

Kent State University

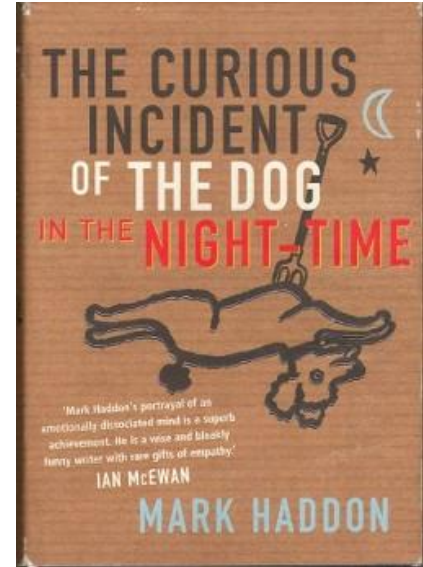
Case Study Competition Submission

Group Leader: Danielle Rueger
Emily Groce, Justin Beckman, Mel Dickey

The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night Time

This novel prompted us to think more about the needs of our students on the autism spectrum. This novel...

- Follows Christopher, a fifteen-year-old boy who is mathematically gifted and also on the Autism Spectrum, as he overcomes his fear of interacting with people to solve the murder of a neighborhood dog.
- Provides insight on how young adults with autism experience the world around them.
- Made us realize that in order to better serve our students with autism, we need to better understand their experiences and inform our practice with research and best practices



Our Demographics are Changing

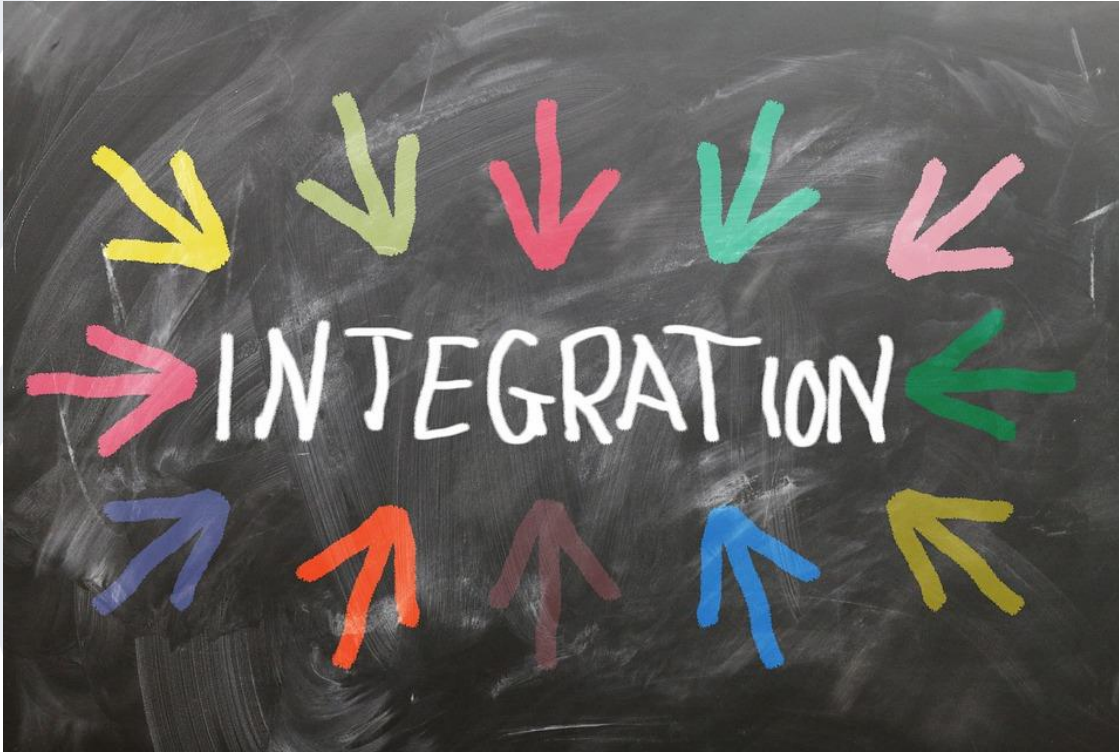
- 1 in 110 college students are on the Autism Spectrum
- 40% increase in enrollment of students with Autism in 2016 compared to 2010.
- 80% increase and 140% increase expected in 2018 and 202 respectively.
- “University environments are likely to be particularly appealing for those with HFA given their propensity for specialised interests and aptitude for academic pursuits” (Hamilton, Stevens, and Girdler, 2016, p. 2).

Source: College Autism Network

Fewer than 39% of these students persist to get a degree.



What do these students need?

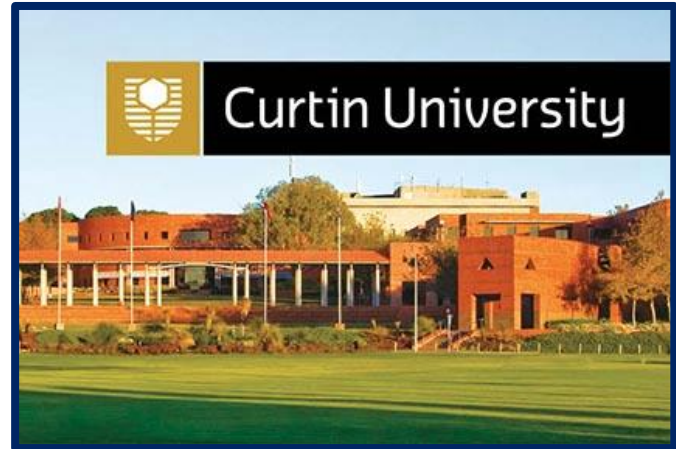


- **Personal**
- **Social**
- **Academic**

Hamilton et al. (2016) reported that in a survey of 313 adults with high functioning autism, “the majority of respondents to this survey identified that although their need for support in higher education was significant, their needs were unmet in the areas of learning support (78%), behaviour support (83%) and social support (84%)” (p. 2).

How do we create integration?

- We first considered training faculty how to better work with students on the spectrum, but understandably, faculty have very little free time in common to attend such trainings.
- Next we looked at what other schools have done that has been successful. Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia stood out, which led us to...



What we Propose



A Mentorship program which trains Psychology and Occupational Therapy Masters and undergraduate students to mentor students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).



First Step: The Program Coordinator

We propose that a professional in Disability Services, in conjunction with individuals in Academic Support Services, act as the Program Coordinator.

This role is vital to the success of the mentorship program and their responsibilities would include:

- Marketing the program to both potential mentors and mentees
- the Selection, training, and supervision of mentors
- Assessment



“Participants reported that developing **a strong relationship with the program coordinators was vital to succeeding in their role as a mentor.** This relationship was strengthened by the **shared communication and respect between mentors and coordinators** and the **experience and knowledge of the coordinators in working with people with ASD.**

Specifically, this relationship was facilitated by the **collaborative nature** of the group meetings, the **respect** shown to mentors in developing their role, the coordinators’ **quick responses** to any concerns raised and the caring attitude that coordinators displayed toward both mentors and mentees” (Hamilton et al., 2016, p. 8).

TRAINING



Mentors will be selected from Psychology and Occupational Therapy Masters and undergraduate students who have applied for this opportunity. We will model our training around what was delivered to mentors at Curtin University:

“Mentors attended six hours of training specifically aimed at **understanding** and **mentoring** students with HFA...The delivery of the training included a power point presentation, question and answer sessions, and a panel discussion involving the CSMP coordinators and a student with HFA who had participated in a generic mentor program and graduated from university. During the last 30 minutes of the training day ‘matched’ mentors and mentees were introduced. Mentees were encouraged to bring a **support person** to this session (Hamilton et al., 2016, p. 3).

“Findings from this study revealed that the experience of being a mentor to university students with HFA was an **overwhelming positive experience** for participants, suggesting that such programs have many benefits for both mentors and mentees” (Hamilton et al., 2016, p. 11).

Matching Mentors with Mentees

“Mentors and mentees were matched by the program coordinators based similarity in **backgrounds** and **interests** (including sports or special interests), with some mentees expressing a preference for a male or female mentor. All students attending Curtin University who had declared their diagnosis of ASD to Disability Services were eligible to be mentees in the CSMP” (Hamilton et al., 2016, p. 3).

Hamilton et al. (2016) highlights the importance of “factors such as **personality fit and the potential for areas of common interest**” when matching mentors and mentees (p. 10).

“Successful peer mentoring programs for students with ASD are dependent on ensuring that **needs of both mentors and mentees are met**” (Hamilton et al., 2016, p. 11).



The Importance of Continued Guidance for Mentors

It is vital to the success of the mentorship program that the mentors are just as supported as the mentees

“The mentor-mentee relationship is also influenced by environmental factors such as [supervision](#), [perceived organisational support](#) and [available resources](#), suggesting the [structural supports](#) are also [critical](#) to the success of such programs” (Hamilton et al., 2016, p. 10).

“the [role](#) of [supports](#) and [resources](#) in determining the ultimate success of such programs [must not be underestimated](#)” (Hamilton et al., 2016, p. 10).



What this will Accomplish

Personal Integration:

- Students will gain more self confidence that will lead to better social and academic integration through the mentoring program.
- Students will gain a sense of belonging on campus through the interactions they receive with their mentor on campus.

Personal

What this will Accomplish (cont'd)

Social Integration:

- Students will organically form relationships with their mentors and fellow peers.
- Students will feel more accepted by fellow classmates and not so much as “other.”



What this will Accomplish (cont'd)

Academic Integration:

- Students will be more engaged in classroom settings by understanding the social cues given by their professors through the help of their mentors.
- Students will be better at adapting to the changing environment of the classroom during focus groups.



What we need from our Institution

- **Support** from Disability services in the form of one of our employees taking the lead as Program Coordinator
- **Support** from Academic Support Services in assisting and acting as a resource for this coordinator
- **Support** from the Departments of Psychology and Occupational Therapy by talking about the mentorship program and encouraging their students to apply and make use of this valuable opportunity



Reminder of Why this Initiative is Important

- Our demographics are changing - we will continue to see more and more students on the Autism Spectrum at our institution
- Retention and Graduation rates are being scrutinized. Anything we can do to support this growing population and help them succeed is also instrumental to our success
- Our mission is to transform lives and communities through the power of discovery, learning, and creative expression in an inclusive environment. To begin a program like this would be undeniably within our mission.



*Thank
you*

for your time



References

COLLEGE AUTISM NETWORK. (n.d.). Retrieved February 24, 2017, from <http://collegeautismnetwork.org/>

Hamilton, J., Stevens, G., & Girdler, S. (2016). Becoming a Mentor: The Impact of Training and the Experience of Mentoring University Students on the Autism Spectrum. *Plos ONE*, 11(4), 1-13. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0153204