MOHAWK VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Disability Services 315-792-5644; http://www.mvcc.edu/disability-services

Faculty information about students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (includes Asperger's) can be top academic achievers with respect to education. Because of the increasing number of Autism diagnoses, along with the fact that people with Autism have average to above average intelligence, it is reasonable to assume that the number of students with Autism at colleges is rising and will continue to rise over the next few years.

What is an autism spectrum (AS) disorder?

An autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder, which essentially means that this is a biologically based condition that is affecting the developing brain. In the case of autism, the parts of the brain that are most affected seem to impact three areas of functioning: social behaviors, communication and restricted and repetitive rituals and routines, or ways that the adult with autism interact with the environment.

Scientists and clinicians now understand that autism is not a singular entity, but, rather, a variety of syndromes that present to create the autism spectrum disorders.

Understanding Asperger Syndrome: A Professor's Guide (great video and tools at this link)

Guidelines for College Success for students with Autism

Suggestions for Professors working with Students with Autism:

Easing Change

Make the environment predictable or routine

Explain any necessary changes with as much advance notice as possible

Explain at the beginning of the class if it will not always be possible to predict all the changes that might occur, so they can be prepared for such an occurrence

When you must make a change, explain it very clearly by making a new timetable to work from, documenting the change on paper and explaining why it is happening, etc.

Dealing with Group Projects

Whenever possible, try to offer an alternative approach that the student can select on an individual basis

Avoid having students self-select into groups. Instead try to place the student with others who you believe will be understanding and tolerant

When the student must be in a group, be sure to clarify your expectations, both academic and behavioral, to individuals within the group and be the mediator should any conflicts arise

If a conflict arises, explain to the student, in a literal way, what effect they had on others, why the conflict arose, and how to behave appropriately in a group setting (e.g. time spent talking, equal work from individuals, hearing everyone's opinion, etc.

Preparing for Test-Taking

Ahead of Time

Provide as much detail about the test as possible. The format, type of questions, date, time, duration and location should all be clearly communicated, preferably be in the syllabus, or printed out for them

Suggest to the student that they consider using testing accommodations with the disability services office and remind them to schedule their test with the office.

When possible, be specific in pinpointing the test structure and what topics and modules will be tested. Give a review sheet so they know specifically what needs to be studied, and the structure that the test will be on.

If the student is prone to repetitive behaviors (muttering, clicking tongue, etc.) to relax, teach them relaxation techniques to use during the test and techniques that will alter the repetitive behavior so it is less intrusive to other students (for example, allow students to bring and squeeze pressure balls). †

When developing the test give very clear, literal, step-by-step instructions

If instructions require choosing between questions, they may need help choosing which to answer as well as how to mark or number the question answered and how to apportion time to finish all questions

Help with Homework and Assignments

Try to choose books and materials that can be accessed digitally

Write down the instructions for assignments in the form of handouts

Explain the purpose behind assignments and how the student will benefit from completing them

Don't base too much of the final grade on one end project. Instead, break the assignments down to make smaller sections that can be handed in for revisions

Help the student to develop concrete, clear goals, that they can outline in steps and try to put to a timetable

Teach students methods to help them learn course material (e.g., time management skills, organization, note-taking strategies, over-learning the material)

Lecture and general classroom suggestions

Use a product such as blackboard to post materials (e.g. handouts, slides, assignments) ahead of time

Make the classroom atmosphere one of tolerance and understanding for differences

Allow students to choose where to sit. If the class is long or there are distractions, let them move around or briefly leave

Unless the course mandates it, don't use activities that require a lot of physical effort. To compensate for physical activities such as taking notes quickly, allow them the use of a word processor, recorder, or a note.

Be thorough and use a variety of methods to teach (e.g. visuals, models, technology, demonstrations, supplemental materials)

Make your instruction straightforward and predictable, and eliminate unnecessary complexities (e.g., explicitly point out important topics, create rubrics)

Be literal in your statements, and when others speak in non-literal, less straightforward ways (e.g. metaphors, sarcasm, sayings), restate or interpret what they say

Don't single the student out (e.g., when you are interpreting another person's comments, don't state that you are doing it for a particular student)

Schedule individual meeting times (office hours) with the student to monitor how well they are understanding the assignments and lectures

Don't take it personally if the student engages in unusual classroom behavior that you find disruptive. It is most likely unintentional and can be resolved by discussing it with the student and advising them on how to behave.

Helping with Outside Problems

Academic performances and classroom occurrences can be indicative of outside problems. Pay attention to these behaviors, recognize possible problems and discuss them with the student.

If a student comes to you with a problem and you are uncomfortable or unable to deal with it, refer them to campus counselors or disability services office.

If they are having an interpersonal problem, explain to them in literal, clear and concrete language what behavior is appropriate in different situations and how to interpret the reasons behind other people's behaviors and reactions. Role playing is a good way to help a student understand how to react to situations.

If they are looking for more social interaction, guide them toward structured activities or clubs and support them in their involvement