

**COURSE TITLE:** AUTISM INSIGHTS: Practical Strategies for the Classroom

**WA CLOCK HRS:** 30

**NO. OF CREDITS:** 3 QUARTER CREDITS  
[semester equivalent = 2.00 credits]

**OREGON PDUs:** 30

**PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48:** 30

**INSTRUCTOR:** Lori Gibson  
loribgibson@hotmail.com

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course is for educators seeking a deeper understanding of students with autism. It is specially tailored for educators who teach in the general education setting and want to understand and add to their toolbox so they can provide for the needs of their neurodiverse students. Special education teachers and support staff will also benefit from this course due to the significant growth in the field of autism, including changes in the diagnosis, interventions, inclusion, and acceptance.

Course topics include:

- An overview of autism.
- Exploring different aspects of the disorder.
- Practical strategies to support students in the school setting.

Specifically, you will learn how to ease anxiety, address executive function challenges, create sensory-friendly settings, increase student communication/socialization, as well as effectively intervene with behavioral challenges.

You can customize your assignments to match your circumstances. This course is appropriate for Pre-K through grade 12 teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Upon completion of this course, participants will have:

- An understanding of the fundamentals of autism, including the components of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis, placements, programs, and supports in school/community settings.
- Addressed anxiety by learning strategies to create a calm and reassuring classroom.
- Discovered effective approaches to address executive function challenges in the classroom.
- An understanding of sensory sensitivities and how to mitigate sensory stress in the classroom.
- An understanding of how communication challenges impact socialization and identify strategies for support, both in interactions with adults and peers.
- Identified the five (5) most likely reasons that are not oppositional or defiant in nature that lead to behavioral struggles and identify strategies for responding to disruptive behavior in the classroom.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Completion of all specified assignments is required for issuance of hours or credit. The Heritage Institute does not award partial credit.

The use of artificial intelligence is not permitted. Assignment responses found to be generated by AI will not be accepted.

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**HOURS EARNED:**

Completing the basic assignments (Section A. Information Acquisition) for this course automatically earns participants their choice of CEUs (Continuing Education Units), Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, or Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours. The Heritage Institute offers CEUs and is an approved provider of Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, and Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours.

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**UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT INFORMATION**

**REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

Continuing Education Quarter credits are awarded by Antioch University Seattle (AUS). AUS requires 75% or better for credit at the 400 level and 85% or better to issue credit at the 500 level. These criteria refer both to the amount and quality of work submitted.

1. Completion of Information Acquisition assignments 30%
  2. Completion of Learning Application assignments 40%
  3. Completion of Integration Paper assignment 30%
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### **CREDIT/NO CREDIT (No Letter Grades or Numeric Equivalents on Transcripts)**

Antioch University Seattle (AUS) Continuing Education Quarter credit is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis; neither letter grades nor numeric equivalents are on a transcript. 400 level credit is equal to a "C" or better, 500 level credit is equal to a "B" or better. This information is on the back of the transcript.

AUS Continuing Education quarter credits may or may not be accepted into degree programs. Prior to registering, determine with your district personnel, department head, or state education office the acceptability of these credits for your purpose.

### **ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION**

#### **REQUIRED TEXT**

The General Education Teacher's Guide to Autism by Barbara Boroson, 2022: Solution Tree Press, Bloomington, IN 232 pages. ISBN 9781954631137

None. All reading is online.

#### **MATERIALS FEE**

Text, The General Education Teacher's Guide to Autism, is available from Amazon for about \$30.

### **ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR HOURS OR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

#### **A. INFORMATION ACQUISITION**

Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments.

Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

#### **Assignment #1: Introducing Yourself**

Read the Introduction from the course text and introduce yourself with a 1-2 page statement that includes:

- Description of your current professional situation.
- What brings you the most joy, and what are your greatest challenges in your work?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve in taking this course?
- What are some of your thoughts on this initial reading from the course text?

#### **Assignment #2: Autism Overview**

Read Chapter 1: Autism Overview

Write a 1-2 page summary that includes the following:

- Describe the criteria for an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis.
- Describe the varied kinds of placements, programs, and supports for ASD students.

#### **Assignment #3: Anxiety**

Read Chapter 2: Anxiety

Write a 1-2 page summary that includes the following:

- Identify and describe the two (2) kinds of situations at school that trigger anxiety for ASD students and put them into a hypervigilant defense mode.
- Identify and describe at least two (2) strategies for easing anxiety for these students in your classroom or work situation.

#### **Assignment #4: Executive Function**

Read Chapter 3: Executive Function

Write a 1-2 page summary that includes the following:

- Define executive function.
- Identify and discuss the three (3) broad areas of cognition that executive dysfunction impacts.
- Identify and describe at least three (3) strategies for boosting ASD students' executive functioning skills (academic and/or behavioral).

#### **Assignment #5: Sensation**

Read Chapter 4: Sensation

Write a 1-2 page summary that includes the following:

- A comparison between the sensory systems of neurotypical vs. neurodiverse students.
- Describe briefly how autism can affect the five (5) senses.
- Identify and describe at least three (3) ways to mitigate sensory stress in your classroom or work situation.

#### **Assignment #6: Communication & Socialization**

Complete section **A** and one other:

##### **Section A)**

Read Chapter 5: Communication and Socialization

Write a 1-2 page summary that includes the following:

- Describe at least three (3) struggles that ASD students have in communication and socialization.
- Identify and describe at least two (2) strategies for supporting communication and socialization.
- Identify and describe at least two (2) ways you can help neurotypical and neurodiverse peers interact in a respectful and positive manner.

**AND/OR**

##### **Section B)**

If a teacher were to use some of the strategies in this chapter, how do you think it would affect a student's attitude about him/herself, the teacher, and the school? Explain in 300-400 words.

**AND/OR**

##### **Section C)**

Think of a time when someone made a difference in your own life by showing real kindness, compassion, and/or gratitude that stands out in your memory. How did this act matter at the time? What does that memory do for you now? Response in 300-400 words.

#### **ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

#### **B. LEARNING APPLICATION**

In this section, you will apply your learning to your professional situation. This course assumes that most participants are classroom teachers who have access to students. If you do not have a classroom available to you, please contact the instructor for course modifications. Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. ?Feel free to read and respond to others' comments. Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

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### **Assignment #7: Disruptive Behavior**

Read Chapter 7: Disruptive Behavior.

At the beginning of this chapter, the author wrote, "... most disruptive behaviors emerge when basic needs for comfort and safety are not met...Once you are able to identify the anxiety trigger, a sensory stressor, or other source of unrest lurking at the root of disruptive behavior, please look back at the chapter that addresses that area of challenge to remind yourself how to alleviate it". So, this reading and written assignment brings together the previous learning from assignments 1-6. The purpose of this assignment is to understand the problem that the behavior is messaging so you can identify the environmental triggers or lack of skills to be addressed in order to mitigate the disruptive behaviors.

Complete **one** of the following options:

#### **Option A)**

Write a 2-3 page detailed summary including the following information:

- Choose a student who has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum and is struggling with disruptive behavior(s).
- Share basic case study information (please change the name for privacy).
- Identify and describe the concerning behavior(s), and be sure to reference the five (5) most likely reasons discussed on pages 139 and 140 in the course text.
- Be sure to include at least three (3) strategies that could be employed to support this student by alleviating the stressors and improving their behavior.

If you do not know a student with an ASD diagnosis, you may create a fictional summary, although if it is possible to meet a student and gain information from their parents or teachers, that may be more beneficial.

**OR**

#### **Option B)**

Another assignment of your own design, with the instructor's prior approval, is equivalent in rigor and length to Option A.

### **Assignment #8: Lesson Plan**

Complete **one (1)** of the following options:

#### **Option A)**

Adapt a lesson to reflect what you've learned in this course.

- Implement your lesson with students in your classroom.
- Write a 250-500 word commentary on what worked well and what could be improved.
- Include any student feedback on your lesson.
- Share what you've learned with other teachers taking our courses by also contributing your Lesson to The Heritage Institute Lesson Library here.
- Upload your lesson plan.

**OR**

#### **Option B)**

Use this option if you do not have a classroom available.

- Adapt a lesson to reflect what you've learned in this course. (Do not implement it.)
- Share what you've learned with other teachers taking our courses by contributing your Lesson to The Heritage Institute Lesson Library here. Sample Lesson Plan Template: <https://www.hol.edu/about/lesson-template/>
- Write a 500+ word article on the subject/topic of this course.
- Please refer to the guidelines on our blog What Works: Teaching at its Best prior to writing your article.
- When you submit your article to your instructor, please also email a copy to Renee Leon THI blog curator and media specialist. ([renee@hol.edu](mailto:renee@hol.edu))
- Indicate whether or not you are OK with having your article considered for publishing on our website.
- Submit your modified lesson along with your article via email to your instructor.

### **Assignment #9: (500 Level ONLY)**

Complete the following:

1. From the course text, bibliography, community-based resources, websites, or other sources, please find a specific resource(s) that you can use to address the needs of an ASD student(s) that you have in your classroom or work situation. Identify the resource(s) and write a 2-3 page detailed summary of at least three (3) to five (5) strategies you will incorporate into your teaching as a result. Please include the outcomes you hope to achieve for your ASD student(s).

**AND**

2. Create a presentation (PowerPoint, Google Slides) to share with your staff summarizing each section from this course's six (6) learning outcomes. Be sure to focus on practical strategies/resources for educators. When you submit your presentation, please include the date, audience, and comments or feedback received.

### **C. INTEGRATION PAPER**

Assignment #10: (Required for 400 and 500 Level)

#### **SELF REFLECTION & INTEGRATION PAPER**

**(Please do not write this paper until you've completed all of your other assignments)**

Write a 400-500 word Integration Paper answering these 5 questions:

1. What did you learn vs. what you expected to learn from this course?
2. What aspects of the course were most helpful and why?
3. What further knowledge and skills in this general area do you feel you need?
4. How, when and where will you use what you have learned?
5. How and with what other school or community members might you share what you learned?

#### **INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON YOUR WORK:**

Instructors will comment on each assignment. If you do not hear from the instructor within a few days of posting your assignment, please get in touch with them immediately.

#### **QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING THIS COURSE:**

**Lori Gibson, M.A., E.S.A.**, is a dedicated school counselor with a wealth of experience in the field of education. She holds a Master's degree in counseling psychology from Gonzaga University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in both education and psychology from Whitworth University. With a career spanning 31 years, Lori has contributed her expertise to various educational institutions, including North Chicago High School in Illinois, Lake Washington School District and Spokane Public Schools, both in Washington state. For the past 21 years, Lori has been an instructor at The Heritage Institute, where she is deeply passionate about empowering fellow educators to excel in their noble work within schools. In today's evolving educational landscape Lori understands the shift on many fronts - including the mandates to integrate technology, embrace neurodiversity, foster social and emotional growth and dig deep to understand the neurological basis for challenging behaviors. Lori recognizes that our students, pre-K to 12th grade face an array of challenges, from learning, social and emotional gaps due to the ripples of the pandemic, family stressors, poverty, the impact of social media and entitlement issues, among others. She firmly believes that educators must be equipped with the latest research and practical strategies to address these multifaceted needs effectively. In her courses, Lori's primary aim is to provide educators with respectful and encouraging guidance to navigate these challenges. Her courses and workshops are designed to empower teachers and administrators with the knowledge and tools necessary to create a supportive and inclusive environment that prioritizes the well-being and development of every student so they can be about the business of learning!

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

##### **AUTISM INSIGHTS: Practical Strategies for the Classroom**

- Armstrong, Thomas (2012). *Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength-Based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs succeed in School and Life*. Alexandria, VA: Bantam. ISBN: 978-1-4166-1483-8. This is a more over-arching text for educators that discusses the strengths and needs of all neurodiverse students including those with learning disabilities, ADHD, autism, intellectual disabilities and emotional and behavioral disorders.
- Boroson, Barbara (2022). *The General Education Teacher's Guide to Autism*. Solution Tree Press, Bloomington, IN ISBN 9781954631137. This is the course text. It is an excellent resource that educators can use not only for this course, but as a guide for years to come for both perspective and strategies in serving neurodiverse students in an inclusive environment. Barbara Boroson brings her dual perspective as an autism educator and the parent of an autistic child to her work.
- Goleman, Daniel (2007). *Social Intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam. ISBN: 978-0553384499. Most educators have read Daniel Goleman's classic work on emotional intelligence. This book is a must-read for those who want to understand the components of social intelligence.

- Mannix, D. (2008). *Social Skills Activities for Special Children*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers. Publishers. ISBN: 978-0470259351. This is an update of the classic resource for special education teachers, counselors and social workers who want to help their students develop social skills. The book has over 160 activities and is organized around three core areas crucial to social development in the elementary grades. They include: accepting rules and authority at school, relating to peers, and developing positive social skills. There is a separate book for those who work in secondary schools – *Social Skill Activities: For Secondary Students with Special Needs*.
- Sicile-Kira, Chantal (2014). *Autism Spectrum Disorder (revised): The Complete Guide to Understanding Autism*. New York, N.Y.: TarcherPerigee. ISBN: 978-0399166631. This book was written by the mother of an ASD child, who is also a professional in the field of autism. This is a very comprehensive book including potential causes, diagnosis, possible treatments and interventions, etc. There is excellent information on strategies for families, as well as strategies and resources for educators.
- Silverman, Stephan, Kenworthy, Lauren & Weinfeld, Rich (2014). *School Success for Kids with High-Functioning Autism*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, Inc. ISBN: 978-161821165X. This book is an updated version of an earlier text based on the criteria from the DSM-5. It does an excellent job describing ASD students who are in the general education setting but need specific support. It discusses the “Big 10” obstacles, as well as offering effective solutions to help them navigate and develop the social and language skills necessary to be successful. This is a good resource (regardless of the age of the ASD student) for parents, teachers and administrators.
- Watson, Karen (2022). *Good AUTISM Practice for Teachers: Embracing Neurodiversity and Supporting Inclusion*. St Albans, UK. Critical Publishing Ltd. ISBN: 978-1-914171-47-5. This book is from an educational teacher and leader from Scotland who is committed to empowering educators. There are two parts in this text, the first is an accessible explanation for understanding autism more deeply, while the second is about putting that theory into practice with strategies, case studies and reflective questions. I highly recommend this book!
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