Faculty Fact Sheet

Accommodating Students with Asperger’s

Overview: The following information is provided to assist you in working with students diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome. Students who identify to the SA office as being diagnosed with Asperger’s may present with varying degrees of difficulty in social situations. Although all students are encouraged to discuss their specific needs in the classroom with each instructor, students with Asperger’s may not be able to communicate effectively; thus, an open dialogue with SAO may be requested as an accommodation until such competence is attained.

Description of Syndrome: Asperger’s Syndrome is a neurobiological developmental disorder at the high functioning end of the Autism spectrum. Essential features, according to the DSM-IV, are severe and sustained impairment in social interaction and the development of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activities. There are no clinically significant delays in language or cognitive development. The condition affects people in different ways, but everyone with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome shares a difficulty in making sense of the world. The support needs of each individual will vary.

Characteristics
- Struggle with social and communication skills, including asking for assistance
- Difficulty interacting with peers/working in groups
- Lack of conversational reciprocity/seeing others points of view
- Poor understanding of social cues, body language, feelings
- Commonly miss jokes, irony and metaphors
- Marked affect in facial expression, vocal inflection, gestures, eye contact
- May have delayed motor skills, appearing awkward
- Possible writing difficulties, including initiating, planning, and carrying out tasks
- May present with repetitive and/or unusual patterns of behavior, interests
- May exhibit under or over sensitivity to stimuli such as light, sound or touch

Strengths
- Often have average or above average intelligence
- Memorize rote material easily and quickly
- Think in a visual way
- Learn chunks of information quickly—especially concrete concepts
- Understand and abide by rules and regulations—honest, even to a fault
- Usually are precise and detail oriented
- Can be extremely focused, if task at hand is pleasurable

Suggested Instructional Techniques and Possible Accommodations
- Get to know your student early in the semester
- Keep instructions clear; be blunt and provide direct feedback
- Define course requirements and expectations clearly; orally and in writing
- Provide concrete structure and guidelines
- Avoid cold-calling in class
- Provide a predictable environment with consistent routines
- Announce any changes to class or syllabus as soon as possible
- Use concrete visual methods as much as possible

Information adapted from http://www.dc.edu/ and www.nas.org/uk