Academic Libraries and Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
How Do We Help?
~ Gerry Shea, Communication Librarian, Seton Hall University Libraries gerard.shea@shu.edu ~
~ Sebastian Derry, Assistant Dean for Public Services, Seton Hall University Libraries sebastian.derry@shu.edu ~

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Characteristics
• Developmental disorder
• Persistent deficits in social communication and interaction
• Restrictive, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
• Intellectual impairment (e.g., trouble with thinking, reasoning, or abstract concepts)
• Language delays, or lack of language entirely

ASD Goes To College — Challenges We Face
• An estimated 1 in 68 children nationally and 1 in 41 in New Jersey has ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
• Increasing number of students with ASD will enroll in higher education—50,000 teenagers with ASD turn 18 each year and nearly 35% attend college (Shattuck et al., 2012)
• Heightened risk for academic failure during college years (Pinder-Amaker, 2014)
• Current services do not address supports needed to help college students with ASD (Ashbaugh, Koegel, & Koegel, 2017)
• ASD characteristics often do not manifest themselves in observable, physical ways, and many students choose not to disclose an ASD condition (Remy & Seaman, 2014)

ASD Goes To College — NJ
Rutgers
The Douglas Developmental Disabilities Center http://dddc.rutgers.edu/
Center for Adult Autism Services http://caas.rutgers.edu/
The Autism Spectrum College Support Program https://is.gd/n0QXkm

Bergen Community College
College of New Jersey
→ TPSID* grant winners from Dept. of Education https://is.gd/TcAPkJ

* Transition Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

ASD Student Snapshot
Strengths
• Strong memory
• Original and creative thought patterns
• Good attention to detail
• Single minded and determined nature

Weaknesses
• Understanding abstract or ambiguous concepts
• Expressing thoughts in writing
• Poor organizational and time management skills
• May be prone to loneliness, anxiety, depression

What Can Libraries Do?
• Personal librarian program for students with ASD (Remy & Seaman, 2014)
• ASD Awareness Training for librarians, staff, and students
• Outreach initiatives (e.g., Autism Awareness events in April)
• Provide opportunities for students with ASD to participate informally in groups (Anderson, 2018)
• Transparent signage directing students to quiet areas (Anderson, 2018)
• Summer transition program including the library (Pinder-Amaker, 2014)
• Promote the Library as a “safe place” (Lawrence, 2013)
• Create ASD-friendly environments (e.g. non-fluorescent lighting, visual signage)
• Offer chat reference services
• Autism Resource Libguide (e.g. Florida State University http://med-fsu.libguides.com/autism)
• Understanding ASD students and their challenges will lead to a better library experience both for students and librarians (Anderson, 2018)

Additional Resources
• Universal Design for Learning http://www.udlcenter.org/
• Libraries and Autism: We’re Connected http://www.librariesandautism.org/
• Project Enable https://projectenable.my.edu/
• Autism NJ https://www.autismnj.org/
• Autism Speaks NJ https://is.gd/1FVGFH
• NJ Dept. Of Education—Autism http://www.state.nj.us/education/special/autism/
References


