

# **Autism Spectrum Awareness Committee**

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THE PROPOSED  
COMMITTEE AND ITS  
PURPOSE

# THE COMMITTEE'S PURPOSE

- The committee's main focus will be the Autism Spectrum Awareness (ASA) Training program, which will be available for anyone on campus on the first Wednesday of every month, and upon request.
  - One to three student volunteers from the Disabilities Services Department will be in charge of presenting the training.
- A Residential Learning Community (RLC) will be formed to include S.T.E.M. majors and autism spectrum advocates.
  - This RLC will be open to all student interested in supporting and interacting with autistic students.
  - It will be designed as a positive living environment that promotes awareness and acceptance.

# THE COMMITTEE'S STRUCTURE

- The committee will be chaired by the Dean of Students and comprised of 5 senior members:
  - The Director of Disability Services
  - A Residence Life Department representative
  - A faculty member representative
  - An Office of Student Activities representative
  - A representative from the Mental Health Services
- The committee will be ad hoc and shall exist for the purpose of spreading awareness of autistic individuals on campus and promoting diversity in regards to disabled individuals.

# ESTIMATED BUDGET FOR THE PROGRAM

- Advertisements (flyers): \$1,000.00
- Room rental and tech use for trainings: \$800.00
- Refreshments during departmental trainings: \$200.00
- T-shirts and polos for student volunteers: \$200.00

Total annual budget estimate: \$2200.00

# IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- The committee will meet once a month, beginning in August 2017, for continued education and program adjustments.
- The student volunteers will be trained on the presentation and will begin training other departments in October 2017.
- The S.T.E.M. RLC will open in January 2018.
- How to assess the program:
  - A semester reflection will be conducted by the committee members and the student volunteers.
  - A campus survey will be conducted to assess the quality of the training presentation as well as its effectiveness.

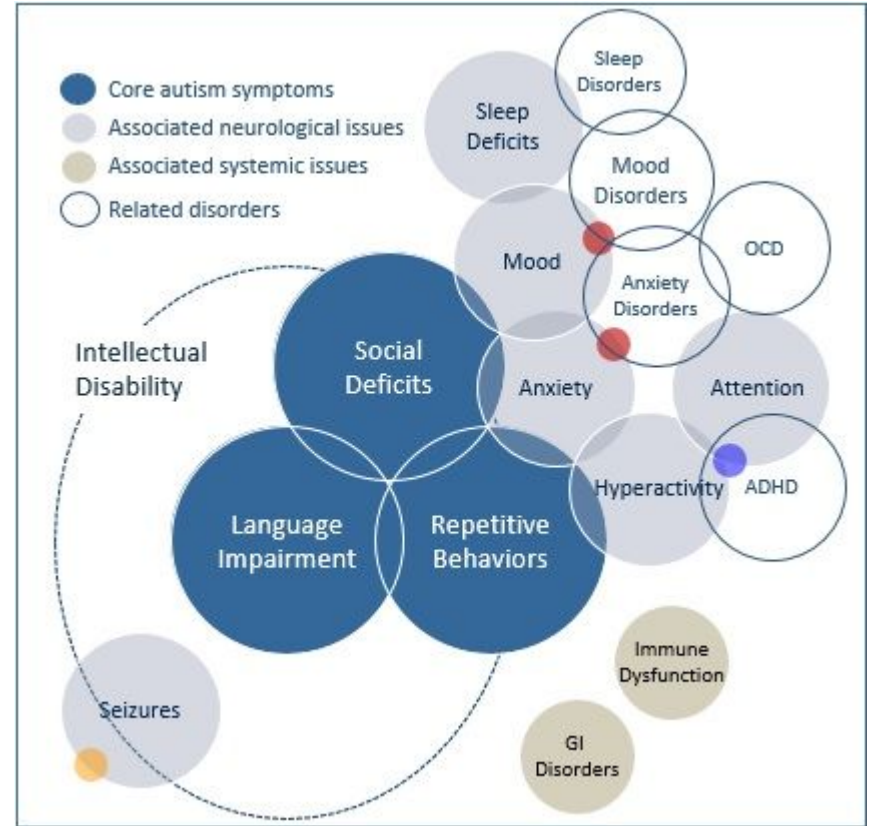
AUTISM SPECTRUM  
DISORDER: AN  
OVERVIEW

# SYMPTOMS OF AUTISM

According to Autismspeaks.org (2012), Autism Spectrum Disorder is “a broad range of conditions characterized by:

- Challenges with social skills,
- Repetitive behaviors,
- Speech and nonverbal communication, and
- Unique strengths and differences.”

Autism is considered a spectrum disorder because no autistic child is the same. The three main types of autism are Autism Disorder, Asperger’s, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder, which is a general umbrella for atypical autism.





# DSM-5 DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

- “Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts”
- “Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities”
- “Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities, or may be masked by learned strategies in later life).”
- “Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning.”
- “These disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability (intellectual developmental disorder) or global developmental delay. Intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder frequently co-occur; to make comorbid diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability, social communication should be below that expected for general developmental level.”

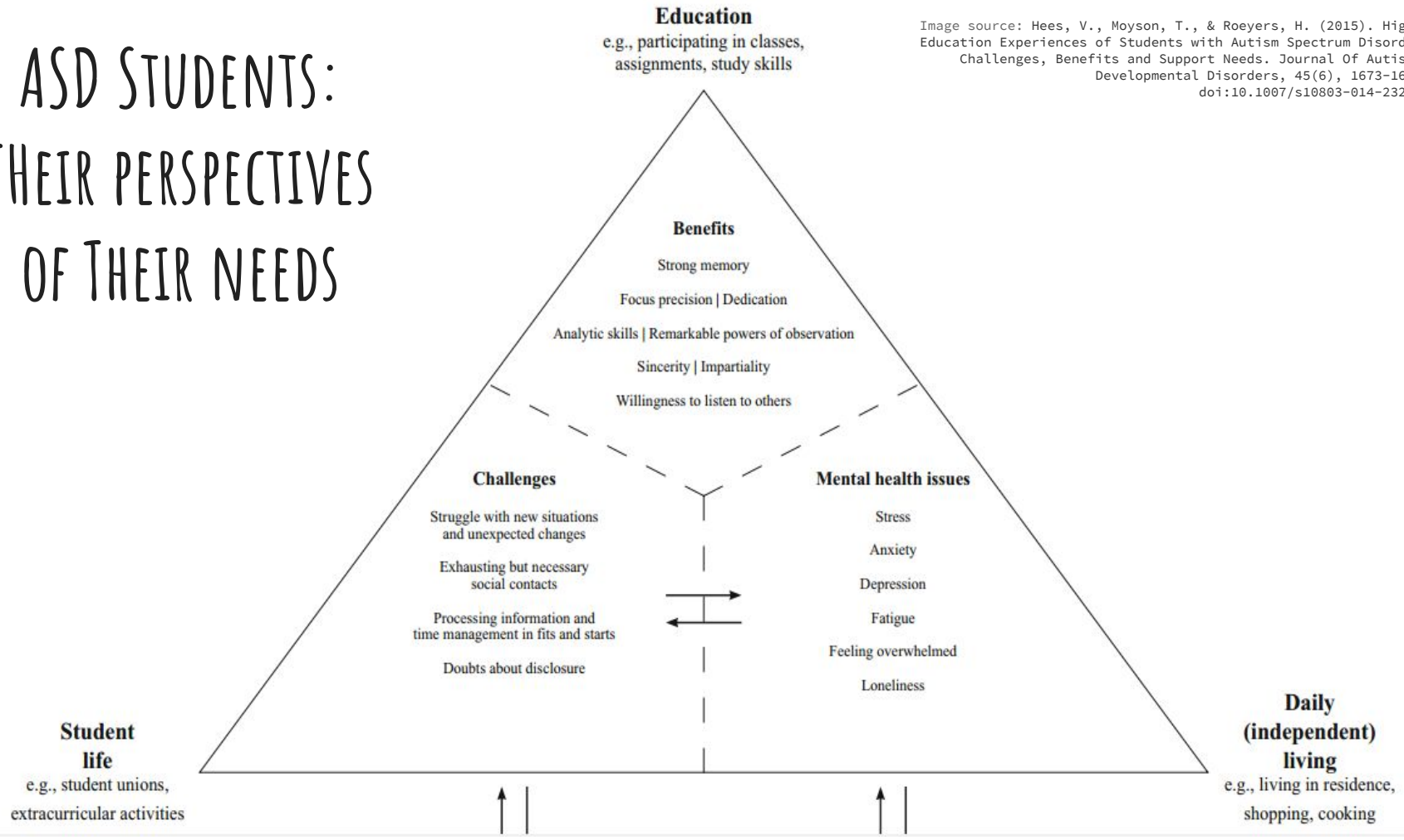
# SANFORD'S CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT THEORY

Nevitt Sanford developed the Challenge and Support Theory in regards to student development with the following ideas in mind (Patton et al., 2016):

- Differentiation and Integration:
  - Differentiation occurs as a student understands themselves as unique
  - Integration occurs as a student understands themselves as part of a group
- Challenge and Support:
  - “Challenges occur in situations for which the individual does not have the skills, knowledge, or attitude to cope (for example, academic, social, psychological).”
  - “Supports are buffers in the environment that help the student meet challenges to be successful.”

# ASD STUDENTS: THEIR PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR NEEDS

Image source: Hees, V., Moyson, T., & Roeyers, H. (2015). Higher Education Experiences of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Challenges, Benefits and Support Needs. Journal Of Autism & Developmental Disorders, 45(6), 1673-1688. doi:10.1007/s10803-014-2324-2



# LEADING WITH STRENGTHS

ASD Students thrive at or are more prone to success in higher education due to their exceptional ability in the following areas, according to Hees, Moyson, and Roeyers (2015):

- Memory and information regurgitation
- Attention to detail and desire for precision
- Focus and dedication on a subject
- Analyzing and observations

# CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

ASD Students face challenges or are more prone to failure in higher education due to the limitations/difficulties in the following areas (Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers, 2015):

- Social and interpersonal skills
  - Fear saying the wrong thing or managing social expectations
  - Disclosing disability
- Organization and time management
- Being overwhelmed and unable to advocate for themselves

# SUPPORT

Hees, Moyson, and Roeyers (2015) suggest the following areas of support for ASD students:

- “A personalized approach”
- “A safe and transparent environment with sufficient planning and clear communication”
- “Academic accommodations”
- “Coaching in education, student life and daily living”
- “Adequate psychosocial support”
- “Leisure activities and sufficient amount of rest”

S.T.E.M.  
RESIDENTIAL  
LEARNING  
COMMUNITY

-AUTISTIC STUDENT ADVOCATES-

2 KEY COMPONENTS TO CONSIDER:

ACADEMIC

SOCIAL



# COMPONENT 1: ACADEMIC

- About 34% of students on the autism spectrum choose a major within Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math which leads to careers in S.T.E.M. industries.
  - There are many things to consider when honing in on furthering academic development for these students, such as offering a structured learning and teaching environment.
    - One way to accomplish this is to establish a Residential Learning Community, which will include:
      - Time management programs
      - Calendar/syllabus activities
      - Priority and academic goal setting programs
      - Socialization opportunities
  - For these students, academic success is directly affected by self efficacy and examining disability identification.

# COMPONENT 1: ACADEMIC

Academic assistance may be provided for these areas:

- Special Accommodations
  - Some cases of autism are mild:
    - Services such as readers, scribes, and notetakers are needed.
  - Some cases of autism require more assistance:
    - This assistance is deemed necessary and fair according to the disability evaluation/application of the student's needs.
    - Evaluations of autism and medical documents are taken into consideration.
- Testing Assistance
  - For example, additional time
- Evaluation of Different Learning Levels
- Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Programs

# COMPONENT 2: SOCIAL

To increase social awareness of ASD students and peers, the Residential Learning Community will promote education and first hand experiences through role playing and practicing behavioral interactions.

## Case Study Example:

(Provided in *Decisions Matter*, by Vaccaro, McCoy, Champagne, and Siegel (2013):

Sally and Rebecca are roommates in a residence hall on campus. Sally has a moderate form of Asperger's Syndrome and Rebecca thinks she is awkward and weird. She wants Sally to move out of the room.

You are the Residence Hall Director of the building. Sally's parents call you to explain Sally's disability and beg you to convince Rebecca to give her another chance.

# COMPONENT 2: SOCIAL

How do you handle this case study situation?

Consider the following when making a decision:

1. “What is the core problem to be addressed?”
2. “What is the urgency of the problem?”
3. “What is the level of threat to the individual or the campus community?”
4. “What immediate actions need to be taken?”

# COMPONENT 2: WAYS TO ENHANCE SOCIALIZATION SKILLS

- Establish a point person for the ASD student to go to when distressed or confused
- Identify a safe place on campus to relax or regroup
- Structure social planning to promote connectedness
  - When structured social planning correlates with the student's interest, the socialization is facilitated as well as motivated, which will increase adherence for the ASD student to continue higher education.
  - This type of social support has proven to enhance ASD student's academics, employment, number of friends and peers to socialize with and increase confidence when interacting with peers.

# COMPONENT 2: WAYS TO ENHANCE SOCIALIZATION SKILLS

- Provide connections for professional networking and career development
- Create social opportunities related specialized interests incorporated in activities to increase quantity and quality of peer interactions
- Include family members and/or support system in social activities to create a comfort space for student

# TO SUMMARIZE:

- The ad hoc ASA Committee will focus on promoting awareness and acceptance of autistic students on campus.
  - A monthly training will be offered to departments on campus regarding this subject.
- A S.T.E.M. RLC will be developed in a residence hall on campus that focuses on academic and social development in autistic students.
  - The RLC will be available to not only autistic students on campus, but also non-autistic students who wish to learn more about and help promote the autistic community.

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