



Department of Teaching, Learning & Leading
1505/2505 Autism: Characteristics and Interventions
Spring 2025

Instructor: Johanna Higgins, PhD, BCBA-D Assistant Professor of Practice Department of Teaching Learning & Leading University of Pittsburgh Email: jhiggins@pitt.edu	Day/Time: Tues & Thurs 9:30 – 10:45 am Location: Cathedral of Learning Room 363 Office hours: by appointment Preferred method of communication: email Phone: [REDACTED]
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School of Education Mission

We ignite learning. We strive for well-being for all. **We teach.** We commit to student, family, and community success. **We commit to educational equity.** We advocate. We work for justice. **We cultivate relationships.** We forge engaged partnerships. **We collaborate.** We learn with and from communities. **We innovate and agitate.** We pursue and produce knowledge. We research. **We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures.** We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development. We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning. **We shape practice and policy.** We teach with and for dignity. We think. We dream. **We lead with integrity.** We are the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh.

Course Description

This course will present information on the characteristics of and intervention approaches for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Introductory material will include diagnosis criteria and characteristics. Current research on theories of etiology will be explored and analyzed. Screening tools and assessments specific to this population will be examined in detail. Intervention approaches will be described and analyzed. Representatives serving children with autism will present services/intervention models available in the area.

Course Objectives

As a result of active participation and successful completion of requirements, students will:

<u>Define</u> the diagnostic and educational verification process and criteria for ASD	<u>Understand</u> the impact of having a child with autism and caregiver training options	<u>Understand</u> evidence-based practices for children with autism	<u>Identify</u> environmental adaptations and accommodations to support children with autism in school settings	<u>Connect</u> with and listen to community providers supporting children with autism and their families	<u>Reflect</u> after learning from providers supporting children with autism and their families
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Important Course Information

Meetings

General classes are held in person on Tuesday and Thursdays 9:30 – 10:45 am in the Cathedral of Learning #363 with the exception of 1/30, 2/20, 4/17.

No large group meeting on 1/30 and 3/18. On 1/30, learners will meet with their groups to complete assignment #1. On 3/18, learners will complete work asynchronously (on their own).

Behavior Skills Training (BST) Lab will be held 2/6, 2/27, 3/6 & 4/17.

Seminar Presenters visit the class on 2/20, 3/20, 3/27, and 4/10.

During **Lab** and **Seminar** learners are asked to practice implementing skills and/or engage in case study group discussions. It is highly recommended that students plan to attend these sessions as they correspond with class assignments.

Communication

The instructor will use Canvas (Learning Management System; LMS) announcements to communicate most frequently with students.

- Tutorial on signing up for announcements: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/doc-10624>.
- Please communicate with the instructor through Canvas or via email at jhiggins@pitt.edu.

Office hours

Students may schedule an individual meeting anytime by emailing the instructor at jhiggins@pitt.edu. The instructor is available to meet in person at her office in Oakland or via Zoom web conference.

Textbooks

Students in this course will read chapters from the following books (available no cost in Pitt's Library):

- Eren, R. (2024). *Introducing autism: Theory and evidence-based practices for teaching individuals with ASD*. Taylor & Francis, Oxford: Routledge.
- Otten, K. L., de, B. S. R., & Bross, L. (Eds.). (2023). *The educator's guide to autism spectrum disorder: Interventions and treatments*. Corwin Press.

Participation expectations

Learning is a social process. While attendance is not tracked, you are expected to attend class, log on to Canvas and work through the modules weekly, be an active participant with guests, and collaborate with other learners. In the event of prolonged absences in which you do not participate in the prior (due to sickness or family emergency), you should contact me via email (jhiggins@pitt.edu). Extreme emergencies will be handled on an individual basis.

Due dates

Quizzes are due on **Sunday by 11:59 PM.**

Assignment Extensions

Need an extension? **Your instructor is happy to provide one!** Request for late assignments must be cleared ahead of time and for good reason as judged by the instructor. Given instructor permission assignments will be accepted within two weeks of due date.

Assignment submissions in Canvas

Please make sure your assignments are clearly labeled with your first and last name. When appropriate, save your file with last name followed by the assignment title (e.g., **Higgins_reflection**).

Confidentiality

You are responsible to maintain the confidentiality of all the students you work with in field placements related to your coursework at the University of Pittsburgh. When writing or completing assignments for courses or speaking about your field experience and the students you work with, use **pseudonyms** (not initials) for student, teacher, and school names. In public, it is your responsibility to keep written assignments and any other materials bearing the names of students, teachers, or staff secure from the view of others.

Feedback

For most assignments, the instructor provides group-level summary for the entire class and/or individual feedback rubrics. The instructor analyzes highlights, patterns of strengths, points of improvements and posted as an announcement. Individual written feedback can be requested by a student at any time.

Graded Activities & Assignments

TLL 1505/2505	Adult Learning Strategy	Point Breakdown	Total Points
Attendance (22) <i>Learners receive points for attending class and seminars with presenters. Learners can miss two classes during the semester and still obtain the total points.</i>	Introduction Illustrate	22x2 points	44
Class Reflections (2) <i>Learners reflect and explore the impact of class materials, content, and resources.</i>	Reflection	2x20 points	40
Seminar Feedback (3) <i>Learners reflect on the presenters and provide constructive, helpful feedback.</i>	Reflection	4x5 points	20
ASD Observation (1) <i>Learners observe videos of two children (one with ASD and one without ASD), document observations, and compare behaviors observed.</i>	Mastery	50 points	50
Online Learning Modules (2) <i>Learners complete Internet learning modules from external website.</i>	Introduction Illustrate	2x15 points	30
Peer BST Lab	Practice	2x20 points	40

<i>Learners practice using intervention strategies following modeling from the instructor.</i>			
Group Assignments (3) <i>Learners review videos and case studies in groups to complete assignments.</i>	Mastery	3x20 points	60
Quizzes (10) <i>Learners take eleven quizzes on readings and material covered in the course. The lowest quiz will be dropped.</i>	Mastery	10x10 points	100
Total			320

Grades

To receive a course letter grade of A-C, all required assignments, projects, and course materials must be completed. The instructor can consider an incomplete only if a substantial portion (50% or more) of the class assignments is completed with a satisfactory grade (A-B) at the time of request. In all other circumstances, students should plan to withdraw from the course.

Percentage (%)	Letter Grade
94 - 100	A
90 - 93	A-
87 - 89	B+
83 - 86	B
80 - 82	B-
74 - 79	C
69 - 73	D

Technology Requirements

Students will need the following technology to participate fully in this course.

- Active Pitt email address (if you forward your mail make sure to check regularly)
- Access to Canvas LMS (Learning Management System)
- Internet connection (preferably high -speed broadband wired or wireless)
- Supported Web browser (Google Chrome is strongly recommended)
- Word processor (such as Microsoft Word)
- Adobe Reader (to view PDF files)

Note: The instructor recognizes that not all students may have access to the technology listed above. Please reach out to the instructor to discuss accommodations if needed.

Tech Support

Contact Pitt IT for technical assistance by submitting a ticket to the helpdesk. Students may also contact 412-624-HELP (437) or email helpdesk@pitt.edu.

Course, School, and University Policies

Online Conduct

Appropriate online academic conduct means maintaining a safe learning environment based on mutual respect and civility. All participants in Pitt online courses are expected to behave professionally by adhering to these standards of conduct: Never transmit or promote content known to be illegal. Respect other people's privacy as well as your own. Forgive other people's mistakes. Never use harassing, threatening, embarrassing, or abusive language or actions. Online communication that fails to meet these standards of conduct will be removed from the course. Repeated misconduct may result in being blocked from online discussions, receiving a grade penalty, or being dismissed from the course. Such misconduct online may be reported to officials for action in accordance with University policy. If you ever encounter inappropriate content in our course, please contact your instructor with your concerns.

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy.

Disability Services

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other modifications, you need to notify the instructor and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of the term. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call (412) 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Disability Resources and Services office is located in 140 William Pitt Union on the Oakland campus.

TLL Departmental Grievance Procedures

The purpose of grievance procedures is to ensure the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students in their relationships with each other. When a student in TLL believes that a faculty member has not met his or her obligations (as an instructor or in another capacity) as described in the Academic Integrity Guidelines, the student should follow this procedure:

1. The student should talk directly to the faculty member to attempt to resolve the matter.
2. If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the student should talk to the relevant program coordinator.
3. If the matter remains unresolved, the student should talk to the associate chair of TLL.
4. If needed, the student should next talk to the SOE associate dean of students.
5. If the matter still remains unresolved, the student should file a written statement of charges with the dean's designated Academic Integrity Administrative.

Civility Commitment

As future or current teachers, we will operate from a standpoint that everyone believes that all students deserve a quality education in a safe setting. The same can be said for university learning. A university classroom is, by definition, space where a free exchange of ideas must happen, but where consideration for others, their views, and their life experiences is also paramount. When you are uncomfortable with

an idea, it is your right to speak up about that. As we learn with and about people with very different life experiences and beliefs from our own, it is imperative that we respect these perspectives and use respectful language in discussing challenging ideas. Carefully consider your language choices to ensure that all learners feel safe and valued. If at any time you are uncomfortable please feel free to speak out and/or speak to me privately.

Sexual Harassment

The University of Pittsburgh is committed to the maintenance of a community free from all forms of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment violates University policy as well as state, federal, and local laws. It is neither permitted nor condoned. It is also a violation of the University of Pittsburgh's policy against sexual harassment for any employee or student at the University of Pittsburgh to attempt in any way to retaliate against a person who makes a claim of sexual harassment. Any individual who, after thorough investigation and an informal or formal hearing, is found to have violated the University's policy against sexual harassment, will be subject to disciplinary action, including, but not limited to, reprimand, suspension, termination, or expulsion. Any disciplinary action taken will depend upon the severity of the offense. For more information, see the Web site: <https://www.policy.pitt.edu/cs-20-sexual-misconduct-formerly-06-05-01>

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

I consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect, and I welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class.

Names and Pronouns

I will gladly honor your request to address you by your name and pronoun (that may differ from the school records). Please advise me of this preference early in the term so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. You may email me or tell me in person in class, whichever is most comfortable to you! I want to be sure you feel yourself and comfortable in our class community.

Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Copyright Statement

These materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials. See Library of Congress Copyright Office and the University Copyright Policy.

G-grades

If unforeseen events (such as major illness) prevent a student from timely completion of course work, he/she may request a meeting with the instructor to discuss the possibility of earning a "G" grade for

the term. If both student and instructor agree to the “G” grade, they collaboratively write a document that describes, in detail, what the student needs to do to complete the required course work and the time frame (not to exceed one academic year) within which he/she must do so. Upon receiving all work, the course instructor would evaluate the work and send forward to the Associate Dean a request for the permanent grade.

Food/Housing Insecurity

Many students, both undergraduate and graduate, experience housing and/or food insecurity that can impact their academic work and general health. Please know there are resources available to you that are confidential. Of course, you are welcome to speak with me if you need support in contacting the right people/offices. You may also consider exploring the Pitt Pantry or Off-Campus Housing Office.

TLL 1505/2505 Autism: Characteristics and Interventions Class Schedule

W	D	Class	Lesson Topics	Tasks/Assignments Due
1	TH	1/9	Lesson 1 Introduction to TLL 1505/2505 Autism Class	Quiz #1 Complete Learner Info Survey due 1/12 (Sunday)
2	T	1/14	Lesson 2 Neurodiversity and Current Issues in Autism	
2	TH	1/16	Lesson 2 Neurodiversity and Current Issues in Autism	Quiz #2 due 1/17
3	T	1/21	Lesson 3 Child Development and Autism	
3	TH	1/23	Lesson 3 Child Development and Autism	Quiz #3 due 1/21
4	T	1/28	Lesson 4 Characteristics of Autism	
4	TH	1/30	Lesson 4 Characteristics of Autism *Meet with group outside of class today	Quiz #4 due 1/31 Online Module #1 due
5	T	2/4	Lesson 5 Diagnostic & Special Education Evaluation Process	
5	TH	2/6	Lesson 5 Diagnostic & Special Education Evaluation Process BST Peer Lab	Quiz #5 due 2/7 Group Assignment #1 due 2/7
6	T	2/11	Lesson 6 Special Education Services and Quality Inclusion Practices	
6	TH	2/13	Lesson 6 Special Education Services and Quality Inclusion Practices	Quiz #6 due 2/14 Autism Observation Report due 2/14
7	T	2/18	Lesson 7 Supports for Caregivers of Children with Autism	
7	TH	2/20	Lesson 7 Supports for Caregivers of Children with Autism *Seminar with Developmental Specialist & Early Intervention Provider *Complete Group Activity and Reflection #1 in class	Quiz #7 due 2/21
8	T	2/25	Lesson 8 Evidence-based Practices for Autism	Seminar Reflection #1
8	TH	2/27	Lesson 8 Evidence-based Practices for Autism Peer BST Lab SPRING BREAK	Quiz #8 due 2/28 Group Assignment #2 due 2/28
10	T	3/11	Lesson 9 ABA and Autism	
10	TH	3/13	Lesson 9 ABA and Autism Peer BST Lab	Quiz #9 due 3/7 Class Reflection #1 due 3/7
11	T	3/18	Lesson 10 Social Skills & Peer-Mediated Supports *No meeting today, complete class activities on own	

11	TH	3/20	*Seminar on Instructional Design for Learners with Autism with Christina Scenna (BCBA & PhD Student at Pitt)	Quiz #10 due 3/21
12	T	3/25	Lesson 11 Transitions in Education & Services Across the Lifespan	Seminar Reflection #2 due 3/25
12	TH	3/27	Lesson 11 Transitions in Education & Services Across the Lifespan *Seminar on College Students with Dr. Brett Nachman, PhD (Assistant Professor at Pitt)	Online Module #2 due
13	T	4/8	Lesson 12 Experiences of Families of Children with Autism	Seminar Reflection #3 due 4/8
13	TH	4/10	Lesson 12 Experiences of Families of Children with Autism *Tentative Seminar with Johanna Murphy (Inclusion Program Director at Evolve Coaching & Instructor at Pitt)	Quiz #11 due 4/11
14	T	4/15	Hold for a makeup session	Seminar Reflection #4 due 4/16
14	TH	4/17	Peer BST Lab Meet in Posvar	
15	T	4/22	Final - Reflection #2 due 4/18	