversity and other contemporary perspectives on disability. Whenever possible, guest speakers with autistic lived experience or clinical/research experts on the topic will join the class.

COURSE HIGHLIGHTS!

- Reflect on the differences between the pathology and neurodiversity paradigms, and how these inform our understanding of ASD as a society.
- Learn from autistic individuals and experts in autism research and clinical care.
- Critically appraise media, interventions/services, and policies that portray or serve autistic individuals.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Assignment	% of Grade
Class participation (attendance & participation in class discussions)	10
In-class Quiz Covers readings and lectures from Unit 1	10
Group Presentation: Interventions Small group presentations about commonly available interventions for autistic individuals	20
Group Presentation: Media Representations Small group presentation critically appraising autistic representation in predetermined Film.	20
Experiential Reflection Paper	15

Attend a community event for autistic individuals and reflect on the experience	
Final paper Weave themes from the course and reflections from a lived experience memoir.	25

COURSE SCHEDULE

Weeks	Topics/Themes
1- 6	<p>Unit 1: Developmental and Historical Perspectives</p> <p><i>Neurodiversity & Pathology Paradigm</i> <i>Historical Context of Autism Spectrum Disorder</i> <i>Early Identification & Diagnosis</i> <i>Neurological Foundations & Etiology</i> <i>Exploring Differences in Behavior, Communication, and Sensory Processing</i></p> <p>Assignments due: In-class Quiz covering Unit 1 & Group Presentation: Interventions</p>
7-13	<p>Unit 2: Lived Experience*</p> <p><i>Sociality and Building Community</i> <i>Mental Health and Wellness</i> <i>Autistic Identity and Culture</i> <i>Relationships & Sexuality</i> <i>Cultural Considerations</i> <i>Gender Differences & Gender Identity</i> <i>Parenthood & Family Life</i> <i>Employment</i> <i>School Life</i></p> <p>Assignments due: Experiential Reflection Paper</p>
14	<p>Unit 3: Representation of Autism in Media</p> <p><i>Media representation in film, television, social media and news</i></p> <p>Assignments due: Group Presentation-Media Representations in Film</p>
15	<p>Unit 4: Policy and Advocacy</p> <p><i>Current Autism Policy impacting autistic individuals across the lifespan</i> <i>Advocacy</i> <i>Allyship</i></p>

Finals Week	Final paper due
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Note: In order to optimize the learning experiences, the course instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus as needed throughout the semester.

***Course themes/topics may change based on guest speaker availability**

Please reach out with any questions!

Christine

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<https://classes.usc.edu/term-20243/classes/ot/>

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and Occupational Therapy