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Amherst

Meeting the Library Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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FITCHBURG STATE
UNIVERSITY

Meeting the Library Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Session Overview

- ▶ Background & Process
- ▶ Initial Outputs
- ▶ Student Employee Training
- ▶ Assessing the Module
- ▶ Next Steps

Background

► Statistics:

- ★ estimated 2% of college students have ASD (White, Ollendick, & Bray, 2011)
- ★ Fitchburg State: 34 students registered with Disability Services (8.7% of students registered with DS & 0.58% of total student population). **Number is underreported.**

► How we got started:

- ★ [Project A+.](#) [Serving Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Academic Library](#)
- ★ Working group members

Our Goal

Provide high quality services and study spaces that support the learning of students on the spectrum

Process

- ▶ Met bi-weekly starting in January 2019
- ▶ Used the Project A+ manual to assess the library environment

Project A+

Serving Students with
Autism Spectrum Disorder
in the Academic Library



The project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We are grateful to the Institute of Museum and Library Services for their support and funding.

- ▶ The Library Environment
- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Social Interaction
- ▶ Technology
- ▶ Employment

Process

- ▶ Created a list of characteristics and sensitivities
- ▶ Consulted with 2 BCBA's and University's Director of Disabilities

Initial Outputs

→ Environmental Scan

- ◆ Ex. can we add dimmer switches to study rooms so lighting levels can be adjusted?

→ Signage Review

- ◆ Ex. Make signage for Library classroom more prominent

→ Communication Strategies

- ◆ Using closed versus open ended questions

Student Employee Training Not Meant To:

- ▶ Diagnose ASD in Patrons
- ▶ Highlight as different or “Other” Individuals on the Spectrum



Student Employee Training Goals:

- ▶ Provide Tools to Address Communication Breakdown
- ▶ Discuss Characteristics and Raise Awareness, Foster Empathy



Student Employee Training Challenges:

- ▶ Yearly In-Person Training:
Attendance and Repetition
- ▶ New Student Employees
- ▶ COVID-19

Training Modules in Blackboard

- ▶ Presented to Library Staff (Aug 2020)
- ▶ Vetted by Director of Disability Services (Feb 2021)

Blackboard Training Modules



Training Modules Timeline

- ▶ No Fall 2020 Training
- ▶ Student Employees Completed March/April 2021
- ▶ Training Assessment Completed April 2021

Student Training Assessment

- ▶ IRB Exemption

- ▶ Goal

Gain student employee perspectives on modules and input about the Library and University Environment



▶ Student participation

100% of student employees volunteered to be interviewed

▶ Layout, Timing and Navigation

► Content of Training

- ★ What did they think was the purpose of the training
- ★ What they liked
- ★ What they didn't like
- ★ Did they find it engaging

"I think it was to give all library workers a better insight on how to handle a situation and if someone on the spectrum comes into the library - overall how to make them more comfortable and have a better experience in the library"

▶ Campus and Library Environment

- ★ Library 1st Floor Computer/Printer Areas
- ★ Campus Dining Areas, Game Room
- ★ Campus Events, Rock the Block, Sports Events

▶ Suggestions for Improvement?

- ★ Keep Computers Spaced Out, Move one Printer
- ★ Provide Noise Cancelling Headphones
- ★ Online Streaming of Events
- ★ Spacing and Pathing for Outdoor Events
- ★ Buddy System

► Applying Strategies at the Library or Elsewhere

“Sometimes people have rough days. So being patient, having a kind tone, not aggressive. You don’t always know if someone has a disability or not.”

“A patron asked a question, but wouldn’t look at me. I didn’t know what to do at the time, so I would try to make eye contact and I thought they were being rude, but after this [training] I can see that they weren’t being rude. I would have used different strategies.”

▶ Continue this Training?

"Yes, I think when they first get hired. Not a lot of jobs in the world teach you to talk to someone who might look different or have a disability, you're not taught that."

▶ Who Else?

- ★ All Students
- ★ Anyone in Customer Service
- ★ Tour Guides
- ★ Faculty

"Every student on campus should take this training. Our generation knows nothing about autism."

Next Steps...

▶ Proposed Changes to the Training Modules

- ★ Module/Exercise for “when to apply strategies”
- ★ Discussion Board Change: Post before reading comments
- ★ Module on Person First Language
- ★ Additional Training for other Disabilities

Next Steps...

▶ Student Suggestions

- ★ Staff and student employees wear a nametag
- ★ Offer more information about the entire range of the Autism Spectrum
- ★ Offer this training to newly hired student employees
- ★ Use patience!

"Staff and students should wear a nametag, it's very important to someone on the spectrum. It identifies people they can reach out to and offers a friendly atmosphere."

Next Steps

- ▶ Implement recommendations from environmental scan and signage review
- ▶ Explore expanding the training to other departments on campus
- ▶ Openly license our content for others to use

Questions

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Link to presentation:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HxaP5gv-itXuOy8oh4s9lQ0gkCSGL0NL/view?usp=sharing>



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