CECS 5900: Parental Perspectives: Life with Autism, Applications of Research, and Technology Use
3 Credit Hours

Audience:
Graduate Students, Parents/Caregivers, Pre and In-Service Teachers (General Ed. & Special Ed.), School Psychologists, School Counselors

Course Description:
More and more children are being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), and their parents are searching for answers in conventional therapies, evidence-based practices, Applied Behavior Analysis, and the use of technology. Many parents spend an enormous amount of time searching for interventions; many take their children to multiple therapies (OT, Speech & Language, ABA, and others), and others search for the best technologies to engage their children and help them gain functional skills. Parents are actively searching for solutions; they should be involved in intervention planning and delivery, because they know their child’s strengths and weaknesses. This course is a comparative analysis of the stories of three families. The comparative analysis will focus on common dominators in the families’ stories and help students build a profile of the things that aided and hindered families struggling to help their children. Three published books will be used to examine the struggles of families. Several technology products will be reviewed and applied to instructional problems, time management, organizational skills, and social skill development. Research articles will be analyzed and evaluated to determine the needs and issues of families coping with the effects of ASDs. In addition to the abovementioned, students in this course will engage in electronic chat sessions with a family of a child with ASDs, and they will design and develop a technology-based solution for one problem faced by the child in the family with whom they have communicated.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Parental Perspectives: Life with Autism, Applications of Research, and Technology Use is designed to help teachers, prospective teachers, parents, caregivers, school psychologists, and school counselors understand and interact positively with families struggling with ASDs. This course provides an overview of various technology tools applicable to students in the Autism Spectrum, and it allows students to compare and analyze family stories to create a profile of needs and issues. Students will learn the following:

1. Strategies for working effectively with parents and caregivers who have a child in the Autism Spectrum,
2. Ways applications of technology can ease transitions, aid organization, support language, assist with academic preparation, and provide entertainment and relaxation,
3. Strategies for applying technology tools to problems faced by their assigned family, and
4. Common characteristics of families working with children in the Autism Spectrum
Course Instructor:

Demetria Ennis-Cole, Ph.D. (Demetria.Ennis-Cole@unt.edu) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Technology and Cognition at the University of North Texas. She has degrees in Computer Science and Curriculum & Instruction (emphasis area: Computer Education). She worked in industry as a Programmer for International Business Machines, and she worked as a Computer Analyst at Louisiana State University before accepting a faculty position with The University of North Texas. Ennis-Cole is included in Outstanding Young Women of America, and she is a Patricia Roberts Harris Fellow, an Image Award Recipient, a recipient of the TCEA Area 10 Excellence with 21st Century Tools Award, and a recipient of ISTE’s Inspire by Example Award. She is a member of several organizations including The Easter Seals North Texas Autism Advisory Board, The Autism Society of America, The International Society for Technology in Education, The Autism Society of Collin County, and others. Her research interests include Technology Utilization by Special Populations (Mature Adults, pre-and-secondary students, and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders), Preservice Teachers and Technology Training, Software Evaluation, and Artificial Intelligence in Education. She added students with Autism Spectrum Disorders after working with her son, who was diagnosed with Autism ten years ago.

Course Overview:

I. An Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders
   a. What is included in the Autism Spectrum? How is a diagnosis made?
   b. Autistic Disorder, Asperger, PDD-NOS, Retts Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and associated profiles
   c. Possible Causes of ASDs
   d. Research on families living with ASDs

II. Technologies Useful for students with Autism
   a. Visual Schedules, PECS
   b. Educational Software (Instructional Games, Simulations, Tutorials, Drill & Practice)
   c. Voice Queues
   d. Augmentative Devices
   e. E-books
   f. Talking Photo Albums
   g. Reading Systems
   h. Interactive Comic Strip Conversations
   i. Applications Software
   j. Natural Language and Voice Recognition
   k. Expert Systems
III. Families’ Stories – Comparative Analysis
   a. See Sam Run: A Mother’s Story of Autism – Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe
   b. Saving Ben: A Father’s Story of Autism – Dan Burns
   c. Raindrops on Roman: Overcoming Autism: A Message of Hope – Elizabeth Scott

IV. Research on the Issues of Families with Autism
   a. Family Profile
   b. Stress Level
   c. Siblings and their interaction with their Autistic brother or sister
   d. Evidence-based Interventions
   e. Balancing the Needs of all Family Members
   f. Marital Issues
   g. Educational Needs of the Child with Autism
   h. Social Needs of the Child with Autism
   j. Family Routines
   k. Social Needs and Issues faced by the Family

V. Strategies for working with Families of Students with ASDs.