



Behavior analysts seek more certified workers

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As Brandon Sikes spoke with the children at the Autism in Motion clinic on Jan. 31, he took note of their behaviors and communication in order to provide them with skills that they can use in their everyday lives.

Interacting with children is just part of Sikes' position as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. A position he thinks Arkansas has a shortage of compared to other states.

BCBAs are professionals certified to conduct Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, which the U.S. Surgeon General considers to be one of the most effective treatments for autism.

There are 95 certified BCBAs in Arkansas, 23 of which are located in Fayetteville, according to the Behavior Analyst Certification Board. Bordering states Oklahoma and Mississippi have a similar amount of certified BCBAs, with 116 and 94 BCBAs, respectively.

Other states bordering Arkansas – Missouri, Texas, Tennessee and Louisiana – have significantly more BCBAs at 552, 1,000, 613 and 363 respectively, according to the Behavior Analyst Certification Board.

ABA therapy has been in place since the 1950s and involves applying and adapting principles of learning theory to affect behavior in another



Haydon King Staff Photographer
Hannah Walter, a behavioral technician at AIM, works with children with autism to help their behavior and teach them how to express themselves.

person. It is one of the only widely accepted methods for treating autism, according to Applied Behavior Analysis Education.

An estimated 1 in 77 Arkansas children has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, according to UAMS.

Sikes, also the regional clinical director for Northwest Arkansas AIM Clinics, said the number of BCBAs at a

clinic determines how many kids they can treat.

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board recommends a caseload of 6-15 kids per BCBA.

While there is currently about one BCBA per school district, Sikes thinks there should be more funding sources for additional BCBAs to help out kids in the school districts, he said.

"I hate seeing families and kids who were kind of lost and maybe depressed about their situation,

but now with ABA I've been able to see the progress that you can make," Sikes said.

Mackenzie Rex, a freshman who has autism, took a class at the UofA about Applied Behavioral Therapy last fall.

Rex took the class because she wants to be a teacher and she thinks learning about behavioral analysis is interesting, she said.

"You can have seven kids

with autism and it's gonna be completely different versus each individual," Rex said. "You can't say 'This kid needs this' and have it work for every kid."

Rex said that medication, weighted blankets, fidget toys and support from her friends have been the best treatment for her.

Elizabeth Lora, an associate professor of curriculum and instruction, said that for someone to become a BCBA,

they must have a master's degree in education or psychology, six courses specific to content in behavior analysis and 1,500 hours of work supervised by a BCBA.

The UofA offers an online graduate certificate program in Applied Behavior Analysis, which has 26 students enrolled as of Feb. 4, Lora said.

"What we see is that behavior analysis - applied behavior analysis - is consistently listed as one of the most validated, if not the most validated, method of autism treatment and intervention," Lora said.

Many of the BCBA in Arkansas work with people with autism or in school systems, Lora said.

In a survey of over 7,000 BCBAs, over 67% worked in autism-related fields, according to the 2016 Job Task Analysis. 12% of the BCBAs worked in education and 8% worked in developmental disabilities.

"We have more than quadrupled the amount of behavior analysts available in Arkansas since I moved here (in 2013), which is incredible, it's a wonderful thing," Lora said.

Lora said that more available BCBAs mean that more children can receive a high quality and evidence-based education.

"That's really, really important because it affects the ability of the individual to live independently and to access things independently, like learning how to communicate or learning how to even go to the bathroom," Lora said.

ASG Senate declines to expand legislation requirements

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The Associated Student Government Senate voted Tuesday to reject a bill requiring senators to write and present one piece of legislation each semester.

Eleven senators voted in favor of the bill, and 28 voted against it, with three abstaining.

The bill would have amended the senate's current standing rules requiring senators to write one piece of legislation each school year. Lizeth Martinez, a senior and senator representing the College of Education and Health Professions, co-authored the bill with Daniel Webster, ASG director of diversity and inclusion.

Martinez thought the bill would have helped to ensure that senators consistently do the job they were elected to do, she said prior to the vote. Fewer than 26% of senators wrote legislation last fall, Martinez said. ASG senators passed 13 pieces of legislation in fall 2019, compared to 33 in spring 2019 and 12 in fall 2018.

"This is in no way to, like, attack any senators that haven't written a piece of legislation," Martinez said. "It's a way for us to really be conscientious of collaborating with one another and to remember why we were elected in the first place."

Senate Infrastructure Chair Levi Brown questioned Martinez and Webster during a 45-minute discussion session when they presented it to the senate Jan. 28. Brown voted against the bill because he feared it could lead to senators hastily writing meaningless legislation that they don't really believe in, he said.

ASG President Jared Pinkerton thinks that while senators should be held accountable for fulfilling the contracts they sign when elected, in which they promise to make efforts to improve the UA campus, this bill might not be the most effective way to uphold that promise, he said.

"We want meaningful pieces of legislation that better the

lives of students here at the University of Arkansas and that is what I'm advocating for and that's what I will always advocate for," Pinkerton said.

Like Brown, Pinkerton thinks requiring senators to write a set number of legislations could lead them to prioritize quantity over quality, he said.

"You're talking about this concept of having to do something instead of doing it because you're passionate about it, you know," Pinkerton said.

Meredith Wilson, a junior and senator representing the Walton College of Business, supported the proposed bill.

Wilson said she understood Brown's and other senators' concerns but thinks it is up to senators to choose what kind of culture they want the senate to have. Wilson thinks senators can and should choose to commit time and energy to working together to write quality, meaningful legislation, she said.

Brown said he thinks senators should write more legislation, but did not think the bill was the right way to spur change. Brown thinks the problem lies not in a lack of senators' desire to do their jobs, but in uncertainty about how to draft legislation. Freshman senators in particular can be nervous about writing bills because they have no prior experience doing so, Brown said.

"Every senator has stuff that they care about and that they want to see done on campus," Brown said. "I feel like the problem right now is that a lot of them don't really know how to go about making that change happen."

Brown, who plans to run for senate chair for the 2020-21 term, wants to implement a more extensive orientation for incoming freshman senators and encourage collaboration between senators if he is elected, he said.

On Jan. 29, Twitter user Clark Irving tweeted "Just found out the only piece of legislation presented at ASG's Senate meeting was about

making senators actually write legislation... and the senators had a 45 minute conniption...over having to do their job? Students first, am I right?"

The tweet resulted in a thread of tweets between Irving, Brown, and Twitter user UARK Mystery Prof discussing senate transparency and the fact that meeting minutes are not immediately available to the public.

In response, Brown and Wilson, along with senators Jesus Perera and Andrew Stark, are co-authoring a bill that would change senate procedure for when minutes are approved and posted online. If the bill passes, senators will vote to approve each meeting's minutes at the end of the meeting so they can be posted the following day, rather than the following week after they are approved at the next meeting, Wilson said.

Brown, Martinez and Wilson all think it is important for students to participate in ASG meetings more, they said. Brown said that over the course of his term as senator he doesn't remember one student ever speaking during the public comment session that is allotted at the beginning of every meeting.

Wilson said she wants to remind students that the comment sessions are there each week for them to voice their opinions on the legislation up for debate. While Twitter can be a good way to keep in touch with senators, these sessions are the best way for constituents to make their voices heard, Wilson said.

Brown and Wilson both said they are hopeful the bill they are drafting will lead to more student participation in senate meetings. If the bill passes, students would be able to more quickly see what the senate discussed at a given meeting and have time to decide if they want to come comment on it the following week, Brown said.

Martinez said Tuesday night that one of the reasons her bill was controversial was that senators thought the proposed requirements might not be comparable to those of other student governments. Martinez plans to contact student government officials at other SEC schools, amend the failed bill and present a new version at next week's senate meeting, she said.

Abbi Ross contributed to this report.



Cayden Hartman Staff Photographer
ASG President Jared Pinkerton (left) and Freshman Leadership Forum Coordinator John Hedgecock (right) give their reports before a senate meeting Feb. 4, when senators voted against a bill expanding legislation requirements.

SWEET CHARIOT

6P.M TUESDAY, FEB 18

Pomfret Great Room

Thirty minute tours will commence at 6 p.m. until 8 p.m.

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