

# Supporting Students on the Spectrum



Taylor Schaar, Julie Leist, Emalie Chandras  
Bowling Green State University

\*please see addendum to follow along with slides



# About Students on the Spectrum

- What is autism?
  - “a neurological disorder that manifests itself in significant behavior and communication differences” (White et al., 2012)
  - Translates into a wide range of different abilities in social interactions and behavioral skills

White, M. L., Smith, D., Smith, T. E., & Stodden, R. (2012). Autism spectrum disorders. In D. Zager, M. J. Wehmeyer, & R. L. Simpson(Eds.), *Education students with autism spectrum disorders: Research-based principles and practices*. (pp. 3-12). New York: Routledge.

# About Students on the Spectrum

- 30% of high school graduates with autism pursue higher education, and 80% of those who begin college do not graduate (Shattuck & Roux, 2015).
- This population needs specific and intentional services and programs to provide:
  - Personal support
  - Academic support
  - Social support

Shattuck, P, & Roux, A. (2015). *Report: 1 in 3 adults disconnected with work and school*. Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/04/21/report-1-3-young-adults-disconnected-work-and-school>

# Personal Integration

Before the first day of class:

- Breakout sessions at orientation and Parent and Family Program events

Throughout the school year:

- Support from the university for professional development opportunities geared towards aiding first responders and their interactions with this student population
- Assign one specific counselor to all students on the spectrum

Looking forward:

- Create a Sensory Sensitive Living Community

# Academic Integration

- Goal: Implementation of Universal Design (UD) across academic departments
  - Universal design is inclusive, accessible, and usable (Burgstahler, 2015)
  - Faculty who create lessons based on universal design *proactively* create inclusive and accessible spaces, rather than *reactively* accommodating for a student with a disability in the classroom (Burgstahler, 2015)
  - UD reduces the need for accommodations but does not eliminate them
- How does UD work for students on the spectrum?
  - Creating lessons that are clear and easy to understand, avoiding sarcasm and metaphors that may be taken at face value
  - Creating spaces that are not overstimulating to the senses

Burgstahler, S. E. (2015). Universal design in higher education. In S. E. Burgstahler (Ed.), *Universal design in higher education: From principles to practice*. (pp. 3-28). Boston: Harvard Education Press.

# Academic Integration

- Goal: Faculty Training
  - Implement faculty and staff training program to equip faculty and staff with the knowledge and skills to best serve students on the spectrum
  - Training would include:
    - Knowledge transfer of autism spectrum
    - Information on universal design
    - Tips on how to interact with students on the spectrum in the classroom

# Social Integration

- Implementation of a Peer Mentorship Program
  - Create a one-on-one advocate and mentor relationship between current students and students on the spectrum
  - Professional opportunity with additional compensations
    - Priority class registration for both mentor and student to align schedules
    - Credit hours and professional experience for students in specific majors
    - Paid position
  - Housed through Disability Services
    - Opportunity for a Graduate Student to oversee this program and advise the Peer Mentors

# Social Integration

- Looking Forward
  - Peer Mentors lead workshops on implementing Universal Design in student leadership programs (Burghstahler, 2015)
  - Work towards having all programs hosted by members of the university shaped by Universal Design, whether students, faculty, or staff

Burgstahler, S. E. (2015). Universal design in higher education. In S. E. Burgstahler (Ed.), *Universal design in higher education: From principles to practice*. (pp. 3-28). Boston: Harvard Education Press.



# Budget Proposal

Program	Cost	Components
Sensory Sensitive Learning Community	\$10,000 annually	\$4,000 per year for programming; \$2,000 per year for staffing; cost offset by fee to live in (scholarship/exemption available)
Peer Mentor Program	\$20,000 annually	\$4,000/ year for 6 Peer Mentors; \$14,000/year for Graduate Assistant + tuition remission
Counselor Professional Development	\$3,000 for each new counselor	Attendance at conferences, 40 hours of specialized training
Faculty Trainings	\$2,000 annually until implementation of Peer Mentor training sessions	Paying for trainings from specialized spectrum experts, eventually move to Peer Mentor lead workshop sessions
Promotional Materials	\$500 annually	Brochures, marketing, etc.
<b>Total Annual Cost:</b>	\$35,500	Cost covered by various departments as this is a campus wide initiative.

# Strategic plan: a summary

	<b>Short Term*</b>	<b>Long Term**</b>
<b>Academic Integration</b>	Faculty Training: “Integrating Students on the Spectrum”	Universal Design in all Classrooms--helpful to all students
<b>Social Integration</b>	Peer Mentor Program to pair students	Peer Mentor Program utilized to do all trainings on campus
<b>Personal Integration</b>	Sessions at Orientation; specialized counselor for students on the spectrum	Creation and implementation of Sensory Sensitive Learning Community

\*Can be implemented within the next 1-2 years.

\*\*Goals to be implemented within the next 3-7 years.

### **Students on the Spectrum**

- College students on the autism spectrum are an underserved population on many campuses
- What is autism?
  - “a neurological disorder that manifests itself in significant behavior and communication differences” (White et al., 2012)
  - Translates into a wide range of different abilities in social interactions and behavioral skills
- 30% of high school graduates with autism pursue higher education, and 80% of those who begin college do not graduate (Shattuck & Roux, 2015).
- This population needs specific and intentional support. Students on the spectrum often exhibit high IQs, but need specific means of academic, personal, and social integration to provide productive space for learning and development

### **Academic Integration**

- Implementation of Universal Design (UD) across academic departments
  - Universal design is inclusive, accessible, and usable (Burgstahler, 2015)
  - Faculty who create lessons based on universal design *proactively* create inclusive and accessible spaces, rather than *reactively* accommodating for a student with a disability in the classroom (Burgstahler, 2015)
  - UD reduces the need for accommodations but does not eliminate them
- How does UD work for students on the spectrum?
  - Creating lessons that are clear and easy to understand, avoiding sarcasm and metaphors that may be taken at face value
  - Creating spaces that are not overstimulating to the senses
  - Faculty members would create lessons that cater to students with varying social disabilities
- Goal: Faculty Training
  - Implement faculty and staff training program to equip faculty and staff with the knowledge and skills to best serve students on the spectrum
  - Training would include knowledge transfer of autism spectrum, information on universal design, and tips on how to interact with students on the spectrum in the classroom

### **Social Integration**

- Recognizing that the design of orientation programs or other activities at the beginning of the school year might be overwhelming for this student population, we argue having a direct 1:1 relationship with a current student acting as a guide or advocate might help to ease this transition overall.
  - A Peer Mentor would be a current student hired as an advocate and an advisor who could take classes with their assigned student and commit to their student relationship for at least a full year.
  - Mentors would take classes with their students, check in with them once a week for at least an hour outside of class, and be generally available for non-emergency questions regarding college life
  - A Peer Mentor would gain the opportunity for credit or internship hours, receive priority registration in order to take classes alongside their student, and be paid to enforce that this is a job that needs to be a priority and not a flexible volunteer opportunity.
  - This program could be housed through Disability Services but overseen by a graduate assistant hoping to work directly with this student population in the future.
- Looking Forward
  - Eventually, we would hope to have our Peer Mentors lead mandatory workshops on implementing Universal Design to student leaders on campus.
  - Ideally, we want to continue to work to have all programs hosted by members of the university to foster and champion Universal Design

### **Personal Integration**

- The university needs to include and value our students on the spectrum as soon as they are committed to our institution.
  - A reactive stance does not create a climate open to empowering students to address their needs and feel welcome
- Thus, our suggested methods to aid in personal integration begin before the student has even started classes
  - Provide breakout sessions to students and guardians
    - Allowing students a space during orientation as they are processing the amount of change this transition will bring can walk students through resources, norms of the campus community, and how to plan for this transition
    - If guardians are highly involved in their student's transition experience and are also nervous about how to navigate their relationship with their child while not being present, this could also be a chance for them to ask

questions without feeling pressured or rushed as if they were dropping into an office.

- During the school year, we want to make sure our students continue to feel supported and we eliminate as much stress as possible in supporting them personally
  - Provide professional opportunities for first responders, specifically Counseling Center and Residential Life team members
    - There are a variety of organizations focused on working with higher education professionals in developing the skills and tactics to navigate the needs of this population, including The Autism Project (The Autism Project, 2017).
    - By investing in this development for our first responders, our university shows we recognize the specific needs of this population and we want to provide as much *consistent* support as possible
  - Ideally, eventually we would hope to hire a counseling team member specializing in interactions with students on the spectrum to oversee all students who identify as on the spectrum. Additionally this person can lead the charge in assuring the counseling center is equipped and held accountable in its efforts to support this population.
- Looking forward: Sensory Sensitive Living Community
  - Understanding the necessity of having a goal of continually evolving to support the needs of this population, eventually, we would recommend creating a Sensory Sensitive Living Community
    - The backgrounds of our students on the spectrum will vary greatly, especially in terms of past accommodations in living environments, socialization opportunities, and developed relationship skills (Zager, Alpern, McKeon, Maxam, & Mulvey, 2013, pp. 8)
    - A Sensory Sensitive Living Community could be a space more mindful of how sound, sudden changes, and other aspects could create a stressful and tension-filled environment for students on the spectrum.
  - Residential Life in this area could spend more time training for the needs of this population, providing programming aiding in socialization opportunities, navigating classroom norms, and work directly with the student's other connections on campus, such as faculty, to ensure they are being supported.
    - Peer mentors could choose to live on this floor, but beyond those directly working with this population on our campus, it could be a floor open to anyone who may not be comfortable identifying as on the spectrum but need a differently styled environment in order to succeed academically, mentally, and emotionally.

References

Shattuck, P. & Roux, A. (2015). Report: 1 in 3 adults disconnected with work and school.

Retrieved from

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