

5-2014

# Autism in Transition from High School to College

Stephanie Grace Bledsoe  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.uark.edu/rhrcuht>

---

## Recommended Citation

Bledsoe, Stephanie Grace, "Autism in Transition from High School to College" (2014). *Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders Undergraduate Honors Theses*. 29.  
<http://scholarworks.uark.edu/rhrcuht/29>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders at ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [ccmiddle@uark.edu](mailto:ccmiddle@uark.edu), [drowens@uark.edu](mailto:drowens@uark.edu), [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu).

Running head: AUTISM IN TRANSITION

Autism in Transition from High School to College

Stephanie Bledsoe

Program in Communication Disorders

Honors Thesis

Spring 2014

Keywords: Autism, College, Students, Faculty

### Abstract

This research project explored the transition from high school to college for individuals who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview that focused on perceived goals for supporting students with autism who are college bound. Six faculty/staff members – two from a local high school and four from a major university – and two college students with autism spectrum disorder participated in the study. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word. The analysis consisted of identifying common themes across the participants. The faculty and staff at the college and high school level expressed many more concerns about the different issues students with autism face on a college campus in comparison to the answers provided by students. Time management and organization, emotional issues, and social issues were discussed in great detail. However, the categories relating to issues with academics and classroom behaviors, issues with the students' ability to be introspective, executive function issues, and parental issues were addressed by the faculty and staff members. It is important to note the overlap in the first three categories of issues, but it is also important to acknowledge the fact that there were many issues addressed by the faculty and staff that were not mentioned by the students.

## Autism in Transition from High School to College

Making the transition from high school to college is an overwhelming and daunting time for everyone. Learning how to adjust to the newfound freedom and independence that comes with moving away from home and beginning life in “the real world” always becomes a trial and error period for everyone who encounters it.

Imagine what this transition is like for someone whose social skills and communication abilities are hindered by a disorder they have been struggling with their whole life. Imagine how difficult meeting new people, adjusting to living in a dorm room, and participating in every day class activities would be for someone who struggles with knowing how to begin a conversation or for someone who is unable to comprehend non-verbal language.

These issues are very real to the many college students who have been diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Because early diagnoses of autism has increased so much in recent years, many children have been provided with treatment throughout their life that has made post-secondary education an obtainable goal for their future (Vanbergeijk, 2008). However, with the appropriate support system and the willingness to work to overcome obstacles, there is no reason an individual with autism cannot be successful as a college student.

The purpose of this study is to explore the transition from high school to college for individuals who have been diagnosed with autism. The goal is to learn about the motivation for attending college, the struggles faced with the transition into college, and preparation for this transition, during their first semester as college students.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **What is Autism?**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a range of incredibly complex neurodevelopment

disorders that affects an individual's communication abilities, causes social impairments, and characteristically involves repetitive and stereotypical behavioral patterns. Disorders that fall on the autism spectrum make up a group of disabilities that have become the most common neurodevelopmental disorders nationwide, affecting 1 in 110 children (McPartland, 2012). Although scientists and medical professionals are unsure of the exact cause of autism, it is believed that both a genetic predisposition and environment plays a role. Researchers have discovered many different areas of the brain that appear irregular in patients with ASD, as well as a number of genes that are affected by the disorder (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke). While these findings are quite impressive and intriguing, further research for the exact cause of autism is necessary. Autism is a very individualized disorder, and the severity and symptoms associated with ASD vary significantly among each individual. This phenomenon is the reason why ASD is considered to be a spectrum disorder. Individuals who fall on the spectrum can range from mild, to moderate, to severe.

Although ASD cannot be diagnosed until a child reaches the age of three, there are many signs that often appear at an earlier age, which causes parents to notice a difference in their child when compared to typical developing children. Examples of these signs include, no pointing or babbling by the age of one year old, no single words by the age of 16 months, poor eye contact, and an obsession with lining up objects (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke). As the child gets older, many other signs often appear that are quintessentially associated with ASD. Examples of these include an inability and lack of desire to make friends, an impaired ability to maintain conversations with others, lack of social play and imagination, and a strict adherence to routines and patterns (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke). Once a parent realizes their child varies from typically developing children, they often

seek help from a medical professional who will then be able to provide the family with a diagnosis.

The most universally known diagnostic criteria for ASD is under the regulations of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (DSM-IV), despite the recent release of the DSM-5 in May 2013 (McPartland, 2012). The majority of individuals living with autism today were diagnosed under the DSM-IV criteria, and many relate with the terms provided during their diagnostic process. Because of this, this study will use the terms and guidelines set in place by the DSM-IV in order to maintain continuity with the individuals' knowledge of their own disorder and the terms used throughout the study.

Under the DSM-IV, issues associated with autism are categorized in a basic triad, which includes the impairment of social interaction, social communication, and restricted behavior patterns (Wing, 2010). The most distinctive change between the DSM-IV and DSM-5 is the fact that under the DSM-IV ASD were divided into subgroups. These subgroups include, Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, Childhood Degenerative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder- Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Due to the goals of this study, focus will lay primarily on what is known as high functioning autism, which typically includes individuals who have been given the diagnoses of either Asperger's Syndrome or PDD-NOS.

**Asperger's Syndrome.** In order for an individual to be diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome in accordance to the DSM-IV, they must "meet at least two symptoms of impaired social interaction and at least one symptom of restricted, repetitive behavior" (Duffy, 2013). This differs drastically from other ASD disorders because an individual with Asperger's will not display delays in their communication abilities. An individual who was given the diagnoses of

Asperger's Syndrome will lack social skills but will fall under the range of average to above average intelligence. Typically, an individual with Asperger's will know a great deal about one very narrow subject (Duffy, 2013). It is evident that Asperger's Syndrome is a very specific form of Autism and will require a very different approach when an individual is seeking treatment than those diagnosed with other forms of ASD.

**Pervasive Developmental Disorder- Not Otherwise Specified.** There is no set criteria for the diagnoses of Pervasive Developmental Disorder- Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and it is often thought of as “a catchall diagnosis for children who do not fit the criteria for one of the other pervasive developmental disorders” (Walker, 2004). Many researchers feel that PDD-NOS is the most common diagnoses for individuals who fall on the spectrum because it can accommodate children whose symptoms may not fit perfectly into the specific criteria required for the diagnoses of other disorders. This caused PDD-NOS to become what is known as “a diagnosis of exclusion” (Walker, 2004).

### **What Makes College Different than High School?**

There are many factors that come with the transition from high school to college, making it a difficult and daunting time for everyone. Moving away from ones hometown, living independently, and the newfound freedom that comes with college life all work together to make this time of transition a difficult time for everyone. Although, many students find academic work to be an adjustment, the stress of social interactions and building relationships with their peers often proves to be the most difficult adjustment first year students must make (Hicks, 2008). High school provides and incredibly structured environment for students. Parents and teachers often times work closely together in order to tailor the curriculum or situation for a specific student. However, once a student reaches college, the unstructured atmosphere that comes with

choosing class times and setting aside time for homework, juggled with their social and extracurricular activities is quite an adjustment (Dente, 2012).

In high school, teachers will often times be aware of the needs of an individual with autism and approach them when they feel they may need assistance in class. Teachers will give students reminders about assignments and provide students with missed information when a child misses class. In college however, although professors are usually willing to help in any way they can, they will expect a student to seek help themselves when assistance is needed, they will typically expect students to keep up with assignments, and when class is missed they will expect students to ask their peers what was missed during their absence (Autism Speaks 2013). These differences are only a few of the issues found in a college classroom that have the potential to be difficult for an individual with autism to adjust to. There are also many issues associated with social skills and life skills that may prove to be difficult for the individual with autism.

Living independently may be one of the biggest adjustments an individual on the spectrum will have to face when they attend college, and it will be essential that they are provided with hands on instruction on how to adjust to the freedom that comes with being a student in college. Training in areas such as room organization, budgeting funds, shopping, and transportation may allow a student with autism to make the transition into college much more smooth. It may also be incredibly important for individuals with autism to receive some supplemental training in learning skill and important executive function skills. Teaching processes such as “planning, organizing, prioritizing, and decision making related to each life skill” will give students on the spectrum the skills necessary in order to be successful in a post-secondary educational setting.



### **What Makes College Difficult for Individuals with Autism?**

Because making the transition from high school to college is difficult for almost all young adults, it is easy to imagine that the transition proves to be even more complex for individuals who fall on the autism spectrum. Despite the fact that those with high functioning autism, Asperger's Syndrome, or PDD-NOS may fall under the range of average or above average intellectually, there are many aspects of college that prove to be a challenge for these individuals. In order to accommodate these challenges, colleges and universities must first be aware of areas that will prove to be difficult for these students.

At a level of higher education, students are forced to become much more responsible and proactive in regards to almost every aspect of their lives. This proves to be an issue with typical young adults, but can be an overwhelming issue for individuals with autism. Students with disabilities are required to manage their own needs of accommodations and provide documentation as proof of their disability, all without the aid of their parents or guardians (Dente, 2012). The pressure put on an individual to possess the skills needed to manage their own life and their impairment is an incredibly difficult task for many individuals on the spectrum.

Students with autism also often time struggle with the social aspects of college life. An individual's social skills are often affected greatly by their disorder, causing interactions with professors and students to be uncomfortable or awkward for everyone involved. Other social concerns that may prove to be difficult for individuals on the spectrum include doing their laundry, developing a budget, and learning how to properly interact with their roommates (Vanbergeijk, 2008). In order to overcome these obstacles, students who fall on the autism spectrum must be coached through different social encounters in many different environments in

order to learn how to act in a given situation.

College life is also full of instances that typically developed individuals would be able to handle without much of a second thought based on their social intuition. These unwritten rules make up what is known as “The Hidden Curriculum” of an environment, which allows an individual to make subconscious decisions about how to “proceed successfully within a given context” (Myles, Trautman, & Schelvan, 2004, p. 1). Individuals who suffer from a social-cognitive disability will lack the natural capability to analyze different situations and be able to react in a socially acceptable way. However, with support and guidance an individual will be able to learn and adapt to the customs of world around them.

Mental health is also a very large concern when dealing with students who have been diagnosed with autism. These students will more than likely have “limited insight to their own emotional states and have even more limited insight into the emotional states of others” (Vanbergeijk, 2008). Post-secondary education is filled with countless stressors, and part of the knowledge gained from college is learning how to manage the stresses of life. For individuals with autism, managing the emotional aspects of college life is incredibly difficult and often times required the help of trained professionals. By seeking counseling and help in order to manage the emotional aspect of life, individuals with autism will be able to deal with their own problems as well as have a better grasp on how to interact with others.

### **Summary and Questions of the Study**

As can be seen from the review of the literature, autism is a complex disorder. Additionally, formal schooling is a complex series of activities that require new learning and conceptual understanding as individuals move from high school to college. The purpose of this study is to explore the transition from high school to college for individuals who have been

diagnose with autism. The specific questions of the study are as follows.

1. What are key issues perceived by students in the change from high school to college?
2. Are the key issues identified by the university faculty and support staff similar or different from those expressed by high school staff members?
3. Are the key issues identified by students similar or different from those expressed by teachers, faculty, and support staff?
4. Are there differences between the perceptions of students who are part of a support program for students with an autism spectrum disorder verses students with autism who are not in such a program?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Three students who were members of a support program for students with an autism spectrum disorder, three students with autism who are not part of a support program, university faculty members who study autism, two staff in a university's the university center for students and two teachers or staff members from local high schools who work with autistic students were sought through nomination for participation in this study.

### **Materials**

A semi-structured interview was used to gather data. This included questions regarding issues that were part of adjusting to a college living-learning situation, understanding associated with the hidden curriculum within class settings, and involvement with peers in social situations.

### **Procedures**

All nominated individuals were contacted about the study. Those that agreed to participate were seen at a location of their choice, e.g., their office or a centrally located

conference room, for the semi-structured interview. This interview was audio-recorded for later analysis. The analysis included verification of intended content by having each participant read and affirm that the transcript captured their intended meaning. The final analysis consisted of identifying common themes across the participants.

## **Results**

### **Demographics**

The final participants for this study included two first year students on the autism spectrum who were part of a support program for students with autism; two faculty members who work with students with an autism spectrum disorder; two staff members at the university center for students; and two speech language pathologists from a local high school who work with individuals with autism.

The students (SP-1 and SP-2) who participated in this study were both members of a support program for students with an autism spectrum disorder. In order to be a member of this program, students must possess the cognitive ability to be successful in post-secondary education but require additional assistance in order to participate in college life that is essential for obtain a college degree. Students in the program have been diagnosed with high functioning autism, Asperger's Syndrome, PDD-NOS, or non-verbal learning disabilities. Both student 1 and student 2 had completed one full semester of college courses and were enrolled in their second semester as college students.

Two university faculty members who work with students with autism were interviewed in this study. One of these (UF-1) worked closely with students in the support program as an academic coach. Coaches within the program work with students in all aspects of their lives as college students. They provide not only academic assistance to their students but give social

support and encouragement when needed. The second faculty member (UF-2) was involved in administrative aspects of the support program.

Two university staff members who worked in a student center for educational access were also interviewed. Both had advanced degrees and had been employed for a number of years in their positions that required they work closely with students with disabilities to ensure appropriate accommodations. Two speech language pathologists from a local high school were interviewed during this study. HS-1 and HS-2 both had master's degrees in speech language pathology and were certified clinicians by the American Speech and Haring Association. They work closely with high school students with autism in order to prepare them for post-secondary education. They address anxiety prevention, organizational skills, and preparing them academically and socially for life on a college campus.

### **Coding of Interviews**

Each interview was audio recorded. These were then transcribed word-for-word and sent to each of the participants in order to verify that the participants expressed their intended meaning in their interview. After verification the primary researcher read the interviews and identified each issue expressed by the participants. Since a number of issues were indirectly discussed by the students with autism, the primary researcher summarized the indirect issues in her own words for inclusion in the data set. Abstracted themes across participants were then grouped in order to determine primary and secondary themes. This corpus of data was used to answer the questions of the study.

### **Question One**

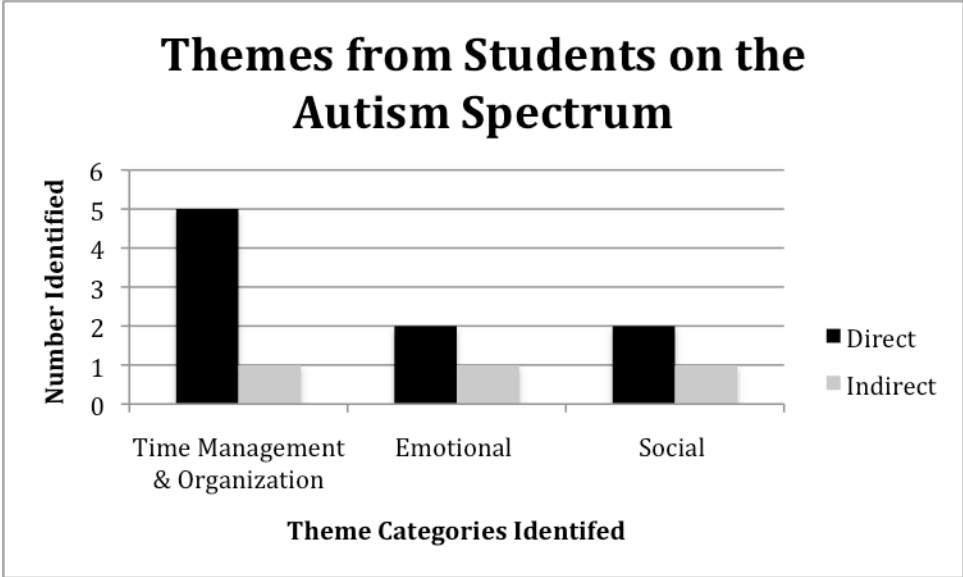
The first question of the study asked what are key students with autism would identify in the change from high school to college. The two interviews with students with autism were used

to assess and answer this question. The researcher found that the three overall themes expressed by students included issues with time management, emotional issues, and social issues.

Issues with time management and organization were the primary concerns expressed by students. The two students combined directly mentioned issues related to time management five times during their interview and one time indirectly with a narrative explaining a particular type of video game. SP-1 made comments about how busy his schedule was this year and how hard it was to remember smaller details when there was so much on his plate already. SP-2 stated that he had to learn to balance work time and relaxation time so he would be able to accomplish everything that needed to be done.

Two secondary themes emerged from the analysis. The first of these concerned emotional issues.. The students directly expressed emotional issues twice during their interviews and indirectly once. For example, SP-1 claimed that his two biggest adjustments when coming to school were that he now had to plan out his own day instead of having someone there to plan his activities for him, and that when he had a stressful day he had to learn how to handle that stress on his own. The second of these themes concerned social issues. The students directly expressed social issues twice in their interview and indirectly once by completely ignoring the social aspect of college all together. SP-1 stated that he an initial fear when moving to college. That same student went on to express his belief that the social aspect of college was not really important at all. (see Table 1)

Table 1



**Question Two**

The second question of the study asked whether or not the issues addressed by college faculty and staff members who worked in a student center for educational access were similar to those issues addressed by high school personnel. In order to answer this question, the two interviews conducted with college faculty and student center staff members were compared to the interviews with high school speech language pathologists.

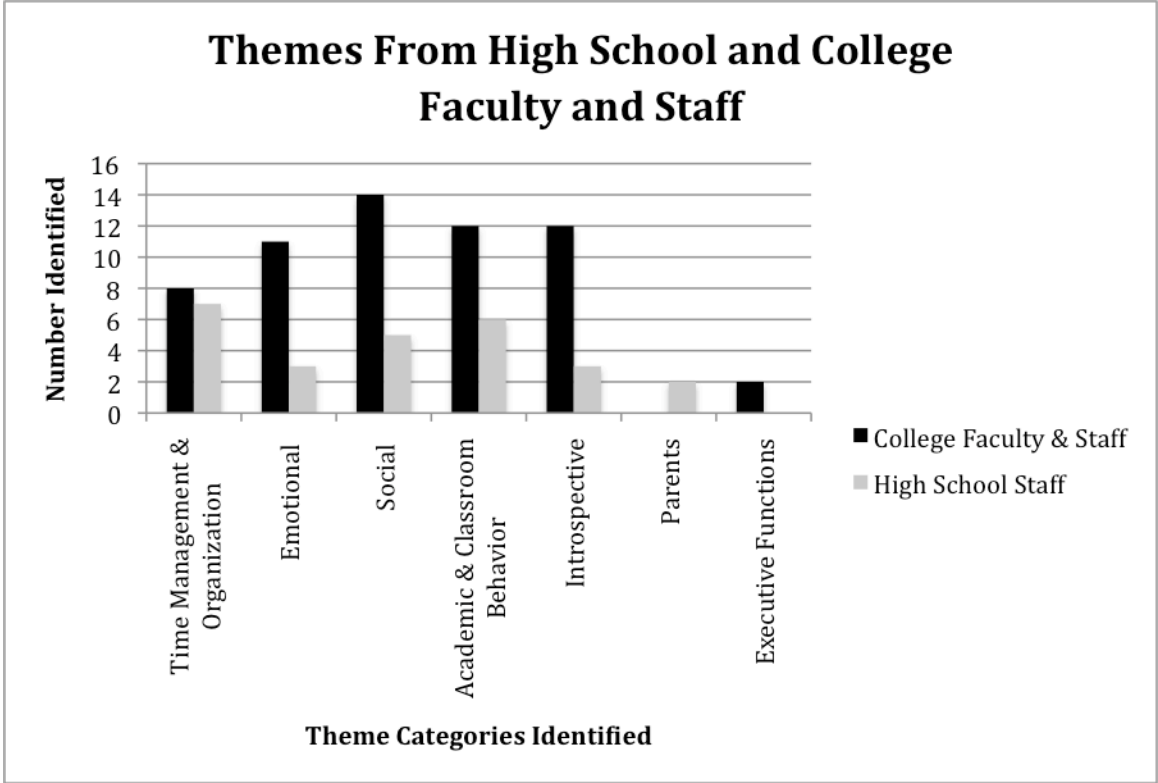
The researcher found that the faculty and staff at the college level and the high school speech language pathologists had many of the same concerns regarding issues related to time management and organization, emotional issues, social issues, academic and classroom behavior issues, and issues related to the difficulty that students might have with introspective. The only drastic difference between the college and high school interviews were that the high school speech- language pathologists discussed many issued related to the parents of students with autism that faculty and staff at the college level did not address. Conversely, the university faculty and staff members addressed issues with executive functioning skills to a greater extend that did the high school professionals.

The college faculty and staff members identified a total of 8 issues related to time management and organization. Their biggest concerns included student's ability to develop skills to manage their day-to-day schedules and keep their schoolwork and living spaces organized. College faculty and staff identified 11 emotional issues that might arise for students with autism. These issues included anxiety and feeling overwhelmed to a point where there is a chance that the students might completely shut down. Social issues were also a concern to this group. They identified 14 social issues that might arise ranging from adjusting to living with roommates, communicating with their professors and various staff members, and working on group projects. Academic and classroom behavior issues were concerns that arose throughout the interviews. Twelve issues were expressed in the interviews including navigating the hidden curriculum of a classroom, students obsessing over their work, neglecting their schoolwork, and adjusting to the changes in classroom setting of college in comparison to high school classes. Concerns with the student's ability to be introspective caused many concerns for this group as well. The faculty and staff members gave 12 examples of issues in this category ranging from an inability of a student to recognize when they need help to struggling with understanding that they have the tools and means to overcome obstacles and barriers that may arise through their time in college. Lastly, two issues with executive functions were addressed. These included waking up in the morning and being able to carry out essential tasks of daily life. The high school speech-language pathologists addressed many of the same issues as the faculty and staff at the college level. Although the high school staff did not speak about executive functioning skills, they brought up seven issues relating to time management and organization, three issues related to emotional needs, and five social issues. They also spoke about six issues relating to academic and classroom behavior concerns and two issues about the introspective abilities of these students.



The biggest different between the interviews with high school faculty and staff were the fact that they spoke a great deal about parents and how issues regarding parents affect the students themselves. (see Table 2)

Table 2



**Question Three**

The third question of the study combined the findings of question one and two in order to take the student’s identification of key issues and compare them to the faculty and staff’s key issues. As reported in the results for the first question of this study, the students with autism who were interviewed identified their primary issue to be time management and organization. They also identified emotional issues and social issues. While these three categories of issues were addressed by all of the faculty and staff members, there were a number of other issues addressed by the faculty and staff members that were not identified by the students.

Academic and classroom behavior issues, issues with the students' ability to be introspective, issues with executive function skills, and parental issues were all things that the faculty and staff felt were key issues in the transitional period of a student with autism that were not addressed by the students.

#### **Question Four**

The fourth question of the study addressed whether or not there were differences between the perceptions of students who are in a support program for students with an autism spectrum disorder versus students with autism who are not in such a program. Because both students with autism who were interviewed are members of a support program, the data collected could not be used to answer this question.

#### **Discussion**

The purpose of this research project was to explore the transition from high school to college for individuals who have been diagnosed with autism. By speaking with students who are in the process of making the transition into post-secondary education as well as faculty and staff at both the high school and college level, a variety of experiences were explored. Results suggest that while high school and college faculty and staff have similar themes that have guided their preparation of high school students for college, the students in talking about college challenges talk about a more limited set of concerns. The need for time management and a schedule was a common theme for all participants. Other themes identified by faculty and staff that were not addressed in the interviews by the college students. These similarities and differences will now be discussed.

Students with autism were very quick to acknowledge difficulties they faced in relation to time management and organization. Both students claimed that it was often times difficult to

manage their busy schedule and prioritize one assignment or test over another when preparing to study. Apart from the time management issues, students were much less open to discussing other issues they face on a college campus. Although emotional issues and social issues were mentioned by the students, they did not indicate that these were recognized hardships in their current lives. The faculty and staff at the college and high school level expressed more concerns about the different issues students with autism face on a college campus in comparison to the answers provided by students. Time management and organization, emotional issues, and social issues were discussed in great detail. However, the categories relating to issues with academics and classroom behaviors, issues with the students' ability to be introspective, executive function issues, and parental issues were addressed by the faculty and staff members. It is important to note the overlap in the first three categories of issues, but it is also important to acknowledge the fact that there were many issues addressed by the faculty and staff that were not mentioned by the students.

Vanbergeijk (2008) stated that many individuals with an autism spectrum disorder have a limited ability to fully understand their personal emotional states. This became apparent when comparing the issues expressed by students on the spectrum with issues expressed by faculty and staff. One of the biggest concerns faculty and staff at both the high school and college level expressed dealt with the student's inability to be introspective. UF-1 stated that many college students on the spectrum struggle with acknowledging when they need help. The faculty member went on to state that even if the student is aware that help is needed, they often times do not make the connection about how to contact the appropriate person in order to seek that help. Encouraging and training college students who fall on the autism spectrum to really try to understand their own emotional needs and issues and even the needs of other might drastically

improve an individual's ability to overcome the issues expressed by the faculty and staff members. Based on the literature, it seems reasonable that college students with autism would struggle significantly with their ability to label and express the issues they faced during their transitional period from high school to college. These issues identified by the high school and college faculty and staff members are supported by the literature (VanBergeijk, 2008). The number of issues identified by the students was drastically lower than the issues identified by the other participants, and can perhaps be explained by an inability to introspectively identify the issues that they face.

In order for an individual to receive an autism spectrum diagnoses, they must show symptoms relating to communication difficulties, social impairments, and will typically display stereotypical and repetitive behavioral patterns (McPartland, 2012). Communication and social issues were thoroughly discussed in each of the interviews conducted throughout this study and often time tied together under the category of social issues assigned by the researcher. Every faculty and staff member from both the high school and college level addressed the issue of living on campus and adjusting to new living conditions. Adjusting to life in a dorm room and all of the changes that come with living on campus can prove to be difficult for most college freshman. Students with autism face these same difficulties and stresses but have the issues and stresses from their disorder that only heighten the anxiety of adjustment. The stress of making social connections and building relationships are some of the most difficult adjustments to make as a first year college student (Hicks, 2008). Because students with autism struggle to make social connections and struggle with their communication abilities, the entire social context of college life proves to be an issue for students on the spectrum.

Stereotypical behaviors of individuals with autism often include difficulty adjusting to

changes in one's environment. SP-1 expressed issues with adjusting to last minute changes or requests from professors. Small changes in the environment or deviation from the original plan can prove to be incredibly difficult and frustrating for many individuals who fall on the autism spectrum. UF-1 stated that coaches and faculty members who work with, college students with autism directly address this issue. Their position is that although these students may still not like variation from their usual schedule, it is important to gain the skills in order to make adjustments when things in everyday life do not go as planned. Both high school speech-language pathologists expressed this same issue. HS-2 specifically stated that even changing their class schedule from semester to semester at the college level and having to adjust to new professors every few months could cause serious anxiety for many students on the spectrum.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The intentional focus of this study was to explore key issues present during the transitional period from high school to college for students with autism from a variety of qualified sources. One of the primary limitations of this study was the small number and lack of variety in the participants. All students and university faculty were members of the same university and, therefore, were only able to speak for a small segment of the autism population. The student participants were both members of a support program for students with an autism spectrum disorder. Therefore, their experience with transitioning from high school to college might be different than students with autism who do not have access to such a program. Seeking a greater number of participants from the autistic population that have a variety of backgrounds, would have improved the outcome of the results found.

The interview questions used in this study also resulted in limitations. More detailed rather than open ended questions for the student interviews would have improved the outcomes

of this study. This would perhaps have encouraged the students to go into more detail when answering. In addition, presenting the students with a greater number of questions that were more specific may have encouraged answers that were more reflective and introspective.

### **Future Directions**

The conclusion of this study opens up many opportunities for related studies in the future. The most important direction that could be taken would be a longitudinal study to explore how students with autism progress throughout their college experience. College is a time of evolution and growth and having the ability to follow students with autism spectrum disorder throughout their time in a university setting would lead to a better understanding of how those individuals are able to grow and adjust.

## References

- (2013, August 21). Autism fact sheet. Retrieved from National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke website: <http://www.ninds.nih.gov>.
- Dente, C. L., & Coles, K. P. (2012). Ecological approaches to transition planning for students with autism and asperger's syndrome. *Children and Schools Advance Access*, 43(1), 27-36.
- Duffy, F. H., Shankardass, A., McAnulty G. B., & Als, H. (2013). The relationship of asperger's syndrome to autism: A preliminary EEG coherence study. *BMC Medicine*, 11(175).
- McPartland, J. C., Reichow, B., & Volkmar, F. R. (2012). Sensitivity and specificity of proposed DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 55(4), 368-383.
- Myles, Trautman, & Schelvan. (2004). The hidden curriculum: Practical solutions for understanding unstated rules in social situations. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.
- Walker, D. R., Thompson, A., Zwaigenbaum, L., Goldenberg, J., Bryson, S. E., Mahoney, W. J., Strawbridge, C. P., & Szatmari, P. (2004). Specifying PDD-NOS: A comparison of PDD-NOS, asperger's syndrome, and autism. *J. Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*, 42(2), 172-180.
- Wing, L., Gould, J., & Gillberg, C. (2011). Autism spectrum disorders in the DSM-V: Better or worse than the DSM-IV?. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 32, 768-773.
- VanBergeijk, E., Klin, A., & Volkmar, F. (2008). Supporting more able students on the autism spectrum: College and beyond. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 38(7), 1359-1370.

## Appendix A

## Semi-Structured Interview Questions for College Students with Autism

1. Why did you decide to attend college?

*Clarification/follow-up questions/prompts:* College students decide to come to college for many reasons. Some need to have a college degree in order to pursue their career goals, others don't know what they want to do so they think college will point them in the right direction, and others come to college because their parents told them they needed to.

2. Do you feel that your high school prepared you for college?

*Clarification/follow-up questions/prompts:* Tell me some of the things you did in high school that helps you now in college. What is an example of advice you received from teachers or advisors in high school that helps you now in college?

3. Have you set any goals for yourself either before you came to college or since you have been in school? These can be social as well as academic.

*Clarification/follow-up questions/prompts:* Many students who come to college set goals for themselves that they hope to achieve before graduation. Some of these goals could be academic. For example, some students might hope to graduate with above a certain GPA or to get an A in one of their really hard classes. Other goals may be directed more towards their social lives or extracurricular activities. For example, some students could set a goal to make a new group of friends, to become involved in a club or activity on campus, or to even find a potential spouse. What would you like to accomplish while here?

4. What things did you have to adjust to that were different here at the university?

*Clarification/follow-up questions/prompts:* College students sometimes struggle with adjusting to the changes that come with moving off to college. Some find living with a roommate in a dorm room hard, while others really struggle with waking up to attend class. Others have trouble keeping up with their schoolwork and even being unsure of how to study for tests.

5. Was it difficult to take responsibility for arranging accommodations (if needed) yourself rather than having them arranged for you?

*Clarification/follow-up questions/prompts:* In high school your teachers and parents may have worked together to make sure you were given assistance as needed to succeed. However, when students are in college, they are given full responsibility for discussing any issues with professor or asking peers for clarification on anything discussed in classes. Have you struggled with the independence that is expected of you as a college student? Have you noticed a big difference between high school and college in this aspect?

6. *(Only for students who are enrolled in a support program)* How has the support program helped you make the transition from high school to college an easier process?



## Appendix B

## Semi-Structured Interview Questions for High School Teachers

1. What does your school do in order to prepare students with autism for post secondary education?
2. Is there anything you do that you feel is the most beneficial in preparing students for college?
3. What are some things that your school might not offer to students with autism that would be beneficial in helping them prepare for college?
4. What issues do you feel should be addressed with students in high school versus issues that parents should address with their children in order to prepare them for college life?
5. What issues do you expect students with autism to identify when discussing making the transition from high school to college?
6. Do you ever help students set goals for themselves when they decide attending college is the next step for their lives? What are common goals you see students set for themselves?
7. Do you feel that it is difficult for students with autism to adjust to the independence that comes with college life and all of the responsibilities of making accommodations pertaining to their disorder, that maybe parents or teachers had always taken on the responsibility of doing up until this point?

## Appendix C

## Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Staff in the Center of Educational Access

1. What are some of the issues that you feel are the most challenging for students with autism in the university?
2. What accommodations are offered to students with autism in order to make their college experience more positive?
3. Do you see greater success for students who are a part of the Autism Support Program versus students who are not?
4. Do you feel that students with autism are generally well prepared for college life coming out of high school?
5. What skills do you feel are essential to have in order for a student with autism to be successful at the college level?
6. Do you feel that it is difficult for students with autism to adjust to the independence that comes with college life and all of the responsibilities of making accommodations pertaining to their disorder, that maybe parents or teachers had always taken on the responsibility of doing up until this point?

## Appendix D

## Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Faculty Members who work with Autism

1. What are some of the issues that you feel are the most challenging for students with autism in the university?
2. What accommodations do you feel are necessary in order for a student with autism to be successful at the college level?
3. What skills should a high school student possess before they should consider attending college?
4. Do you feel that setting goals is an important aspect in order for a student with autism to be successful in college?
5. Do you feel that the Autism Support Program has made the transition from high school to college more manageable for students with autism? Would all students with autism benefit from this program?

## Appendix E

## Guide For Coding Themes

1. Audio recorded each interview
2. Transcribe interview
3. Send interview to participant in order in order to verify the participant expressed their intended meaning
4. Read interview and underline each issue expressed by the participant
5. Summarize any indirect issue expressed by the participant
6. Read underlined issues and begin noticing developing theme categories among issues
7. Assign a color to each emerging theme category
8. Underline each issue expressed by participant in the corresponding color of the category the issue falls under
9. Repeat steps 1-8 with all interviews conducted
10. Count the number of issues in each theme category
11. Numbers gathered here serve as data for the study

## Appendix F

IRB Study Approval  
November 22, 2013

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Stephanie Bledsoe  
Fran Hagstrom

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 13-11-278

Protocol Title: *Autism in Transition from High School to College*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 11/22/2013 Expiration Date: 11/21/2014

---

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 12 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).