

Autism in College Students Fact Sheet

Autism is a neurological variant that is often diagnosed by the age of three, but sometimes much later in students who do not have a delay in acquiring language as children. There may be students on a college campus who have only recently received a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and some who received a diagnosis in childhood. Anyone with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, PDD-NOS, or High Functioning Autism is considered to have an ASD diagnosis.

It's been said that "if you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism." It's important to remember that no two autistic people share exactly the same characteristics, strengths or difficulties, and can indeed be very different from one another.

Autistic students may have:

- ⇒ Trouble comprehending social cues, non-verbal cues, or conversational language styles
- ⇒ Difficulty changing expected routines, such as changes in syllabus or test dates
- ⇒ Difficulty understanding auditory cues, especially in noisy environments
- ⇒ Difficulty retaining information delivered orally; may need information in writing, including captioned videos, for example
- ⇒ Repetition of movements, words or phrases
- ⇒ Difficulties with fine-motor skills, such as extreme handwriting difficulties
- ⇒ Extreme sensitivity to sounds, lights, touch, textures, odors and other sensory input
- ⇒ A need to use objects to self-regulate; such as a cell phone or iPad, for example
- ⇒ Intense areas of interest; may result in straying off-topic in class
- ⇒ Difficulty with executive functioning skills such as organization, working memory and more

In addition, ASD students may have other associated difficulties that can include sensory impairment, gastrointestinal problems, sleep disturbances, anxiety disorders, learning disabilities, ADHD and more.

It's important to keep in mind that these differences have a neurological, and not a behavioral or psychological basis. A typical college student on the autism spectrum is in class because they want to be there, and they are working very hard to pay attention, complete their work and understand and execute what is expected of them. If you experience difficulty with a student, the best course of action is to be direct and kind, and always assume that the student has the best intentions. The Disability Resource Center and the Autism Spectrum Navigators program can offer assistance with communication or other difficulties that may arise.

Sources: Organization for Autism Research: <http://www.researchautism.org/>

Center for Disease Control/ASDs homepage: <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health: <http://www.jhsph.edu/cadde/Facts/autism.html>

