

**Student  
Empowerment and  
Accessibility Program  
at Haddon University**

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Each year about **16,000** students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enroll in higher education institutions (Wei, Wagner, Hudson, Yu & Javitz, 2016).

Many students with ASD achieve academically at the same level or higher than their peers (Cox, Thompson, Anderson, Mintz, Locks, Morgan, Edelstein, & Wolz, 2017), but

only **38.8%** of college students with ASD will graduate (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver, & Wei, 2011).

These students arrive at college with certain underdeveloped skill sets that negatively impact both their transition and persistence (Ackles, Boman, Brown, Cornman, Lubbers, McGarry, & Rigler, 2014).

By creating a system of support, we can ensure these students have a greater opportunity for success on our campus.

# Haddon University Overview



**Public, coed** - INSTITUTION TYPE



**1854** - YEAR FOUNDED



**13,586** - UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT



**11** - NUMBER OF RESIDENCE HALLS



**42** - NUMBER OF STUDENTS (SELF-REPORTED) ON  
AUTISM SPECTRUM





# Peer Programs

## **Adelphi University - "Bridges to Adelphi"**

Program Focuses:

- Career preparation, social competence, and academic skills

Program Components

- Vocational coaches
- Peer Mentors
- Individual learning strategists and academic coaches

## **Bellevue College - "Autism Spectrum Navigators"**

Program Focuses:

- Executive functioning, social interaction, self-advocacy, and self-regulation

Program Components

- Career preparation courses
- Facilitated conversations with professors
- Campus awareness and training and self-regulation

## **Marshall University - "Autism Training Center"**

Program Focuses:

- Social, academic, communication, leisure, and personal living

Program Components

- \$4,500 per semester
- Focused on students with Asperger's Syndrome

# The Student Empowerment and Accessibility (SEA) Program

Based on Domains of Challenge for College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Ackles et al., 2014):

- Executive functioning
- Academic skills
- Self-care
- Social competence
- Career preparation
- Self-advocacy

## Program Components:

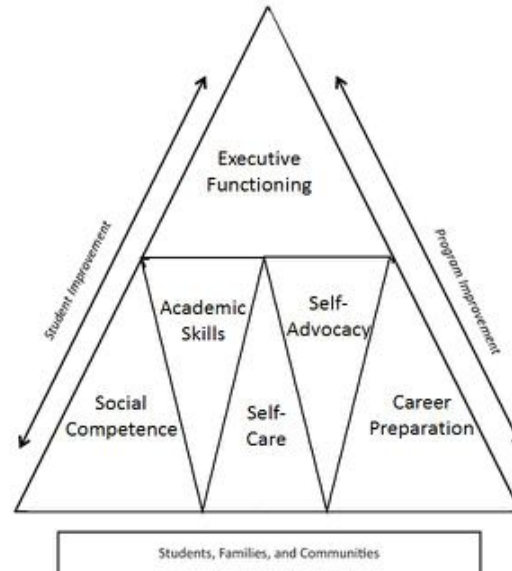
- Peer mentors
- Weekly skills building meetings
  - Curriculum focused on social skills, goal setting, group outings, college life and more
- Partnerships with:
  - Career center
  - Residential life
  - Orientation
  - Academic affairs
  - Student Activities
- Faculty and staff training and development



# Executive Functioning

**“Individuals with ASD possess varying degrees of executive functioning deficit, which can make it difficult to adapt to the organizational aspects of independent living and self-directed learning required for college success” (Ackles et al., 2014).**

Executive functioning refers to organization, working memory, complex problem solving, sustained attention, and self-regulation (Ackles et al., 2014). These skills affects all the other domains. We recognize that students will be on varying levels of executive functioning deficit and SEA aims to provide accommodations for all students. We believe involving peers, families, and communities will contribute to the success of students with ASD.



**“Although students in this population may be intellectually gifted or passionate about a particular subject area, they often have an uneven profile of strengths and challenges that is important to recognize” (Longtin & College, 2014).**

We are taking a three-pronged approach to focus on the strengths of students and empower them to overcome obstacles involving:

#### Faculty and staff

- An academic advisor in each department with either training or previous experience working with ASD students

#### Peer tutors/mentors

- Working with student success services to pair up students knowledgeable & comfortable working with students with ASD

#### Professional Development Opportunities

- Semesterly workshops addressing effective feedback methods, potential academic obstacles, providing support, etc. available to all faculty, staff, and students in peer mentorship roles
- Training available for faculty: effective pedagogical practices for ASD students such as using universal design for presentations and utilizing clarifying and concise language

A close-up photograph of a student's hands holding a pencil and writing in a notebook. The background is blurred, showing other students in a classroom setting. The text 'Academic Skills' is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

Academic Skills



# Self-Care

**“Many students with ASD [autism spectrum disorder] experience heightened sensitivity to noise levels, types of lighting, and other stimuli”  
(Shmulsky, Gobbo, Donahue & College, 2013).**

Providing students with ASD with specialized residential options will contribute to their sense of belonging and lower levels of stress related to overstimulation and housing.

- Carpeted rooms to reduce noise
- Incandescent lighting (as opposed to fluorescent)
- Accommodations for autism support animals in residence halls

**“Students with ASD frequently struggle to maintain consistent hygiene and sleep patterns and may have difficulty independently managing medications necessary for focus and stability”  
(Ackles et al., 2014).**

During one-on-one meetings with peer mentors and weekly program meetings, students in the program will spend time learning about and planning for self-care.

- Making daily/weekly schedules that plan time for hygiene, sleep, and fun activities



**College students with autism “are likely to be quite socially isolated and may experience considerable loneliness, as well as victimization...due to their socially unskilled behaviors” (White, Ollendick & Bray, 2011).**

During meetings with trained peer mentors, SEA Program students will receive individualized help with socialization challenges they might be facing. These could include, but are not limited, to:

- Conversation/body language identification and practice
- Outings to places on campus and in community
- Planning for campus involvement

The SEA Program will also consist of weekly skills building meetings led by Disability Services staff members. Weekly classes will be divided by year in the program and will focus on different topics based on this.

- Year 1: Transition to Haddon University (basic social skills, planning and time management, working with others effectively)
- Years 2-3: Making the most of college (working toward campus involvement, academic success, planning for future, fostering relationships)
- Year 4: What's next? (interview and job placement, community involvement, preparing for continued transitions in life)



# Social Competence

A close-up photograph of two hands shaking, symbolizing agreement or support. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers interlaced. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and white.

# Career Preparation

**“Individuals on the spectrum are often unemployed or underemployed and generally report negative work experiences”  
(Longtin & College, 2014).**

SEA Program will combat this by providing:

- A trained liaison in the career center

The liaison will be able to provide support to students on the spectrum in the following areas:

- Vocational and aptitude testing
- Navigating the job/internship application process
- Interviewing strategies
- Asking for references

**“...students must initiate the accommodations process and communicate their own needs, with limited parental support”  
(Ackles et al., 2014)**

In order to help parents/guardians transition into a less active role in seeking out accommodations, SEA Program will offer:

- A parent/guardian workshop during new student orientation about their student's rights and responsibilities

Students will also receive support in learning how to advocate for themselves through one-on-one meetings with Disability Services staff about self-advocacy in the classroom, during which they will:

- Complete student profiles about teaching strategies that are/are not effective for the student, to aid in interactions with professors
- Learn how to describe their experiences with autism spectrum disorder and what accommodations they need to be successful
- Receive information about on-campus resources that, while not official accommodations, can be helpful to students

A photograph of two men in a meeting. The man on the left is wearing a light blue shirt and a backpack, and is holding a pen and a notepad. The man on the right is wearing a grey suit and is holding a green folder. They are standing outdoors with green foliage in the background. The text "Self-Advocacy" is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

Self-  
Advocacy



# Campus Collaboration

In order for the SEA Program to fulfill its mission of empowering students to seamlessly integrate into Haddon University's campus community, we are dependant upon buy in from our campus partners.

**Career center:** trained liaison for working on career preparation with SEA Programs

**Residential life:** redesigned reduced sensory stimulation room in each hall, training for resident advisors and resident hall directors for working effectively with students with ASD

**Orientation:** training for orientation leaders on how to work with students with ASD, communicating information about SEA Program during orientation, workshop during orientation for parents of students with ASD

**Academic affairs:** trained advisor in each college to work with students with ASD, pedagogical training for faculty

**Student Activities:** SEA Program peer mentors drawn from currently involved student leaders

Starting the SEA Program is a big project. A program of this size, at an institution like Haddon University, warrants at least one full-time staff member.

We suggest adding a program coordinator and a graduate assistant position to Haddon University's Office of Disability Services in order to run the program. Here's how our peer institutions set up the leadership of their autism services programs:

**Adelphi University** - seven person staff: director, assistant director, administrative assistant, learning strategist coordinator, social coordinator, academic coordinator, graduate assistant

**Bellevue College:** program specialist working directly with Autism Spectrum Navigators

**Marshall University:** nine person staff: program coordinator, assistant coordinator, five student support specialists, two mental health counselors



# Office of Disability Services

# Program Evaluation

College programs for students with ASD are becoming more common, but valid and reliable research about individual programs' effectiveness is scarce (Cox et al., 2017).

The SEA Program at Haddon University will place high importance on continued improvement by utilizing a cyclical model of assessment.



Assessment will be conducted with multiple constituents:

- SEA Program students
- Academic advisors
- Orientation staff
- Peer mentors
- Residential life staff
- Faculty

## 2018-2019 School Year

	Price
Full-time SEA Program Coordinator	\$35,931
SEA Program Graduate Assistant	\$12,130 (includes tuition remission, stipend, and health insurance coverage)
Residence hall re-carpeting (X 11 rooms)	\$10,000
Residence hall LED lighting (X 11 rooms)	\$989
SEA Program marketing campaign	In-house
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$59,050</b>





# Timeline

Ideally, planning and preparation for the SEA Program will begin in fall 2017. The SEA Program will accept its first cohort of students for the 2018-2019 school year.

- **July 2018:** SEA Program Coordinator job posted
- **September 2018:** SEA Program Coordinator start date
- **Fall 2018:** Curriculum development, planning, program marketing and recruitment
- **February 2018:** Graduate Assistant job posted
- **April 2018:** Peer mentors selected
- **April 2018:** Initial faculty workshop
- **May 2018:** Peer mentor orientation/training
- **Summer 2018:** Residence hall room renovations
- **Summer 2018:** Parent orientation workshops begin
- **June 2018:** SEA Program Graduate Assistant start date
- **July 2018:** Skills building curriculum completed
- **July 2018:** Academic advisor training completed
- **August 2018:** Residence hall staff trainings
- **September 2018:** Career center liaison trained
- **December 2018:** First assessment data collected
- **January 2019:** Assessment data coded and analyzed
- **January 2019:** Redesign and implementation based on assessment data



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