Guidance for Graduate Students on the Autism Spectrum

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Workshop Objective

The main objective was to provide guidance to Graduate Students with ASD on dealing with the demands of Graduate School.

Some challenges for ASD Grad Students:
- Difficulty establishing social networks
- Speaking up and participating in Seminars
- Responsibilities that come with TAing
- Balancing important quarter deadlines
- Preparing for and scheduling one’s Qualifying Exams
- Asking for help
- Traveling for research
- Stepping outside of one’s comfort zone
- Dealing with meltdowns

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

The National Institute of Mental Health purports that, “According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), a guide created by the American Psychiatric Association used to diagnose mental disorders, people with ASD have:

- Difficulty with communication and interaction with other people
- Restricted interests and repetitive behaviors
- Symptoms that hurt the person’s ability to function properly in school, work, and other areas of life

Autism is known as a ‘spectrum’ disorder because there is wide variation in the type and severity of symptoms people experience.”

Autism in 2018

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in their report from the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (ADDM) published in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Surveillance Summary (MMWR) on April 26, 2018, the prevalence of Autism has increased by 15% from 1 in 68 children (8 year-olds) to 1 in 59.

Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience autism at different levels and are referred to as being “on the autism spectrum” or “on the spectrum.” Persons with ASD are not all the same and may have very unique needs based on the intensity of their condition.

Graduate Students with ASD attending UC Davis have unique individual needs.

Booklet – Guidance for Graduate Students on the Spectrum

Another goal of this project was to create a booklet titled Guidance for Graduate Students on the Autism Spectrum, to be disseminated on campus upon completion.

This booklet is intended to provide guidance to Graduate Students with ASD attending the University of California, Davis (both incoming and continuing) and will be made available through Graduate Studies and the Student Disability Center. With autism becoming more prevalent, more Graduate Students with ASD will be seeking higher education. The expectations and responsibilities for Graduate Students can be challenging. I hope that this booklet will offer help and encouragement to students on the Autism Spectrum as they make their way along their academic journey. The information presented is from my own perspective, based on my own personal experience as a Graduate Student with ASD.

Potential Next Steps

- Update and expand on Booklet as necessary
- Make similar information available at the Undergraduate level
- Support and expand on Workshop and other activities on campus for Graduates on the Autism Spectrum

Acknowledgement

Thank you to Dr. Teresa Dillinger, Dr. Jean-Pierre Delplanque, and the Professors for the Future program for their support and patience. Thank you to my Major Professor Dr. Inés Hernández-Avila and the Native American Studies Faculty and Staff for their support.

I was inspired to do this project for others like myself and those who may be interested in this topic.