

MAPS EDI Lunch Hour Conversations 2022 - 2023

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Neurodiversity and university

In our first event in 2023, we invited Brian Irvine from the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE) to discuss neurodiversity and adapting education and employment environments for our staff and students to make them inclusive. He explores developing research tools with and for those with intellectual impairment by widening our thinking to see if superior perceptual capacity crops up elsewhere. Brian began by introducing himself and sharing his story. Brian was diagnosed with aphantasia, the inability to visualise – often known as image-free thinking. He is unable to create pictures of familiar objects, people or places or picture thoughts, memories, or images. He recently completed a PhD in Specialist (Autism) Mentoring for UK HEIs [1]. The thesis reviews autistic students' first-hand accounts of life at a university. Recommendations are made, as to what universities can do to enhance the life of autistic students. Over the last decade, Brian has mentored autistic students at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Brian highlights if anyone becomes a mentor and is working with someone from a neuro minority, they have the power/position to acknowledge that the systems we use at UCL are designed for the majority. They do not need to be fixed, but the acknowledgement can be enough. Secondly, there should be a variety of learning strategies as it is not one-size fits. For example, some individuals with autism like lists, mind-maps, or without regimented tools by “getting in the zone” but understanding that your strategies may suit several types of people and offering alternatives. Finally, as a person in a position of power, it is about telling the student that you are there when they need you, giving them motivation. Aphantasia came into knowledge in 2016, and whilst Brian thought he was different, this finding radically changed his life by being able to talk about it. If you have a student who may be struggling or you would like to provide the right tools to help that person figure out, sometimes, a diagnosis is a tool. Sometimes having someone in a position of power say, “This is who you are,” allows the person to reflect, find out more and find people who think or feel like themselves (their tribe), such as #actuallyautistic or #actuallyADHD.

The discussion began exploring the experiences of autistic students entering university. Students can go to Student Finance and disclose, and they will talk to the university on your behalf. The student can receive an assessor. The assessor can say there is funding for mentorship for these students, for example, from the DSA. At UCL, few staff members are mentors, as the mentors primarily work for businesses such as autism associates. As teachers/mentors, create different zones for education in the university setting through universal design. There should be multiple ways of engagement and representation. For example:

- Recording lectures, including live captions, having a mic on during lectures and allowing participants to wear noise-cancelling headphones.
- Creating a safe space with good language from the beginning allowed creativity.
- Thinking about the type of assessments used, for example, some neurodiverse students like group work as they are structured, where everyone has a role, particularly keeping the group small. However, do not assume everyone likes group work – if you do not need to do it as a group, do not make it group work unless you are assessing how effectively an individual is working together.

There are still several online meetings, and there are tools that can improve that meeting environment. For example, talking with 360 neurodivergent people, 50% mention the idea of comfort, the Danish idea of “Hygge”. If we are creating a comfortable office, space, or home, this allows others to feel comfortable. There is an argument some neurodiverse people prefer to complete work at home, but for collaborative work, working in pairs is a fantastic way of

[1] Irvine, B and MacLeod, A. (2022) What are the challenges and successes reported by autistic students at university? A literature Review. Good Autism Practice (GAP), 23 (1): 49-59.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361337091_What_are_the_challenges_and_successes_reported_by_autistic_students_at_university_a_literature_review

For our second event, we invited AbilityNet’s workplace inclusion experts will provide insight into their experiences of people living with different disabilities and impairments. The session focused on the experience of how language, organisational culture and how adaptive equipment can support removing barriers in the workplace. The session was designed as a panel discussion addressing the broad topics noted below but was designed to be geared towards audience interaction and questions:

- An important message from the guest speakers was that, as disabled people, they wanted to emphasise that they become very much *enabled* if provided with appropriate tools and technologies to support the function of their working roles.

Ethne James-Souch: Summary of all MAPS Lunchtime Conversations

How inequalities of gender, race, and class shape unequal patterns of STEM participation - and what we can do about it.

For our third event, we invited Professor Louise Archer from the Institute of Education's (IOE) Education, Practice and Society department to discuss how inequalities of gender, race, and class shape unequal patterns of STEM participation and what we can be done. After a brief introduction by Nick Achilleos, Louise began her presentation on her research which is trying to understand by also challenging inequalities in STEM participation.

Although advancements have been made in the physical sciences and engineering, which remain dominated by those in privileged backgrounds (e.g., white, male, middle-class, able-bodied). The ASPIRES project [1] has been running since 2009 and has tracked a cohort of young people from 10 – 23, and they are currently twenty-two. The project has surveyed 48,000 young people and has conducted over 765 interviews, a core of fifty young people who come with their parents. One insight from the survey is that it is not just that young people are not interested in science; in primary school and up to year 11, over 70% say they like learning things in science, there is a slight dip in year 11 where content is more challenging, but still, 60% enjoy science. Of those who have taken it for A-Level, 90% say they find it interesting. In addition, all ages agree parents think it is important to learn science and scientist do valuable work. However, all these positive views do not translate into saying that this is something the students could do in future. For those who did agree with this statement, the gender profile narrows between ages 10 and 18, and it becomes more likely to be a white middle-class male.

Prof Archer explains the conceptual framework by Pierre Bourdieu on habitus, capital, and field [2] as background to the study. From these ideas, the project developed this notion of science capital. Statistically, the more science capital you have, the more likely you are to aspire to continue a STEM and go on to take STEM post-age 18 (e.g., 7.8x more likely in Physics) and have a “science identity”. Science capital is made up of science literacy “what you know,” science-related attitudes and values “how you think,” out-of-school science behaviours “what you do” and science at home “who you know.” Capital can also help produce attainment, for example, families provide children with science-related skits, experiences, books, and extra help/tutoring. In the field category, even extensive home science capital can be mitigated and negated by school experiences, coming to see science as “not for me.” For example, teachers reinforce STEM stereotypes around “difficulty” or “boy's brain.” However, even if teachers are encouraging more students, it is interesting that boys are feeling it. For Black students who have higher aspirations, there is much less support to realise those aspirations. A science identity is gendered, classed, and racialised. Teaching and learning practices and popular discourses socialise young people (especially young women, Black and working-class students) into feeling that science is for “clever people” and is difficult irrespective of attainment. Prof Archer shared some anecdotes and case studies from interviewees in the study.

Prof Archer highlighted that it is not all doom and gloom after working with a range of teachers, outer school practitioners and people involved in outreach and developed some approaches and tools, which state it is not what you do, but how it is done. It is the values that underpin your

practice which has influence and makes issues of equity and social justice central. An example of a tool is the Equity Compass [3] which sets out four overarching areas and eight sub-dimensions. The key idea is to change practice rather than trying to change young people. Prof Archer recommended different versions below for teachers [4], school leaders [5], funders [6] and STEM ambassadors [7]. There are also short videos [8] and a free, short online learning course [9].

- [1] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/departments/education-practice-and-society/aspires-research>
 - [2] Scambler, Graham (2015). Sociological Theorists: Pierre Bourdieu. www.grahamscambler.com/sociological-theorists-pierre-bourdieu
 - [3] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/departments/education-practice-and-society/youth-equity-stem>
 - [4] <https://yestem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Equity-Compass-for-teachers.pdf>
 - [5] <https://yestem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Equity-Compass-for-school-leaders-and-governors.pdf>
 - [6] <https://yestem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-YESTEM-Insight-Equity-Compass-Funders-Edition.pdf>
 - [7] <https://yestem.org/document/the-equity-compass-for-stem-ambassadors-accessible/>
 - [8] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WE4ksRCEoyA>
 - [9] <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/equity-informal-stem-learning-using-the-equity-compass/1>
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Discussing the barriers and challenges faced by BAME staff and students in the MAPS Faculty

For our fourth event, we focussed on the experience of BAME staff and students at UCL. The session was designed as a panel discussion amongst two colleagues (Cass Morrison, PhD Student in Earth Sciences and Luke Davis, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Mathematics) in the MAPS Faculty addressing:

- Their experiences of language, stereotypes and the institutional culture which has created barriers and challenges throughout their academic careers.
- What universities can do to break down these barriers and be more inclusive?

Before the panel discussion began, we heard from Professor Tariq Jazeel, the Co-Director of the Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation (SPRC) [1] to provide a brief introduction of the work of the SPRC and the centre's priorities for research and teaching. Prof Jazeel stated that the centre was founded in 2019 and offers a master's programme in race, ethnicity, and post-colonial studies [2]. Eventually, due to some student-led movements ten years ago, the centre was founded. The campaigns argued, "Why is the curriculum white, and why are our professors not black". These campaigns were successful in raising concerns about the history of colonialism. Secondly, the centre was founded after UCL's Eugenics Inquiry, looking into UCL's historic involvement in Eugenics, commissioned in 2018 by the former Provost, Michael Arthur. Prof Jazeel explained that the centre is based in the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS), and the seed funding allowed the recruitment of a founding director, a permanent administrator and two lectureships. The founding director (and now co-director) is Professor Paul Gilroy, one of the foremost figures internationally in Black studies, cultural studies, and the history of racism. Prof Jazeel joined the centre this academic year.

The centre has three research themes, focusing on the impact of racial divisions and racial hierarchy on data's social and political life. Secondly, the significance of climate emergency for post and neo-colonial relations. Lastly, the continuing significance of race, racism, and the inequalities they generate in health and medicine. The centre is very event-based, hosting early career conferences, film screenings, podcast series, and an activist residence scheme which provides a home for two six-month activists in residence for a year to give those activists a platform and connection to powerful institutions such as UCL. Prof Jazeel mentioned that the centre was awarded small seed funding to establish a Black Atlantic Innovation Network, which pushes questions and practices of decolonisation in institutional contexts, with partners such as the National Trust, Kew Gardens, the National Education Union, Serpentine galleries, and the Eden Project. The SPRC commissions a piece of research auditing research related to racism and racialisation that is currently taking place across UCL'S Faculties of Social and Historical Studies and Arts and Humanities [3]. The centre is looking at intersectionality, for example, why there are not enough Black women on the syllabus or reading list and working with other groups such as the Centre for Research on Sexual and Gender Diversity.

In this seminar, we heard about the speakers' opinions on the acronym "BAME" and whether the term is problematic. Prof Jazeel mentioned there is an ongoing conversation. BAME has been useful in corraling energy and getting people to have these conversations. There are exclusions in this term, and it can be damaging. The argument would be whether this would be a debate worth having or whether it is a diversion from some of the structural and endemic issues. Cass Morrison agreed that this was a valid discussion. However, it distracts both time and energy from other serious issues. It may be easier to change the term to minority ethnic or ethnic minority instead. Luke Davis reiterated the opinions and added that BAME could assume all within the group have the same experience when this is not true. There is data to suggest that Black ethnic groups are more underrepresented in UKRI funding than compared to some Asian ethnic groups [4]. Nick Achilleos mentioned that a programme partnership between Astrophysics and an anti-racist initiative called Shift-25 highlights on their webpage a note on the language it uses and its reasons for doing so [5].

The Dean of the Faculty, Ivan Parkin, gave a brief overview of the Faculty's race pledges [6]. Professor Parkin noted that the Faculty had met all the pledges, although some would be ongoing due to continued commitment. The Faculty is now working with Mike Sulu from the Race Equality Steering Group to renew our race pledges to better align with the Universities' priorities. These are in the draft stage of development but will address Issues of the cost of university for the retention and progression of students, the students awarding gap, improvements to the current demographics of staff and students and pastoral student support. There have been discussions to appoint a Race Equity Envoy in the Faculty to attend the Race Equity Implementation Group (REIG) meetings and report back to the MAPS EDI Committee. In the MAPS Faculty, some demographic groups, such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, not achieving the best outcomes and are often underrepresented in academia as you move further down the academic pipeline. Professor Jawwad Darr has provided guidance from his charity "UPSIGN," a UK-Pakistan Science and Innovation Global Network.

The speakers shared their experiences of how welcoming universities are for young people and if universities are making enough effort to engage and nurture education as a path that is accessible to everyone. An example Cass shared, whilst his department and supervisors have been very welcoming, he feels the EDI sector can be toxic, where minorities and protected characteristics compete for who is the most disadvantaged and can attack one another, particularly on social media websites. This is particularly prevalent for early career researchers who are driven to improve, where others in this space can see that they are taking away the work they are already doing. Universities should release some guidelines or support for any bullying online. Luke shared that he is the only

Black postdoctoral researcher in the Mathematics department, and, sometimes, this can be disheartening. Luke is conscious he does not want to change who he is when he develops in his career and shows the importance of this to the PhD students that he mentors. Mentorship was especially important to Luke's academic career and has had mentors from a range of diverse backgrounds: Asian women, Black women, and Black men.

On whether improving representation within the University could improve the experiences of BAME staff, Cass mentioned that just because someone is in a minority does not prevent them from discriminating against the majority and or discriminating against the minority. Cass has had exceptional support from those from the ethnic majority and has had negative experiences with those from ethnic minorities.

There would be a follow-up conversation in the new academic term.

[1] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/racism-racialisation/sarah-parker-remond-centre>

[2] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/taught-degrees/race-ethnicity-and-postcolonial-studies-ma>

[3] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/institute-of-advanced-studies/news/2023/jan/sprc-report-current-research-related-racism-and-racialisation>

[4] <https://www.ukri.org/publications/diversity-data-for-funding-applicants-and-awardees-2020-21/ukri-diversity-data-for-funding-applicants-and-awardees-2020-to-21-update/#:~:text=After%20the%20White%20ethnic%20group,and%20less%20than%200.5%25%20respectively.>

[5] <https://www.shift25.org.uk/>

[6] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mathematical-physical-sciences/equity-ed/our-work-race-equity>

The history of Ballroom and Houses in the US

For our fifth event, we invited Sydney Baloue, writer, artist, and Ballroom historian, to discuss the history of Ballroom and Houses in the US. Sydney has been in the Ballroom community for eleven years. Sydney began by explaining his journey through an extract from his book "Undeniable: a history of Voguing, Ballroom and how it changed my life (and the World)." Sydney completed his bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Pennsylvania and then achieved a fellowship at the Free University of Berlin, looking into public policy, eco-justice, environment, and energy policy. In Berlin, Sydney discussed and watched Paris is Burning, one of the earliest films about Ballroom and voguing and discovered a voguing class. Sydney explained that a Ballroom dancer, Georgina Philip, part of the house of Saint Laurent, hosted the first voguing / Ballroom festival in Germany. Like many dancers, she would go to New York, attend dance classes, and bring the culture, icons, and prolific dancers back to Germany to develop the culture in Germany. Sydney entered the best dress category in a ball organised by Georgina in Dusseldorf and won.

Sydney highlighted that during his time in Dusseldorf, he met Lasseindra Ninja, a mother of the scene in Paris. Simultaneously, he completed his research in Berlin and pursued a master's in urban planning for one year at Sciences Po, Paris and the second half at the London School of Economics. In Paris, Sydney started learning how to vogue in the style of Old Way Performance. Sydney noted that the origin of the term voguing is to make it look like you are doing a photo shoot for Vogue magazine. Sydney joined the house of Omni, one of the oldest houses in Ballroom, which started in the 1970s and was travelling to do competitions.

Sydney mentioned that when he arrived in London for the second half of his master's, he connected with a friend JJ. Revlon formed a collective called "English Breakfast, London" [1], and the idea was to come and serve looks on the runway through a host of balls. Sydney was invited to speak on a panel at Goldsmiths University to discuss Paris is Burning, which shifted Sydney's future as his personal and professional life are merging. Professionally, this steered Sydney into writing his master's thesis on how the geography of New York City affected the history and evolution of the ballroom scene, which meant personally, Sydney got access to and gained knowledge about a wide range of icons in the Ballroom scene about their experience and the space.

After finishing his master's in London, Sydney said he moved back to the US and pursued a PhD in African Studies at the University of Pennsylvania whilst starting a gender transition. However, Sydney experienced some transphobia from professors and students, so left academia into TV and film to explore the oral histories he had collected for his master's thesis. Sydney met Eric Marcus, who does a podcast called "Making gay history" [2], providing different accounts of LGBTQ+ history and suggested to Sydney to author a book. Sydney started drafting articles for newspapers such as the New York Times on "realness" and whether the Ballroom scene has outgrown that term [3].

Sydney explained the origins of the Ballroom scene, which once started as a fundraiser for fraternal societies, for example, the Hamilton Lodge Ball in Harlem. The balls would attract gender non-conforming individuals and LGBTQ+ people and become extremely popular in the 20th century. These balls meant the emergence of many certain drag queens or female impersonators. At the time, these spaces and other nightlife venues were protected and controlled by the Mafia in New York City, but attracted many celebrities who would attend these spaces. During the 1950s and 1960s, Crystal LaBeja emerged from this world and was credited as the first mother of Ballroom as well as many others such as Dorian Corey, Paris Dupree, and Avis Pendavis. The balls would become a space for the after-party during the night. In the 1970s, voguing emerges as a style of dance. Examples are Jose Xtravaganza and Luis Xtravaganza, in Madonna's music video "Vogue" and her "Blond Ambition" tour in the 1990s. Or from Malcolm McLaren with his number-one song "Deep in Vogue" in 1989.

Sydney continued to explain his journey. In 2017 hosted his first-ever ball, the New York City Legacy Ball, at the Brooklyn Museum [4]. Sydney had left the House of Omni due to transphobia. Sydney highlights that even within LGBTQ+ spaces, they are not completely safe from discrimination. Sydney was a free agent, meaning not associated with a house and won the biggest ball in New York City, the Latex Ball. This was prominent as not many transgender men do voguing. Sydney was the first transgender man to win a prize at that time. After this, Sydney joined the House of Xtravaganza and was asked to be a co-producer on the show "Legendary" for two series, opening the doors to being involved with many TV and film opportunities since.

The floor was open to the audience's questions.

[1] <http://www.sydneybaloue.com/english-breakfast-london>

[2] <https://makinggayhistory.com/>

[3] <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/opinion/ball-culture.html>

[4] <http://www.sydneybaloue.com/the-new-york-city-legacy-ball>