

Faculty Information 11/02/2019

**STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

**OVERVIEW**

Understanding students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be challenging for faculty to address, particularly if the faculty member is not familiar with Autism Spectrum Disorder and how it manifests itself. This document is designed to provide faculty basic information about Autism Spectrum Disorder and how to support students with ASD.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are neurological disorders characterized by deficits in three domains. These include:

* Social and Communication Deficits, such as social-emotional reciprocity, engaging in conversation, and sharing experiences with others;
* Non-verbal communication behaviors, demonstrated by lack of eye contact and failure to understand and correctly interpret body language, facial expressions, and gestures;
* Developing and maintaining relationships, noted by difficulty making and maintaining friends.

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder often have difficulty on the college campus. This difficulty is not due to the student’s academic abilities. Instead, students with ASD may struggle with difficulty processing language, especially metaphors, innuendoes, and jokes. A student with ASD tends to be a very literal, concrete thinker. Additionally, the student may lack executive functioning skills, leading to poor time management and organizational skills. This student may also experience sensory sensitivity to light, sound, or smell. Additionally, the faculty member may observe that the student exhibits rigid, sterotyped behavior, with mannerisms that are often mechanical in nature. The student typically benefits from structure and consistency, often wanting things “just so”. It is possible that the student with ASD may engage in unusual, repetitive preoccupations with specific objects or ideas and may have difficulty with transitions and change.

The term “Spectrum Disorder” means that individuals may be at different points on the Spectrum, with characteristics ranging from mildly impacting the student to severely impacting the student. No two students are impacted in the same manner. Each is unique. Many have very high cognitive and linguistics skills, but are challenged by the impact of the Disorder in social and communication areas of their lives.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FACULTY**

* Include a statement in your syllabus inviting students with disabilities who may have special needs to meet with you privately so that you may confidentially discuss the student‘s needs and reasonable accommodations. Also, at the beginning of each semester, verbally invite students with disabilities and to meet with you privately to discuss their individual and unique needs. Talk about the requirements of the class, special needs of each student (on a case-by-case basis, as each student’s needs are unique), and strategize as to how to implement the reasonable accommodations defined by the Student Disability Resources and Services Director. Never make an assumption about an individual’s abilities. Each individual is unique, and his/her disability impacts him/her in varying ways. If you have concerns, contact the Director of the Student Disability Resources and Services (SDRS).
* Some students may require preferential seating as a reasonable accommodation. Discuss the accommodation with the student and together determine the best seat for that individual.
* Many students with ASD will require the use of a note taker as a reasonable accommodation. Please assist the student in obtaining a note taker by either announcing to the class that SDRS is hiring note takers, or by singling out good students and asking if they would be interested in the job. Never disclose who the notes are for in order to preserve the confidentiality of the students. SDRS will provide NCR paper to the note taker who is hired and establish how the notes are to be delivered to the student.
* Face the class when speaking to help students understand what is being said.
* Use multiple modalities of instruction when possible to promote attentiveness and comprehension of the subject matter. Include, when feasible, dramatic presentations, PowerPoint presentations, overheads, movies, and online resource that involve both auditory and visual processing. This benefits ALL students in your class.
* Give a brief overview of what will be taught at the beginning of each class, followed by a brief review of what was taught at the end of each class. This promotes retention of the course material.
* For exams, it is helpful to provide, in advance, questions that review the content to be covered in the exam, as well as illustrating the format of the exam. This helps prepare the students for the exam and reduces anxiety.
* It is helpful to always write directions and keep handouts in the same place, as the student with ASD benefits from structure and consistency.
* Use color where possible, such as color-coded notebooks, colored markers and pens to help students with ASD differentiate subject material. Color can also be used to highlight critical points and important information.
* Use visual cues, supplementing oral directions with written directions.
* Use clear and detailed directions when explaining a concept and/or when working with the student on paper revisions.
* If the student has a preoccupying interest, see if there is a way to incorporate it into the course to help motivate and focus the student, such as writing a paper on the topic.
* Be sure that, at all times, you maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the student. If you need to discuss issues or testing arrangements with the student, do so privately.
* Each student who is on the Autism Spectrum is unique. While there is not a specific list descriptors that all students on the Spectrum exhibit, some common behaviors might include rocking, waving hands, talking to oneself, asking constant questions in class, interrupting, pacing. If a student is disrupting the learning environment, please talk privately with the student about the specific disruptive behaviors and state that this type of behavior is disruptive to the class. If the student discloses that he/she is on the Autism Spectrum, it is acceptable to ask the student if he/she is registered with SDRS. If the student is not already registered with SDRS, please refer the student to this office so that services may be identified, if appropriate. Additionally, the Director or Case Manager of SDRS can meet with you and/or the student to clarify the student’s responsibilities and to help support appropriate behaviors in class.
* TAMUC is proud to have a program on campus specifically for students who are on the Autism Spectrum and interested in participating. If you encounter a student who is interested in participating, please refer the student to the SDRS Director or Case Manager.

**Texas A&M University Commerce Student Disability Resources and Services**

Gee Library, Suite 162

903-886-5150

E-mail: StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

**Texas A&M University-Commerce at Frisco – 9700 Wade Blvd, University Hall 105, Frisco TX**

Frisco@tamuc.edu

(972) 377-1665

**Universities Center at Dallas – 801 Main Street, Suite C340, Dallas TX**

Dallas@tamuc.edu

(214) 954-3600

**Collin Higher Education Center – 3452 Spur 399, Mckinney, TX 75069**

CHEC@tamuc.edu

972-599-3122

**Mesquite Metroplex Center – 2600 Motley Drive, Suite 100, Mesquite, TX 75150**

Russell.blanchett@tamuc.edu

972-882-7520

**Navarro Partnership – 3200W 7th Avenue, Corsicana, TX 75110**

Virginia.monk@tamuc.edu

903-875-7619

***REMEMBER****:*

**ALL** students must meet the same academic standards for credit in your class. Standards should NOT be lowered. Students with disabilities may use reasonable accommodations, but they are held to the same academic and Code of Conduct standards as any other student.