Autism Goes to College:
What this means for UCR

UCR SEARCH Center &
UCR-UCLA LEND Program

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The Faces of SEARCH
Overview of Presentation

- Autism Defined
- Autism 101 Study
- Autism in College
- Autism Services on Campus
WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?
What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

• Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): a disorder of brain development

• Onset in childhood → Continues into adulthood

• No one cause of autism has been identified

• Most cases involve a complex and variable combination of genetic risk and environmental factors that influence early brain development
What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Prevalence rate of autism **1 in 68** children with autism

- More common in boys than girls
- Occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups
- As many as 1.9% of college students with autism

Autism runs on a spectrum:

- No cognitive delay vs. cognitive delay, verbal vs. nonverbal
- Previous terms: Asperger’s, Pervasive Developmental Disorder...
- “If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism”
Co-Occurring Issues with Autism

70% of adults with ASD have at least one additional disorder

– social anxiety
– attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder
– oppositional disorder
– obsessive compulsive disorder
– Tourette’s syndrome
– insomnia
– depression

Siminoff, Pickles, Charman, Chandler, Loucas and Baird (2008)
Attwood (2007)
AUTISM 101:
UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES & NEEDS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WITH AUTISM
Students with ASD are increasingly attending college.

Challenges for university students with ASD:
- Social interactions, independence, daily living skills, organization, structure, appropriate classroom behaviors

SOURCES: Adreon & Durocher, 20007; Hart et al., 2010; Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Kapp et al., 2011; Shattuck et al., 2012; VanBergeijk et al., 2008
13 students with ASD & 18 students with ADHD reported factors impeding in meaningful postsecondary experiences:

- Disclosure of Diagnosis
- Influences Prior to University
- Academic Expectations
- Self-Awareness in the Present
- Comorbid Conditions
- Opinions on Medication Use
- Peer Interactions
- Living & Housing Arrangements
- Anticipation of the Future
Both students with ASD and ADHD frequently reported issues with disclosure of diagnosis:

Most people don’t really have a good idea of what autism is - you’re either curled in a corner in the fetal position rocking back and forth, or you’re totally normal. And there’s nothing in between...so I tend not to tell people that I have been diagnosed just because I don’t want it to be a part of how they see me. It’s just one thing about you, but it’s not what defines you.

A professor told a student with ADHD, “I just want to let you know that I don’t really believe [ADHD] is a real disorder.”
Students with ASD most frequently reported **negative peer interactions**:

*The student transition from high school to college is a gigantic one for anybody to take...I can’t tell if mine’s that much worse...but I can tell that it’s a lot harder to make friends. My issue, more or less, is keeping friends and finding good friends...I would say the impact autism mostly has on people is in forming social relationships.*
Students with ADHD most frequently reported topics related to medication use:

A professor in science said, “You don’t take [medication], right?” And I didn’t want her to think of me any different, so I’m like “Yeah, I don't.” She’s like, “That’s so good. You don’t need it. It’s so bad for you. You can learn how to deal with your problem without it.” And I was thinking in my head, “I almost got kicked out of school without this medicine!” ...People don’t realize that you don’t take it for the abuse of it. You take it to be normal. It’s the people who abuse it who make a bad name for people who actually need it.
Autism 101: Next Steps

1. To increase awareness of autism on campus (e.g., UCR events, Residential Life Training)

2. To develop an educational module about the presentation of autism in the classroom that can help university faculty nationwide to recognize, accommodate, and enhance the college experience of these students

3. *Autism Goes to College* film/documentary...Stay tuned!
WHAT MIGHT BE SIGNS OF AUTISM IN A COLLEGE STUDENT?
Recognizing ASD in College

• May have difficulties with **perspective taking**
  – lack social understanding (e.g., jokes, indirect messages),
    difficulty in groups
  – difficulty understanding others’ facial features and emotions

• **Odd communication style**
  – Poor eye contact
  – Odd voice intonation
  – Excessive talking (or talking too little)
  – Abnormal focus on a particular subject/activity
  – May have limited ability to engage in reciprocal conversations
    (e.g., often focusing on their topic entirely)
  – Repetitive or constricted patterns of speech

Attwood (2007)
Dillon (2007)
Recognizing ASD in College

• **Sensitivity** (or lack thereof) to environmental stimuli

• **Rigidity** around rules or options to solve problems
  – May often focus so much on details that they miss the big picture
  – May resist changes

Attwood (2007)
Dillon (2007)
SUPPORTING STUDENTS’ NEEDS
Supporting the needs of students with ASD on campus
Supporting Students with ASD

• Students are diverse and require personalized support
  – Adjust methods and approach, as needed
• Maintaining a strengths-focus
  – “The world needs all kinds of brains.” – Temple Grandin
• “Whole-person” thinking
  – May need to refer for assessment, behavioral health, or medical services
Supporting Students with ASD

- Be clear, concrete, and explicit (e.g. step by step instructions in written format)
- Peer ‘mentors’ (assisting with organization, turning in assignments, navigating social situations)
- Allow for student to have short breaks if necessary
- Allow delivery of assignments in different formats such as electronically
- Provide the option to work in a group or independently if they feel uncomfortable in a group work setting
What are the challenges for students with autism on campus?

- Lack of staff and faculty awareness of ASD
- Navigating campus systems
- Planning ahead of time
- Managing stress
- Controlling behavior/impulses
- Daily living skills, personal hygiene, and independence
- Making and maintaining peer networks
- Communicating with professors
- Working collaboratively in groups
- Self-advocacy and disclosure
- Other?
On-Campus Resources

Student Disability Resource Center: sdrc.ucr.edu/disabilities/index.html

SDRC Academic Support Center
- Exam accommodations/arrangements (e.g., testing environment with fewer distractions, additional time, readers/writers), text in alternate formats, note-sharing, adaptive equipment, assistive technology software and hardware, library assistance, Computer-Aided Real-Time Translation (CART) and sign language interpreters.

R’Ability Portal: rability.ucr.edu/Clockwork/custom/misc/index.aspx
  - For Students with a disability: Register for disability-related services, complete forms, and schedule tests, & final exams
  - For Faculty: View accommodations assigned to students enrolled in your courses, & provide requested test/final exam info
On-Campus Resources

Student Disability Union
- Organization on campus that works to support students with disabilities
- https://sduatucr.wordpress.com/
- Instagram: @sduatuc

Assistance, Coaching, & Encouragement (ACE): arc.ucr.edu/excel/ace/
- *For students encountering academic difficulty:* Aid students in the development of essential, lifelong academic skills & study habits that will ultimately help them achieve academic success
- Not specific to students with a registered disability, but must have certain concerns (e.g., difficulty understanding faculty/course expectations, difficulty transitioning to college)

Non-academic resources for all students
- Recreation center: Life Skills and Leadership program workshops
- UCR Counseling and Psychological Services: Individual and group counseling (start with an intake appointment)
- The WELL - UCR wellness center
Website/Online Resources

**UC-LEND**: Collaboration between UCLA and UCR to provide training and promote best practices and leadership in the field of neurodevelopmental disabilities: [http://uc-lend.org](http://uc-lend.org)

**College Autism Network**: National nonprofit organization linking stakeholders engaged in evidence-based efforts to improve access, experiences, and outcomes for college students with autism: [http://collegeautismnetwork.org/](http://collegeautismnetwork.org/)

**Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)**: non-profit organization run by and for people with autism. The organization provides information and support to those with autism and their families: [http://autisticadvocacy.org/](http://autisticadvocacy.org/)
Reflection: 3 – 2 – 1

• 3 things you learned today
• 2 things you want to learn more about
• 1 thing you want to do
The families and children involved in the SEARCH Screening Clinic

UC-LEND (UCLA and UCR)

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