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CASE STUDY
Offering an Academic Library Internship Opportunity for an Individual on the Autism Spectrum

APRIL 1, 2021
Inclusive Library Programmes for Users with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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CONTEXT

CASE STUDY

REFLECTIONS

Context: Neurodiversity & Neurodivergence

neurodiversity

variation / range of ways in which humans…think, learn, and relate to others
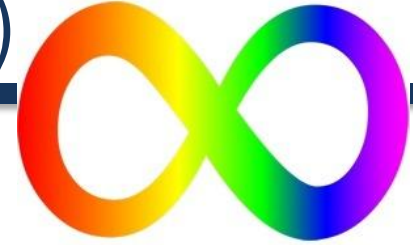
neurodivergence

when an individual's brain function style "does not fall within the dominant societal standards"

e.g., ASD, ADHD, dyslexia

Honeybourne, 2019

Context: Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

autism spectrum disorders (ASD)

a difference in brain functioning that impacts how an individual perceives the world and socializes with others throughout their life

"spectrum" refers to the broad range of traits as well as the range of intensity of trait effects

Honeybourne, 2019

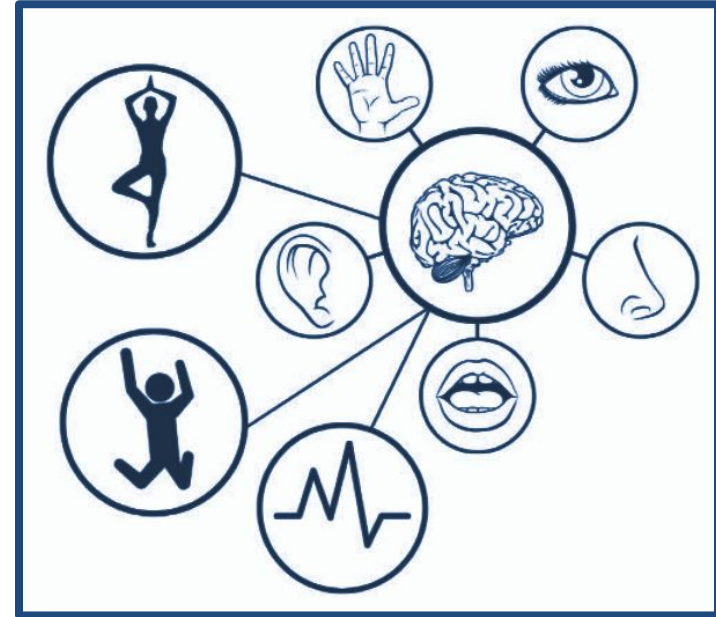# Everyone on the autism spectrum is different!

some common challenging traits

attention/organization

communication/social cues

sensory activities

sensitivity to change

Honeybourne, 2019; LaTrobe University

Context: Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (cont'd)

some common strengths

reliability

logical reasoning

novel problem-solving

deep expertise in
    areas of interest

Honeybourne, 2019; LaTrobe University

Context: Challenges Faced by Teenagers and Adults with ASD

"High rates of unemployment or under-employment"

"Low participation in education beyond high school"

"Majority continue to live with family members or relatives"

"Limited opportunity for community or social activities—nearly 40% spend little or no time with friends"

"Changes in their ASD symptoms, behaviors, and co-occurring health conditions during adolescence and young adulthood"

CDC, 2020

Context: ASD & Higher Education

2016 US prevalence: 1 in 54

↑ diagnosis + ↑ early intervention = ↑ educational attainment

challenge of accessing ASD-specific resources on campus
(self-disclosure, lack of official diagnosis)

campuses need training

more research needed (inclusive of ASD individuals!)

CDC, 2020; Walton & McMullin, 2019

Context: ASD & Student Employees in Libraries

"Data show that not only do individuals with ASD have unusual difficulty in finding jobs, but they often end up working in positions that do not meet their educational levels." — Walton & McMullin, 2019

(Roux et al., 2013; Shattuck et al., 2012; Baldwin, Costley, & Warren, 2014)

Studies "...suggest that a majority of college students with ASD are not only capable of securing and maintaining employment but are also balancing it with their coursework."

— Walton & McMullin, 2019

ASD-specific considerations for student employment

communication challenges in frontline roles

adjustments to new routines

time management, interruptions

sensory experiences

shared workspaces

Walton & McMullin, 2019

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The world needs different kinds of minds to work together

— *Temple Grandin*

CONTEXT
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REFLECTIONS

Case Study: Community Context—LOGAN Center

Case Study: Institutional Context

University of Notre Dame

private, Catholic, R1 institution

8,731 undergraduates

3,950 graduate students

1,396 instructional faculty

nd.edu/about

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Case Study: Student Employment Context

Internship versus Student Employee Position

"At the foundation...is the tenet that the internship is…
not simply an operational work experience that just
happens to be conducted by a student."

— National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018

Case Study: Internship Timeline

JULY
Initial inquiry

AUGUST
Initial meeting

SEPTEMBER
Detail finalization

OCTOBER - MAY
Internship period

Case Study: Internship Funding

all email communication from the NFCDS was reviewed first by the job development specialist

not a frontline position, but there were still opportunities for practicing social interactions

information about the intern's communication preferences was provided to the NFCSD team members prior to the intern's start date

the intern was highly reliable and punctual

occasional transportation / weather issues (just as occasionally come up for any employee/intern!)

Case Study: Internship In Practice—Time Management

customization options while on duty

adjust the window blinds

adjust the lighting

open or close the door

play music or wear headphones

our organization does not have uniforms

Case Study: Internship In Practice—Shared Workspace

Specialty Technology Room

Case Study: Internship Check-In

email feedback from the intern in December

"My favorite part is coding...because I like using computers…. It is challenging and I like to try new things."

"Figuring out what part of the coding that is incorrect is also a tough aspect."

"I learned quite a bit and I feel a little more comfortable doing these kits now."

Case Study: Internship Continuation & Conclusion

email feedback from the intern in December

> "I want to thank you for the opportunity to let me work on these project kits for the past couple months. I also want to thank you for the opportunity to bring me back next semester."

Internship ran from October 2018-May 2019

CONTEXT
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Reflections

limited information resources

critical component for creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment

change people's perspectives on working with people with ASD spectrum

drive broader commitment and support in the effort

Recommended Resources & References

Recommended Resources

Neurodiversity Hub Employer Resources

- Autism communication tips (PDF)

- Quick tips for employers: sensory sensitivities (PDF)

- Simple adjustments you can make to be more inclusive of employees on the autism spectrum (PDF)

- Strengths-based job matching (PDF)

- Understanding autism (PDF)

- Understanding autism for employers (PDF)

Recommended Resources

UK Home Office Designing for Accessibility Posters: easy-to-read dos and don'ts for a variety of digital accessibility considerations, including individuals on the autism spectrum

Rochester Institute of Technology Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education: [Employer Guide to Supervising Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)](PDF) (PDF)

[**Walton & McMullin ACRL 2019 Conference Presentation**](PDF) (PDF)**:** Contains numerous recommendations for adapting library interactions and instruction sessions to be more inclusive of individuals with ASD.

PROJECT PALS

"This course, designed by experts in both the library and autism fields, is a series of four independent, self-paced instructional modules that are intended for librarians and library staff to learn how to better serve their users on the autism spectrum."

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