

Interview Protocol:

AI Approaches to Learning Gaps

Dr. Dawn Hathaway, Primary Investigator, and Cheryl Burris, Student Researcher

Investigating Neurodiverse-Inclusive Instructional Design at GMU

Study: AI Approaches to Learning Gaps

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dawn Hathaway

Student Researcher: Cheryl Burris

Estimated Time: 60 minutes total (15 min admin + 40 min Q&A + 5 min closing)

Pre-Interview Setup (5 minutes)

- Test audio/video quality
- Confirm recording consent
- Verify a comfortable, private environment
- Start recording once confirmed

Section 1: Introduction & Administrative (10 minutes)

Personal Introduction & Rapport Building (5 minutes)

Researcher Introduction:

"Thank you for taking time to participate in this study. I'm Cheryl Burris, a PhD student in Education at GMU. I'm investigating how instructional designers consider the needs of neurodivergent learners in their work. This research is part of my independent study focused on AI approaches to learning gaps, supervised by Dr. Dawn Hathaway."

Participant Introduction:

- "Could you briefly introduce yourself and tell me about your role at GMU?"
- "What drew you to instructional design?"

Administrative Items (5 minutes)

- Confirm consent for recording
- Review confidentiality and anonymization process

- Clarify right to withdraw or skip questions
- Estimated timeline review
- Any questions before we begin?

Section 2: Background & Experience (8 minutes)

Professional Demographics

1. "How long have you been working in instructional design, both at GMU and overall?"
2. "What is your educational background? What degree(s) do you hold?"
3. "Have you taken any training related to instructional design in the last 12 months? If so, what topics were covered?"
4. "What types of courses do you typically design? (online, hybrid, face-to-face, specific subject areas)"
5. "In your current role, what does a typical project look like from start to finish?"

Section 3: Neurodiversity Knowledge & Frameworks (12 minutes)

Understanding and Definitions

6. "When I mention 'neurodivergent learners' or 'neurodiversity,' what comes to mind for you?"
 - Probe: How do you define these terms in your work?
7. "Are you familiar with specific frameworks like Universal Design for Learning (UDL)? How do you incorporate these into your design process?"
 - Probe: What other frameworks or guidelines inform your work?

Regulatory Awareness

8. "What role do accessibility regulations—such as ADA compliance or Section 504—play in your design decisions?"
 - Probe: How do you stay current with these requirements?
9. "Can you walk me through how you ensure your designs meet accessibility standards?"
 - Probe: What tools or resources do you use?

Section 4: Current Practices & Decision-Making (12 minutes)

Design Practices

10. "When you're designing a course, when do you consider the needs of neurodivergent learners?"
 - Probe: Is this integrated from the beginning, or addressed later?
11. "Can you share a specific example of an accommodation or design choice you made with neurodivergent learners in mind?"
 - Probe: What motivated that decision? What was the outcome?

Decision-Making Process

12. "How do you gather information about learner needs when you're designing?"
 - Probe: Do you interact directly with students? Faculty? Other sources?
13. "When you encounter competing priorities (ex, time constraints, budget, or technical limitations), how do you make decisions about accessibility features?"
 - Probe: Can you share an example where you had to make trade-offs?

Section 5: Challenges & Institutional Context (8 minutes)

Barriers and Constraints

14. "What challenges, if any, do you face when trying to design for neurodivergent learners?"
 - Probe: Are these technical, institutional, resource-related, or knowledge-based?
15. "Are there things you wish you could implement but currently cannot? What prevents you from doing so?"
 - Probe: How could institutional support be improved?
16. "How does GMU's institutional culture support or challenge your efforts to create inclusive designs?"
 - Probe: Frame as opportunities for improvement rather than criticism

Section 6: AI & Future Vision (8 minutes)

Current AI Awareness

17. "Are you currently using any AI tools in your instructional design work? If so, which ones and how?"

18. "Have you considered how AI might support neurodivergent learners specifically? What possibilities do you see?"

Future Perspectives

19. "If you could envision the ideal AI-powered tool to help you design for neurodivergent learners, what would it do?"
- Probe: What would be most helpful—automated accommodations, personalized content, assessment adaptations?
20. "What concerns, if any, do you have about using AI in instructional design for neurodivergent populations?"
- Probe: Privacy, accuracy, human oversight, etc.
21. "How do you think AI might change the field of instructional design in the next 5-10 years, particularly regarding accessibility and inclusion?"

Section 7: Closing (2 minutes)

Wrap-Up Questions

22. "Is there anything about designing for neurodivergent learners that we haven't discussed but you think is important?"
23. "Do you have any questions about this research or how your responses will be used?"

Appreciation & Next Steps

- "Thank you so much for your time and insights. Your perspective is invaluable to this research."
- "As a reminder, your responses will be completely anonymized, and you'll be referred to as Participant [Number] in any reporting."
- "If you think of anything else you'd like to add, please feel free to email me within the next week."
- "Would you like a summary of the study findings once the research is complete?"

Post-Interview Protocol

- Stop recording
- Thank participant again
- Save recording to secure GMU OneDrive

- Begin transcription process within 48 hours
- Assign participant code (P1, P2, etc.)
- Delete any identifying information from notes

Interview Protocol Notes

- Total time: about 60 minutes = 15 min admin + 40 min questions + 5 min closing
- Use neutral, non-leading language
- Allow for natural conversation flow while covering all topics
- Be sensitive to institutional criticism; Frame as improvement opportunities
- Respect participant comfort levels with sensitive topics