

Advising Students on the Autism Spectrum

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Today's Messages

- Growing UC population—scholarly talents
- Individual variations in strengths, weaknesses
 - Process information visually
 - Difficulty with social interactions
- Suggestions for advising strategies
- DRC and other campus resources
- Share challenges and successes



Terminology Varies

- ❑ Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- ❑ On the spectrum
- ❑ Asperger's Syndrome (AS)
- ❑ Autistic person
- ❑ Person with Autism or Asperger's
- ❑ An aspie
- ❑ Does the label matter?



What's Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- Neurological condition
- Spectrum=wide range of people, with broad range of abilities and challenges
- Disability with social skills
 - ordinary conversation
 - eye contact
 - emotional understanding of others
- Maybe fine or gross motor skill difficulties



Change in DSM Diagnosis

- DSM IV included:
 - Autistic disorder (classic autism)
 - Asperger's syndrome
 - Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified

- DSM V includes:
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder, with qualifiers



Often Multiple Diagnoses

- ❑ Intellectual disabilities (50%+)
- ❑ Learning disabilities (30-50%),
- ❑ ADHD (previously excluded)
- ❑ OCD (20-30%)
- ❑ Anxiety disorders (“majority” of adults).



Population is Increasing

- ❑ Identified vs. just an eccentric person
- ❑ Wider criteria for diagnosis
- ❑ Increased awareness re opportunities
- ❑ Medical and technological advancements
- ❑ Encouraged to pursue higher education to become employable



Temple Grandin

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fn_9f5x0f1Q



Common Strengths

- ❑ Ability to systemize/order information
- ❑ Pitch perception
- ❑ Notice details in patterns
- ❑ Superior memory for details
- ❑ Ability to teach themselves
- ❑ Solve puzzles



Natural Scientific Thinkers

- Interest in information and structures
- Perform calculations in their head
- Possess visual acuity
- Question assumptions and approaches
- Process large data sets



Autism in Higher Education

- Strengths and talents effective in academic setting
- Opportunities to work around difficulties
 - Flexible schedule
 - Focus on project for long periods of time
- Many more people than we realize



Common Challenges

- ❑ Strong strengths and weak weaknesses
- ❑ Focus on interests while avoiding basic needs
- ❑ Easily overloaded by sensory stimulation
- ❑ Asking for help is stressful
- ❑ May not wish to discuss disability



Daily Activities Difficult

- ❑ Communication- especially by telephone
- ❑ Social interactions
- ❑ Unscheduled events
- ❑ Computer problems
- ❑ Changes to existing plan
- ❑ Negative criticism



Possible Manifestations

- ❑ Lack of eye contact
- ❑ Repetitive behaviors
- ❑ Excessive talking
- ❑ Odd speaking style
- ❑ Lack of recognition or return smile
- ❑ Avoids handshake or touch



University Obligation

- ❑ Provide equal access
- ❑ Create welcoming environment
- ❑ Maintain confidentiality
- ❑ Provide individualized accommodations
- ❑ Conduct the ADA interactive process, as needed



The Interactive Process



Faculty/ Staff

Student

DRC



Welcoming Climate?

- ❑ Respect privacy and disclosure
- ❑ Respect differences
- ❑ Avoid stereotypes
- ❑ Avoid assumptions
- ❑ Work in collaboration across campus
- ❑ Help educate others



Possible DRC Services

- ❑ Regular check-in appointments
- ❑ Priority enrollment
- ❑ Part-time status
- ❑ Notifying faculty before term begins
- ❑ Authorize individualized academic accommodations
- ❑ Resource to other advisors, res hall staff



Sample Accommodations

- ❑ Assignments explained--oral and written
- ❑ Alternative to oral presentations, etc.
- ❑ Extended time on essay exams
- ❑ Preferential seating
- ❑ Break during class
- ❑ Sunglasses or hat in class
- ❑ Notetaker



Why not Affiliate with DRC?

- ❑ Prefer not to identify with disability
- ❑ Never been diagnosed
- ❑ Don't know about DRC
- ❑ Don't think accommodations needed
- ❑ Many other reasons



Student Needs the DRC?

- ❑ Is this student already an affiliate?
- ❑ If not, how to suggest?
- ❑ Referral process?



Advising Needs

- ❑ Navigating bureaucratic system
- ❑ Opportunity to make own choices (good, bad)
- ❑ Explanations about basic processes
- ❑ Written information or directions
- ❑ Simple and direct conversation
- ❑ Help identifying good match with instructors



Advising-- Basic Strategies

- ❑ Simple and direct information, directions
- ❑ Discuss/prioritize areas of assistance
- ❑ Ask student, “What works well for you?”
- ❑ Discuss specific scenarios—role play, provide scripts or templates



Setting Boundaries, if needed

- ❑ You can come to drop-in hours
- ❑ You can email me with questions
- ❑ You can wait here in the waiting area until your name is called
- ❑ You can do thisrather than don't do that



Classroom ideas

- Frequent questions
 - Limit number during class
 - Agree upon tracking mechanism, if needed
 - Address additional questions later
- Frequent Interruptions
 - Agree upon visual signal
- Frustrated easily; possible outbursts
 - Discuss back up plan



Help Avoid Meltdowns

- Regular exercise (PE classes)
- Maintaining regular sleep schedule
- Maintaining healthy eating schedule
- Structured fun time
 - Video games, surfing net, friends
- Regular alone/down time
- Yoga, meditation, walk in the woods



Concerning Behavior

- Aggressive behavior -- AS meltdown?
- Running away-- sensory overload
- Breach of student code of conduct
 - Or lack of awareness/training?
- Lack of remorse or eye contact—don't assume guilt



Student Voice:

- ❑ Please reach out
- ❑ Let's do an activity together
- ❑ Please be patient
- ❑ Please be respectful; suggest what I CAN do differently
- ❑ Please be open to diverse thought processes
- ❑ Please be considerate about hyper-sensitivity
- ❑ Some very famous people have/had ASD



Parents on the Team?

- ❑ Could be helpful—expert on this student
- ❑ Student may feel strongly
- ❑ Student makes decisions
- ❑ Identify campus point person for parents



Campus and Other Resources

- Support group through CAPS
- Disability Resource Center
- CARE Team, Dean of Students Office
- Learning Support Services
- Graduate students as tutors
- College Internship Programs (CIP)
- Reference Materials



Recommended Book

- Students with Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for College Personnel
- Lorraine E. Wolf, Ph. D., Jane Thierfeld Brown, Ed. D., and G. Ruth Kukiela Bork, M. Ed.
- Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
 - www.asperger.net



Share Best Practices

- Your experiences with students who are on Autism spectrum—successes and challenges?



DRC Contact Information

- <http://drc.ucsc.edu>
- 831-459-2089
- 146 Hahn Student Services
- Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.