

## Student Affairs Professionals Successful Support of Students with Asperger's Syndrome



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## Who is in the audience?

## Origin of Project

- Increased incidence in colleges
  - Students with disabilities
  - Students with ASD
  - Students with AS
- Personal interest
- Perceived need for students in grad. preparation program in College Counseling/Student Services

## More on Why

- Opportunity for a trans-disciplinary project
  - Collaboration
  - Created trans-disciplinary presentation on basics of supporting students transition from K-12 to higher education
  - With great support from AGSAP student group, developed and created professional workshop/training that included trans-disciplinary case-based for broad group of graduate students from the following programs:
    - College Counseling/Student Services
    - Special Education
    - School Psychology

## Put yourself in his shoes...

## Overview

- I. What is Asperger's?
- II. Student Involvement
- III. Residential Housing
- IV. Academic Advising
- V. Career Counseling

### What is Asperger's Syndrome?

Asperger's Syndrome is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), one of a distinct group of neurological conditions characterized by a greater or lesser degree of impairment in language and communication skills, as well as repetitive or restrictive patterns of thought and behavior.

A developmental disorder with a range of functionality.

### Student Involvement

"I want to be involved but I've never had a real friend before and I'm not sure how to approach others."



### Student Involvement & Asperger's Syndrome

Student involvement is often a challenge for students with Asperger's Syndrome. Poor social skills and difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships are common characteristics of students with Asperger's Syndrome.

### Some Student Activities Issues

- Social and interpersonal (finding, joining, managing groups)
- Navigating and negotiating with peers
- Off-campus activities (novel situations)

### Activities for Students with Asperger's Syndrome

- Anime, chess club, fantasy gaming, film groups, and other clubs/organizations
- Peer mentoring programs
- Support groups

### Suggestions for Student Affairs Personnel

- Becoming familiar with characteristics and indicators of Asperger's to identify the needs of these students
- Further education and training on working with students with Asperger's
- Additional research

### Residential Housing

“Will I still be bullied and teased like in high school, or will my roommates/staff be able to understand me?”



(King, Tierfeld Brown, & Wolf, 2010)

### Skill Expected From All

- **Social Skills:**
  - Interaction according to social norms, dealing with criticism, peer pressure
- **Independent Living Skills:**
  - Locate help when needed, self-advocacy, use leisure time effectively, personal care: laundry, hygiene

(King, Tierfeld Brown, & Wolf, 2010)

| Behavior                                    | Cause                            | (Mis) Interpretation            |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Mimics or recites or stalls for time        | Need time to process             | Not taking speaker seriously    |
| Great expressive skills                     | Compensates for receptive skills | Overestimation of functioning   |
| Odd speaking habits                         | Pragmatic language               | Inappropriate                   |
| May not respond to facial expressions, tone | Difficulty with non-verbals      | Leads to miscues in assignments |
| Does not seem to recognize you              | Limited facial recognition       | Aloof, rude                     |
| May not shift topic on cue                  | Does not automatically catch on  | Self-absorbed, uninterested     |

(King, Tierfeld Brown, & Wolf, 2010)

### Misinterpretation

- Bullied, teased, and ridiculed
- Stigmatized by DISABILITY
- Sense of feeling lost

Leading to:

- Stress, depression, isolation
- Mistrust, difficulty with disclosing/self-advocating

“I want to be like everyone else”  
“I want to be ‘normal’.”

(Wolf, Tierfeld Brown & Bok, 2009)

### “Common” Issues

- Transition- tight adhering to routines & rituals
- Expressive communication – oral &/or written
- Inadequate social skills
- Tends to be rigid
- Sensory overload: music, loud noise, touch, smell, crowds
- Inability to deal with stress
- Increased incidence of anxiety and depression

(King, Tierfeld Brown, & Wolf, 2010)

### Residential Housing

- **Training**
  - RA's , RD's, RDA's
- **Room selection**
  - Roommates, suitemates, and others
- **Orientation**
  - Ice breakers
- **Housing security**
  - Fire, earthquake
- **Emergency plans**
- **Parents/ Families**

### Residential Life Training

- AS Fact Sheet:
  - Definition
  - Typical symptoms
  - Possible residential issues & behavior
    - Roommates, isolation, sensory issues, hygiene, friends, intense interests, lack of understanding of nonverbal communication, bullying
  - Strategies
    - Universal design
    - Avoiding labeling
    - Increase understanding
    - Self-educators

( Wolf, Thierfeld Brown, & Bork, 2009)

### Housing Consideration

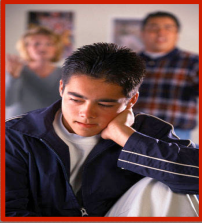
- Campus Ecology
  - Support groups
  - Providing a multipurpose rooms
- Marginality/ Mattering
  - Creating a connection
  - Mentor

*Carefully managing “transition, orientation, and attention to staff training in residential halls can help a student with AS to thrive in a communal living space such as the residence halls.”*

- Bork, Thierfeld Brown, & Wolf, 2009, p.135

### Academic Advising for Students with Asperger's

• “My parents always did the talking before; I don't know what to ask or talk about when I go to see my advisor.”



### Academic Challenges

- Writing papers
- Math classes
- Taking exams
- Presentations
- Group projects
- Taking notes
- Physical activity courses

### Areas of Academic Strength

- Commitment to ideas
- Original ways of approaching problems
- Routine
- Strong pursuit of knowledge in areas of interest
- Unbiased judgment
- Strong sense of equality and justice
- Loyal to their friends
- Increase sense of 'mattering'



### Strategies for Meetings with Students

- 1) Emphasize their strengths
- 2) Summarizing the meetings
- 3) Getting student progress reports
- 4) Ask students to keep records of their grades in each course .
- 5) Discuss safe places for students
- 6) Discussions to potentially have with students with AS: selecting courses, selecting a major, classroom etiquette, testing, meeting with instructors and time management.

Palmer, 2006

### Registration and Course Selection

- Professors who have a highly structured teaching style are often a good fit for these students
- Could recommend physical education courses that do not involve loud whistles, team sports, coordination (i.e. power walking, open gym)
- Inquire about the student's strengths
- Encourage students to take classes in areas they are interested in or in subjects they have done well in the past
- Recommend students schedule breaks between classes
- Providing these students with priority registration allows them the opportunity to get the classes that fit their needs

### Effective Partnerships to Establish

- Admissions and Records
- Disability Services
- Career Services
- Residential Life
- Faculty members
- Parents

### Connecting with the family and parents

- Parents may be used to being in charge of their students education; college presents a role shift for most parents, especially those with A.S.
- Families may often be the experts on the student's disability more than the student
- Creating an effective partnership, if possible, is important
- Keeping in mind the rights of the student (e.g., confidentiality, FERPA)
- Type of Parenting:
  - Absent
  - Angry
  - Intrusive
  - Supportive
- When families are not around, teaching the student about their disability will help them advocate for themselves

### Communication with Faculty/Professors

- It is not required for students to disclose to professors
  - Only as appropriate for their needs in that class.
- Can be important/helpful for faculty to have some understanding as to what the student is going through
- Students may feel uncomfortable speaking with their professor
- Advocate and empower the student as much as possible
- If an advisor is going to discuss a student's disability with others, the student's permission and a signed release is required.

### Students with Asperger Syndrome and Career Counseling

"I'm a sophomore and unsure about what career path I want to take, what will happen when I graduate? How will I find a job?"



### Career Counseling Students with AS

- Graduates with disabilities have traditionally required a significantly longer time to locate employment.
- Why is that?

### Tools to help prepare students with Asperger's Syndrome for successful employment

To be responsive to this growing population, career counselors need to prepare students with the skills needed to self-advocate, and prepare them so they can successfully transition from school to work.

- Identifying learning styles
- Identify a mentor
- On-campus jobs/internships
- Interview training
- Disclosure to employees

### Prior to Addressing Career Options

- Investigate the student's learning style

What does this allow for?

### Identifying a Mentor

- Students with AS are able to function well when they have a supportive and understanding coworker or supervisor to help "translate."
- If this is not possible:
- Identify a "go to" person

What does a mentor allow for?

### On Campus Jobs

- Explore various work environments that exist.
- Create a list of work cultures
- Analyze the differences and similarities

Benefit of this exercise?

### Analyzing Work Cultures

**Identifying such things as:**

- Good work habits
- How to address people
- Fitting in
- Office attire
- Grooming and hygiene
- Office comportment
- Telephone etiquette
- New vocabulary
- Office routines
- Time sheets
- Lunch hours
- Breaks

- The goal of this exercise is to provide the student with a personalized tool they can use when they are entering and to prevent unnecessary struggling in the workplace.

### Interview Training

**Develop scripts :**

- Meeting the interviewer
- Type of questions asked
- Cues that the interview has ended

**Prepare a portfolio**

**What can we do as counselors to help students with AS prepare for the interview process?**

- Role play with the students
- Rehearse
- Videotape practicing interviews

### Disclosure to Employers?

- When a student's social skills are weak and their insights about handling themselves in unfamiliar situations are poor, disclosure could mean the difference between being accepted for a position or internship .

### Moving from the world of school to the world of work

- Working with the office of career services
- Finding on-campus jobs or internships
- Preparing to work after graduation

### Resources After College Life

- Student's with AS may consider becoming clients of their state vocational rehabilitation agency.

Why?

- Further expand services and support to the students.

### Application of Theory

The application of career and student development theory may differ with students with Asperger's Syndrome

### Campus Considerations

- Gearing orientations towards students with Asperger's Syndrome
- Quiet spaces that are available 24 hours a day
- Assistance in obtaining lap tops
- Prepare graduates to succeed in the work place by forming job links that have environments suitable for students with Asperger's Syndrome
- Educate your faculty and staff to good practices
- Provide support for working with parents

*Understanding Asperger Syndrome: A College Professor's Guide*

### Successful programs designed to support students with Asperger's

- "Transition to Independent Living" at Taft College in Central California  
([http://www.taftcollege.edu/tcwp/til/?page\\_id=12](http://www.taftcollege.edu/tcwp/til/?page_id=12)) and
- "College Support Program" in Amherst, NY  
(<http://www.collegesupportprogram.org/>)
- These are two examples of how colleges can fully support students with disabilities needs while maintaining academic standards.
- Many aspects could be replicated in larger settings, too.

### A parental perspective of a student with AS...

As the mother of an 18 year old with Asperger's I can tell you that as a population these students are very diverse in their interests and abilities. Over all, I think that students benefit from hands on experience and from extensive coaching. They often need to have everything broken down into incremental steps. Knowledge of their sensory issues is important to help them decide what environments are a good fit. For example, my son is a passionate cook and very talented. I think he could be a very good chef, but I don't think he could work in a busy hectic kitchen with lots of time demands and noise. He could perhaps work for a catering company or for a private client. People with Asperger's often have very strong interests that, if they can be harnessed, could lead to satisfying careers. But they can also have some pretty grandiose ideas, too -- thus the need for hands on experience.

- Donna Morley: Learning specialist/Mother of a son with Asperger's Syndrome

### Closing Thoughts

- As student affairs professionals we need to be responsive to this growing population, to prepare students with the skills needed to self-advocate, become more independent, and prepare them to successfully transition from high school to college to work.
- College provides a valuable opportunity for students with Asperger's Syndrome to further develop their social and interpersonal skills.

### Selected Resources

Atwood, T. (2008). *The complete guide to Asperger's Syndrome*. London, England/Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Research Autism (n.d.). *Understanding Asperger Syndrome: A college professor's guide*. Downloaded from YouTube on March 5, 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=233-3jtEZck&feature=related>

Wolf, L. E., Brown, J. T., & Bork, R. (2009). *Students with Asperger Syndrome: A guide for college personnel*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

### Questions? Comments?