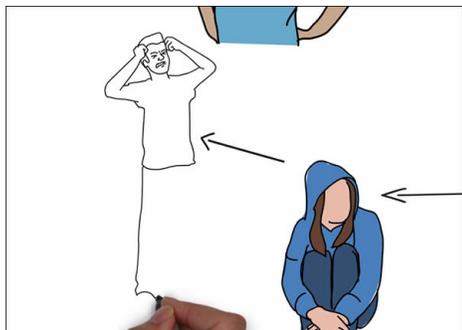


Video Helps Staff Understand Autism Spectrum | CPD

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Autism -- University Faculty and Staff: What We Know, What We Do Not Know and What We Need to Know explains autism from a students' perspective. "Have you ever had a student in your class who came to ask you for information, and immediately you felt like there was some social awkwardness?" a young voice for autism asks his viewers. "Well, I admit it, that is me." The voice-- John Robert Johnson--is fictional, but he has research backing him up as he briefly takes his audience through the higher education experience from his point of view. Voiced by Shawn Wright, "John" represents the findings of a team of Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities program researchers. Led by Dr. Gwen Mitchell of the University of Idaho, they come from five different universities, including the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State. Their message is for faculty and staff in higher education. "There is a lot to be done to get faculty and staff in university settings up to speed in knowledge and understanding of the autism spectrum," Dr. Mitchell said. The [10-minute video](#) entitled *Autism--University Faculty and Staff: What We Know, What We Do Not Know and What We Need to Know* is intended to help bridge that knowledge gap. It discusses the rights people on the autism spectrum have as students, and the responsibilities faculty and staff members have at their institutions. People on the spectrum are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act

and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. But mostly, John's story is personal. "I have a hard time with social rules," he says. "I have never seen social rules written down... You know the rules, and at times I know them, but a lot of the time, I don't have time to think about what you want before I feel pressure to say something. And at times, I get lost in my own head." He explains other difficulties: trouble initiating and maintaining eye contact; difficulty explaining why he comes into an adviser's office; challenges adjusting to changes in the environment or how things are done in the classroom.

"There are some of us on the spectrum that are working hard not to call attention to our differences, and have not asked for accommodations with the disability supports office," John said. "And we're doing pretty well. But if you see me struggling in some area, it would be nice if perhaps you'd talk to me."

The team's video and research will be presented during the [Association of University Centers on Disabilities](#) conference in Washington, D.C. in December. The researchers included Mitchell, Howard Fulk and Ashley Kuznia of the University of Idaho; Nelson Atehortua of Utah Valley University; Katie Ahlers of the University of Montana, Ron Bean of Utah State University and Jamie Hammer of Minot State University.