Online Engagement Strategies for Autistic Students

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Jaime Butler, M.S. (she/her)
We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects…

**Access and Inclusion**

and

**Civility and Respect**

…this week and in all aspects of our organization.
About Us

• Presenter Introduction
  o Amy Rutherford (She/Her)
  o Michelle Rigler (She/Her)
  o Jaime Butler (She/Her)

• University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Mosaic Program
  o Founded in 2008
  o Comprehensive support program
Language

• AHEAD Conversations about Word Choice
  o Person First Language (Person with Autism)
  o Identity Language (Autistic Person)
Objectives

• Provide some information about barriers presented to individuals with Autism during the pandemic
• Offer some creative strategies for student engagement that we have employed in online life
• Provide some resources that can be utilized on different campuses
Our Numbers

2020-2021
• Started Fall 2021 with 41 students; 12 new students
• 9 remote; 25 on campus housing; 7 commuting
• Staff impacts (maternity leave, internships, etc)
• Transition between Fall 2020 and Spring 2021
  ○ Lost 4 students, 3 returning

2021-2022
• 54 students enrolled; 14 new students
• All returning to campus in the fall
In Their Own Words

• “As an autistic adult, the sudden loss of my comfortable work routine was difficult. Coupled with the constant media coverage of illness and death, global lockdowns, and panic buying, the anxiety that I.... live with on a daily basis had peaked.” (Houting, 2020)

• “I didn’t realize how important that incidental human contact was to me. It was so incidental that it never really registered on my radar until it was gone.” (Pellicano, 2020)
In Their Own Words

• "Like many autistic people, I have a strong sense of right and wrong, and this has caused some conflict with friends and relatives who haven’t taken social distancing seriously." (Borrell, Nordling, Wickelgreen, Zaraska & Zeldovich, 2020)

• "Neurotypicals are, for the first time, experiencing the overwhelming fear of uncertainty that I experience every day. The unanswered questions. Not knowing who to believe. Going outside now requires a checklist, a plan of action, a script and a ritual, something I’ve done since I was old enough to walk." (Borrell, Nordling, Wickelgreen, Zaraska & Zeldovich, 2020)
COVID-19 RELATED BARRIERS
Barriers: Information

• Lack of Information/Misinformation
  o Confusing National & Local Guidance
• Information constantly changing without warning
• Autistic individuals reported problems with limited guidance due to resources shutting down; expressed need for autism-specific info and advice (Jones et al., 2021)
Barriers: Mental Health Impacts

• Already increased rates of mental health impacts
• Increase in worries about their pets, work, getting medication and food, and their own safety/security.
• Felt more relieved from social stress; yet experienced the loss of social contact as difficult.
• Stressed about the loss of routines
Barriers: Online Learning

- Online Learning
  - Navigating online learning
  - Steep Learning Curve (profs, students, staff, etc)
  - Multiple Systems In Different Places
  - Lack of Structure
    - Asynchronous
    - Inconsistent Meeting Times
Barriers: Executive Functioning

• Executive Functioning
  o Extra Steps
  o Time Management
  o Online Distractions
Smart But Scattered Executive Skills

- Response Inhibition
- Working Memory
- Emotional Control
- Flexibility
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation

- Stress Tolerance
- Planning
- Organization
- Time Management
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Metacognition
Barriers: Economic Inequities

• Employment
  o Economic Inequities
    ▪ Lack of access to resources (computers, wifi, etc)
  o Already Significantly Unemployed or Underemployed
ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES
Engagement Strategies: Education

- Covid-19 Education
  - Pre-Semester Training/Q&A
    - Communicate University Changes
    - Strategies for Staying Safe
    - Social Considerations
  - Pre-Semester Parent Roundtable
    - Outlined what we were doing to ensure student safety & engagement to alleviate parental anxieties
Social Distancing Pizza Party
Communicating Zoom Strategies

- Pinning instructor (can pin multiple)
- Hiding Self-View
- Offering feedback through private chat
- Advocating for not screen sharing
- Troubleshooting when students were using not screen sharing as a way to disengage
Continuing the Conversation

- Consistently reviewing how to be safe in coaching throughout the semester
- Communicating updates as we knew them in a variety of mediums
- Modeling good habits (keeping our space clean, following protocols)
Engagement Strategies: Adapting Existing Components
COACHING
Before Start of Year: Student Preference Survey

How would you prefer to engage with Coaching in the fall 2020 semester?

- Online (via Zoom and Canvas): 38.24%
- In person (face-to-face): 26.47%
- Hybrid (Combination of remotely and face-to-face): 26.47%
- No preference: 8.82%
Coaching

• Virtual Coaching w/ In-Person Options
• Keeping Them Engaged
  • Create meeting rules of engagement
  • Let them lead (share screen)
Coaching

- Physical Space
  - Scan of their space
  - Distraction reduced space
- Including Check-In as part of the process
  - Social engagement
  - Wellness strategies
End of Year Coaching Feedback

I feel like the hybrid style coaching was effective this semester

- Strongly Agree: 61.54%
- Agree: 26.62%
- Neutral: 3.65%
- Disagree: 7.69%
Open Coaching

• Virtual and In-Person Options
• 2 hours daily during weekdays
• Assistance & Accountability
• DRC also adopted open coaching model
## End of Year Open Coaching Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I utilized open coaching this semester</td>
<td>69.23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not utilize open coaching this semester</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# STUDY HOURS

![Image of a time clock and a time card]

**MOSAIC STUDY HOURS TIME CARD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Signature</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Total Number of Hours:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class/Assignments Worked On During Study Time</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clock In &amp; Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**AHEAD**

Association on Higher Education And Disability®
### Study Hours

- **Online Tracking System**
  - Tracks Time & Assignments
  - Saw an increased engagement in this component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clock in:</td>
<td>Clock in: 3:09</td>
<td>Clock in: 4:15</td>
<td>Clock in:</td>
<td>Clock in: 5:53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clock out:</td>
<td>Clock out: 5:33</td>
<td>Clock out: 5:46</td>
<td>Clock out:</td>
<td>Clock out: 6:40</td>
<td>Physical Geology and Chemistry, Chemistry Lab and Geology Lab, Co</td>
<td>What did you work on?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
End of Year Study Hours Feedback

I prefer to track my Study Hours:

- Online: 56%
- Card System: 28.00%
- Both Online and Card System: 16.00%
Peer Mentoring

• Virtual or In-Person
• Points of Connection/Engagement
• Mentor course
• Weekly Reports
Beginning of Semester Preferences

- Peer Mentoring
  - No Preference: 8.82%
  - Online (Via Zoom/Canvas): 23.53%
  - Hybrid (Combination of Remotely and Face-to-Face): 26.47%
  - In Person (Face-to-Face): 41.18%
End of Year Mentoring Feedback

I feel like I was able to connect with my mentor in the hybrid platform this semester

- Strongly Agree: 50.00%
- Agree: 30.77%
- Neutral: 7.69%
- Disagree: 3.85%
- Strongly Disagree: 7.69%
Classes

- Virtual
- Challenge with developing year one cohort rapport
- Using it as an opportunity for them to develop self-advocacy skills
- Zoom/Engagement Etiquette
- Attendance was consistent
Beginning of Semester Preferences

• Mosaic Class
  o No Preference: 8.82%
  o Online (Via Zoom/Canvas): 32.35%
  o Hybrid (Combination of Remotely and Face-to-Face): 44.12%
  o In Person (Face-to-Face): 14.71%
End of Year Class Feedback

| Strongly Agree: 48.00% | Agree: 28.00% | Neutral: 12.00% | Disagree: 12.00% |

I feel like the hybrid style Mosaic Course was effective and engaging.
Professional Development
Engagement Strategies: Social Engagement
Social Engagement

• Some Things We’ve Done
  o Silent Disco
  o Game Night
  o Open Mic Night
  o Cooking Tutorials
  o Meet My Pet

• Consistency is Key
  o Weekly Events
  o Monthly Challenges
• Virtual Scavenger Hunt
  • Broke off into breakout rooms in teams
  • Found items in their spaces
• Session Activity
  • Let’s do a Scavenger Hunt!
  • Find items
  • Winner gets a prize
Online/Virtual Resources

FREE:

• Discord
• Scattegories- https://scattergoriesonline.net/
• Pokemon Go
• Kahoot!
• Among Us (free on phone)

PAID:

• JackBox TV
• Exploding Kittens
• GooseChase
• Disney+ (GroupWatch with up to 7 people)
• Netflix Party
Engagement Strategies: Student Involvement
Student Involvement

• Mosaic Events Committee
  o Leadership development
  o Conflict management
  o Budgeting
  o Project planning
• More Student Buy-In
Engagement Strategies: Wellness/Wellbeing
• Wellness Initiative
  o Building wellness/well-being into routines
  o Physical health
  o Mental health
  o Healthy relationships

• Building Wellness Checkpoints into Coaching
Engagement Strategies: Campus Collaborations
Campus Collaborations

• Shared events
• Asking to be a part of accessibility conversations
• Professor education about unique impacts
Campus Collabs: Things to Consider

- Educating others on how to create accessible online events
- Collaborations also equal less stress on program resources
Engagement Strategies: Academics
Academic Strategies

- Systems for Project Management
  - Excel Assignment Tracker
- Creating Structure
  - Schedules & Routines
- Accountability Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Due Date/Time</th>
<th>Clarify</th>
<th>Submission Location</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>complete</td>
<td>Unit 1/a</td>
<td>MATH</td>
<td>due 8/25 at 11:59pm</td>
<td>watch videos associated with the assignment in order to complete</td>
<td>via web assign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td>Unit 1/b</td>
<td>MATH</td>
<td>due 8/25 at 11:59pm</td>
<td>watch videos associated with the assignment in order to complete</td>
<td>via web assign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Process</td>
<td>01. Matlab as a Calculator</td>
<td>ENEE</td>
<td>due 8/25 at 11:59pm</td>
<td>Download Matlab and complete tutorial</td>
<td>via canvas</td>
<td>Ask professor for more guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complete</td>
<td>Q3: Essay on Computer Chip Manufacturing</td>
<td>ENEE</td>
<td>due 9/8 at 11:59</td>
<td>Input specific coding into platform</td>
<td>via canvas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Process</td>
<td>Q3: Simulation Calculator in MATLAB (Extra Credit)</td>
<td>ENEE</td>
<td>due 9/8 at 11:59</td>
<td>3 pages on a particular topic within computer chip</td>
<td>via canvas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Service Provider Impacts

• Work-Life Balance
  o Challenge of working where you live
  o Boundaries
  o Pro: Being able to do your laundry in between meetings

• Creating Workplace Structure
  o Learned we can do work remotely; trying to adapt that for the fall with one day remotely
  o Recognizing that some people don't do well working remotely
Good Things…

• Online Options Have Created:
  o Increased attendance for components
  o Increased engagement with DRC services
  o Increase engagement with community mental health resources

• Student Resiliency
Good Things...

• DRC
  • Started using online scheduling link so saw a decrease in amount of scheduling phone calls
  • Saw an increase engagement in access appointments
  • Decrease in no-shows for both access appointments and academic coaching
  • More efficient student meetings
  • Only area that wanted face to face meetings were those that wanted AT training
Long-term Implications

• “I can only hope that this might engender empathy for our experiences, and prompt more allies to work together with us to build inclusive, accessible communities when this crisis eventually ends” (Houting, 2020)

• “Imagine how much closer you would be to having a meltdown if this pandemic and time of sheltering at home was not measured in months but in years or decades…. remember that many Autists are living every day on what should be emergency reserve energy—not just during this crisis, but all our lives.” (Sparrow, 2020)
Moving Forward

• Offering virtual options for in-person events, meetings, etc.
• Educating staff and faculty on what we’ve learned and how we can best serve disabled students and colleagues
  ○ Universal Design can exist
• Assist students in adapting back to majority in-person classes
Sources


Session Evaluation

• Your feedback helps shape future programming.

• Thank you for attending!