



**College of Education and Human Development
Division of Special Education and disAbility Research**

Spring 2024

EDSE 230 DL1: Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders

CRN: 22687, 3 – Credits

Instructor: Dr. Grace Francis and Ms Christina Eagle	Meeting Dates: 1/16/24 – 5/8/24
Phone: 703-993-1920	Meeting Day(s): Monday
E-Mail: gfranci4@gmu.edu	Meeting Time(s): 4:30 pm – 6 pm
Office Hours: By Appointment	Meeting Location: Fairfax; Online
Office Location: https://gmu.zoom.us/j/94738393454?pwd=cnhFTC9xYlNKQzIvdVh4SThkZTV3Zz09 Password: 230	Other Phone: N/A

Note: This syllabus may change according to class needs. Teacher Candidates/Students will be advised of any changes immediately through George Mason e-mail and/or through Blackboard.

Prerequisite(s):

None

Co-requisite(s):

None

Course Description

Examines the characteristics, assessment, and diagnosis of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Describes instructional, behavioral, sensory strategies and assistive technology to support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Explains the experiences of individuals, groups, or institutions influenced by Autism Spectrum Disorders through an examination of social and behavioral science perspectives.

Course Overview

This course examines the characteristics, assessment, and diagnosis of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This course describes instructional, behavioral, sensory strategies, and assistive technology to support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This course explains the experiences of individuals, groups, or institutions influenced by Autism Spectrum Disorders through an examination of social and behavioral science perspectives.

Advising Contact Information

Please make sure that you are being advised on a regular basis as to your status and progress in your program. Students in Special Education and Assistive Technology programs can contact the Special Education Advising Office at 703-993-3670 or speced@gmu.edu for assistance. All other students should refer to their assigned program advisor or the Mason Care Network (703-993-2470).

Advising Tip

Would you like the opportunity to work on campus with students with special needs? The LIFE Program (<http://masonlife.gmu.edu/>) is an innovative post-secondary program at Mason for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who desire a university experience in a supportive academic environment. A variety of employment opportunities are available.

Course Delivery Method

Learning activities include the following:

1. Class lecture and discussion
2. Application activities
3. Small group activities and assignments
4. Video and other media supports
5. Research and presentation activities
6. Electronic supplements and activities via Blackboard

This course will be delivered online (76% or more) using synchronous format via the Blackboard Learning Management system (LMS) housed in the MyMason portal. You will log in to the Blackboard (Bb) course site using your Mason email name (everything before @masonlive.gmu.edu) and email password. The course site will be available on January 16th, 2024.

Under no circumstances, may candidates/students participate in online class sessions (either by phone or Internet) while operating motor vehicles. Further, as expected in a face-to-face class meeting, such online participation requires undivided attention to course content and communication.

Technical Requirements

To participate in this course, students will need to satisfy the following technical requirements:

- High-speed Internet access with standard up-to-date browsers. To get a list of Blackboard's supported browsers see: [Browser support](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Ultra/Getting_Started/Browser_Support) (https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Ultra/Getting_Started/Browser_Support)
- Students must maintain consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Blackboard, as these are the official methods of communication for this course.
- Students will need a headset microphone for use with the Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing tool.
- Students may be asked to create logins and passwords on supplemental websites and/or to download trial software to their computer or tablet as part of course requirements.
- The following software plug-ins for PCs and Macs, respectively, are available for free download:
 - [Adobe Acrobat Reader](https://get.adobe.com/reader/): <https://get.adobe.com/reader/>
 - [Windows Media Player](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14209/get-windows-media-player): <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14209/get-windows-media-player>
 - [Apple Quick Time Player](http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/): www.apple.com/quicktime/download/

Expectations

- **Course Week:**
Our course week will begin on the day that our synchronous meetings take place as indicated on the Schedule of Classes.
- **Log-in Frequency:**
Students must actively check the course Blackboard site and their GMU email for communications from the instructor, class discussions, and/or access to course materials at least 2 times per week. In addition, students must log-in for all scheduled online synchronous meetings.
- **Participation:**
Students are expected to actively engage in all course activities throughout the semester, which includes viewing all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions.
- **Technical Competence:**
Students are expected to demonstrate competence in the use of all course technology. Students who are struggling with technical components of the course are expected to seek assistance from the instructor and/or College or University technical services.
- **Technical Issues:**
Students should anticipate some technical difficulties during the semester and should, therefore, budget their time accordingly. Late work will not be accepted based on individual technical issues.
- **Workload:**
Please be aware that this course is not self-paced. Students are expected to meet *specific deadlines* and *due dates* listed in the Class Schedule section of this syllabus. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of the weekly course schedule of topics, readings, activities and assignments due.
- **Instructor Support:**

Students may schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss course requirements, content or other course-related issues. Those unable to come to a Mason campus can meet with the instructor via telephone or web conference. Students should email the instructor to schedule a one-on-one session, including their preferred meeting method and suggested dates/times.

- **Netiquette:**
The course environment is a collaborative space. Experience shows that even an innocent remark typed in the online environment can be misconstrued. Students must always re-read their responses carefully before posting them, so as others do not consider them as personal offenses. *Be positive in your approach with others and diplomatic in selecting your words.* Remember that you are not competing with classmates but sharing information and learning from others. All faculty are similarly expected to be respectful in all communications.
- **Accommodations:**
Online learners who require effective accommodations to ensure accessibility must be registered with George Mason University Disability Service.

Learner Outcomes

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

1. Describe the characteristics, assessment, and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders as defined by the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.
2. Describe and evaluate instructional, behavioral, and sensory strategies and related assistive technology to support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
3. Explain how individuals, groups, or institutions are influenced by Autism Spectrum Disorders and the importance of collaboration with families.
4. Demonstrate awareness of changes in social and cultural constructs relative to Autism Spectrum Disorders.
5. Use appropriate methods and resources to apply social and behavioral science concepts, terminology, principles, and theories in the analysis of Autism Spectrum Disorders, past or present.

Professional Standards

Not applicable.

Required Texts

You will need to purchase or borrow one book for the Book Club assignment (see assignments section). We will discuss book assignments in class- please wait to purchase a book.

Recommended Texts

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000>

Additional Readings

Steinbrenner, J. R., Hume, K., Odom, S. L., Morin, K. L., Nowell, S. W., Tomaszewski, B., Szendrey, S., McIntyre, N. S., Yücesoy-Özkan, S., & Savage, M. N. (2020). *Evidence-based practices for children, youth and young adults with Autism*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice Review Team. (Will be provided as PDF.)

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, VIA, hard copy).

Assignments and/or Examinations

Performance-based Assessment (VIA submission required)

N/A.

College Wide Common Assessment (VIA submission required)

N/A.

Other Assignments

Assessment 1: Positionality Statement: This assignment aims to provide students with an opportunity to identify and describe their microcultures, including the influence of their microcultures on their autism allyship and advocacy. Create a statement that discusses or represents your personal reflections on autism and illustrates the ways in which you include how your various identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sex) shape the way in which you approach your profession. Within this statement, you will also reflect upon how your beliefs and commitments related to teaching, students, and education more broadly may inform your approaches to serving as an ally and advocate.

Assessment 2: Ally & Advocate Guidebook: This assignment aims to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their comprehensive understanding of autism and intersectionality with other characteristics and identities, systemic barriers autistic individuals experience, the role of an ally and advocate, and strategies and resources to support this work. Students will engage in personal reflection and the development of practical skills for creating inclusive environments for autistic individuals. **This assignment can be completed as an individual or with a partner.**

This assignment requires you to contribute to a comprehensive guidebook focused on allyship and advocacy for autistic individuals. The guidebook aims to explore societal barriers and supports, understanding, and action for the autistic community. You will examine contextual factors influencing individuals, groups, or institutions, demonstrate your awareness of changes in social and cultural constructs, and identify resources to support the work of allies and advocates.

You will also examine justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion within the context of autistic individuals and your own biases and assumptions.

The guidebook should be formatted in a visually engaging manner, incorporating accessible language and multimedia elements for wider dissemination and understanding. Please ensure clarity, accuracy, and professionalism in the presentation of your content.

Your guidebook should address all of the following elements:

1. Provide an overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD):
 - a. Definition of ASD
 - b. Description of core characteristics of ASD including:
 - i. Communication
 - ii. Behavioral
 - iii. Social
 - c. Description of diverse range of characteristics seen on the Autism Spectrum
2. Neurodivergence
 - a. Define and describe neurodivergence
 - b. Describe strengths-based approaches to neurodivergence
 - c. Describe your experiences, perceptions, and biases with neurodivergence and autism
3. Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion
 - a. Define and describe the following key terms: justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in relation to autism allyship and advocacy.
 - b. Explain how these terms (above) intersect with the experiences of autistic individuals and the broader societal perception of autism and other identities and characteristics.
 - c. Describe the importance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of autistic individuals from diverse backgrounds.
4. Understanding contextual factors and influences
 - a. Identify and analyze societal, cultural, and institutional factors influencing the perception, treatment and support available to autistic individuals.
 - b. Describe obstacles to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion within the scope of autism allyship and advocacy
 - c. Describe shifts in societal attitudes, policies, and cultural perceptions of autism over time.
5. The role of an ally
 - a. Define and describe the key features of an ally within the context of autism
 - b. Describe the relevance of allyship in your work
6. The role of an advocate

- a. Define and describe the key features of an advocate within the context of autism
 - b. Describe the relevance of advocacy in your work
7. Actionable strategies to foster inclusive environments and promote equity and inclusion within the scope of autism (Select a minimum of 3 of the following to describe):
- a. Building awareness and understanding of autism
 - b. Challenging stigma and disseminating accurate information about autism
 - c. Creating supportive environments
 - d. Educational initiatives
 - e. Creating sensory-friendly spaces
 - f. Inclusive language and communication
 - g. Collaborating with autistic individuals
 - h. Community engagement
 - i. Policy changes
 - j. Other (please consult with instructor)
8. Resources
- a. Compile and describe a list of at least 3 resources (e.g., community organizations, support tools, academic literature) designed for autistic individuals and their allies.
 - b. Describe how a person may use each resource to foster inclusive environments and promote equity and inclusion within the scope of autism within the three strategies you selected
9. Reflection and Reflexivity
- a. Briefly describe your positionality as a professional, including personal biases and growth relative to autism
 - b. Describe your reflexivity practices in completing this assignment
 - c. Identify a minimum of 3 areas for personal growth as an ally and advocate

Assessment 3: Book Club: This assignment encourages students to delve deeply into representations of autism within literature, fostering critical thinking, empathetic understanding, and nuanced discussions about the experiences of individuals on the autism spectrum. You will select one book from a list of books featuring characters with autism. You will engage in book club discussions throughout the semester and collaborate in groups to prepare a culminating group presentation.

Book List: Here is a list of books centered on autism. Please choose one book from the list to read and analyze throughout the semester.

1. "Thinking in Pictures" by Temple Grandin
2. "Unstrange Minds" by Roy Richard Ginker
3. "The Reason I Jump" by Naoki Higashida
4. "Rules" by Cynthia Lord
5. "Life, Animated" by Ron Suskind
6. "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night" by Mark Haddon
7. "NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity" by Steve Silberman
8. "But You Don't Look Autistic at All" by Bianca Toeps
9. "Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's" by John Elder Robison
10. "And Straight on Till Morning: Essays on Autism Acceptance" by Autistic Self Advocacy Network
11. "Untypical: How the World isn't Built for Autistic People and What we Should all do About it" by Pete Wharmby
12. A minimum of 10 children's books related to autism (please consult with instructor)
13. Other (please consult with instructor)

Part 1: Book Club discussions. Students will participate in four book club discussions, engaging with peers to analyze, reflect upon, and critically discuss the content, themes, and representations of autism within the chosen novels. Each session will focus on specific chapters or sections of the selected book. Discussion questions will be provided prior to each Book Club discussion and you will have the opportunity to rate your peers' contributions to each discussion.

Topics may cover aspects such as:

- Character portrayal and development of autistic individuals
- Representation of family dynamics and societal perceptions of autism
- Exploration of sensory experiences, communication challenges, and coping mechanisms depicted in the book
- Disability identity and advocacy
- Critique of the book's accuracy and impact on societal understanding of autism

Part 2: Book Club presentation. After reading your selected novel, you will work with 2-3 peers who read the same book to develop a 15-20 minute presentation that will be given to the class during the last two class meetings. This presentation will focus on a specific theme or aspect related to the book's portrayal of autism, such as character analysis, societal perceptions, family dynamics, sensory experiences, communication challenges, barriers to equity and inclusion, or allyship and advocacy. Presentations should include visual aids, such as slides or multimedia elements to support the discussion and encourage audience engagement through thought-provoking questions or activities.

Your presentation will include:

1. Summary of book including:
 - a. Description of characters
 - b. Background
 - c. Setting
 - d. Plot

2. Characteristics of autism: Describe a minimum of three characteristics of autism that are evident in the book's character. Include at least one social characteristic.
3. Thematic Analysis
 - a. Introduce the chosen theme or aspect and its relevance to the book
 - b. Analyze 2-3 specific excerpts or instances from the book that exemplify or relate to the chosen theme
 - c. Discuss broader implications or societal reflections arising from the portrayal of autism in the book
 - d. Describe how group members' values, experiences, beliefs, and understanding of autism influence their response to the book.

Assessment 4: Article synthesis infographic. Students will locate, analyze and create an infographic synthesizing key findings from one peer-reviewed journal article (2015-present) related to autism.

1. Select one peer-reviewed journal article (2015-present) related to autism. The article might focus on behavior, communication, assessment, evidence-based practices, instructional strategies, family, transition, collaboration, ableism, identity, or another theme discussed in class.
2. Thoroughly read and analyze the selected article, extracting key concepts, findings, methodologies, and implications.
3. Use Piktochart (<https://piktochart.com/>) to create a one page infographic that provides a "key take-away" synthesis of your article that you could provide to a colleague to help inform their practice. This infographic should be professional in appearance, include accurate and concise text, visuals, and an organized layout.

Assessment 5: Updated Positionality Statement: This assignment aims to provide students with an opportunity to update their positionality statement in light of course content and activities, including reflexivity practices.

Assignment Summary

Assessment 1: Positionality Statement	10 points
Assessment 2: Ally & Advocate Guidebook	40 points
Assessment 3: Part 1: Book Club discussions: 20 points (4 discussions, 5 points each) Part 2: Book Club presentation: 10 points	30 points
Assessment 4: Article Synthesis Infographic	15 points
Assessment 5: Updated Positionality Statement	5 points
Total Points	100 points

Student Evaluations of Teaching:

The student evaluation of teaching, or SET, is an online course survey. You are strongly encouraged to complete this form for each course as this feedback helps instructors and administrators improve your class experiences. Towards the end of the course, you will receive email and Blackboard notifications when the evaluations open. Your anonymous and confidential feedback is only shared with instructors after final grades have been submitted. More information about the SET can be found on The Institute of Effectiveness and Planning website at <https://oiep.gmu.edu/set/>

Course Policies and Expectations

Attendance/Participation

Class attendance and professional participation at all sessions is very important because many of the activities in class are planned in such a way that they cannot be recreated outside of the class session. Students are expected to (a) attend all classes during the course, (b) arrive on time, (c) remain in class for the duration of each session, (d) actively participate and demonstrate professional behavior in the classroom, and (e) complete all assignments with professional quality and on time. All assigned readings should be completed prior to class (Note: assigned readings may be added or removed as the semester progresses).

Participation during class sessions includes being fully present and using computers and devices responsibly. Computers and other devices may be used during class for note-taking, class activities, or any other class-related tasks; they may not be used for internet exploration, texting, sending or receiving emails, or any other non-class activities. *****Points for books discussion sessions may not be made-up.**

Please notify me in advance by email if you will not be able to attend class. When absence from class is unavoidable, it is the student's responsibility to make arrangements to obtain notes,

handouts, and/or lecture details from another student prior to the class meeting that follows the absence.

Late Work

To successfully complete this course, students need to adhere to all due dates for readings and assignments. All assignments should be submitted on or before the assigned due date. To be considered on time, assignments must be submitted by the start of class on the due date, unless otherwise noted by the instructor. On all assignments, full credit is available for those submitted on time. **For every 24-hour period that an assignment is late, a 5% point deduction will occur.** After one week from the due date (or until the last class session per the syllabus, whichever comes first), assignments will not be accepted. Please contact the instructor in advance if there is a problem with submitting your work on time.

Other Requirements

Your GMU email address and the instructor's GMU email address are the only email addresses that will be used for communication in this course. Student email is accessed at <http://mail.gmu.edu>. All communications are sent to students via their Mason email accounts, and students are held responsible for this information. You should plan to check your email before each class in case there is a need to cancel class or go online. Blackboard must be accessed frequently, as all course information is housed on this platform.

Grading

Letter Grade	% of Points
A	95-100%
A-	90-94%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D	60-69%
F	<60%

***Note:** The George Mason University Honor Code will be strictly enforced. See [Academic Integrity Site \(https://oai.gmu.edu/\)](https://oai.gmu.edu/) and [Honor Code and System \(https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/\)](https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/). Students are responsible for reading and

understanding the Code. “To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.” Work submitted must be your own new, original work for this course or with proper citations.

Professional Dispositions

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times. See [Policies and Procedures \(https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/\)](https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/).

Class Schedule

*Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

Week	Major Topics and Activities	Readings and Assignments
1 1.27	Course & syllabus review Terminology and Contextual Factors Identity Wheel	Syllabus
2 1.29	Autism History Allyship and Advocacy Positionality and Reflexivity	See Blackboard
3 2.5	Assessment Medical and Social Models Bias and Ableism	See Blackboard Positionality Statement
4 2.12	Acadmeic needs and strategies Social role valorization	See Blackboard Book Club Discussion 1
5 2.19	Behavior needs and strategies Social role valorization	See Blackboard Guidebook Parts 1-4
6 2.16	Communicaton needs and strategies Social role valorization	See Blackboard Book Club Discussion 2
7 3.4	Spring Break	

Week	Major Topics and Activities	Readings and Assignments
8 3.11	Transition needs and strategies Social role valorization	See Blackboard Guidebook Parts 5-7
9 3.18	Guest Speaker	See Blackboard Book Club Discussion 3
10 3.25	Safety needs and strategies Social role valorization	See Blackboard Article Infographic
12 4.1	Documentary	See Blackboard
13 4.8	Community Resources	See Blackboard Book Club Discussion 4
14 4.15	Work day!	Guidebook Parts 8 and 9
15 4.22	Book Club presentations	Book Club presentations
16 4.29	Book Club presentations Course wrap-up	Book Club presentations Final Guidebook Updated Positionality Statement

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: See [Core Values](http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/) (<http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>).

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code. See [Honor Code and](#)

[System](https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/) (<https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>).

- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See [Responsible Use of Computing](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/) (<http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor. See [Disability Services](https://ds.gmu.edu/) (<https://ds.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Support for submission of assignments to VIA should be directed to viahelp@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/assessments>.
- Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to [Blackboard Instructional Technology Support for Students](https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/) (<https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/>).
- [Learning Services](mailto:learningservices@gmu.edu) (learningservices@gmu.edu) - Provides a variety of experience-based learning opportunities through which students explore a wide range of academic concerns. Services include support to students with learning differences, individual study strategy coaching, individualized programs of study, and referrals to tutoring resources. Presentations on a variety of academic topics such as time management, reading, and note taking are available to the university community. The programs are open to all George Mason University students free of charge.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Non-Confidential Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per [University Policy 1202](#). If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as the [Student Support and Advocacy Center \(SSAC\)](#) at 703-380-1434 or [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website [College of Education and Human Development \(http://cehd.gmu.edu/\)](http://cehd.gmu.edu/).

Appendix

Assessment Rubric(s)

N/A – all assignment rubrics will be posted on Blackboard and discussed in class.