

## Fast Facts for Faculty

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

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#### Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication.

#### What You Might Notice

The following list is designed as a general overview of autism spectrum disorders while providing characteristics you may see with a student who has this diagnosis:

- May exhibit awkward eye contact, posture, and/or gestures
- Difficulty with changes in classroom, seating, and syllabi
- Sensory sensitivity (lights, sounds, touch, smells)
- May have delayed responses
- May misunderstand tone of voice, jokes, facial expressions, sarcasm, and other subtle messages
- Oddities in vocal pitch, volume, intonation
- May be easily distracted, particularly in long classes
- Strong, narrow interests
- May come across as argumentative, rude, or monopolizing
- Displays literal and concrete thinking patterns
- May use calming or focusing strategies such as rocking, tapping, or pacing
- May become easily overwhelmed

#### Strengths and Struggles

The following strengths and struggles are generally shared by students who have an autism spectrum diagnosis, although each individual student experiences unique strengths and challenges.

##### Strengths

- Above average to superior intellect
- Passionate commitment to ideas
- Strong sense of equality and justice
- Exceptional talents in one specific area
- Diligent with routine work and excellent memory
- Strong pursuit of knowledge within areas of interest
- Good visual and spatial learners
- Original ways of solving problems

##### Struggles

- Initiating/sustaining effort
- Setting boundaries
- Working in groups
- Initiating, planning, organizing, and carrying out tasks
- Seeing others points of view
- Understanding social rules
- Assessing priorities and performance
- Asking for clarification or assistance
- Interpreting vague instructions
- Abstract concepts and seeing the “big picture”

# Strategies

The following are recommended strategies for ways to better assist students with autism spectrum disorder to have a successful experience both in and out of the classroom:

## Strategies

- Provide direct feedback, set clear boundaries
- Allow breaks during class
- Consider allowing a laptop for note taking
- Avoid cold-calling in class
- Avoid idioms, metaphors, and sarcasm
- Consider assigning group roles
- Provide visual learning tools when possible (pictures, charts)
- Supplement oral instructions with written instructions
- Explain the purpose of the assignment
- Utilize syllabus and note changes as soon as possible

## Important Note

This information is available in alternate format upon request. Please call the Office for Disability Services at (724) 738-4877.

It is also available at <http://www.sru.edu/ods> and Accommodate faculty resources tab at <https://sru-accommodate.symlicity.com/>.

Public requests for accommodations through the Office of Disability Services can be made by visiting the following link: [https://sru-accommodate.symlicity.com/public\\_accommodation](https://sru-accommodate.symlicity.com/public_accommodation).