Title: NYU Child Study Center (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Studies, CAMS)  
Advanced Seminar: Autism Spectrum Disorders (CAMSHS-UA-201)

Instructor:

Adriana Di Martino, MD, Leon Levy Assistant Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Research Director of the Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinical and Research Program, Associate Director of the Institute for Pediatric Neuroscience of the Child Study Center at the NYU Langone Medical Center. Dr. Di Martino’s email is dimara01@nyumc.org; her phone number is 646-754-5154.

Points and Prerequisites:

Four points. V05.0201

Prerequisite: V05.0101 (Child and Adolescent Psychopathology) or consent of the instructor.

Course Description:

This seminar will provide students with an in depth exposure to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Beginning with etiological theories, we will examine various biological, behavioral and cognitive paradigms in an effort to help students conceptualize the developmental links between brain and behavior. We will then move onto epidemiology, diagnostic and treatment strategies, and finally issues of public policy. All students will engage in a supervised experiential lab practicum where they will work directly with children and adolescents with ASD for 2-3 hours each week. Primary sources will include scientific papers, individual accounts by people living with ASD, and reviews of current popular media and websites.

Course Aims:

a. Knowledge

Students will learn key aspects of:

1. Theories that link biology and brain function to account for the symptoms of autism and other developmental and psychiatric disorders; and

2. How these theories lead to the development of treatments and the clarification of prognostic indicators.

b. Skills

Students will be able to:

1. Apply child development and behavioral theory to their work with children and adolescents with ASD; and
2. Develop an understanding of the relationship between scientific research and public policy.

c. Attitudes: to avoid glibness, to question media portrayals, to think about what it means to be human

Students will develop:

1. An understanding of the complexity of individual differences even amongst individuals diagnosed with the same developmental disorder, recognizing that each person with ASD is an individual and that his/her strengths and particular difficulties must be considered in developing appropriate interventions and treatments; and

2. An appreciation of the fact that no single theory can explain all behavior and no single treatment approach is effective for all individuals.

Autism Spectrum Disorders
Course Outline & Syllabus

This course provides students with an in depth study of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Students will develop observational skills and a sense of scientific inquiry into current representations of autism and other developmental and psychiatric disorders. By incorporating a supervised clinical practicum into the investigation of autism, the prototypical developmental disorder, students will learn to integrate their personal observations and experience with current research studies.

The course will have particular relevance for those interested in psychology and medicine but is open to all interested and qualified students. Brief lectures and readings will introduce major areas of research in ASD, including diagnosis, assessment, theories of brain-behavior function, and treatments. Students will be required to attend a lab practicum for three hours each week at an affiliated school program for children and adolescents with ASD. Students will keep a journal of their observations and experiences, as well as their reactions to the readings, which will be handed in weekly for review by the instructors.

Students will regularly present their observations and ideas in class based upon their practicum placements, the readings, and the presentation of ASD in the media and on specified websites. Each week students will be taught one clinical or educational technique used in the assessment or treatment of individuals with ASD. In class we will examine the current major areas of autism research, including epidemiological studies of the prevalence (and reasons for the rising numbers of children identified), methods of diagnosis, current treatment techniques, and contexts (e.g., educational, Relationship Development Insights, social skills training, and peer modeling). The focus of the class will be on integrating information from the reading and brief lectures with personal hands-on experience working with children and adolescents.

Although the focus of the course is on the specific developmental disorders within the autistic spectrum, through the lectures, demonstrations and discussions, and the experiences in placements, the course will provide students with a broad introduction to developmental changes over time, questions about the relationship between brain function and basic human behaviors, individual differences, ethics of clinical practice, health and public policy issues, and treatment approaches.
### Session 1

**Course Topic:** 
*Introduction to autism*

Information regarding the structure of the class, the volunteer opportunities, and requirements will be reviewed. An introductory description of how autism is defined and the major issues in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in clinical practice and research will be provided. Dates for in class media and website student presentations will be selected.

**Sign up for Volunteer/Practicum Site:** Learning Spring School or Boost! JCC After School Program.

***Note: next week’s class February 5th will be held at Learning Spring: Meet at Learning Spring School 247 E 20th Street at 2nd Ave at 9:40 am***

### Session 2

**Course Topic:** 
*Epidemiology and prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (Is there an autism epidemic? How would we know if there were?)*

**Orientation to Learning Spring:** class will be held today at Learning Spring

**Discussion** of Readings and Journals

**Readings Due:**


**Assignment Due:** Journal 1: Comment on readings and any personal experience with individuals with ASD.

### Session 3

**Course Topic:** 
*Epidemiology and Etiology (Is there one cause of autism? What does counting the number of cases of autism have to do with determining its causes?)*

**Website Reviews:**
• Safe Minds (http://www.safeminds.org/)
• American Academy of Pediatrics (http://www.aap.org/enus/Pages/Default.aspx)
• Centers for Disease Control (CDC; http://www.cdc.gov/)

Discussion of experiences, readings and journals

Readings Due:


Chapters 4 and 5


Assignment Due: Journal 2: Comment on the readings and observations of typical toddlers in ordinary situations – park, stores, buses; how do they act and how might it feel to have a child with ASD?

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Brain development & the neuroscience of autism. Regression: one of the mysteries of autism.

Website reviews:
• First Signs (https://www.firstsigns.org/)
• National Institute of Health NIH (http://www.nih.gov/)

Autism in the media

Discussion of the readings

Readings Due:


**Assignment Due:** Journal 3: Comment on readings and experience at site.

**Diagnosis of ASD:** How is it done? How is it different at different ages; for children at different levels? For different purposes? By different disciplines?

**Website review:**
Association for Science in Autism Treatment ([http://www.asatonline.org/](http://www.asatonline.org/))

**Autism in the media**

**Presentation** and videos of individuals with ASD (from toddlers to adults) with a range of severity.

**Readings Due:**


**Assignment Due:** Journal 4: Comment on readings and experience at site; or any experience you have had “being diagnosed.”

**Social behavior in ASD (Part I)**

**Website Reviews:**
- The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding ([http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories](http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories))
- RDI-autism (google search)

**Autism in the Media**

**Readings Due:**


**Assignment Due:** Journal 5: Comment on readings and experience at site
Social behavior in ASD (Part II)

Autism in the media

Website reviews:
• The TEACCH Autism Program (http://www.teacch.com/)

Guest Lecturer: Candice Baugh, MA, LMHC. Clinical Assistant Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Clinical Coordinator, Social Learning Program.

Readings Due:


Assignment Due: Journal 6: Comment on readings and experience at site

Language and communication development in ASD

Website reviews:
• American Speech and Hearing Association (http://www.asha.org/);
• PROMPT (http://www.promptinstitute.com/)

Autism in the media

Presentation/demonstration of language tasks and samples. Guest Lecturer: Sarah Kern, LCSW. Clinical Assistant Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Program Coordinator, Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinical and Research Program.

Discussion of readings and volunteering

Readings Due:


Grinker, R., Unstrange Minds: Remapping the World of Autism. New York, Basic
Books, 2007. Chapters 10 to 11


**Assignment Due:** Journal 7: Comment on readings and experience at site

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*Restricted, repetitive and sensory behaviors, and their associations with problem behaviors*

**Videos of repetitive behaviors**

**Discussion** Learning Spring staff will be here today to discuss placement experience

**Website Reviews:**
- ASPIE.com (http://www.aspie.com/)
- OASIS@MAAP (http://www.aspergerssyndrome.org/)

**Autism in the Media**

**Readings Due:**


**Assignment Due:** Journal 8: Comment on readings and experience at site

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*Functional analysis to improve communication*

**Website Reviews:**
- Association for Behavior Analysis International® ABAI (http://www.abainternational.org/)

**Autism in the Media**

**Presentation and demonstration; Guest Lecturer:** Sarah Kuriakose PhD, BCBA-D Clinical Assistant Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Clinical Director, Autism Spectrum Disorders Service

**Readings Due:**


**Assignment Due:** Journal 9: Comment on readings and experience at site

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**Behavioral interventions and psychopharmacological treatment techniques**

**Website reviews:**

- Defeat Autism Now (www.autism.com)

**Presentation** on use of positive behavioral supports in individuals with ASD; **Guest Lecturer:** Caitlin Walsh, PhD Candidate, Intern at NYU Child Study Center,

**Autism in the media**

**Readings Due:**


**Assignment Due:** Journal 10; comment on readings, site observations.

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**Cognitive development and ASD; theories of cognitive deficits and differences (Theory of Mind; central coherence, higher order cognition)**

**Website Review:** Autism Society of America (http://www.autism-society.org/)

**Autism in the Media**

**Readings Due:**


**Assignment Due:** Journal 11 : Comment on readings and experience at site

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**Stigma, parent support, parent teaching, parent roles**
Website review: Autism Speaks (www.autismspeaks.org/)

Autism in the media

Parent visit for discussion

Readings Due:


Offit, P. Autism’s False Prophets, Chapter 9 and Epilogue (Next on Oprah).

Assignment Due: Journal 12: Comment on readings and experiences

From treatment to neuroscience, the idea of plasticity. What does this mean for public policy?

Readings Due:


Assignment Due: Peer-reviewed Journal Article Summary

EXAMINATIONS AND GRADES:

Grades will be calculated based upon weekly participation in class and volunteer sites, journaling, and two presentations, as follows:

1) Journal Entries (30%): 10 entries are required, each of which should be 1 - 2 double-spaced typed pages; if more than 10 reports are submitted, students can drop the lowest two scores. Journals will be graded from 1 (very poor) to 10 (spectacular) with 3 points deducted for every day late. Journal entries are due via email Tuesday by 5 pm. Total for journals = 100 points. Please type the journal double-spaced with your name, the journal number, the date
and a title for that journal entry at the top. Please use 12 or 14 point easy to read font.

2) Participation (25%): Students will be graded upon their participation in class, specifically their demonstrated familiarity with the academic material and research (worth 50 points for class/50 points for volunteer time).

3) Current Event Presentation (15%): Students are required to make a 10 minute presentation on a current event which illuminates some aspect of how we as a society deal with ASD. (worth 25 points)

4) Website Presentation (15%): Students are required to make a 10 minute presentation based upon their analysis of a website relevant to the topic of the class. Selected websites will describe various ASD diagnostic and treatment strategies and different aspects of medical and neuroscience research in the field. (worth 25 points)


**VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT:**

**LearningSpring School** (elementary school for children with autism or Asperger Syndrome).
Located at 247 E 20th Street. [www.learningspring.com](http://www.learningspring.com) mpoggi@learningspring.org (Margaret Poggi, Head of School)

1) Assist in class and lunch (MTThF – pick one; all are from 11 – 1) OR

2) Assist in after school program Mondays 3 – 5 or Tuesdays 3-5:30pm

**Boost! Afterschool program:** Upper West Side JCC (Amsterdam between 75th-76th St; take 1, 2 or 3 or B or C to 72nd St. exit). Spots for 2 people in each of two groups. Volunteers contact Melissa Lader, 646-505-5729, mlader@jccmanhattan.org.

1) Assist in social groups one or two days a week on Tuesdays or Thursdays for a social group session with a focus on music and movement – the session will be 45 minutes long from 4:15 to 5 pm.

Both placements will continue through the semester. **You are expected to miss no more than one session.**

**Rules for volunteer work:**

1) You must be on time and stay for the whole session. Sign in when you arrive and leave at Learning Spring. If you are unable to attend, please call before 8 am the day you are expected.

2) Introduce yourself by name and NYU as often as possible.
3) Help in any way you can (e.g. opening doors, getting trash).

4) Please be careful with your language. Many children with autism regularly repeat things they have heard that they may not understand.

5) Dress appropriately. Wear your nametag (and t-shirt). No flip-flops, skimpy outfits, clothes with holes, ears or underwear showing. Be prudish!

6) Turn off cell phones. No texting, calling or taking photographs.

7) No eating or gum

8) Ask for help if needed. Do not discuss individual children in front of other children.

The textbooks for the course will be:


A recent wide-ranging account of autism research and policies in a number of countries, as well as personal experiences by a cultural anthropologist who is also the father of a girl with autism.


This is a summary of papers regarding the core features of autism, diagnostic methods, behavioral and other educational (as opposed to medical) treatments and the public policy implications.

Various personal, fictional and other accounts of autism used in the course will include:


(7) *Speed of Dark* by Elizabeth Moon (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002).


In addition, primary sources will be assigned from journals and other sources.