**STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN THE POST-SECONDARY ENVIRONMENT**: **NEEDS AND AVAILABLE SUPPORTS**

**Kaitlyn Young, B.Sc.**

**Brock University**

**Correspondence:** Kaitlyn Young, Brock University, ky15mo@brocku.ca

**Objectives:** The number of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) entering post-secondary institutions in Ontario is increasing (Alcorn MacKay, 2010). The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has documented the need for specialized supports for students with ASD. However, little empirical evidence exists to provide guidance in developing and implementing programs to support students with ASD (Barnhill, 2016). Relatedly, specialized peer-mentoring programs for students with ASD have been identified as a substantial gap in services (Pillay & Bhat, 2012). Although some excellent examples of Canadian mentoring programs for students with ASD exist (e.g. Ames, McMorris, Alli, & Bebko, 2016), further examination of the needs of students with ASD and related outcomes of programming is merited. This research will further inform the development and implementation of specialized programming that addresses identified needs effectively and maximizes the use of resources. This presentation aims to examine the existing evidence to inform future practices in post-secondary student supports and emphasize the benefits of integrating behavior-analytic techniques in services, specifically in the development and implementation of specialized peer-mentorship programs.

**Methods:** Recent publications focusing on post-secondary students with ASD were analyzed, with a special focus on Canadian populations and mentorship. To date, 34 articles and 1 report have been reviewed, with an additional 10 articles currently awaiting review. However, this project is currently a work in progress and the number of studies included in this review is expected to increase through continued review of recent publications. Participants in the studies conducted to date included current and incoming students with ASD, current students without a diagnosis of ASD, recent graduates with ASD, parents of individuals with ASD, post-secondary staff and faculty, secondary school staff, and current peer mentors and mentees.

**Results:**Of the literature reviewed to date, 13 publications focused on reviews or recommendations, and 22 publications were categorized as research studies. Of those categorized as research studies, 7 focused on students needs, 7 focused on supports available, 5 focused on student outcomes, and 3 focused on traits and correlated factors. Specific areas of student needs often identified included social skills, academic group work, organizational skills, academic skills, mental health, and daily living skills. Further, student needs were identified as being specific to each individual student and likely to change over the course of the academic career. Additional analyses are currently being conducted and will be incorporated in the presentation.

**Discussion/Conclusion:**Consistent with a behavior-analytic approach, the needs of post-secondary students with ASD are unique to each individual and students with ASD are likely benefit more from an individualized approach.Although some studies have examined available supports, student needs, outcomes and other relevant factors, continued examination is required to adequately inform the development and implementation of supports for students with ASD, specifically in a Canadian context. Future research should explore the development and implementation of specialized peer mentoring informed by individual student needs.

References

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