

An ASD-Friendly Campus: Strategies and Systems for this Emerging Population

* Christine Arieta * Debbie Hayward * Lena Jahn *Patrice Nolan
Landmark College - Putney, Vermont

The Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, February 7-10, 2015 Dallas, Texas

Objectives for the session

- Provide general statistics
- Briefly introduce the theories explaining Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Identify how college students with ASD present
- Share effective practices for working with students in the classroom and in 1:1 settings
- Introduce an institutional response through campus-wide systems

General Statistics about ASD Occurrence

- More children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder
- 2014 - Approximately 1 in 68
- 2012 - Approximately 1 in 88
- 2000 - Approximately 1 in 150

(CDC - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014)

General Statistics about ASD Occurrence (cont'd)

- ASD occurs across racial and socio-economic groups but more often in white children compared to Latino or African American children
- ASD is more prevalent in boys -1 in 42 compared with girls - 1 in 89
- Almost 50% of children with ASD have average to above average intelligence compared to 30% in 2004
- Within last decade more high-functioning students with ASD enter college
- Students with ASD can be a greater risk for developing psychiatric issues like depression or anxiety
- Students with ASD are more likely to drop out of school

More students with ASD attending college

- Civil Rights legislation resulted in passing of ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) in 1990
- ADA entitled students with ASD to inclusion in public education
- Students with ASD qualified for special education services and an IEP (Individualized Education Program)
- Students with ASD acquired skills and independence to attend post-secondary institutions, while also tending to be naïve and vulnerable
- Increase in public and institutional awareness of ASD via media and prominent figures with ASD such as Temple Grandin
- Easier to diagnose higher-functioning individuals with ASD who may have been overlooked in the past

www.autismspeaks.org

Theories explaining ASD

```
graph TD; A[Theories explaining ASD] --> B[Anatomical]; A --> C[Psychological]
```

Anatomical

Psychological

Disruption of Synaptic Connections

Saliency Landscape Theory

Anatomical
Theories

Reduced Structural Connectivity

Mirror Neuron Dysfunction

“Theory of Mind”

Weak Central Coherence

Psychological
Theories

Executive Dysfunction

Context Blindness and Context
Sensitivity

How Students with ASD Present

*“If you’ve met one person with ASD,
you’ve met one person with ASD.”*

- Stephen Shore

While the information presented here applies to many students with ASD, profiles and skills levels vary greatly between individuals, and it is important to be careful about making generalizations and assumptions.

How Students with ASD Present (cont'd)

- Relative strengths in and preference for processing *visual* information (compared to auditory processing, particularly of language)
- Frequent attention to *details*, but difficulty understanding the meaning of how these details fit together
- Difficulty *combining* ideas

(www.TEACCH.com)

TEACCH® Autism Program developed the concept of the “Culture of Autism” as a way of thinking about the characteristic patterns of thinking and behavior seen in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

How Students with ASD Present (cont'd)

- Difficulty with ***organizing*** ideas, materials and activities
- Difficulties with ***attention*** (some individuals are very distractible, others have difficulty shifting attention when its time to make transitions)
- Difficulty with ***concepts of time***, including moving too quickly or too slowly, and having difficulty recognizing the beginning, middle or end of an activity.

How Students with ASD Present (cont'd)

- **Communication** problems which vary by developmental level, but always include impairments in the social use of language (called “pragmatics”)
- Tendency to become **attached to routines**, with the result that activities may be difficult to generalize from the original learning situation and disruption in routines that are upsetting, confusing or uncomfortable.
- Very strong **interest and impulses** in engaging in favored activities, with difficulties disengaging once engaged
- Marked **sensory** preferences and dislikes

(www.TEACCH.com)

Working with Students

- Faculty Approaches and Mindset
- Strategies for the Classroom
- 1:1 meetings

Faculty Approaches and Mindset

- Structure
- Non-judgmental, matter-of-fact
- “Intercultural” frame of mind

Strategies for the Classroom

- Use fewer words when explaining assignments
- Check for understanding of sarcasm, innuendoes and double meanings
- Provide a clear and detailed syllabus
- Alert the student ahead of time when the syllabus changes
- Make time to meet with the student on a weekly basis

(Freedman, 2010)

Classroom Strategies – Faculty Suggestions

A study of faculty with experience teaching college students with ASD yielded the following suggestions:

Provide structure:

- Clarify directions and questions
- Follow routines
- Preview what is to come (especially changes)
- Directly explain format of course
- Build in opportunities to exercise strengths / follow interests

(Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2014)

Classroom Strategies - Faculty Suggestions (cont'd)

- Emotional needs:
 - Notice heightened anxiety
 - Reduce triggers for anxiety
 - Allow for breaks
 - Non-judgmental approach
 - One-on-one discussion with instructor for feedback

(Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2014)

1 : 1 Meetings - Examples

- Faculty in office hours
- Advising
- Disability Support Services
- Student Life / Residential Life
- Counseling
- Health Services
- Peer mentors

1:1 Meetings - Opportunities

1:1 meetings provide the opportunity to facilitate development of:

- Self-understanding
- Self-advocacy
- Independence
- Anxiety management
- Social pragmatics

1 : 1 Meetings - Make no Assumptions

To set up a meeting:

- Rather than wait for the student to take the initiative, invite him / her to meet with you
- Make sure that the student has recorded the required information to access you in planner or phone (your name, office number and location, date and time of appointment)

1 : 1 Meetings - Make no Assumptions (cont'd)

During the meeting:

- Pay attention to possible anxiety
- Pay attention to possible sensory triggers (e.g. lighting, scent, noise)
- Avoid open-ended questions
- Give students options
- Pause and give students time to reflect and respond, especially those with auditory processing difficulties

Social Pragmatics: Social Stories

- Social Stories™ , or Social Articles describes situations, skills or concepts
- Purpose: to disseminate information in an overall respectful manner
- 10 defining criteria guide format, voice, content and process
- Content is descriptive, meaningful, physically, socially and emotionally safe for the “Audience”
- Meant to inform, not change the individual
- Informative sentences outweigh suggestions by at least 2:1
- Most effective when paired with visual support, such as Comic Book Strips and video modelling
- Examples of Social Articles available on www.wrongplanet.net

Social Pragmatics: Social Thinking

- Social Thinking is a cognitive approach used to teach social observation skills to individuals with ASD by taking abstract social concepts and teaching them in a more concrete manner.
- Acronym: *I LAUGH* - Approach to Social-Cognition Training

(Michelle Garcia Winner, www.socialthinking.com)

Approach to Social-Cognition Training

I

Initiation of Communication

having to start a behavior that is not routine

L

Listening and Attention

"listening with our eyes"

A

Abstract and Inferential Thinking

the ability to infer meaning from social cues or work out meanings from words

U

Understanding Perspective Taking

thinking about others

G

Gestalt: Getting the Big Picture

teach how to connect knowledge

Weak Central Coherence theory

H

Humor

helps break barriers of insecurity at a level on which we can all relate

Winner, M. G. (2006). Inside out: What makes a person with social cognitive deficits tick? (3rd ed.). Thinking Social Publishing, Inc. San Jose, CA.

Institutional Response

- Accommodations
- Expanded Services
- Beyond Accommodations
- Programming

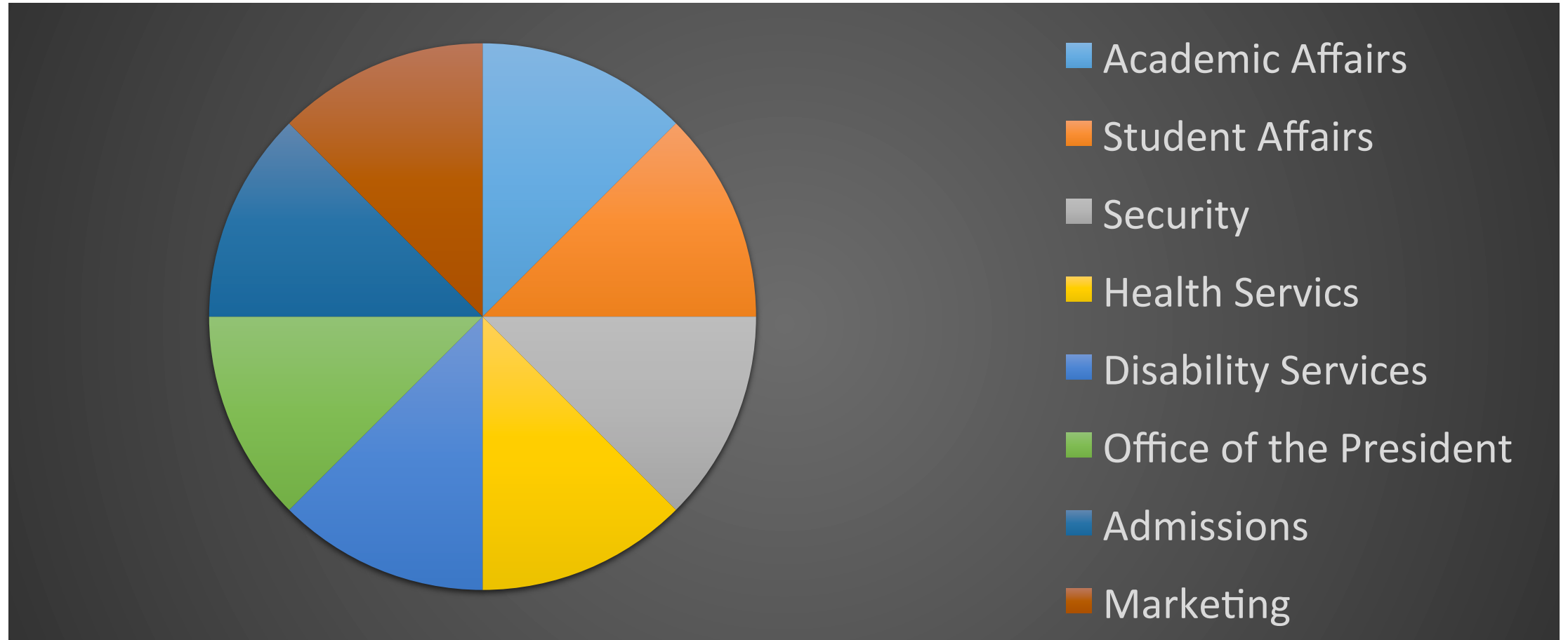
Accommodations for College Students with ASD

- Extended time on exams
- Reduced course loads
- Assistance with registration and financial aid
- Preferential seating in the classroom
- Taping and note-taking assistance
- Specialized housing – single room
- Tutoring
- Advisor for mentoring

Expanded Services for College Students with ASD

- Residence Hall
- Ability to leave class when symptoms begin to occur
- Environmental considerations such as special lighting and acoustics
- Peer networking
- Student success course
- Reduced course load
- Priority registration
- Early Orientation

Beyond Accommodations - Campus-Wide Approach



ASD / Social Pragmatic Programming

- Professional development for faculty and staff
- Establishment of Office of Social Pragmatic Programming
- Designating experts
- Identifying practices
- Creating student groups
 - Classes
 - Advisories
 - Social groups
 - Peer Mentors
- Research
- Assessment

ASD / Social Pragmatic Programming: Social Language Courses

Through Academic Advising:

- **Section 1:** Social Pragmatics (the conversation hierarchy, personal and procedural narratives, active listening and mirroring, and related skills)
- **Section 2:** Analysis of neuro-typical (NT) culture through media
- **Section 3:** Social-Cognition (Social Reasoning) through role-play and problem-solving complex social situations

ASD / Social Pragmatic Programming: First-Year Courses

- Special Sections of First-Year Seminars for students with social pragmatic needs
- Special Sections for First-Semester English Composition
- Introduction to Interpersonal Communication with emphasis on social pragmatics

ASD / Social Pragmatic Programming: Social Groups

Through Office of Social Pragmatic Programming:

- Social Groups facilitated by Peer Mentors who are also students with ASD
- Workshops for all students facilitated by individuals trained in social pragmatic coaching

Landmark College - Institutional Response to Increased Number of Students with ASD

Spring 2009

- Special programming, including evening social groups and one credit elective course in Social Pragmatics
- Program planning in consultation with Advising and Counseling
- Presentations and trainings on campus by ASD experts in the field

Fall 2010

- Early Orientation pilot with no additional charge
 - Tour of campus
 - Educational and Residential planning in advance of semester
 - Establishment of allies and safe places
 - Peer Groups
 - PATH TM exercise with Advisors for goal setting, etc.
(The P.A.T.H Process, www.northstarfacilitators.com)
- Social Groups formed for evening programming

Landmark College - Institutional Response to Increased Number of Students with ASD (cont'd)

- June 2011** -Oversight and steering group meet regularly for updating and planning:
- ASD Advisory Board continues the work of the steering committee
 - ASD Program Development Task Force
 - ASD Marketing Task Force
 - ASD Professional Development Task Force
 - ASD Research Task Force
 - Social Pragmatic Practitioners Group
- Fall 2013** -Piloted ASD section of First-Year Seminar: Perspectives in Learning created for credit students
- Fall 2014** -Piloted ASD section of First Year Seminar: Foundations in Learning created for “partial-credit” students

Works cited

Autism: Sensory Overload Simulation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcS2VUoe12M>

Autism Speaks. www.autismspeaks.org

Baron-Cohen, S. (1995). *Mindblindness: An essay on autism and theory of mind*. Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC). (2014). <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>

Freedman, S. (2010) *Developing college skills in students with autism and asperger's syndrome*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gobbo, K. & Shmulsky, S., (2014). Faculty experience with college students with autism spectrum disorders: A qualitative study of challenges and solutions. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 29:1, 13-22.

Works cited (cont'd)

Gray, C. (2010) *The New Social Story™ Book*. Future Horizons. Arlington, TX.

Happe, F., & Frith, U., (2006). The weak coherence account: Detail-focused cognitive style in autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 36(1), 5-25

The University of North Carolina TEACCH Autism Program. www.TEACCH.com

Vermeulen, P., (2010). *Autism as Context Blindness*. AAPC Publishing. Shawnee Mission, Kansas.

Winner, M. G. (2006) *Inside out: What makes a person with social cognitive deficits tick? (3rd ed.)*. Thinking Social Publishing. Inc. San Jose, CA.