**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

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

# Process

► Created a list of characteristics and sensitivities

► Consulted with 2 BCBAs 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:
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