Neurodiverse Journeys:
Transitioning to Post-Secondary Education For Students on The Autism Spectrum

“Patience and diligence, like faith, remove mountains.”
-William Penn

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The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network
http://www.autisticadvocacy.org
Presentation Overview

• 1. My Background

• 2. Postsecondary Education & Autism: An Expanding Focus

• 3. Transitioning to College/University: Secondary Planning
  • College Search
  • College Planning & Preparation

• 4. Transitioning to College/University: Pre-Campus & Campus Planning

• 5. Transitioning to Vocational & Trade School

• 6. Resources & References
1. My Background

“What is important is the assurance that my life will continue to hold adventure, purpose, and goals...

To continually reach higher is to live; to always strive to be a better person, or to make the world around you a better place, or to enrich your life or the lives of those you love is the secret to that most elusive of goals: a sense of accomplishment.”

—Drizzt Do’Urden
1. My Background: Overview

- Asperger’s Autistic Individual

- Live in Central PA
  - Ph.D. Program @ Penn State (College of Information Sciences & Technology)
  - State College, PA

- Originally from Northern NJ
  - Lake Community
  - 2 Older Siblings
  - Very Supportive Parents
1. My Background: Siblings & Me

“We are born into the world of nature.

Our second birth is into the world of spirit.”

−Bhagavad Gita
1. My Background: Lake Community in NJ
1. My Background: Lake Community in NJ [2]
1. My Background: College of IST @ Penn State
1. My Background: Contacting Me

- Multiple Ways To Reach Me
  - Email: srobertson@ist.psu.edu (include *autism* in subject line)
  - IM: hppalm (AIM), srobertson@ist.psu.edu (WLM), psuresearcher (YIM), aspiegeek (Google)
  - Cell Phone: Available upon request
  - In-Person: Conferences, in State College, etc.

- Available to Answer Questions

- Available to Speak to schools/conferences/organizations/events on request
1. My Background: Passions & Interests

- The Autism Spectrum & Disability Support
- Community Service
- Computers, Technology, & Videogames
- Fantasy & Science Fiction Novels
- Sports (esp. Baseball, Hockey, Football, Tennis)
- Photography
- Teaching & Public Speaking
- Scholarship & Research
- Walking & Hiking
1. My Background: Autism Experiences (QBE)

• Research
  • Dissertation Focus: Transition To College For Autism Spectrum Students

• Advocacy & Service
  • Organizational (e.g. ASAN, ASCEND, BAS 21+ Workgroup, Autism Higher Education Foundation)
  • Speaking, Mentoring, Writing, & Teaching

• Personal Experiences (as an Asperger’s Autistic individual)

• Friendships
1. My Background: My Perspective on Autism

• Neurological Diversity
  • Neurological Differences in Sending, Understanding, & Interacting w/ the World

• 3 Primary Areas:
  • 1. Language, Communication, & Social Understanding
  • 2. Sensory Integration & Motor Skills
  • 3. Executive Functioning

• Major Challenge From Living in Non-Autistic World (The Disability)
  • Sensory Demanding, Illogical, Socially Ambiguous, Information Overloading
1. Perspectives on Autism from other Autistic Self-Advocates

“Autism is a way of being. It is pervasive; it colors every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter—every aspect of existence.

It is not possible to separate the autism from the person.”
– Jim Sinclair, founder of Autism Network International & Autreat

“It all started in elementary school when I realized that I wasn't like everyone else....Sometimes I wish I were like everyone else, but not really. Because I believe people should be respected for being different because we're all different in our own ways.”

– Joshua Yuchasz, Michigan high school student
1. My Background: Shyest Student in High School
1. My Background: Shyest Student
2. Postsecondary Education & Autism

“I decided that what I really enjoyed was thinking about the human mind, language, and philosophy...I wanted to get a university degree.”

−Darius, *Aquamarine Blue 5*
2. Postsecondary Education & Autism: An Expanding Focus

- Increase in Autistic Students Attending Postsecondary Education
  - More Identified Autistic Students In K-12 (+ cultural understanding, + diagnosis, etc.)
  - Stronger K-12 Supports for Autistic Students in K-12
- Increase in Media Attention (newspapers, magazines, TV, etc.) & Academia Attention
- Increase in Organizational & University Efforts
  - Organizational: Autism Higher Education Foundation, Penn Autism Network
  - University: ex. Fairleigh Dickinson, Marshall, Minn/UConn/BostonU, Keene St., Oakland University, etc.
2. Postsecondary Education & Autism: An Expanding Focus->Media Attention

- The Billings Gazette: “An Asperger’s Life,” April 2004
2. Postsecondary Education & Autism: An Expanding Focus->Emerging Academia Attention

• 2008: “Supporting More Able Students on the Autism Spectrum: College and Beyond”

• 2007:
  • “Evaluating The College Transition Needs Of Individuals With High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders”
  • “Support Services For Students With Asperger's Syndrome In Higher Education”
  • “Creating Supports for College Students With Asperger Syndrome Through Collaboration”

• 2006:
  • “Coping With Problems In Social Interaction In Asperger's Syndrome: An Investigation of Persons With Higher Education”
2. Postsecondary Education & Autism: An Expanding Focus

- Books (e.g. Prince-Hughes, 2002; Palmer, 2005; Harpur, Lawlor, & Fitzgerald, 2004; etc.)

  - See Resources & References (section 6)

- Magazine Articles from the Autism Community & The Educational Community

  - ex. in *Autism Asperger’s Digest*, in *Autism Spectrum Quarterly*
2. Postsecondary Education & Autism: Organizational Efforts

- Autism Higher Education Foundation (www.autismhighereducationfoundation.com)
  - Founded in 2007
  - Transitional & Postsecondary Education Opportunities in Music, Fine Arts, & College Academics
- Penn Autism Network (www.med.upenn.edu/pan/)
  - Emerging Community of Practice of Colleges/Universities
  - Sharing Resources, Information, etc.
  - Affiliated w/ University of Pennsylvania’s Social Learning Disorders program
2. Postsecondary Education & Autism: University Efforts

- Fairleigh Dickinson University: COMPASS Program
- UConn/U Minnesota/Boston Univ.: Pilot Program @ University of Minnesota
- Keene State College: Asperger’s Study Group
- Marshall University: Model College Program/Autism Training Ctr.
- Oakland University: Pilot Program
- Western Kentucky University’s Kelly Autism Program
- AHEADD
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.

Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”

–Henry David Thoreau
### 3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning

**College Search->Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Majors &amp; Minors Academics</th>
<th>Campus Offerings &amp; Extracurriculars</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type (2 Yr./4 Yr., online)</td>
<td>Disability Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Size</td>
<td>Student Body Size</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location (Rural, Urban)</td>
<td>Scholarships &amp; Costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance &amp; Traveling</td>
<td>Residential Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>Public/Private</td>
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3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
College Search->Recommendations

• Wide Range of Schools (at least 5/6+)
  • Variance in Competitiveness, etc.

• Student Buy-In & Comfort Essential

• Visit Schools 1-2 times before applying & after acceptances

• Creative, Flexible, & Open-Minded

• Maintain a College Search Notebook/Binder

• Start Looking Early (Sophomore/Junior Yr. or Earlier)

• Choice Not In Stone: Deferment (if needed), Transfer (if needed)
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning

College Planning & Preparation

- 1. Organizational & Study Skills
- 2. Living Skills
- 3. Public Transportation Experience
- 4. Mental Health Support
- 5. Safety Skills
- 5. Self-Advocacy Skills
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning

College Planning & Preparation -> Organization & Study Skills

• Time Mgmt. & Scheduling w/ PDA/Calendar/Dayplanner, Watch, etc.
• Planning Work & Study Periods w/ Checklists, Outlines, Note Sheets, etc.
• Balancing Passionate Interests/Activities & School w/ Timed Activity Periods
  • Timer w/ Auditory Ring or Visual Signal for Activity Period
• Practicing Note-taking & Summarizing Information
  • Highlighters, Index Cards, Note Sheet in Parallel w/ Reading
• Pacing Work (over multiple days)
• Seeking Help when having difficulties
  • Professor, Tutoring, Disability Services
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
College Planning & Preparation->Living Skills

• Eating
  • Practice Visiting/Ordering @ Restaurants
  • Practice w/ Planning, Scheduling, & Organization of Home Meals

• Health & Hygiene
  • Listing of Daily & Weekly Health/Hygiene Activities & Checklists
  • Guidelines for Knowing When You’re Sick & What To Do
  • First Aid & Health Kits

• Waking Up w/ Alarm
  • Practice w/ Using Alarm in Morning & For Activities
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning College Planning & Preparation->Living Skills (2)

• Laundry
  • Practice w/ all aspects of laundry process (washer, dryer, folding, etc.)
  • Make a Laundry Manual For Steps Involved

• Clothing Selection
  • Tying Clothing Selection to Weather Temp, Precip, etc. (Rules of Thumb)
  • Matching Clothes (Rules of Thumb)
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
College Planning & Preparation->Public Transport

- Practice Riding Local Transportation
  - Local Bus/Trains/Cabs/Shuttles
    - Learn about using schedules, ticket purchasing, etc.

- Practice Riding Long Distance Transportation
  - Greyhound/Trailways Bus, Amtrak, Airplane, etc.
  - Practice w/ packing, ticket booking, scheduling, etc.
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
College Planning & Preparation->Mental Health

• Learn explicit Stress/Relaxation activities
  • Ex. Deep Breathing Exercises, Mediation, Affirmations, etc.

• See a Counselor Weekly/Biweekly

• Exercise & Physical Activities
  • Individual & One-on-One Activities

• Sleeping Schedules & Routines
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
College Planning & Preparation->Exercise & Physical Activities

• Recommended Individual Exercise
  • Walking, Running, Jogging, & Hiking
  • Bowling
  • Swimming, Diving, Fishing
  • Golf

• Recommended One-on-One Exercise
  • Tennis/Racquetball/Squash/Table Tennis (Ping Pong)
  • Pool
  • Fencing
  • Martial Arts
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
College Planning & Preparation->Safety Skills

• List of General Safety Tips & What To Do In Common Emergencies

• General Strategies for What To Do When Afraid

• Keeping Personal Possessions Safe

• Keeping Personal Info Safe

• Traveling Safety
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
College Planning & Preparation->Self-Advocacy Skills

• Self-Advocacy (def):
  • Voicing What We Want & Need In Life
  • Purpose: a) Satisfying Our Own Needs & Wants; b) Satisfying Our Community’s Needs & Wants

• 4 Components of Self-Advocacy (Test et al., 2005):
  • **Knowledge of Yourself**: Strengths, Challenges, Being Autistic, Interests/Passions, Preferences, etc.
  • **Knowledge of Your Rights**: Civil & Legal Rights
  • **Communication & Social Skills**: Listening, Articulating, Negotiation, Compromise, Assertiveness, etc.
  • **Leadership Skills**: Take Direction in Advocating for a Community’s Needs & Wants
3. Transition to College/University: Secondary Planning
The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)

• Nonprofit Organization Established in 2006

• Founded & Led By Autistic Self-Advocates collaborating w/ Non-Autistic Allies (e.g. Parents, Educators, Researchers, Occupational Therapists, etc.)

• Website: http://www.autisticadvocacy.org

• Focus: Increasing understanding, support, & acceptance of autistic individuals (across the spectrum & age range) through a neurodiversity perspective

• Initiatives:
  
  • Autism & Educational Policy/Support; Autistic-Run Social/Support Groups; Speaking Services; Advisory & Consulting Services;
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning

“The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving.”

−Oliver Wendell Holmes
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning

Overview

• Develop a Resource Notebook/Guide Book
  • Practice Lessons Based on Guidebook

• Collaborate w/ Disability Services

• Identify & Seek Support for Additional Needs Beyond Disability Services

• Visit Campus Multiple Times To Get Acquainted w/ Buildings, Campus Offerings, etc.

• Interacting w/ Leaders @ Campus/Clubs & Activities
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning
Developing A Resource Notebook

- Put together Binder/Notebook w/ extensive info (ongoing & dynamic)
- Couple w/ Pre-College Lessons (scheduled, calendar)
- Some Notebook Sections:
  - Day-to-Day Living (w/ Campus Maps), Housing, & Dining, & Safety
  - Academics
  - Disability Services
  - Contacts (@School, @Home, etc.) w/ phone #s, email addresses (including for emergencies)
  - Leisure, Recreation, & Extracurricular
  - Financial
  - Technical & Technology
  - Traveling & Transportation
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning

Recommended Interest Clubs

- Student Publications (Newspaper & Yearbook)
- Student Radio Station
- Chess Team
- Gaming & Videogaming
- Music, Arts, & Photography Related
- Engineering & Technology Related
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning Recommended Service Clubs

- Special Olympics
- Alpha Phi Omega
- Big Brothers, Big Sisters
- Best Buddies
- Student Red Cross Club
- Rotaract Club
- Habitat 4 Humanity
- Collegiate 4-H Club
- Circle K
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning
My Club Experience @ College

- Sophomore Year Joined *The Rensselaer Polytechnic*

- Stayed Thru Graduation

- 3 Editor Positions (Assoc. News Editor, Features Editor, Contributing Editor) + Reporter
  
  - Authored ~200 Articles (News, Features, Sports, Editorials)
  
  - Hundreds of Interviews

- Copy Reading & Mailing Subscriptions
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning

Disability Services

- Some Standard Services
  - Extended Time On Tests
  - Test-Taking in a Quiet Room
  - Additional Notes & a Note-Taker
  - Books on Tape
- Driven by Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)
  - No Equivalent of IDEA at Postsecondary Education Level
  - Disability Community May Seek Future Legislation (i.e. Postsecondary Education With Disabilities Act)
    - May Not Happen For Some Years
4. Transition to College/University: Pre & On Campus Planning

Additional Support Needs (Beyond Disability Services)

- Counseling Services (one on one)
  - Weekly Counseling for Student (Anxiety, Self-Esteem, etc.)
  - May need Local Counseling (outside college) w/ session limits (often 12/yr.)
- Mentoring
  - Mentoring by older student (junior or senior)
  - May need to pay the mentor for mentoring the autistic student
- Organizational & Study Skill Assistance
- Classroom/Campus Sensory Accommodations
- Tutoring
- Other Assistance (ex. Making Friends on Campus)
5. Transition to Vocational School/Trade School

“Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.”

− Goethe
5. Transition to Vocational School/Trade School Overview

• Trade School Fit Based On:
  • Student’s Passionate Interests
  • Student’s Individual Strengths
  • Consideration of Individual Challenges
• Fit to Jobs (Competitive Employment if possible)
• Buy-In & Enthusiasm for Trade from Student
• Support from Professionals working in Trade & Studying in Trade
  • Meet w/ & talk to workers in the trade (& pursuing the trade)
  • Visit local & regional companies employing the trade
  • Have student develop rapport w/ mentor from the trade
5. Transition to Vocational School/Trade School
Some Trade Options For Autism Spectrum Students

- Artist, Photographer, or Writer
- Technician
- Maintenance Worker
- Mechanic
- Drafting
- HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning)
- Culinary
- Network & Systems Admin
5. Transition to Vocational School/Trade School Certifications

• Professional Certification(s)
  • Requirement for Working in Many Trades
  • Test Thru Professional Association or Agency
  • Multiple Choice Exam (often)

• Hands-on Understanding vs. Conceptual Understanding
  • Autistic Student May Have Stronger Hands-On Understanding
  • Certification Exams Test Conceptual Skills (Usually)

• Challenge in Learning Conceptual Skills
  • Creative in Relating Conceptual to Hands-On Understanding
  • May Need Lots of Practice & Extended Tutoring on Conceptual Skills
Striving Forward

“Energy and persistence conquer all things.”

–Benjamin Franklin
6. Resources & References:
Books on College/University & Autism


• Palmer, A. (2005) Realizing The College Dream With Autism Or Asperger Syndrome


6. Resources & References: Books on Advocacy & Autism
