




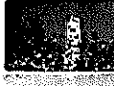


AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN COLLEGE: CHARACTERISTICS AND PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

MATTHEW SEGALL, PH.D.
EMORY AUTISM CENTER, EMORY UNIVERSITY

Presentation to the Faculty and Staff of the University of West Georgia, March 2016

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

- Developmental disability
- Complex behavioral, neurological and genetic features
- Two core areas of impairment
 - Social communication
 - Repetitive behaviors and restrictive interests
- Challenges with
 - Executive functioning
 - Emotion regulation
 - Independent living skills

Segall, 2016

Associated Features and Co-morbidities

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Attention problems
- Difficulties with handwriting and/or written expression
- Poor organization
- Low motivation for work
- Limited goal-setting
- Poor self-advocacy skills
- Aggression and/or anger management

Segall, 2016

“Behaviors” of a College Student with ASD

- Incessant question asking
- Blurring out
- An 'elitist' attitude
- Limited participation
- Social isolation
- Poor home skills
- Poor hygiene
- Directive, bossy
- Seems to not be paying attention
- Highly literal; difficulty with sarcasm and jokes
- Frequent social faux-pas
- Not seeking assistance
- Rude to others
- “Brilliance” without common sense

Segall, 2016

Common Impairment: Social Communication

- Challenged Social Communicator
 - Think: cognitive impairment, limited verbal abilities
- Emerging Social Communicator
 - Think: clearly “different” but progressing towards independence
- Nuance Challenged Social Communicator
 - Think: appears “typical” but makes “surprising” errors
- Neurotypical

Borrowing heavily from Michelle Garcia Winner: check out www.socialthinking.com

Segall, 2016

High School vs. College

High School	College
□ IEPs and 504 plans	□ Letter of accommodations
□ IDEA	□ ADA
□ Network of supports	□ Expectation of independence
□ Case managers	□ Self-advocacy
□ Modifications (e.g., written expression)	□ Emphasis on writing ability and written communication

Segall, 2016

Some other “differences”

- Structure
- Grading rubrics
- Critical thinking skills; level of “abstractness”
- Quantity of studying
- Social aspects of academic work
- Review and reminders by teachers
- Access to services (e.g., speech therapy)
- Independent living expectations

Segall, 2016

High School

From the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 . . .

- Of students with ASD . . .
 - 20% do not respond to questions orally
 - 50% do not present to class or to groups
 - 20% do not work with peers or in groups
 - 67% have an individualized and specialized curriculum
 - 90% receive accommodations or modifications (e.g., extended time, alternative assignments)
 - 80% receive learning support (e.g., paraprof), 57% use assistive technology, and 70% receive “related services” (e.g., speech therapy, behavioral services, psychological services)

Segall, 2016

Academic Concerns

- Difficulty understanding material
- Limited motivation for specific subjects
- Challenges with writing and written expression
- Attendance and engagement during class
- Organization
- Group work
- “Abstract” assignments
- Breaking tasks down
- Visual learners
- Time management
- Completing and turning in assignments

Segall, 2016

Social Concerns

- Connecting to others
- How to make friends
- Joining special interest groups, clubs, activities
- Inappropriate social behavior
- Disclosure
- “Hidden” social rules
- Perspective taking
- “Social thinking” deficits

Segall, 2016

Mental Health Concerns

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Obsessions and perseverations
- Anger management
- Emotional coping skills
- Stress management
- Loneliness

Segall, 2016

Life Skills and Adaptive Behavior Concerns

- Living with a roommate; living independently
- Cleanliness; home-living skills
- Hygiene
- Self-advocacy
- Self-determination
- Community participation and use
- Leisure activities
- Safety behaviors

Segall, 2016

Other "Life" Skills

- Sexual health
- Relationships, dating, consent
- Appropriate internet use and behavior
- Diet, nutrition, exercise
- Employment, resumes, interview skills
- Knowledge of legal system
- Interactions with community professionals

Segall, 2016

Transition Skills

- Causal Capacity Skills
 - Goal setting, choice making, decision making, problem solving, attribution
- Intrapersonal Capacity Skills
 - Emotional self-regulation, self advocacy, behavioral self-management, perception of control, self-awareness
- Adaptive Behavior Skills
 - Independent living, social competency, behavioral responsibility

Segall, 2016

Concerns and Goals

- College students with ASD will often have a great number of strengths alongside some "surprising" skill deficits
- Goals may come from a wide array of domains
- Important to not make assumptions about skillsets
 - Avoid: "He should know better!"

Segall, 2016

Resources on a College Campus

- Office of Disability Services
- Student Health Center
- Counseling and Mental Health Services
- Academic and Writing Centers
- Tutoring Services
- Student Activity Organizations
- Residence Life
- Career Center
- "Helping fields" academic departments

Segall, 2016

General Strategies

- Directly connect to campus resources (e.g., tutoring, student organizations, career services)
- Use visual supports and teaching methods
- Engage in task analysis
- Be as concrete as possible
- Foster regular contact with peers and instructors
- Use a positive behavioral approach
- Focus on self-management and self-reinforcement
- Encourage participation but don't push too hard
- Create proactive plans
- Be patient
- Implement mentoring programs
- Create therapy groups for learning social-cognitive and emotional management groups
- Direct instruction of skills
- Promote awareness, offer trainings to campus community

Segall, 2016

Be student-centered and strengths-based

- Draw on student strengths and interests to create strategies and solutions
- Allow students to set their own goals: "What do you wish was a little different?"
- Highlight the positives and successes for our students
 - In some cases, others have been focused on shortcomings and weaknesses
 - In other cases, this may be the first time, they have experienced academic and/or social challenges

Segall, 2016

Academic Accommodations

- Many students with ASD struggle with executive functioning challenges similar to students with ADHD or learning disabilities and can benefit from accommodations
 - Extended time (for assignments and tests)
 - Note takers or receiving lecture notes ahead of time
 - Quiet testing environment
 - Participation modifications
 - Priority registration
 - Reduced course load
 - Others as needed

Segall, 2016

“Unidentified” Students

- Many students with ASD in college may not have an official diagnosis, they may be “misdiagnosed”, or they may not have sought out any services
- Be discrete – engage student in a discussion about concerns
- Be solution-focused, rather than label-focused
- Connect student to existing campus supports (e.g., disability services, mental health counseling, tutoring, etc.)

Segall, 2016

Classroom Strategies

- Build rapport – take time to get to know the student, learn about interests and strengths
 - Encourage use of office hours
- Consider increasing visual presentation of information
- If student has academic accommodations, meet with student to understand what supports are helpful and why
- Allow for breaks and self-regulation
- Create subtle non-verbal cues for self-management

Segall, 2016

Classroom Strategies

- Attendance and Participation
 - If attendance is “optional” (and attendance is poor), explain why attendance is important and concrete consequences for not attending
 - If attendance is mandatory, explain the concrete behaviors associated with attendance (arrive on time, stay throughout, participation expectations, sign-in, etc.)
 - If student does not participate, work with the student to learn “safe and simple” means of participating
 - If student participates “too much”, coordinate with student to create concrete expectations and subtle cues for limiting participation

Segall, 2016

Classroom Strategies

- Participation in Group Work
 - Many students have difficulty with group work
 - As appropriate, allow for modification
 - Define individual roles within the group
 - Highlight student strengths
 - Help with matching student to team members

Segall, 2016

Classroom Strategies

- Unusual or “disruptive” behaviors
 - Meet with student to learn about self-awareness and potential reasons for the behavior
 - Set clear expectations in a positive way without judgement and consequences
 - Collaborate with student to create a “cue” for regulating or managing behavior
 - Encourage taking a short break

Segall, 2016

Classroom Strategies

- Completion of Assignments
 - Connect student to Disability Services and other academic supports (e.g., writing center, tutors)
 - Student may need help with breaking down long-term or abstract assignments into manageable components
 - Provide reminders beyond the syllabus
 - Create opportunities for flexibility – allow for assignments to come in late (with clear grading consequences)

Segall, 2016

Striving for Inclusion

To truly be an inclusive environment for students with ASD, we have to think about embedding structured supports for teaching skills that may be lacking

All members of the campus community should be engaged in supporting our students – collaboration is key!

Segall, 2016

Self-Advocacy

- A process of getting your needs and wants met
- Needs to be explicitly taught
- Self-assessing a situation and then speaking for themselves to get their needs met
- Prompt dependency and lack of independence
- The ASD individual may assume that since they know what they want, everyone else does, too
- Paradox #1: in order to teach self-advocacy, we must be their advocates
- Paradox #2: the belief that "independence" means doing everything on your own

Segall, 2016

Self-advocacy and Self-awareness

- Many of our students with ASD have had limited experience with taking the initiative to approach instructors about concerns, needs, supports, etc.
- Reach out to the student (privately) – create a safe space for discussion and problem solving
- Connect to resources directly

Segall, 2016

Skill deficit strategies

- Task analysis: break the skill down into very small discrete behaviors, create a "checklist", model and practice doing the skill
- Utilize visual learning strengths – use pictures, watch videos
- Engage in data collection and self-monitoring
- Create age-appropriate reward systems
- Goal attainment should be student-led

Segall, 2016

Self-monitoring

- Awareness of one's own behavior
- Tallying behaviors during class
- Graphing and setting behavioral goals
- Self-evaluation of behaviors
- Tie into behavior and reinforcement systems

Segall, 2016

Organization and Time Management

- Checklists and other visual supports
- Use of daily planners or web-based calendars
- Review weekly schedule; ownership of setting schedules
- Use technology
- Practice awareness of time
- Color-coded organizational systems
- Schedule time for organization
- Find the motivator!

Segall, 2016

Social strategies for students with ASD

- Connect to special interest groups
- Work with an individual counselor to foster disclosure and self-advocacy skills
- Participate in social learning groups when possible
- Read books and web-based resources to learn about common social and employment rules and expectations

Segall, 2016

Potential Campus-wide Initiatives

- Peer mentoring
- Social interaction intervention groups
- First year seminar

Segall, 2016

Peer Mentoring

- Trained volunteers meet regularly with students with ASD (e.g., weekly)
- Progress monitoring across academic, socialization, mental health, and life skills
- Guidance on common, practical strategies; referrals to campus and community resources
- Supervision of mentors
- Supplemented with didactic and interactive social skills and social thinking learning opportunities
- "Promising" evidence-based practice

Segall, 2016

Peer Mentoring – Creating a Program

Where the Program is Housed

- Office of Disability Services
- Academic Affairs
- Counseling/Psychological Services
- College of Education
- Stand alone

Other Program Members

- Volunteer organizations
- Department of Psychology
- Health and Helping Fields Departments
- Existing mentoring programs and initiatives
- Residence Life

Segall, 2016

Peer Mentoring – Training and Supervision

- ASD characteristics, similarities with typical peers, and general strategies
- Emphasis on rapport building, strengths focus, goal setting, and accountability
- Careful review and monitoring of mentor roles and boundaries
- Ongoing training and supervision

Segall, 2016

Social Strategies and Recommendations

- Social skills and social thinking groups
 - Include non-diagnosed peers as appropriate
 - Different from support group (but this is important, too)
 - Not the same needs as social anxiety
- Special interest groups, clubs, student organizations
 - Autism specific student groups
- Combination of direct instruction and natural learning opportunities

Segall, 2016

"Social Thinking"

- Understanding the relationship between behavior, thoughts, feelings, and responses
- Perspective taking and theory of mind
- Anticipating social norms and "expected" behavior in "shared space"
- Developing social-cognitive flexibility and expanding "black and white" thinking

Segall, 2016

Freshman/First Year Seminar

- | Typical Arrangement | Key Topics |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Understanding yourself and goal setting□ Understanding your learning and work style; study strategies□ Working in groups□ Leadership and engagement□ Career research and resume building (3 sessions)□ Special Topics (3 sessions)□ Using media and information resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Linger on self-awareness□ Use visual and concrete strategies□ Task analysis for "working in groups"; provide concrete roles and rules for group work□ Use "special topics" for "social thinking" skills□ Get out of the classroom; visit campus resources and departments□ Limit enrollment; include a few undiagnosed peer leaders□ Focus on executive functioning strategies and emotion regulation |

Segall, 2016

Mental health support staff

- Monitor students presenting with anxiety or depression and assess for ASD
- Be open to long-term treatment models
- Partner individual psychotherapy with group therapy and peer mentors
 - Utilize a Cognitive Behavior Therapy format
- Focus on self-awareness and understanding ASD diagnosis
 - Assess (and help students understand) individual strengths, interests, challenges, and helpful strategies
- Be patient and take time to build rapport

Segall, 2016

Mental Health/Counseling, cont'd

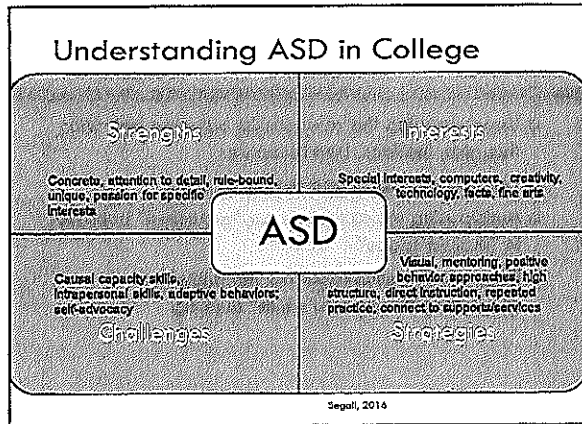
- Directly connect students to outside referrals and resources as necessary and appropriate
- Use concrete and visual strategies
- Arrange interdisciplinary, team-based goal planning meetings, including disability service provider, academic advisor, peer mentors, parents, and other stakeholders

Segall, 2016

Residence Life

- Engage family in proactive planning
- Provide a safe space for stress management and calming down
- Work with the student to address sensory challenges
- When in crisis, limit physical contact and verbal input
- Review clear and concrete rules with students; create visual supports

Segall, 2016



- ### Colleges and Universities with ASD-specific Programs
- Marshall University/ West Virginia
 - University of Alabama
 - Western Kentucky University
 - Rutgers University
 - Pace University
 - Carnegie Mellon
 - Rochester Institute of Technology
 - Virginia Tech
 - Cal Tech
 - Georgia Tech
- Segall, 2016


- ### Resources and Additional Information
- Autism Speaks Transition Toolkit
 - Organization for Autism Research Transition Guide
 - College Internship Program
 - Rochester Institute of Technology: Guide to ASD in Higher Education
 - Autistic Self-Advocacy Network: Navigating College Handbook
- Segall, 2016

- ### What do “transition” programs do?
- #### Example: College Internship Program
- Academic advising
 - Study hall
 - Tutoring
 - Career counseling and strategies
 - Cooking, shopping and life skills instruction
 - “Health club”
 - Individual therapy
 - Social thinking groups
 - Theory of mind groups
 - Executive functioning groups
 - Sensory understanding and intervention
- Segall, 2016

- ### Take-aways
- Avoid the assumption that “unexpected” behavior is intentional or willful – instead, get to know the student and engage in positive problem solving and setting concrete expectations
 - Connect students with ASD to campus resources
 - Emory students with ASD have tremendous gifts and talents – they have great potential but also need support: Take an active and positive role in their success!
- Segall, 2016

Contact Information

Matt Segall, Ph.D.
mattsegall@emory.edu



Emory Autism Center
404-727-8350