Advising Students on the Autism Spectrum

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Disability Resource Center
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 this …..rather 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
  - 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](http://drc.ucsc.edu)
- 831-459-2089
- 146 Hahn Student Services
- Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.