BEST PRACTICES FOR COLLEGES TO ACCOMMODATE STUDENTS WITH ASPERGER’S SYNDROME AND COMORBID DIAGNOSES

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ABSTRACT

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An increasing number of students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses are pursuing college degrees. Many institutions of higher education are not prepared to provide the necessary accommodations to help these students be successful in college. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find best practices at institutions of higher education in accommodating students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses and helping them be successful in college.

The findings of this study cite many important factors that need to be in place for students to be successful in college. Although some initiative needs to be demonstrated on the part of the student, there are many steps a college can take to help facilitate the students so they will be successful.

Suggestions for students with Asperger’s Syndrome to look for in a college to be successful in higher education are outlined in Appendix I. While research does show that each student with Asperger’s Syndrome is unique and has individualized needs, there are many steps that can be taken to help the majority of students with Asperger’s Syndrome be successful in college.
In dedication to my son, Justin Charles Schultz, who was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome in 2003.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction ....................................................................................................................1
  Context of the Problem ..............................................................................................................2
  Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................................4
  Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................................5
  Significance of the Study .........................................................................................................5
  Limitations .................................................................................................................................6
  Definition of Terms ..................................................................................................................7

Chapter II: Review of the Literature ..............................................................................................10
  The History of Identifying Students With Asperger’s Syndrome ..........................................10
  Accommodations in College ....................................................................................................12
  Case Studies .............................................................................................................................13
  Challenges for Students and Colleges ....................................................................................14
  Parental Perceptions ...............................................................................................................17
  Summary ....................................................................................................................................17

Chapter III: Methodology ..............................................................................................................19
  Restatement of the Problem .....................................................................................................19
  Research Design .......................................................................................................................19
  Expert Panel Selection .............................................................................................................20
  Protection of Participants .........................................................................................................20
  Human Instrument .................................................................................................................21
  Data Collection .......................................................................................................................21
  Data Analysis .........................................................................................................................22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: Data Analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire 1 Responses</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire 2 Responses</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire 3 Responses</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations and Future Studies</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I: Introduction

Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) is an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). There are five subgroups of Autism that fall into the spectrum. Autism Spectrum Disorders include Autistic Disorder, Rett’s Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified, and Asperger’s Syndrome. While there is no cure for Autism, therapies and behavioral interventions can bring about substantial improvement (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, n.d.). With the use of proper support and strategies at home and school, individuals with AS can overcome weaknesses and build their confidence as successful students and live happy and successful lives (Silverman & Weinfeld, 2007).

Asperger’s Syndrome is a pervasive developmental disorder, which means it causes significant problems in many areas of a child’s development including socialization, communication, behavior, thinking, and activities (Ashley, 2007). However, many students with Asperger’s do have the cognitive ability and specific interests to be successful in college (Morrison, Sansosti, & Hadley, 2009). Because a greater number of individuals with Asperger’s have earned a high school education with the help of early intervention, there are more of these individuals prepared and interested in pursuing higher education (Morrison et al., 2010).

One of the most profound impairments of Asperger’s Syndrome is the lack of social skills. Many individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome would find the thought of attending college to be overwhelming. A student with Asperger’s Syndrome who is considering college is, however, likely to be in the upper 30% of his or her class—a academically above average (Harpur, Lawlor, & Fitzgerald, 2004).
Most individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome have a comorbid diagnosis, a coexisting condition such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Anxiety Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or depression. Depression is very common and thought to be brought on by children with Asperger’s Syndrome not fitting in or being teased or rejected by their peers (Ashley, 2007). These coexisting conditions can further hinder successful completion of a college degree. However, with appropriate intervention and planning, individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome can go on to be successful in post-secondary education and have successful careers (Silverman & Weinfeld, 2007).

**Context of the Problem**

Many high school graduates plan on attending college. Many students with Asperger’s Syndrome share that plan, but a high school student with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses is not as likely to attend or succeed in college. Students with Asperger’s Syndrome have social deficiencies that decrease their desire to leave the comfort of their home surroundings to continue their education away from home. There are, however, ways to assist post-high school students with Asperger’s Syndrome so they can successfully attend and graduate from college.

Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome do best when they maintain a set schedule, are taught in a series of simple steps, are engaged in highly structured activities, and learn about subjects that are of interest to them. While college classes do have scheduled class times, the individuals must adjust to having different routines than they have become accustomed to. Additionally, in college they will need to take many general education classes to fulfill the degree requirements. These general education classes may not be of interest to them, and may be more difficult to comprehend and successfully pass.
College administrators are just now developing best practices for assisting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is hoped that soon, increasing successes will be seen through graduating students with Asperger’s Syndrome (Silverman & Weinfeld, 2007). Many individuals with ASD are intellectually capable of completing a college education; however, they need academic and supportive accommodations to succeed both educationally and with transitioning to greater independence (Glennon, 2001). ASD students can be successful both academically and socially in higher education if there is a carefully planned out transition process, appropriate accommodations, and support (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008).

Due to the increasing number of individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome who have earned a high school education who are interested in attending higher education, colleges need to be better prepared to serve these individuals. Some colleges are establishing services to attract students with ASD.

The University of North Carolina School of Medicine, for example, has established the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped CHildren (TEACCH), an evidence-based service, training, and research program for individuals with ASD and their families (TEACCH Autism Program, n.d.). One service of the TEACCH Center of North Carolina is to work with students with Asperger’s Syndrome who are considering attending college. This is a free service to residents of North Carolina. TEACCH provides detailed information on selecting a college, precollege planning, academic support and accommodations, organization, selecting courses, social life, living in the dorms, and daily living (Silverman & Weinfeld, 2007).
Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is that an increasing number of students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses are pursuing college degrees and that many institutions of higher education are not prepared to provide the necessary accommodations to help these students be successful in college.

One concern for students with Asperger’s Syndrome is finding the right institution with the most effective disability support services to help a post-high school student with Asperger’s Syndrome succeed in college. A good start is to use the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that had been developed in high school as a blue print for services at the university level (VanBergeijk et al., 2008). An IEP should identify the student’s strengths and weaknesses, which will help when scheduling classes. Additionally, finding an area of interest to the student and introducing that area to the student may ensure that he or she becomes actively engaged in the college experience.

There may be advantages for a student with Asperger’s Syndrome to attend a community college versus a 4-year college. The admissions requirements are generally not as stringent, plus there are fewer general education courses to complete so students with Asperger’s Syndrome can take classes based mostly on their specific interests to complete their 2-year degree. Class sizes are generally smaller at community colleges, which may lessen anxiety. Because many community colleges are nonresidential, the student with Asperger’s Syndrome would not have to deal with the social stress of a roommate. The students can either live at home and commute or live alone in an apartment.

In college, students need to advocate for themselves. Studies show that college students who have regular contact with a counselor or mentor exhibit less stress, better coping abilities,
and greater success remaining in college (Ashley, 2007). Students may receive support from the Disability Services office under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) although that support can vary from institution to institution. Academic accommodations that have been helpful for students with Asperger’s Syndrome include allowing more time to process information and organize responses. Many times students are given additional time to complete tests. A distraction-free environment may be very helpful for students when taking tests. Some universities will allow students to take tests in a controlled environment while other institutions may leave it up to the instructor to make arrangements for students to take the test in a quiet location with additional time (Palmer, 2006).

Many students with Asperger’s Syndrome do best in courses that deal with factual memory and/or visual perception. A good counselor will help students find courses that capitalize on the students’ strengths and interests. Courses that require abstract reasoning, flexible problem solving, extensive writing, or reasoning are often challenging to students with Asperger’s Syndrome. Course load is also important to reduce stress especially during the first year when they are adjusting (Palmer, 2006). Again, a good counselor or assistance from the Disability Services office can help facilitate the appropriate course load.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to find best practices at institutions of higher education in accommodating students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses and helping them be successful in college.

**Significance of the Study**

There are laws and guidelines for educating individuals with learning disabilities. During K-12 education there are Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), special needs educators, tutors,
counselors, parental involvement, and other forms of support. Unfortunately, once students reach 18 years of age and graduate from high school, they lose the established support system and need to be able to advocate for themselves. No longer are the parents able to guide them along and fight for their educational rights. They are now legal adults and there are Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws protecting adult students from their parents having access to their educational records. College students diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Disability is defined by the ADA as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity" (United States Department of Justice, 2005). The ADA prohibits an institution from discriminating against anyone with a disability. Further, ADA assures students with a disability to a level playing field. This ensures equal access to all students, which could be information or technology, so students may demonstrate his or her ability (University of Toledo, n.d.).

Special needs teachers are hired and placed in elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools. Counselors and tutors are all available at the K-12 grades. Little has been written about the nature of Asperger’s Syndrome for college-aged individuals and about strategies and therapies for helping this age level. Yet the challenge is great; these individuals are entering a new adult-like community with little parental guidance and assistance (Baker & Welkowitz, 2005).

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome are each unique. There are varying degrees of Asperger’s Syndrome and while some of the suggestions may work for many individuals, there is certainly no guarantee that these suggestions will work for all persons with Asperger’s Syndrome. Additionally, since there are often coexisting
conditions with Asperger’s Syndrome, there are differences in how each individual may respond to varying situations.

Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome vary in their level of functionality. While one person who is high functioning may succeed following a particular protocol, a lower functioning individual may not succeed following that same path. Likewise, two high functioning individuals may not succeed if they follow the same path because they may have differing interests. In order to succeed, it is very important that each individual study a field in which he or she is interested.

Few studies have been done that track the success of students with Asperger’s Syndrome with comorbid diagnoses in college. Due to the limited number of studies on students with Asperger’s Syndrome attending college, there is room for error in the findings.

**Definition of Terms**

Many terms are used throughout this thesis. Since the focus is on Asperger’s Syndrome, that will be defined along with many of the educational plans and laws that assist students with learning disabilities.

*Asperger’s Syndrome (AS)* is a neurobiological disorder that is one of a group of conditions called Autism Spectrum Disorders. The term *Autism spectrum* refers to a range of developmental disabilities that includes Autism as well as other disorders with similar characteristics. (KidsHealth, n.d.)

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP)* is defined as a written plan that is designed to meet the unique needs of one child. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires public school districts to develop an individualized plan for every child who qualifies as having one of the identified 13 disabilities identified by IDEA as a qualifying condition for special education. The special education evaluation determines if a student is eligible for services and if
so, what programs are appropriate. (Understanding Special Education, n.d.)

**The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** IDEA pertains to students aged 3-22. To qualify, a child must have one of the identified disabilities AND it must adversely affect his or her educational performance. Every school district has the legal responsibility to identify, locate, and evaluate children who are in need of special education services (Understanding Special Education, n.d.).

**SECTION 504: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973** guarantees that a child with a disability receives an education that is comparable to an education provided to those who do not have a disability. Since it is a civil rights law, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is an educational law, a child who receives services under Section 504 does not benefit from the mandates that a child who receives special education services under IDEA does. Section 504 reads: “No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall solely, by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (this would include public schools).” (Understanding Special Education, n.d.)

**The No Child Left Behind Act** was signed into law in 2001. The focus is on accountability and requires that the academic performance of all school children, including those with disabilities, achieve 100% proficiency in reading and math by the year 2012. (Understanding Special Education, n.d.)

**The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or
she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students." (United States Department of Education, n.d.)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is the most comprehensive federal civil-rights statute protecting the rights of people with disabilities. It affects access to employment; state and local government programs and services; access to places of public accommodation such as businesses, transportation, and non-profit service providers; and telecommunications.

The ADA is solely about equal opportunity, from its preamble to its final provision. Like other civil rights laws, the ADA prohibits discrimination and mandates that Americans be accorded equality in pursuing jobs, goods, services, and other opportunities—but the ADA makes clear that equal treatment is not synonymous with identical treatment.

(The Center for an Accessible Society, n.d.)
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

All high school graduates deserve the opportunity to continue their education at the college level should they desire. Pursuing a college degree is especially challenging for students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses. In this chapter, the history of how Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) came to be recognized, along with many of the traits identified with AS, are outlined. Accommodations and strategies used to help students with Asperger’s Syndrome succeed in college are addressed, including case studies demonstrating accommodations currently being made for students with Asperger’s Syndrome by colleges and universities. Challenges faced by students and colleges and parent perceptions of needs and expectations are also explored.

The History of Identifying Students With Asperger’s Syndrome

Hans Asperger (1906-1980) was a doctor in Germany specializing in pediatrics. He worked with a number of boys who he thought found difficulty fitting in socially. Further, he noted their difficulty understanding gestures and facial expressions and saw that they used repetitive behaviors and were often fixed on certain objects. In 1944 he wrote a paper about autistic psychopathies in childhood. The paper was written in German and was translated to English in the early 1980s. Asperger’s work was referred to by Lorna Wing in 1981 in her research on Autism and related conditions. She thought the term autistic phychopathies was too negative so Wing referred to it as Asperger’s Syndrome.

Leo Kanner, a child psychiatrist, was doing research around the same time as Asperger. Kanner referred to similar conditions as early childhood Autism and thought there were a number of defining features: profound autistic withdrawal, an obsessive desire for the preservation of sameness, a good rote memory, an intelligent and pensive expression, mutism or language
without real communicative intent, over-sensitivity to stimuli, and a skillful relationship to objects (Cumine, Leach, & Stevenson, 1998).

From these two similar yet different observations of Autism, Wing (1981) in her research began using the term *autistic continuum* and later *autistic spectrum* to allow for a broader definition of Autism. Additional studies by Ehlers and Gillberg (1993) found that boys are more likely than girls to be affected by Asperger’s Syndrome. The ratio of boys to girls diagnosed was 10:1 (Gillberg, 1991). This further supported Asperger’s original study that focused on boys.

Key features of Asperger’s Syndrome are characterized by subtle impairments in development of social interaction, social communication, social imagination and flexibility of thought, and motor clumsiness (Cumine et al., 1998). Although the broad characteristics of students with Asperger’s Syndrome are the same, individual features are different in each case. Some children are higher functioning than others. Multiple case studies show the similarities yet differences in students diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome. Because of these differences, the process of dealing with each individual is dependent on each person’s individual condition. Teachers, educational professionals, doctors, and psychologists provide very specific information to aid in the assessment process.

To be effective in educating a student with Asperger’s Syndrome, intervention must be grounded in an understanding of the condition and how it is manifested in each particular person. Each case must be studied and referred to individually since no two individuals are affected in the same way. The most important role the teacher has is to create an environment where each student is educated at a level appropriate to his or her individual needs.
**Accommodations in College**

While there is a solid framework for working with identified students in grades K-12, this same level of support is virtually nonexistent for students entering college. In college, the students are expected to notify their teacher of any disability once they’ve been identified to qualify for services. Additionally, it is up to students to provide medical documentation and any other assessments and testing to the Disability Services office authenticating their disability. Once the appropriate documentation has been provided, the institution analyzes the data and determines what accommodations the student is eligible to receive (B. Lashaway, personal communication, June 2, 2010).

The support that is offered differs from institution to institution. Accommodations range from giving additional time to take tests, to securing a quiet location to take tests. Disability Services may have weekly or monthly meetings with students and may also correspond with faculty if students are having any problems in class (B. Lashaway, personal communication, June 2, 2010).

Little has been written and researched on college-aged individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome. Any student going off to college has anxiety but a student with Asperger’s Syndrome has additional anxieties. In K-12, these students have had support from their parents, teachers, and other personnel to assist with their educational success. These individuals with social deficiencies are attempting to face their biggest fears without the support they have grown accustomed to. Not only have they had support, they have grown quite comfortable with their established routines.

While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provided funding for special education to students in K-12 and accommodations for students with learning disabilities,
The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that universities provide services to students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Since the nature of Autism Spectrum Disorders is a social disability, universities need to provide social supports for these individuals (VanBergeijk et al., 2008).

**Case Studies**

Colleges and universities are just beginning to realize they need to accommodate students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Prince-Hughes, 2003). Students who have been aided by services and accommodations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are choosing to attend college and looking for assistance. Their success or failure can be dependent on the services they receive at the college level.

Keene State College, in New Hampshire, received grant funding from the Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation to aid in this transition for students with Asperger’s Syndrome or high-functioning Autism. To support this population, the faculty in the Psychology Department designed a college community. Not only did they want to help the students with Asperger’s Syndrome adjust, they also hoped to affect the community culture as well (Baker & Welkowitz, 2005). Peer mentors were hired on an hourly basis to provide social support and problem-solving assistance with some of the mentors receiving classroom credit through the Psychology Department. Peer mentors met weekly with the college students with Asperger’s Syndrome to discuss any problems or issues the students had. These meetings encouraged social interactions. It was also an opportunity for the student with Asperger’s Syndrome to become comfortable with someone he or she could trust to ask any questions and to practice strategies and behaviors. Many of the peer mentors went on to volunteer as student mentors to maintain the friendships they had created.
New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) aspires to be a national model for educating and integrating students with Autism into college environments and would like to collaborate with other universities and community-based programs. NYIT offers a 7-week summer “camp” for students with Asperger’s Syndrome who intend to study there in the fall. Students spend part of their day working for a stipend. The remainder of their time is spent developing independent living and social skills in a structured and fun environment. This is a transition for students with Asperger’s Syndrome and a time to adjust to the social demands of a college environment without the additional stress of classes (Block, 2006).

**Challenges for Students and Colleges**

Ernest VanBergeijk, Executive Director of the New York Institute of Technology’s (NYIT) Vocational Independence Programs, is nationally recognized for his work in special education including Asperger’s Syndrome and crisis intervention. He thought one of the biggest barriers for a student with an ASD is stigma. Self-advocacy is a big obstacle to learning for students with Asperger’s Syndrome. Students often do not want to ask for help or accommodations because they are embarrassed by their disability. VanBergeijk felt that the biggest challenge for colleges dealing with students with Asperger’s Syndrome is not services needed, since many of these students are of average or above-average intelligence, but rather the help the students need decoding the social environment.

The Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) gave a presentation on strategies for success: proactive and individualized intervention. These strategies include preparation. Students need to become familiar with their location and be proactive by identifying potential concerns or causes of anxiety. One way to prepare is to become familiar with the location by previewing maps and videotapes of campus. They also suggest developing a plan to
deal with any concerns by creating a manual that lists names and addresses of people they can contact for support. Identifying safe places and safe people on campus to go to in the event of a crisis is essential. OCALI also recognizes the need for college-aged students to advocate for themselves by seeking out educational accommodations to which they are entitled.

Willey (1999) wrote about survival skills for college-aged students with Asperger’s Syndrome. He suggested improving social skills by taking classes in speech communications, sociology, psychology, and dramatic arts programs to learn more about social skills. He also suggested searching for other identified AS students to form friendships with, and taking career placement workshops to learn job interviewing skills, how to write a strong resume, and how to dress professionally.

Willey also encouraged students to establish relationships with teachers and suggested taking courses from empathetic instructors. Counselors and other students should be able to identify which teachers may be more accommodating in ways such as being willing to allow a student to avoid group projects or laboratory partners, or providing other special accommodations like offering preferential seating away from noise or other external distractions. He also identified becoming familiar with campus and taking advantage of student transportation assistance to avoid the stress of navigating through a large campus. Another suggestion Willey makes is to walk with a recorder to identify buildings and destinations so a set routine can be established. Other factors included planning a schedule to accommodate for the routine the student with Asperger’s Syndrome is accustomed to and working on study skills to ensure success in the classroom. Realizing there are still normal stresses that will be encountered, the student with Asperger’s Syndrome needs to set up stress reduction plans such as exercising,
finding a favorite activity to avoid feeling overwhelmed, listening to a favorite song or type of music to calm nerves, or keeping a journal to record feelings (Willey, 1999).

Louise Bedrossian wrote an article for *Psychiatric Disabilities*, a newsletter produced by Disability Compliance for Higher Education, in which she suggested that the success of students with Asperger’s Syndrome depends on how they adjust to campus life. She believes creating a resource to get them through college living could be the difference between success and failure. This manual should include telephone and address contact information for family, friends, and community services; maps and directions; survival rules and instructions; personal care routines; academic and campus policies; calendars; medical information; transportation information; and social and recreational opportunities. Bedrossian thought that preplanning is key to satisfactory student adjustment. Since students with Asperger’s Syndrome prefer routines, change can be stressful. Becoming as familiar as possible with the campus and services available is important even if the student is commuting from home. She believes that keeping this resource manual continuously updated is important and since it is specific to each individual student, it should be up to the family to prepare this resource. The disability office should alert families of students with Asperger’s Syndrome of the need for such a guide (Bedrossian, 2007).

There are several universities that have developed specific programs for students with Asperger’s Syndrome. These universities provide academic, social, and life skills training. Some examples are the West Virginia Autism Training Center at Marshall University; Keene State College in New Hampshire (mentoring program); Weston College in Somerset, England; and Beechwood College in Sully in Vale of Glamorgan in Wales (college for individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome and autistic individuals). With more students being diagnosed and
successfully completing high school, more students with Asperger’s Syndrome are matriculating and pursuing a college education.

**Parental Perceptions**

A study was done on parental perceptions of anticipated needs and expectations for support of their college-bound students with Asperger’s Syndrome (Morrison et al., 2009). A few parents from a local chapter of the Autism Society of America (ASA) participated in a focus group while their children were still in high school. One suggestion from the parents was to match students with accommodating professors. Parents thought someone from the disabilities office could work with the students with Asperger’s Syndrome and determine which instructors would be more accommodating for students with an ASD. This person would not only help the students determine which classes to take, but would also communicate with the instructors so they were aware of the disabilities and report the students’ progress and any problems. This liaison would work closely with the students and even suggest intramural activities or other matches to the students’ interests. Parents also thought a 2-year community college would be a good alternative to slowly transition their children from high school to college. The final concern was housing accommodations. Most parents preferred their children live at home and commute or live in a single occupant residence hall. Other concerns were personal such as hygiene, finances, and laundry.

**Summary**

More high school graduates identified with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses are choosing to continue their education at the college level. Colleges are recognizing the increased enrollment of students with AS and are working diligently to ensure academic success and retention.
In this literature review, the history of how Asperger’s Syndrome came to be recognized, and many of the traits identified with AS, were outlined. Accommodations and strategies used to help students with Asperger’s Syndrome succeed in college were addressed, including case studies demonstrating accommodations currently being made for AS students by colleges and universities. Challenges faced by students and colleges and parent perceptions of needs and expectations were also explored.
Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter provides an explanation of the methods and procedures used to collect and interpret data to support the problem of the study. The problem of the study will be restated, the research design will be discussed in detail, the data collection and analysis process will be explained, and a timeline for the research will be provided.

Restatement of the Problem

The problem of this study was that while an increasing number of students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses are pursuing college degrees, many institutions of higher education are not prepared to provide the necessary accommodations to help these students be successful in college. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find best practices at institutions of higher education in accommodating students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses and helping them be successful in college.

Research Design

In order to render best practices, a Modified Delphi Technique was used with a panel of experts. With the Modified Delphi Technique, the researcher gathered input from participants through emailed surveys. A consensus from experts with varying views were used to problem solve. The researcher used email to gather information, provide feedback, and report conclusions. It was done using multiple rounds of questionnaires. Once the information from the first questionnaire had been compiled, a second round of questionnaires was distributed to participants. Conclusions were again made and then an additional questionnaire was formulated.

With this study, the researcher investigated the best practices utilized at institutions of higher education that specialize in programs designed for aiding students with Asperger’s Syndrome. Information compiled from studying the successful programs at these institutions
provided recommendations to ensure success for students with Asperger’s Syndrome at other institutions of higher education.

**Expert Panel Selection**

Five potential expert panel members were identified by Dr. Robert Cunningham, Director of Disability Services, at Bowling Green State University. Dr. Cunningham has a research interest in best practices of institutions of higher education as well as professional interest and experience from his position at Bowling Green State University. The expert panel members were contacted through a formal electronic request (Appendix A). Three of the five expert panel members agreed to participate in this study. Each brought a unique perspective to the review.

1. **Expert Panelist A** – a full professor at a large Midwestern university with research interests in Autism, transition to work and college, inclusion and legislation, rehabilitation counseling, and families of children with disabilities.

2. **Expert Panelist B** – an interim associate director at an Autism training center providing training to individuals, family members, and educators at a large Midwestern university with a reputation of attracting students with Asperger’s Syndrome.

3. **Expert Panelist C** – an associate professor and chair of communication sciences and disorders at a large Midwestern university specializing in child language, Autism, developmental disabilities.

**Protection of Participants**

Expert panelists have had their identities protected. Names of institutions and individuals were not identified to ensure confidentiality. They were referred to as Expert Panelists A, B, and
C. Policies and procedures of the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University were followed (Appendix B).

**Human Instrument**

Qualitative research depends on the use of the human instrument to collect data and analyze the findings. Data was collected by the researcher through emailed questionnaires and further analyzed for bias through peer debriefing with Dr. Robert Cunningham, thesis committee member and subject content specialist, and Dr. Kathryn Hoff, thesis chair.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) note the skills required for doing qualitative research are to be able to critically analyze situations while avoiding bias, obtain valid and reliable data, and to think abstractly. They further state that to be able to do that, the researcher needs to be able to maintain analytical distance while drawing upon experience and knowledge to interpret that observed while maintaining good interational skills.

The researcher brought a unique perspective to this study by having a child with Asperger’s Syndrome that is of college age. While the personal experiences and values have initiated this study, and post-secondary education is no longer a goal for her child, it is still believed this was an extremely worthwhile project for the future of students with Asperger’s Syndrome intending to pursue college.

**Data Collection**

Various researchers have found methods to successfully educate students with Asperger’s Syndrome so they could complete a degree program. Through this Modified Delphi study, the researcher identified multiple key factors to ensure success. The panel of experts were asked to respond to questionnaires in multiple, progressive rounds. After each round, a summary of the experts’ responses were gathered, analyzed, and the next questionnaire was developed until the
best practices were derived from the final results. For this study, three questionnaires were completed.

While it is true that not every student with Asperger’s Syndrome has the same qualities and needs from an institution, this study was centered on the concept that people who are comfortable in their institution and given the accommodations they need to succeed, are happier and more successful students.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was acquired by a Modified Delphi study. Questionnaires were emailed to expert panel members identified by a content expert. The first questionnaire (Appendix C) was open-ended questions seeking to identify best practices to successfully educate students with Asperger’s Syndrome and co-morbid diagnoses. Questionnaire 1 was sent mid April. The purpose was to identify the expert panel’s thoughts of best practices and what they would identify as important issues to address to provide an opportunity for students to be successful in college. The results of those questions were grouped by responses (Appendix D). From that analysis, the questions were resent (Appendix E) approximately 4 weeks later with a request to rank the importance of the responses from most important to least important. From the ranked responses (Appendix F), one more questionnaire (Appendix G) was sent at the end of May to further identify the top two ranked responses of the expert panel members. This final questionnaire also allowed the expert panelists to identify any pertinent data they thought had been omitted from the questionnaire if they felt that data ranked 1 or 2 in their analysis. The final responses were documented (Appendix H).

To keep the study objective, peer debriefing was conducted with Dr. Robert Cunningham, Director of Disability Services at Bowling Green State University and thesis
committee member, and Dr. Kathryn Hoff, thesis chair, after each questionnaire round had been analyzed by the researcher.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative data needs to be trustworthy. In order to ensure trustworthiness, data used in this study was formulated from a consensus of the three professional panel member responses. Panel experts were determined to be credible and dependable based on their research and career experiences.

The researcher shared findings of this study with committee members familiar with qualitative methodology. Committee members, through peer debriefing, provided feedback regarding the content and themes formulated in the findings to be used in the subsequent questionnaires.

**Summary**

More students identified with Asperger’s Syndrome are pursuing college. In order for colleges to successfully educate students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses, expert panelists were identified and contacted to help determine best practices for colleges to successfully educate students with Asperger’s Syndrome. Using a Modified Delphi study, a total of three questionnaires were sent to expert panelists to render best practices.
Chapter IV: Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to find best practices at institutions of higher education in accommodating students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses and helping them be successful in college. The researcher worked with an expert panel to determine what the expert panelists believed to be instrumental to successfully educating students with Asperger’s Syndrome. From open-ended answers provided in the first questionnaire, a second questionnaire was developed asking the panelists to rank order the responses from most important to least important. After the second questionnaire responses were documented, a final questionnaire was developed using responses rated “1” or “2” to be reranked. The respondents were also able to list a response that had not been indicated if they believed that response would rank a “1” or “2.”

Questionnaire 1 Responses

Questionnaire 1 contained opened-ended questions posed to the expert panelists to gather responses that would later be ranked in subsequent questionnaires. Questions and responses from Questionnaire 1 are below.

Question 1: What do you see as five or more of the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home, or work?

Responses: Three panelists responded, finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety and lack of experience with independent academic environments. Two panelists identified a) social navigation of campus life; b) executive function skill problems, including time management and organization (impaired problem solving ability needed to make decisions and weigh alternatives); and c) lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision-making, social skills training, college support programs). Other responses
with only one panelist response per comment were a) dorm life, b) self-advocacy, c) comorbid diagnoses, and d) parent unaware of college options.

Question 2: What do you see as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to the following areas:

a) academic
b) social
c) emotional

Responses:

Academic – organization, developing relationships with professors, self-disclosure; completing the broader, often unspoken, requirements of class (don’t answer an essay question in three sentences), debate held in the classroom. Writing, reading at a higher level; higher order problem solving relative to understanding. Scheduling issues for courses that fit their needs. Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details. College faculty not trained to provide appropriate accommodations. Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual.

Social – distinguishing between flirtation and friendly behavior; social stigma related to self-disclosure; being vulnerable to peers who have dubious intentions; interactions with peers in the classroom. Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (even visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms). Being able to fit in socially on campus. Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education. Lack of understanding of their own theory of mind and how it could negatively impact the process of building relationships.
Emotional – loneliness; isolation. Depression; low motivation; two respondents indicated any comorbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed. Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule. Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept. Potential sleep issues.

Question 3: In your opinion, what services and pedagogical practices have emerged to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education?

Responses: Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed. One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports is absolutely necessary for many on the spectrum, especially their first year or two in college. Specialized advising and a person-centered model with coordinated services with relevant team members from a variety of areas would be ideal. Skeptical of peer mentoring in the absence of expert supervision and guidance. Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings. Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD. Peer mentoring.

Question 4: What knowledge, skills, and expectations do students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty?

Responses: Ability to manage time and provide a thorough explanation of their needs, to proactively advocate for their needs, to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur.

Knowledge of what their accommodations are, what their legal rights are, and what faculty’s responsibilities are and how to access those accommodations. If a note taker is used,
they need to be able to meet with the note taker to understand what is written or clarify notes with the instructor. Need to open email from Disability Services and share it with each professor as required by law. Familiarity with email and commitment to using it on a daily basis to communicate with professors and how to log into the course website. Independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments and finding the office. Once with professor, need to have a plan to best use this time. Know how to read syllabus and track assignments and also how to break assignments down into manageable parts. Use a planner faithfully to best utilize time and get assignments done on time.

Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty.

After analyzing the responses of the first questionnaire, a second questionnaire was developed using the responses provided by the expert panelists. The expert panelists were asked to consider all of the responses and then rank the responses.

**Questionnaire 2 Responses**

The second questionnaire restated the questions from the first questionnaire and asked that the expert panelists rank in order of most importance to least importance, all of the responses they had provided. Following are questions from Questionnaire 2 (Appendix B). Each question is listed below with the ranked number for each response from each of the three expert panelists.

**Question 1:**

Please rank the responses below as the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home, or work from biggest obstacle (1) to least obstacle (8).
Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety. Lack of experience with independent academic environments. – Ranked by panelists 1,4,3

Dorm life – Ranked by panelists 5,6,7

Social navigation of campus life – Ranked by panelists 2,8,5

Self advocacy – Ranked by panelists 3,1,4

Executive function skill problems, including time management and organization. Impaired problem solving ability needed to make decisions and weigh alternatives. – Ranked by panelists 4,3,1

Lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision making, social skills training, college support programs). – Ranked by panelists 6,2,2

Comorbid diagnoses – Ranked by panelists 8,5,8

Parents unaware of college options – Ranked by panelists 7,7,6

Question 2:

Please rank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to Academic (most important 1, to least important 10).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Organization – Ranked by panelists 2,1,5

Developing relationships with professors. – Ranked by panelists 1,4,4

Self-disclosure – Ranked by panelists 6,10,9

Completing the broader, often unspoken, requirements of class (don’t answer an essay question in three sentences). – Ranked by panelists 5,5,3

Writing, reading at a higher level. – Ranked by panelists 7,3,10
Higher order problem solving relative to understanding. – Ranked by panelists 10,2,6

Scheduling issues for courses that fit their needs. – Ranked by panelists 8,8,7

Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details. – Ranked by panelists 9,6,2

College faculty not trained to provide appropriate accommodations. – Ranked by panelists 3,7,8

Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual. – Ranked by panelists 4,9,1

Question 3:

Please rank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to Social (most important 1, to least important 8).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Distinguishing between flirtation and friendly behavior – Ranked by panelists 7,5,8

Social stigma related to self-disclosure – Ranked by panelists 8,7,7

Being vulnerable to peers who have dubious intentions – Ranked by panelists 5,8,6

Interactions with peers in the classroom – Ranked by panelists 6,4,4

Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (even visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms) – Ranked by panelists 4,1,1

Being able to fit in socially on campus – Ranked by panelists 1,6,2

Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education – Ranked by panelists 2,2,3
Lack of understanding of their own theory of mind and how it could negatively impact the process of building relationships – Ranked by panelists 3,3,5

Question 4:

Please rank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to Emotional (most important 1, to least important 7).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Loneliness; isolation – Ranked by panelists 1,5,6

Depression – Ranked by panelists 3,4,2

Low motivation – Ranked by panelists 4,3,4

Any comorbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed – Ranked by panelists 5,1,3

Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule – Ranked by panelists 6,6,1

Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept – Ranked by panelists 7,2,5

Potential sleep issues – Ranked by panelists 2,7,7

Question 5:

Please rank services and pedagogical practices you believe to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education from most effective (1) to least effective (5).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed. – Ranked by panelists 1,5,5
One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, especially their first year or two in college. – Ranked by panelists 4,1,3

Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings. – Ranked by panelists 2,3,4

Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD. – Ranked by panelists 3,2,1

Peer mentoring. – Ranked by panelists 5,4,2

Question 6:

Please rank the following with regard to the knowledge, skills, and expectations that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty from most important (1) to least important (10).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Ability to manage time and provide a thorough explanation of their needs and to proactively advocate for their needs. – Ranked by panelists 5,9,4

Ability to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur. – Ranked by panelists 1,10,2

Knowledge of what their legal rights are, what the faculty’s responsibilities are, what accommodations are available, and how to access those accommodations. – Ranked by panelists 3,4,1

Understand the need to read and keep email from Disability Services and share it with each professor as required by law. – Ranked by panelists 7,5,9
Become familiar with email and commitment to using it on a daily basis to communicate with professors. – Ranked by panelists 6,7,10

Know how to log into the course website. – Ranked by panelists 10,6,8

Develop independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments, and finding the office. Once with professor, need to have a plan to best use this time. – Ranked by panelists 2,1,3

Know how to read the syllabus and track assignments and also how to break assignments down into manageable parts. – Ranked by panelists 8,3,5

Use a planner faithfully to best utilize time and get assignments done on time. – Ranked by panelists 9,8,6

Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty. – Ranked by panelists 4,2,7

One reviewer commented that they could rank the other areas with some confidence but in this area they could all be ranked “1” and they wrote, “can’t do without the whole package.”

**Questionnaire 3 Responses**

From the ranking of Questionnaire 2, one final questionnaire was created that only used any response with a rating of 1 or 2 on the second questionnaire. An extra line was added to the questionnaire allowing the expert panelists to add an item not identified if the panelist felt that item would rank at a 1 or 2 in importance. The researcher did not want to lose an opportunity to gain valuable information for the study. Only Expert Panelist B and Expert Panelist C responded to the final questionnaire.
Question 1:

Please rerank the responses below as the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home, or work from biggest obstacle (1) to least obstacle (5).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety. Lack of experience with independent academic environments. – Ranked by panelists 1,5

Social navigation of campus life – Ranked by panelists 2,4

Self advocacy – Ranked by panelists 3,3

Executive function skill problems, including time management and organization. – Ranked by panelists 4,2

Lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision making, social skills training, college support programs). – Ranked by panelists 5,1

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ____________________________ Not ranked

Question 2:

Please rerank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to Academic (most important 1, to least important 5).

Expert Panelist Response/Rankings:

Organization – Ranked by panelists 2,2

Developing relationships with professors. – Ranked by panelists 1,4

Higher order problem solving relative to understanding. – Ranked by panelists 5,1

Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details. – Ranked by panelists 6,3
Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual.
– Ranked by panelists 4,5
Ranked response not listed. Please describe: untrained college faculty – Ranked by panelist 3

Question 3:
Please rerank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to Social (most important 1, to least important 3).
Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:
Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (even visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms). – Ranked by panelists 3,1
Being able to fit in socially on campus. – Ranked by panelists 1,3
Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education. – Ranked by panelists 2,2
Ranked response not listed. Please describe __________________________ Not ranked

Question 4:
Please rerank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to Emotional (most important 1, to least important 6).
Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:
Loneliness; isolation – Ranked by panelists 1,4
Depression – Ranked by panelists 3,3
Any comorbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed – Ranked by panelists 4,1
Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule – Ranked by panelists 5,5
Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept – Ranked by panelists 6,2

Potential sleep issues – Ranked by panelists 2,6

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ______________________ Not ranked

Question 5:

Please rerank services and pedagogical practices you believe to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education from most effective (1) to least effective (5).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed. – Ranked by panelists 1,4

One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, especially their first year or two in college. – Ranked by panelists 4,2

Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings. – Ranked by panelists 2,3

Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD. – Ranked by panelists 3,1

Peer mentoring. – Ranked by panelists 5,5

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ______________________ Not ranked
Question 6:

Please rank the following with regard to the knowledge, skills, and expectations that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty from most important (1) to least important (4).

Expert Panelist Response/Ranking:

Ability to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur. – Ranked by panelists 1,3

Knowledge of what their legal rights are, what the faculty’s responsibilities are, what accommodations are available, and how to access those accommodations. – Ranked by panelists 3,2

Develop independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments, and finding the office. – Ranked by panelists 2,1

Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty. – Ranked by panelists 4,4

Ranked response not listed. Please describe Time Management. – Ranked by panelist 5

As one reviewer remarked on the last question on Questionnaire 2, when asked to rank the following with regard to the knowledge, skills, and expectations that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty from most important (1) to least important (10), they said they could rank the other questions with some confidence but for the last question, they could all be ranked “1” because they felt the student with Asperger’s Syndrome cannot do any without the whole package.
Analysis

Every student with Asperger’s Syndrome is unique in their needs and their learning. From the responses from expert panelists, the researcher found that institutions of higher education can help successfully educate students with Asperger’s Syndrome by providing a variety of services. Universities can have faculty who recognize students’ need to develop deep, meaningful relationships and work to create conditions where this can happen. Willey (1999) wrote about survival skills for college-aged students with Asperger’s Syndrome. He encouraged students to establish relationships with teachers and suggested taking courses from empathetic instructors. Counselors and other students should be able to identify which teachers may be more accommodating in ways such as being willing to allow a student to avoid group projects or laboratory partners, or providing other special accommodations such as preferential seating away from noise or other external distractions.

The student with Asperger’s Syndrome will benefit from weekly one-on-one guidance with trained staff who will provide effective supports especially the first year or two in college. Another way to provide successful support is to have individually tailored support programs for each student with ASD since each student has unique needs.

Expert panelists identified organization multiple times as an obstacle for students with Asperger’s Syndrome. The student who wants to be successful in college needs to be aware of his or her deficiencies to try to overcome them. There are many ways students can overcome their deficiencies but they require work and determination of the student. Some of these deficiencies can be identified and worked into the university supports but some items such as self-advocacy are things the students must strive to overcome if they want to be successful.
Common themes ranking important for students to be successful in college were being comfortable in their environment, having appropriate levels of support, organization, being aware of hidden curriculum, students being aware of their legal rights and the responsibilities of faculty, and the ability to self advocate.

All three expert panelists indicated that students need to feel safe with reduced anxiety in their environment. New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) aspires to be a national model for educating and integrating students with Autism into college environments and would like to collaborate with other universities and community-based programs. NYIT offers a 7-week summer “camp” for students with Asperger’s Syndrome who intend to study there in the fall. Students spend part of their day working for a stipend. The remainder of their time is spent developing independent living and social skills in a structured and fun environment. This is a transition for students with Asperger’s Syndrome and a time to adjust to the social demands of a college environment without the additional stress of classes (Block, 2006).

Two expert panelists thought social navigation of campus life was an obstacle for students with Asperger’s Syndrome as well as difficulties with time management and organization. Louise Bedrossian wrote an article for Psychiatric Disabilities, a newsletter produced by Disability Compliance for Higher Education, in which she suggested that the success of students with Asperger’s Syndrome depends on how they adjust to campus life. She believes creating a resource to get them through college living could be the difference between success and failure. Bedrossian thought that preplanning is key to satisfactory student adjustment (Bedrossian, 2007).
Summary

More students identified with Asperger’s Syndrome are pursuing higher education. In order to accommodate these students and help them be successful in college, universities need to be willing to accommodate their individualized needs by providing programs, empathetic faculty, and a variety of services to meet each of their individual needs. Research has documented successful programs. If universities are willing to invest in their own programming, more students with ASD will be successfully educated. At the same time, students need to be aware that they too are responsible for their education and need to be able to self advocate.
Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

The problem of this study was that while an increasing number of students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses are pursuing college degrees, many institutions of higher education are not prepared to provide the necessary accommodations to help these students be successful in college. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to recommend best practices for institutions of higher education to accommodate students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses to help them be successful in college.

Conclusions

The background of the expert panelists determined the level of importance they put on the ranking of responses. Their positions and responsibilities differ in regard to their interaction with students and other faculty working with students with Asperger’s Syndrome. Interestingly, the third and final questionnaire was only completed by Expert Panelist B, who works at an Autism center where students attend because of the success of the program, and Expert Panelist C, who is a faculty member specializing in Autism research, yet they have completely opposite rankings for question 1, which asked the expert panelists to rerank the responses as the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home or work from biggest obstacle (1) to least obstacle (5). Expert Panelist B ranked the responses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, whereas Expert Panelist C ranked the questions 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1. Expert Panelist B is at an Autism training center where faculty, family, and students are educated. Expert Panelist C is a faculty member with a research interest in Autism. Expert Panelist B thought lack of appropriate levels of support was the biggest obstacle for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college whereas Expert Panelist C felt it was the least obstacle and that finding environments in which they can feel safe with reduced anxiety
was the biggest obstacle. It is possible, therefore, that each panelist did not have similar responses because of his or her personal experience working with individuals, family members, and faculty.

Participants responded based on their experience working with students with Asperger’s Syndrome. It is highly possible that their responses were limited based on individual expertise. They also could have responded based on their personal literature review and role in educating students with Asperger’s Syndrome without taking into account other successful programs or trends and without knowing what has enabled other students with Asperger’s Syndrome to be successfully educated in college.

**Recommendations and Future Studies**

Responses from the expert panel members were compiled for a Best Practices Guideline (Appendix I). There are many factors to keep in mind as students with Asperger’s Syndrome seek to attend institutions of higher education. While there are steps colleges can take to better accommodate these students, there are also steps that the students need to engage in to enhance their opportunity for success in college.

Parents, students, and educators can refer to the Best Practices Guideline to look for practices that institutions of higher education offer to give them an indication if their needs will be met. There may also be items listed that an institution may not offer that a student can ask an institution about.

It is the researcher’s hope that this Guide will serve to help students with Asperger’s Syndrome who intend to pursue a college education. The researcher also would hope that as institutions of higher education recognize that more students are being diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome and are interested in pursuing a college education, they will be interested in
this Guide to enhance the services their institution provides to facilitate the education of students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses.

Some areas for future research:

1. Are there differences between practitioners and academics in the perceptions and/or attitudes toward educating and accommodating students with Asperger’s Syndrome, and how might those differences affect the implementation of recommended best practices?

2. What are the perceptions and/or attitudes of traditional (non-expert) faculty toward the education and accommodation of students with Asperger’s Syndrome; and how might those perceptions and attitudes affect the implementation of best practices?
References


needs and expectations for support for their college-bound students with Asperger’s Syndrome. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*(2), 78–87.


Understanding Special Education. (n.d.). Understanding the IEP process. Retrieved from
http://www.understandingspecialeducation.com/IEP-process.html


April 18, 2011

Dear (expert panel member name inserted):

Hello. My name is Lori Schultz and I am a Learning Design graduate student in the College of Technology at Bowling Green State University. I am currently researching best practices for colleges to accommodate students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses. You have been recommended to serve as an expert panel member by Dr. Robert Cunningham, Director of Disability Services at Bowling Green State University. This is an invitation and request to participate in this research study. Please refer to the attached consent document prior to completion of the questionnaire.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to find best practices at institutions of higher education in accommodating students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses and helping them be successful in college. The potential benefit of this study will be to provide information that can be used by colleges, support groups, parents, and students with Asperger’s Syndrome to make future planning decisions and to conduct more efficient and effective programming.

The data collection method used for this study will be a modified delphi study which is an emailed online questionnaire. Data will be collected, analyzed, and an additional questionnaire generated until I am able to derive best practices. I anticipate no more than 3 or 4 rounds of short questionnaires. Your participation only requires that you answer questions from questionnaires provided. There are no additional tasks. The initial questionnaire should take 15-20 minutes to complete but subsequent questionnaires should take much less time to complete.

The information provided from the questionnaire results will remain private and all participants’ identities will be kept confidential. You may choose to review the document before publication to be sure there is no identifying information. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

The data will be gathered and analyzed by myself, and Dr. Robert Cunningham. The data will be stored on my personal computer protected by a password known only by the researcher. Completing the questionnaire will be your consent to participate in the study. You must be at least 18 years of age or older to participate. There are no risks associated with your participation in this study. After completing the questionnaire, be sure to please save the document onto your hard drive before attaching it in an email back to me.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the survey or study, or if you would like to see a copy of the results of the study, you may contact me at lschult@bgsu.edu or by phone at 419-601-0907. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Kathryn Hoff at khoff@bgsu.edu or by phone at
419-372-7557. If you have any questions concerning the conduct of the study or rights as a research participant, please contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at hsrb@bgsu.edu or by phone at 419-372-7716. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lori Schultz
Graduate Student, Learning Design
College of Technology
Bowling Green State University
Email: lschult@bgsu.edu
Phone: 419-601-0907
Appendix B

CONSENT DOCUMENT

My name is Lori Schultz and I am a Learning Design graduate student in the College of Technology at Bowling Green State University. I am currently researching best practices for colleges to accommodate students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses. You have been recommended to serve as an expert panel member by Dr. Robert Cunningham, Director of Disability Services at Bowling Green State University. Completion of the attached questionnaire constitutes consent to participate.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to find best practices at institutions of higher education in accommodating students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses and helping them be successful in college. The potential benefit of this study will be to provide information that can be used by colleges, support groups, parents, and students with Asperger’s Syndrome to make future planning decisions and to conduct more efficient and effective programming. By participating in this study, you will be contributing to the collection of valuable information that can be used by others to help students with Asperger’s Syndrome and comorbid diagnoses to prepare for college.

The data collection method used for this study will be a modified delphi study which is an emailed online questionnaire. Data will be collected, analyzed, and an additional questionnaire generated until I am able to derive best practices. I anticipate no more than 3 or 4 rounds of short questionnaires. Your participation only requires that you answer questions from questionnaires provided. There are no additional tasks. The initial questionnaire should take 15-20 minutes to complete but subsequent questionnaires should take much less time to complete.

The information provided from the questionnaire results will remain private and all participants’ identities will be kept confidential. You may choose to review the document before publication to be sure there is no identifying information. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

The data will be gathered and analyzed by myself, and Dr. Robert Cunningham. The data will be stored on my personal computer protected by a password known only by the researcher. Completing the questionnaire will be your consent to participate in the study. You must be at least 18 years of age or older to participate. There are no risks associated with your participation in this study. After completing the questionnaire, be sure to please save the document onto your hard drive before attaching it in an email back to me. Please note that email is not a secure form of communication, so confidentiality of responses cannot be guaranteed.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the survey or study, or if you would like to see a copy of the results of the study, you may contact me at lschultz@bgsu.edu or by phone at 419-601-0907. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Kathryn Hoff at khoff@bgsu.edu or by phone at 419-372-7557. If you have any questions concerning the conduct of the study or rights as a research participant, please contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at hrsr@bgsu.edu or by phone at 419-372-7716. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lori Schultz
Graduate Student, Learning Design

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Appendix C

QUESTIONNAIRE 1

The questionnaire below should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Please complete the questionnaire, save the document, and then attach the saved document in an email to me at lschult@bgsu.edu. After the initial questionnaire, subsequent questionnaires should take less time to complete.

Questionnaire Round 1

What do you see as five or more of the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home, or work?

What do you see as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to the following areas:

   a) academic
   b) social
   c) emotional

In your opinion, what services and pedagogical practices have emerged to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education?

What knowledge, skills, and expectations do students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty?
Appendix D

Questionnaire 1 Responses

What do you see as five or more of the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home, or work?

(3) Finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety. Lack of experience with independent academic environments.
Dorm life
(2) Social navigation of campus life
Self-advocacy
(2) Executive function skill problems, including time management and organization. Impaired problem solving ability needed to make decisions and weigh alternatives.
(2) Lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision making, social skills training, college support programs).
Comorbid diagnoses
Parents unaware of college options

What do you see as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to the following areas:

**Academic:** organization, developing relationships with professors, self-disclosure; completing the broader, often unspoken, requirements of class (don’t answer an essay question in three sentences), debate held in the classroom. Writing, reading at a higher level; higher order problem solving relative to understanding. Scheduling issues for courses that fit their needs. Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details. College faculty not trained to provide appropriate accommodations. Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual.

**Social:** distinguishing between flirtation and friendly behavior; social stigma related to self-disclosure; being vulnerable to peers who have dubious intentions; interactions with peers in the classroom. Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (evening visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms). Being able to fit in socially on campus. Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education. Lack of understanding of their own theory of mind an dhow it could negatively impact the process of building relationships.

**Emotional:** loneliness; isolation. Depression; low motivation; any (2) co-morbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed. Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule. Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept. Potential sleep issues.

In your opinion what services and pedagogical practices have emerged to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education?

Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed.
One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, is absolutely necessary for many on the spectrum, especially their first year or two in college. Specialized advising and a person-centered model with coordinated services with relevant team members from a variety of areas would be ideal. Skeptical of peer mentoring in the absence of expert supervision and guidance.

Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings. Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD. Peer mentoring.

**What knowledge, skills, and expectations do students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty?**

Ability to manage time and provide a thorough explanation of their needs, to proactively advocate for their needs, to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur.

Knowledge of what their accommodations are, what their legal rights are, and what faculty’s responsibilities are and how to access those accommodations. If a note taker is used, they need to be able to meet with the note taker to understand what is written or clarify notes with the instructor. Need to open email from Disability Services and share it with each profession as require by law. Familiarity with email and commitment to using it on a daily basis to communicate with professors and how to log into the course website. Independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments and finding the office. Once with professor, need to have a plan to best use this time. Know how to read syllabus and track assignments and also how to break assignments down into manageable parts. Use a planner faithfully to best utilize time and get assignments done on time.

Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty.
Appendix E

QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Thank you very much for your participation in Questionnaire 1. From the responses I received, I have compiled the second questionnaire that involves ranking the various responses. Please save the document, and then attach the saved document in an email to me at lschult@bgsu.edu.

Please rank the responses below as the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home or work from biggest obstacle (1) to least obstacle (8).

1. Finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety. Lack of experience with independent academic environments.
2. Dorm life
3. Social navigation of campus life
4. Self advocacy
5. Executive function skill problems, including time management and organization. Impaired problem solving ability needed to make decisions and weigh alternatives.
6. Lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision making, social skills training, college support programs).
7. Comorbid diagnoses
8. Parents unaware of college options

Please rank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to the following areas from most important to least important.

Academic (most important 1, to least important 10):

1. Organization
2. Developing relationships with professors.
3. Self-disclosure
4. Completing the broader, often unspoken, requirements of class (don’t answer an essay question in three sentences).
5. Writing, reading at a higher level.
6. Higher order problem solving relative to understanding.
7. Scheduling issues for courses that fit their needs.
8. Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details.
9. College faculty not trained to provide appropriate accommodations.
10. Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual.
Social (most important 1, to least important 8):

_____ Distinguishing between flirtation and friendly behavior
_____ Social stigma related to self-disclosure
_____ Being vulnerable to peers who have dubious intentions
_____ Interactions with peers in the classroom
_____ Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (even visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms).
_____ Being able to fit in socially on campus.
_____ Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education.
_____ Lack of understanding of their own theory of mind and how it could negatively impact the process of building relationships

Emotional (most important 1, to least important 7):

_____ Loneliness; isolation
_____ Depression
_____ Low motivation
_____ Any comorbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed
_____ Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule
_____ Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept
_____ Potential sleep issues

Please rank services and pedagogical practices you believe to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education from most effective (1) to least effective (5).

_____ Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed.
_____ One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, especially their first year or two in college.
_____ Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings.
_____ Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD.
_____ Peer mentoring.
Please rank the following with regard to the knowledge, skills, and expectations that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty from most important (1) to least important (10):

_____ Ability to manage time and provide a thorough explanation of their needs and to proactively advocate for their needs.
_____ Ability to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur.
_____ Knowledge of what their legal rights are, what the faculty’s responsibilities are, what accommodations are available, and how to access those accommodations.
_____ Understand the need to read and keep email from Disability Services and share it with each professor as required by law.
_____ Become familiar with email and commitment to using it on a daily basis to communicate with professors.
_____ Know how to log into the course website.
_____ Develop independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments, and finding the office. Once with professor, need to have a plan to best use this time.
_____ Know how to read the syllabus and track assignments and also how to break assignments down into manageable parts.
_____ Use a planner faithfully to best utilize time and get assignments done on time.
_____ Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty.
Appendix F

Questionnaire 2 Responses

Please rank the responses below as the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home or work from biggest obstacle (1) to least obstacle (8).

1,4,3 Finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety. Lack of experience with independent academic environments.
5,6,7 Dorm life
2,8,5 Social navigation of campus life
3,1,4 Self advocacy
4,3,1 Executive function skill problems, including time management and organization. Impaired problem solving ability needed to make decisions and weigh alternatives.
6,2,2 Lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision making, social skills training, college support programs).
8,5,8 Comorbid diagnoses
7,7,6 Parents unaware of college options

Please rank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to the following areas from most important to least important.

Academic (most important 1, to least important 10):
2,1,5 Organization
1,4,4 Developing relationships with professors.
6,10,9 Self-disclosure
5,5,3 Completing the broader, often unspoken, requirements of class (don’t answer an essay question in three sentences).
7,3,10 Writing, reading at a higher level.
10,2,6 Higher order problem solving relative to understanding.
8,8,7 Scheduling issues for courses that fit their needs.
9,6,2 Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details.
3,7,8 College faculty not trained to provide appropriate accommodations.
4,9,1 Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual.
Social (most important 1, to least important 8):
7,5,8 Distinguishing between flirtation and friendly behavior
8,7,7 Social stigma related to self-disclosure
5,8,6 Being vulnerable to peers who have dubious intentions
6,4,4 Interactions with peers in the classroom
4,1,1 Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (even visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms).
1,6,2 Being able to fit in socially on campus.
2,2,3 Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education.
3,3,5 Lack of understanding of their own theory of mind and how it could negatively impact the process of building relationships

Emotional (most important 1, to least important 7):
1,5,6 Loneliness; isolation
3,4,2 Depression
4,3,4 Low motivation
5,1,3 Any comorbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed
6,6,1 Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule
7,2,5 Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept
2,7,7 Potential sleep issues

Please rank services and pedagogical practices you believe to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education from most effective (1) to least effective (5).

1,5,5 Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed.
4,1,3 One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, especially their first year or two in college.
2,3,4 Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings.
3,2,1 Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD.
5,4,2 Peer mentoring.
Please rank the following with regard to the knowledge, skills, and expectations that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty from most important (1) to least important (10):

5,9,4 Ability to manage time and provide a thorough explanation of their needs and to proactively advocate for their needs.
1,10,2 Ability to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur.
3,4,1 Knowledge of what their legal rights are, what the faculty’s responsibilities are, what accommodations are available, and how to access those accommodations.
7,5,9 Understand the need to read and keep email from Disability Services and share it with each professor as required by law.
6,7,10 Become familiar with email and commitment to using it on a daily basis to communicate with professors.
10,6,8 Know how to log into the course website.
2,1,3 Develop independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments, and finding the office. Once with professor, need to have a plan to best use this time.
8,3,5 Know how to read the syllabus and track assignments and also how to break assignments down into manageable parts.
9,8,6 Use a planner faithfully to best utilize time and get assignments done on time.
4,2,7 Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty.

One reviewer commented that they could rank the other areas with some confidence but in this area they could all be ranked “1” and they wrote, “can’t do without the whole package.”

**Another comment/concern made by two of the reviewers is that some of the responses had more than one answer and that it could pose problems when analyzing the data. The example is in the question above about working with faculty, the first response has ability to manage time and also something about self advocacy.**
Appendix G

QUESTIONNAIRE 3

Please rerank the responses below as the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home or work from biggest obstacle (1) to least obstacle (5).

_____ Finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety. Lack of experience with independent academic environments.
_____ Social navigation of campus life
_____ Self advocacy
_____ Executive function skill problems, including time management and organization.
_____ Lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision making, social skills training, college support programs).
_____ Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________

Please rerank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to the following areas from most important to least important.

Academic (most important 1, to least important 5):
_____ Organization
_____ Developing relationships with professors.
_____ Higher order problem solving relative to understanding.
_____ Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details.
_____ Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual.
_____ Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________

Social (most important 1, to least important 3):
_____ Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (even visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms).
_____ Being able to fit in socially on campus.
_____ Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education.
_____ Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________
Emotional (most important 1, to least important 6):

_____ Loneliness; isolation
_____ Depression
_____ Any comorbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed
_____ Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule
_____ Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept
_____ Potential sleep issues
_____ Ranked response not listed. Please describe __________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Please rerank services and pedagogical practices you believe to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education from most effective (1) to least effective (5).

_____ Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed.
_____ One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, especially their first year or two in college.
_____ Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings.
_____ Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD.
_____ Peer mentoring.
_____ Ranked response not listed. Please describe __________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Please rank the following with regard to the knowledge, skills, and expectations that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty from most important (1) to least important (4):

_____ Ability to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur.
_____ Knowledge of what their legal rights are, what the faculty’s responsibilities are, what accommodations are available, and how to access those accommodations.
_____ Develop independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments, and finding the office.
_____ Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty.
_____ Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix H

Questionnaire 3 Responses

Please rerank the responses below as the biggest obstacles for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder transitioning to college from high school, home or work from biggest obstacle (1) to least obstacle (5).

1. Finding environments in which they can feel safe, with reduced anxiety. Lack of experience with independent academic environments.
2. Social navigation of campus life
3. Self advocacy
4. Executive function skill problems, including time management and organization.
5. Lack of appropriate level of supports (career counseling, independent decision making, social skills training, college support programs).

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Please rerank the responses below as the most acute problems for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder related to the following areas from most important to least important.

Academic (most important 1, to least important 5):

1. Developing relationships with professors.
2. Organization
3. Higher order problem solving relative to understanding.
4. Being able to grasp the big picture as opposed to composite details.
5. Making coursework relevant to the interests and career needs/life goals of the individual.

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ______ un-trained college faculty_______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Social (most important 1, to least important 3):

1. Lack of social knowledge to navigate a wide variety of environments (even visiting a professor’s office takes social abilities and knowledge of social norms).
2. Being able to fit in socially on campus.
3. Not being informed of the hidden curriculum in higher education.

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________
_______________________________________________
Emotional (most important 1, to least important 6):
4,1 Loneliness; isolation
3,3 Depression
1,4 Any comorbid psychiatric disorder that is not being managed
5,5 Learning to deal with acceptance, rejection, and ridicule
2,6 Ability to develop and maintain a positive self concept
6,2 Potential sleep issues

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Please rerank services and pedagogical practices you believe to be the most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education from most effective (1) to least effective (5).
4,1 Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed.
2,4 One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, especially their first year or two in college.
3,2 Good transition programs that prepare for transition from high school to college settings.
1,3 Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD.
5,5 Peer mentoring.

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Please rank the following with regard to the knowledge, skills, and expectations that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder need to help them successfully work with faculty from most important (1) to least important (4):
3,1 Ability to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur.
2,3 Knowledge of what their legal rights are, what the faculty’s responsibilities are, what accommodations are available, and how to access those accommodations.
1,2 Develop independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments, and finding the office.
4,4 Understand the hidden curriculum on how to get along with and deal with university faculty.

Ranked response not listed. Please describe ________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Appendix I

Best Practices Guideline

Services and pedagogical practices most effective at addressing problems that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder face at institutions of higher education are:

- Professors who recognize that students need to develop deep, meaningful relationships with instructors, then work to create conditions in which those relationships can be formed.
- One-on-one guidance (at least weekly) with expert analysis of what is needed in order to provide effective supports, especially in their first year or two in college.
- Individually tailored support programs for individuals with ASD.

Knowledge, skills, and expectations for students that students need to help them successfully work with faculty:

- Ability to recognize situations that require a discussion with professors and the resilience and self-confidence to make those discussions occur.
- Knowledge of what their legal rights are, what the faculty’s responsibilities are, what accommodations are available, and how to access those accommodations.
- Develop independent problem-solving skills to identify when they need help, finding professor’s office hours, scheduling appointments, and finding the office.

Suggested programs to follow for best practices:

- Summer transition program – institutions could offer a summer transition program for several weeks prior to the beginning of the fall semester to help students with Asperger’s Syndrome become comfortable and get to know the campus. This would also help with social navigation and help build some friendships that can continue to develop. The primary benefit of this is to reduce anxiety and stress while making the student comfortable with campus prior to the beginning of classes in the fall.
- Resource Guide/Handbook – Disability Services can provide a resource guide that students can update with useful resources, contacts, and telephone numbers.
- Optional Topics Course – institutions can offer an optional topics course taken by students with Asperger’s Syndrome. The class would be small in size and the topic would be different each week. Topics may include study skills, organization, stress management, a field trip explaining how to effectively use the library, an etiquette class, an outline of intermural options, tutoring lab field trips, counseling services, and other activities such as star gazing or bowling to explore activities the student may not explore otherwise. Many topics would enhance skills for students, some would make them aware of opportunities and services available at the institutions, and it is also an opportunity to build friendships within the small class group.