

Challenges and Supports for College Students with ASD: An Overview

(please see Marci Wheeler's original resource at: <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/Academic-Supports-for-College-Students-with-an-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder>)

What is Autism?

- A neurobiological difference
- Affects perception
- Social skills deficits
- Communication challenges
- High autonomic reactivity
- Difficulty with hidden curriculum
- Loneliness and isolation
- Sensory hyper-/hypo- responsivity
- Executive functioning challenges
- Can affect motor skills (fine and gross)
- Uneven learning profile
- Presents differently in each individual

Strengths of Individuals with ASD

- "Out of the box" thinkers
- Detail-Oriented
- Sustained attention to interest
- Thrive in structure
- Excellent visual-spatial skills
- Idiosyncratic form of humor
- Honest, loyal, reliable
- Excellent long-term, rote, + recall memory
- Motivated by strong interests

What will it Look Like in the Classroom?

- May seem inattentive or bored
- May see repetitive behaviors
- Trouble staying on topic
- May become over-focused
- May display opposite emotion when stressed (may laugh or smile when corrected)
- Difficulty with changes in routines
- Weak organizational skills
- Literal thinking/interpretation
- Difficulty with perspective taking
- Difficulties with handwriting/fine motor
- May have difficulty on group projects
- Difficulty coping with academic stress
- Difficulty with ambiguous assignments

How it may affect campus life for the Individual with ASD?

- Doubts about disclosure
- May be bullied
- Increased vulnerability to unwanted sexual contact (particularly for those who identify as women or hold non-binary gender identities).
- Difficulties managing social demands
- Alteration in routines
- Social areas on campus may contribute to sensory overload/may be avoided
- Awareness of difference from peers
- Social ostracism/marginalization

Changes for Individuals with ASD from High School to College

- Who manages medication
- Maintain sleep/wake cycle
- Organization for projects/hw
- Managing special interests
- Advocacy for accommodations
- Accessing needed services/resources
- Managing own computer use/time
- Independently maintain hygiene
- Self-motivation for homework
- Self-check the quality of work
- Coping with stress
- Maintain own safety/security

Supports for Individuals with ASD in the College Setting

- Avoid visual clutter
- Provide syllabus ahead
- Teach Hidden Curriculum
- Allow extra transition time
- Use visual supports/schemas
- Provide notes or notetaker
- Avoid strong scents in the class
- Use peer mentors
- Clarify ambiguous language
- Connect current and prior learning
- Provide quiet area for learning/tests
- Allow more time for work assignments
- Allow multiple forms of participation
- Draw attention to salient information
- Ask the student for suggestions

Adapted from: (Wheeler & Chapin, 2018) (Berry, 2018) (Brown J. T., Transition and College Students on the Autism Spectrum, 2016) (Brown & Ackles, Is This Person Ready to be a College Student?, 2018) (Brown, Pena, & Rankin, Unwanted Sexual Contact: Students with Autism and Other Disabilities at Greater Risk, 2017) (Van Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers, 2015) (Cox, et al., 2017) (Gelbar, Smith, & Reichow, 2014) (Graetz & Sisson, 2016)