



Academic Supports for College Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Overview

Contributed by Marci Wheeler, M.S.W. and Brenda Chapin, B.A.

What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- A neurobiological disorder
- Affects perception
- Communication challenges
- Social skills deficits
- Often suffers from high anxiety
- Sensory issues—easily under or over stimulated
- Organization and prioritization challenges
- Can affect motor skills (fine and gross)
- Exhibits uneven learning profile
- Presents differently in each individual

What will it Look like in the Classroom?

- Student may appear inattentive or bored
- May see ritualistic and repetitive behaviors (e.g., body rocking when stressed)
- Trouble staying on topic and maintaining conversation
- Literal interpretation of words
- Knowledgeable in subject areas of interest
- May display the opposite emotion when stressed (e.g., smiling when being corrected)
- Poor awareness of body space
- Difficulty manipulating small objects
- Organizational skills lacking
- Focused on one task at a time
- Difficulty working in groups

What are the Strengths of a Student with an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- "Out of the box" thinkers
- Task oriented
- Reliable; once expectations understood
- Intelligent
- Excellent visual-spatial skills
- Strong attention to detail
- Ability to maintain prolonged, intense focus on subjects of interest
- Motivated by strong interests
- Excellent long term and rote memory

What are the Challenges of a Student with an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- May misread social cues, facial expressions learning and body language
- Social interactions and group work are stressful
- Stress relieving activities may make others uncomfortable (e.g., flapping hands, rocking)
- Intelligence and large vocabulary may hide communication challenges
- Sensory perceptions can interfere with (e.g., flickering lights and noises can be a distraction)
- Multi-tasking is extremely difficult
- Nebulous sense of time
- Difficulty with changes and transitions

What Can I Do to Help Support this Student's Learning?

- Provide quiet areas for learning and test taking
- Respect student's chosen level of eye contact
- Allow more time for work assignments
- Provide a note taker or instructor's notes
- Provide step by step written instructions
- Allow use of a computer for in-class work
- Allow for sensory or comfort items
- Provide hands on learning and visual aids
- Provide peer mentors to check in with student
- Allow extra transition time
- Allow for adjustments to seating placement
- When under stress, ask if the student would like to leave for a few moments
- Ask the student for suggestions



For faculty: Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum

CSUMB Health and Wellness Services (Bldg. 80) – Caroline Haskell, Director

<https://csumb.edu/hws> is comprised of 3 separate departments

<https://csumb.edu/pgcc>, <https://csumb.edu/health>

and

Student Disability Resources

Ruthann Daniel-Harteis, Disability Advisor and Margaret Keith, Manager

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<https://csumb.edu/sdr>

Recommended reading

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[http://www.umassd.edu/media/umassdartmouth/centerforaccesssuccess/Academic Supports for College Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder Quick Overview.pdf](http://www.umassd.edu/media/umassdartmouth/centerforaccesssuccess/Academic_Supports_for_College_Students_with_an_Autism_Spectrum_Disorder_Quick_Overview.pdf)

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/teaching-college-students-with-autism-spectrum-disorders/>

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/Academic-Supports-for-College-Students-with-an-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder>

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/colleges/university/disability/faculty-staff/classroom-issues/autism/autism-strategy.htm>

Do-It

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/collaboration-struggles-engineering-lab-case-study-about-student-autism>

How to Teach Students on the Autism Spectrum modified from UC Berkeley DSP

<http://www.umassd.edu/dss/resources/facultystaff/howtoteachandaccommodate/howtoteachautismspectrum/>

24 Faculty Tips for Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum - 2 pages

<http://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/drc/1/documents/LearningAssistance/24%20Faculty%20Tips%20for%20Working%20with%20Students%20on%20the%20autism%20Spectrum.pdf>