**The Autism-Friendly Classroom**

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Given that:

* Increasing numbers of students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), estimated to occur in 1 of 68 children (Centers for Disease Control, 2014),
* Students with ASD are less likely than their typical peers to attend college (Wei et al., 2012), &
* Students with ASD often opt to major in science and technology fields (Wei et al., 2012),

The needs of students with ASD must be addressed to increase likelihood to educational and career success.

* Specifically for business communication courses that include communication assignments, faculty can use strategies to build success:
  + encourage inclusivity and a safe classroom environment,
  + bridge gaps of understanding among students and faculty, &
  + encourage a hand across (not a hand out) the communication divide.
* Strategies adhere to one+ Universal Design Principles (The Center for Universal Design, 1997) so design is effective to those of all abilities: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple/intuitive use, tolerance for error, & low physical effort.

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| Characteristic of Students with ASD | Universal Design Principle | Solution, not “Accommodation” |
| Resistance to Change | Simple & Intuitive Use | --Same seats throughout semester (at least at the start of each class)  --Lesson plans posted online prior to each class |
| Social Anxiety | Flexibility in Use | Group and individual speeches |
| “Robotic” Communication | Flexibility in Use | Encourage vocal variety through acting, not just formal speeches |
| Co-morbidity with ADHD and general anxiety | Tolerance for Error | --Low stakes assignments  --Scaffolded assignments to gain confidence for longer assignments |
| Limited fine motor skills e.g. keyboarding | Low Physical Effort, Tolerance for Error | --Take-home tests, quizzes  --Submit/turn in classwork at end of class or after class (optional) |
| Class Communication not socially appropriate e.g. blurting out questions | Tolerance for Error | Rules that all students must raise hand before asking questions |