

Faculty Guide

Having a student with Autism in your class

What is Autism

- Autism is a complex neurobehavioral condition that includes impairments in social interaction and developmental language and communication skills combined with rigid, repetitive behaviors. Because of the range of symptoms, this condition is now called autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Autism is a spectrum

- No two students are alike, especially students with autism.
- Due to the diversity of autism, you may see only a few or maybe all of the characteristics associated with autism.
- Behaviors that seem odd or unusual or even rude are in fact often unintentional.

General Characteristics

- Frequent errors in interpreting others' body language and facial expressions
- Problems asking for help
- Perseveration of details
- Difficulty seeing the big picture
- Difficulty transitioning or adapting to changes with the class schedule or syllabus
- Problems with organization including initiating, planning, carrying out and finishing tasks
- Deficits with abstract thinking
- Unusual sensitivity to touch, sounds and visual details

Classroom Impact

- Difficulty knowing how to interact with classmates
- Poor or unusual eye contact
- Problems understanding social rules such as respecting personal space
- Impairment of two way interaction or communication
- Conversation that may be repetitive or off topic
- Interests that may not be related to class or topic
- Unusual speech intonation, volume, rhythm or rate
- Literal understanding of language; e.g. difficulty interpreting words with double meaning, understanding sarcasm and metaphors.

Tips to aid in Classroom

- Be clear on expectations.
- Provide detailed and clear syllabus.
- Clearly say or write down changes to the syllabus, assignment dates or class routine.
- Supplement oral instructions with written instructions.
- Be aware that many *ASD* students do not inherently possess interpersonal skills.
- Set clear rules and boundaries. In many instances, an *ASD* student may be unaware of an issue but will accept being told proper classroom etiquette.
- Call or email Access Services for assistance 913-469-3521.

Writing

Research shows that many students on the spectrum experience difficulty with written language. The reasons for these concerns vary but may include problems with:

- Analyzing or understanding plots
- Assimilating facts that have been researched into essay form
- Not understanding what the writing assignment is exactly
- Comparing and contrasting ideas
- Planning, focusing and/or reducing ideas to a specific topic
- Time management, especially including the management of long-term assignments

Tips to assist with writing assignment

- Provide clear guidelines and date deadlines for assignments.
- Ask student to repeat his/her understanding of the writing assignment.
- Ask the student to turn in rough drafts multiple times to check for understanding.
- List or number changes or suggestions on the paper when providing revisions.
- Conference with the student, tutor and/or professor together.
- Encourage use of Writing Center and Academic Achievement Center.

Challenges and Benefits of Group Projects for students with ASD

- Benefits

Student brings:

1. A unique perspective to group activities
2. A potentially vast knowledge of a wide range of different subjects
3. Willingness to do the required work

- Challenges

Student may have difficulty:

1. Understanding the social aspects of a group project
2. Understanding distribution of work among group members

Other Considerations

- Every student must follow the Student Code of Conduct.
- Don't be afraid to tell the student with ASD what your expectations and requirements are for your class.
- Most students with ASD want to do well and will appreciate your advice and guidance.
- If you have questions please call Access Services at 913-469-3521.

References

- Students with Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for the College Personnel by Lorraine E. Wolf, Ph.D., Jane Thierfeld Brown, M.Ed., and G. Ruth Kukiela Bork, M.Ed
- Interviews with Mindy Diaz-Joliet Junior College, Lauren RodriguezPurchase, NY, Laurie Ackles-RIT, Lauren Greiner-SUNY
- Article-Preparing to be Nerdy where Nerdy Can Be Cool by Lars Perner, Ph.D
- Unwritten Rule of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries through the Unique Perspectives of Autism by Temple Grandin
- WebMD.com