

## Assist students on the spectrum as they prepare for jobs

By Joan Hope, Editor

Laurie Ackles, director of the Spectrum Support Program at the Rochester Institute of Technology, provides ongoing support to students with autism spectrum disorder to help them prepare for the workforce.

### **Q** What challenges do students with autism spectrum disorder need to prepare for when they enter the workforce?

**A** Being prepared to work in teams in a work setting can be tricky. Sometimes individuals on the spectrum can be seen as difficult to work with. They aren't trying to be difficult, but sometimes they challenge people, interrupt or blurt things out.

Office politics will also be a challenge. Workers need to understand why it's important to ask "How was your weekend?" even if they don't really care.

And executive functioning skills can be a challenge. Being able to prioritize, focus, and respond to frustration appropriately are critical skills.

### **Q** What support is most helpful for students during the job search?

**A** All students at RIT fulfill co-op requirements that provide them with work experience in their field. The Spectrum Support Program offers three seminars that prepare students to be successful finding and keeping a position. The courses are noncredit and pass/fail. But it's important for them to be set up as courses that appear on the students' schedules so that instructors know the students will come.

As second-semester freshmen, students take a 15-week course that teaches them how to choose activities to build their résumé. Ackles and a staff member from the co-op office teach it. The faculty

help the students create LinkedIn profiles. Also, students think about what type of work environment would be best for them. And they conduct an informational interview with their faculty advisor about working in their chosen field.

Next, students take an advanced co-op prep course, usually in the first semester of their second year. They practice interviewing and attend a networking event with local employers. Learning to answer questions about how their experiences prepare them for a job can be a challenge.

When students are ready to apply for co-op positions, they participate in a co-op lab, which is taught one-on-one in a computer lab. They get help identifying positions that might suit them and writing cover letters.

The faculty start discussions about when, how and whether to disclose that they have autism spectrum disorder early on. That decision is highly individualized. Sometimes students can disclose during the interview when they are talking about their strengths. Some students need to disclose that they are on the spectrum during the interview or the interviewer will think they are unfocused or disinterested.

And throughout the courses, the faculty help them work on issues that are challenging for students with autism spectrum disorder such as what their body language is saying.

Ackles recommends authors Barbara Bissonnette and Michelle Garcia Winner to students so that they can learn more about getting and keeping a job and about social thinking. ■

### Higher Education Publications from Jossey-Bass/Wiley

- Enrollment Management Report
- Student Affairs Today
- Campus Legal Advisor
- Dean & Provost
- Recruiting & Retaining Adult Learners
- FERPA Bulletin for Higher Education Professionals
- College Athletics and the Law
- Disability Compliance for Higher Education
- Assessment Update
- The Department Chair
- Campus Security Report
- The Successful Registrar

For information about any of these publications, call Customer Service at 800.835.6770.

### DISABILITY COMPLIANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Copyright © 2015 Wiley Periodicals, Inc., A Wiley Company

**Publisher:**  
Lesley Iura

**Editor:**  
Joan Hope

**Assistant Editor:**  
Halley Sutton

**Legal Contributors:**  
Aileen Gelpi, Esq.  
Richard H. Willits, Esq.

**Contact Editor Joan Hope at 561-748-5094 or jhope@wiley.com or Legal Contributor Richard H. Willits, Esq., at reelrhw@hotmail.com.**

**JOSSEY-BASS**  
A Wiley Brand

*Disability Compliance for Higher Education* (Print ISSN 1086-1335, Online ISSN 1943-8001) is published monthly by Wiley Subscription Services, Inc., A Wiley Company, 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774.

Annual subscription rate is \$230 for individuals.

To order single subscriptions, call toll-free 800-835-6770 or email [cs-journals@wiley.com](mailto:cs-journals@wiley.com). Discounts available for quantity subscriptions—contact Customer Service at [cs-journals@wiley.com](mailto:cs-journals@wiley.com). Periodicals postage paid at Hoboken, NJ, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Disability Compliance for Higher Education*, Jossey-Bass, One Montgomery Street, Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94104-4594. Outside the United States, go to [www.wiley.com/customerhelp](http://www.wiley.com/customerhelp) and click the "Contact Us" link for additional information.

Copyright © 2015 Wiley Periodicals, Inc., A Wiley Company. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600. Requests to the Publisher for reprint permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, c/o John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774; 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6326, [www.wiley.com/go/permissions](http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions).

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information regarding the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the publisher and editor are not engaged in rendering legal counsel or other professional service. If legal advice is required, the service of a competent professional should be sought.