Student Disability Services Newsletter, Spring 2016

University of Northern Iowa. Office of Student Disability Services.

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This semester, Student Disability Services has said goodbye to two of its beloved staff members: Ashley Brickley and Brittany Warren.

Ashley served as the coordinator for nearly five years and with the office for more than eight years. In those years she created a responsive, collaborative, and supportive environment for our students with disabilities. She created the weekly mentoring program and multiple Disability Awareness month activities. She developed numerous outreach and information programs for current and prospective students. She cultivated relationships with faculty and staff across campus to help serve students. Ashley established herself as the go to person for supporting our students with disabilities. Most importantly, Ashley has been an advocate for all students, not only those with disabilities, and was a pillar of support for students across campus. We will certainly miss her expertise and her passion for serving all of us. Ashley left us on January 22nd to take the Assistant Director position in the Disability Center at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

Brittany has served as the Interim Coordinator since Ashley left in January and has served with the office for nearly four years. Brittany has developed our process for books in alternative text, she has supervised our student assistant scribes, readers and note takers. She has taken our assistive technology efforts to new heights. Brittany is also always a constant source of enthusiasm for the office and has served as a great advocate for students with disabilities. Brittany has also served the division of student affairs by chairing the Staff Development Committee and serving on the PSE Partnership Committee in which she was in charge of I-Day. Her efforts across campus and in our division will be missed. Brittany left us on April 8th to serve as an academic advisor at Hawkeye Community College.

Thank you for everything you have done for SDS and UNI, Ashley and Brittany!!
On February 17th, SDS partnered with the Rod Library to host the second event in Reaching for Higher Ground’s year-long series, Disability Justice: Past, Present & Future. This event examined disability issues in the criminal justice system.

Steven Onken from Social Work facilitated a discussion with panelists from local mental health and criminal justice systems. Excerpts from Frontline’s The Released film were shown. The event had an excellent turnout of more than 80 students and community members!
About a Disability: Autism Spectrum Disorders

I. Definition: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a group of developmental disorders, which includes a wide range, “a spectrum,” of symptoms, skills, and levels of disability.¹

II. Facts¹

- ASD occurs across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups
- It is five times more common among boys than girls
- About 1 in 68 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder

III. Signs¹

Restrictive / repetitive behaviors may include:

- Repeating certain behaviors or having unusual behaviors
- Having overly focused interests
- Having a lasting, intense interest in certain topics, such as numbers, details, or facts.

Social communication / interaction behaviors may include:

- Getting upset by a change in a routine or being placed in a new or over-stimulating setting
- Little or inconsistent eye contact
- Having a tendency to look at and listen to other people less often
- Rarely sharing enjoyment of objects or activities by pointing or showing things to others
- Responding unusually when others show anger, distress, or affection
- Failing to, or being slow to, respond to someone calling their name or other verbal attempts to gain attention
- Repeating words or phrases that they hear, a behavior called echolalia
- Having facial expressions, movements, and gestures that do not match what is being said
- Having trouble understanding another person’s point of view or being unable to predict or understand other people’s actions.

IV. Possible Strengths & Abilities¹

- Having above-average intelligence
- Being able to learn things in detail and remember information for long periods of time
- Being strong visual and auditory learners

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About a Disability: Autism Spectrum Disorders

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V. Asperger’s Syndrome

In the past, Asperger’s syndrome and autism were separate disorders, listed as subcategories within the diagnosis of “Pervasive Developmental Disorders.” However, this separation has changed. The latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) does not highlight subcategories of a larger disorder, but instead includes the range of characteristics and severity within one category. People whose symptoms were previously diagnosed as Asperger’s syndrome or Autistic Disorder are now included as part of the category called Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).¹

VI. Language

While most individuals and organizations advocate for and recommend the use of “people first” language when referring to an individual with a disability, some in the ASD community prefer “identity first” language: “In the autism community, many self-advocates and their allies prefer terminology such as ‘Autistic,’ ‘Autistic person,’ or ‘Autistic individual’ because we understand autism as an inherent part of an individual's identity -- the same way one refers to ‘Muslims,’ ‘African-Americans,’ ‘Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘gifted,’ ‘athletic,’ or ‘Jewish.’”² If you are unsure about what language to use, respectfully ask an individual what he/she/they prefers.

VII. Organizations

- Autism Speaks is the most well-known autism organization in the US. However, some in the autistic community criticize this organization for spending very little (4%) of its budget on services that support autistic individuals and their families³. According to the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, while 44% of Autism Speaks’ budget goes towards research, this research is devoted to prevention rather than in improving the lives of those with autism. They are criticized for not having a single individual with autism on its board of directors or leadership. Its fundraising tactics are said to rely on fear, stereotypes, and devaluing people with ASD; it portrays autism as a “disease” to be cured rather than an identity to be celebrated. Organizations that are seen as more representative of the autistic community:
  - Autistic National Committee
  - Autism Network International
  - Autistic Self-Advocacy Network

References


For more information and resources, visit the Counseling Center, Psychology Department or the Student Health Clinic on campus.
Graduate Student Feature: Kristen Aldrich

- **Tell us about yourself. Where are you from?**
  
  My name is Kristen Aldrich and I'm a graduate student in the Post-Secondary Education: Student Affairs program. I transferred to UNI after completing two years at Kirkwood Community College and finished my BA in Psychology from UNI in May 2015. Since then I've been in my grad program and getting a variety of experiences from Financial Aid to New Student Programs to Career Services. I’m not sure what area of Student Affairs I want to end up in, but I’m looking forward to the summer and second year of my program to help guide me along the journey.

- **What is your role in the SDS office?**
  
  My role in the SDS office is as a practicum student. I chose this office to do a practicum in because I wanted to learn more about students with disabilities and how higher education professionals support and advocate for them. Most of my time in this position is with the Weekly Mentoring program where I mentor 7 students. I really enjoy the one-on-one interaction with these students and helping develop their organizational and time management skills.

- **What is your educational background?**
  
  I'm a Cedar Falls High School graduate and since then have completed an AA Liberal Arts degree from Kirkwood which contributed to my BA in Psychology from UNI. At the completion of my graduate program I will have a Master of Arts in Post-Secondary Education: Student Affairs.

- **What do you like to do when you’re not at work/school?**
  
  I am a TV/movie junkie and I try to go to the movie theater as much as I can to see the next great movie playing. Currently I've been watching a lot of the NCAA men's basketball tournament and hanging out with my roommate, aka my dad. If I'm not lounging at home, I like to visit my friends and occasionally go to Zumba.

- **What is your favorite quote?**
  
  My favorite quote is "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken" by Oscar Wilde.
Rule Your Mind: An Introduction to Mindfulness

By Alyssa Cobie-Nuss

Have you ever driven home and had no recollection of your journey? Been in the middle of a conversation realizing you’ve missed huge chunks of what the other person said? Eaten something without being aware of or really tasting what you are eating? What about reacting emotionally in certain ways or have emotions that just “came out of nowhere”? These are examples of mindLESSness—the opposite of mindfulness. If you experience any of these or similar things at times, you are probably a normal member of the human race!

Many of us have experienced our thoughts and feelings getting stuck in the past, ruminating about something that happened and cannot let go of. Alternatively, we may also focus our thoughts towards the future, worrying about what is going to happen. This causes us to be distracted and experience things like those listed above.

It can also lead us to react to events more strongly than we otherwise would, becoming dysregulated by our emotions. With mindfulness, we bring our attention to the present moment, focusing on the here and now. Thus, mindfulness is defined as paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment nonjudgmentally.

Mindfulness has been trending over the last few years and research has shown its benefits in the fields of counseling and education. Some of these benefits include: lowered stress levels, less anxiety, improved sleep, increased focus and concentration, boosts in effectiveness and creativity, and builds confidence and leadership ability. Additionally, mindfulness has been found to build resilience, cultivate empathy, develop humility, foster gratitude, and increase patience with self and others. Research has identified five facets of mindfulness: observe, describe, act with awareness, nonjudgement, and non-reactivity. You can assess yourself on these five facets by taking the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire online at http://awakemind.org/quiz.php

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Mindfulness

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While mindfulness is often associated with yoga and meditation, there are many simple ways we can practice mindfulness every day. Even five minutes of mindfulness practice can have a powerful impact on your day. Here are some daily strategies:

- **Come Back:** When you catch yourself being caught up in worries about the future or guilt and regret about the past, just notice that it is happening and simply and kindly say to yourself, “Come back.” Then take a calming breath and focus on what you are doing right now.

- **Three Senses:** Another helpful mindfulness trick is simply to notice what you are experiencing right now through three senses – sound, sight, touch. Take a few slow breaths and ask yourself: What are three things I can hear? What are three things I can see? What are three things I can feel?

- When you wake up, take a few minutes to lie in bed and stretch your body. Notice any sensations.

- Drive to work with the radio off. Notice your thoughts and feelings as you drive. If someone cuts you off or if you are sitting in traffic, take a breath.

- As you walk to school or on your way home, pay attention to your feet connecting with the ground, even for just a few steps.

- Take a breath between classes and activities.

- Try to sit down and relax when you eat your lunch, even if it’s just for five minutes. Avoid eating while driving or working. Take a breath. Notice the color, the texture and the smell of your food. When you think you’re done chewing, chew it five more times.

- As you talk to people, notice the impact they have on you. Be aware of how your words and attitudes are impacting others, too.

- Notice if your bedtime routine is relaxing or busy and what your state of mind is when you get into bed.

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Mindfulness

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As you start to practice mindfulness you will begin to see things as they are rather than how you wish they were. You may notice some things you want to change. It’s important to be patient with yourself and make one small change at a time. This is also where the non-judgmental aspect of mindfulness comes in: when you notice yourself experiencing negative thoughts and feelings, accept and acknowledge them rather than judging yourself; these are a part of being human! Mindfulness does not rid you of negative experiences, but makes you better able to overcome them. Also, remember that mindfulness is a skill that takes practice!


7 Things Mindful People Do Differently

1. Approach everyday things with curiosity—and savor them
2. Forgive their mistakes—big or small
3. Show gratitude for good moments—and grace for bad ones
4. Practice compassion and nurture connections
5. Make peace with imperfection—inside and out
6. Embrace vulnerability by trusting others—and themselves
7. Accept—and appreciate—that things come and go

List compiled by Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D., psychologist, author of *The Power of Now*.
FREE Mindfulness Apps

- Headspace
- Stop, Breathe, Think
- Deep Calm
- Pacifica--Anxiety, Stress, Depression
- Relax Melodies
- Mindfulness Coach
- 7 Second Meditation
- Calm
- Chill
- Digipill
- + Many More!

We’re On Facebook!

The UNI Student Disability Services Facebook page is intended to keep you updated on upcoming events, current issues in the news, and fun happenings within our office on campus. Like our page today to follow along!
We would like to recognize the following faculty who students have identified as going above and beyond to help support students with disabilities! A huge THANK YOU for all you do!

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