
Creating an Inclusive Campus Climate for Students with ASD

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Our Charge

Offer assistance and advice in the development of a Disability Services program aimed at providing **personal, social, and academic integration** into the campus community.

Present to the Board of Trustees committee on Growth and Development.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

“Autism is an umbrella term for a wide spectrum of disorders referred to as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The terms PDD and ASD are used interchangeably. They are a group of neurobiological disorders that affect an individual’s ability to interact, communicate, relate, play, imagine, and learn. These disorders not only affect how the brain develops and works, but may also be related to immunological, gastrointestinal, and metabolic problems.”

Facts & Statistics

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates autism's prevalence as 1 in 68 children in the United States.
- Each year, an estimated 50,000 teens with autism become adults – and lose school-based autism services.
- Around one third of people with autism remain nonverbal.
- Around one third of people with autism have an intellectual disability.
- Certain medical and mental health issues frequently accompany autism (e.g. gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, seizures, sleep disturbances, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and phobias).

Impact on College Life

- The number of individuals on the Spectrum has been increasing over the past 10 years
- Systems in place on college campuses are often structured to serve neurotypical students
- Students on the Spectrum may have difficulty:
 - Attending orientation
 - Eating in crowded dining halls
 - Living in a double room in the residence halls
- Students on the Spectrum can be successful on college campuses, and it is our responsibility to create inclusive environments for all students

Status Quo

- Policies exist to ensure equal treatment, but students on the Spectrum often need creative and equitable solutions.
- Programs are based on needs of neurotypical students, with little space for modification.
- Most neurotypical students, faculty, and staff do not recognize their role in ensuring that students with autism have positive campus experiences.
- Responsibility for advocacy and accommodations rests with students on the Spectrum and the Disability Services Office.
- Disclosure of a condition serves as a gateway, and sometimes barrier, to students on the Spectrum gaining access to services, even if they are not comfortable disclosing.

Inclusive Language and Terminology

Our campus culture should be one where students are open to describe themselves using whatever language or terms they wish. Generally, person first language is encouraged.

Instead of...	Use...
Autistic person	Person with Autism
Disabled person	Person with a disability
Blind person	Person who is blind

(Edlyn Vallejo Peña, Personal communication, 2017)
("Identity-First Language", n.d.)

“After you have met someone with Autism, you can say you have met one person with Autism. Everyone on the Spectrum is a unique individual with their own experiences, diagnoses, preferences, and thoughts. When serving students it is most important to remember that a one-size-fits-all approach will probably not successfully meet the needs of each student on the Spectrum.”

Dr. Edlyn Vallejo Peña
(personal communication, 2017)

Student Development Theory

Astin's Involvement Theory

Students who are deeply involved on campus are more successful. It's about quality, not quantity.

Schlossberg's Theory of Marginality and Mattering

Based on experiences and social identity status, students may feel "less than" in an education space. Educators should be aware and combat this by investing in students' needs and goals.

Rendon's Validation Theory

Encouraging students and reassuring students they are successful/doing something right is beneficial to overall transition and success in higher education.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory

Structures, from society to an individual's personal relationships, impact and influence an individual's trajectory, needs, goals, and aspirations.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Change affects an individual's relationships and perceptions of the transition they are going through.

Recommendation

We propose a peer mentoring program to assist students on the Spectrum with their personal, social, and academic integration into the campus community.

Ability Peer Advocates Program

Peer Advocates benefit students by:

- Helping ease transition onto campus
- Developing incoming student's self-advocacy skills
- Assisting students in navigating university and campus offices
- Mediating positive interpersonal relationships with peers, faculty, and staff
- Fostering social integration into campus community by organizing formal and informal programs

Assessment at peer institutions with similar programs found several benefits for students with ASD

- Increases in GPA
- Higher levels of persistence
- Greater satisfaction with college experience

Core Components of the Program

Interpersonal Relationships

- Opportunities to interact with peer advocate and larger campus community
- Two-tier LINK program to assist with transition
 - Blue Team: Lives in same residence hall as mentee, upperclass student
 - Orange Team: Nonresidential, provides general support, upperclass student

Intentional Programming

- Academic (e.g. time management and study strategies)
- Personal Development (e.g. living on- or off- campus, finances, cooking, etc.)
- Community Engagement (e.g. local business internships, area non-profit events)

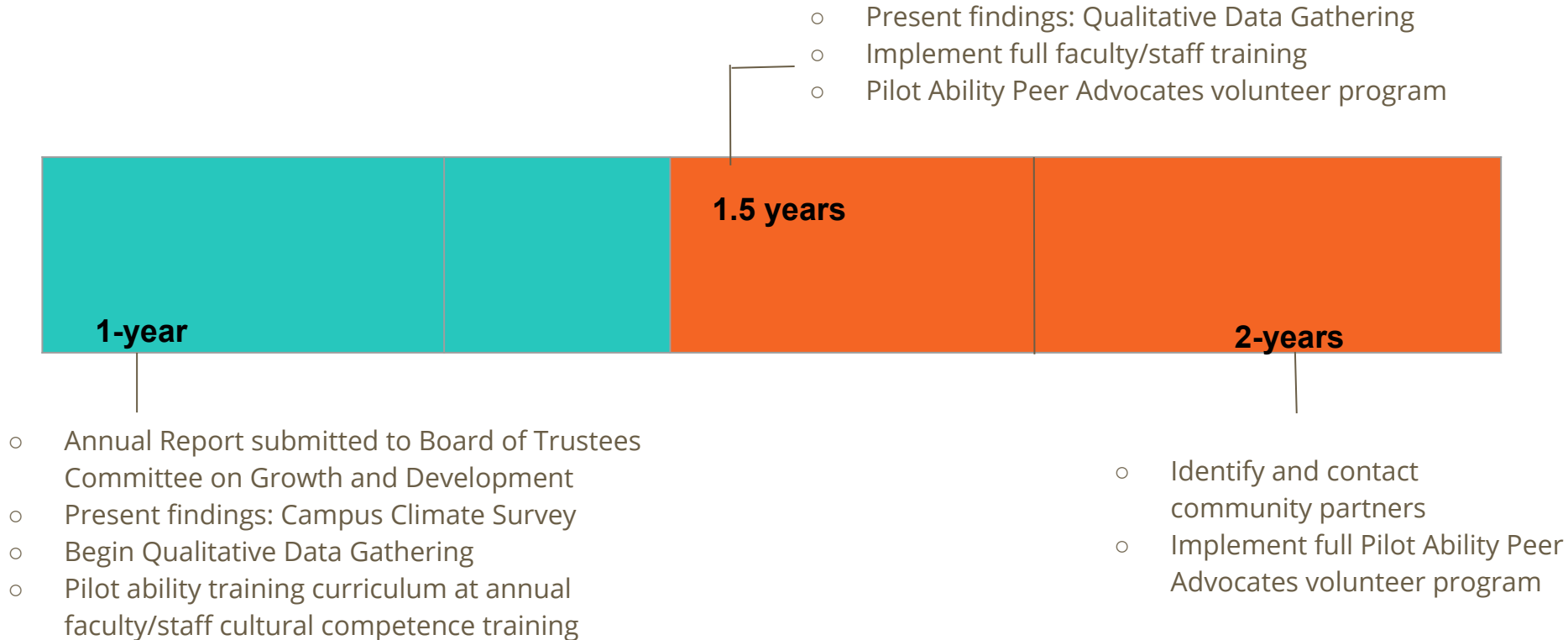
Additional Recommendations

We recommend that the institution prioritize the experiences of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder beyond a singular program. We have included a three year strategic plan that would accomplish such a goal.

Implementation Timeline: Short-term



Implementation Timeline: Long-term



Assessment

We recommend the Office of Institutional Assessment begin examining this topic in a variety of ways:

- Institutional Benchmarking
 - What services are we currently providing for students on the Spectrum?
 - What services are comparable institutions providing for students on the Spectrum?
- Qualitative Data Gathering
 - Focus groups, interviews
- Quantitative Campus Climate Survey
 - What is the experience of students on the Spectrum? Do they feel supported and included in the community?
 - What is the perception of students on the Spectrum among faculty and staff?
 - What is the perception of students on the Spectrum among neurotypical students?

Staff Hiring

Inclusive Programs Coordinator, Office of Disability Services

Ensure campus programs and services are meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

- Primary responsibilities include:
 - Creating curriculum and coordinating ASD training
 - Consultation with campus offices
 - Cultivating community partnerships
 - Oversee Ability Peer Advocates program
 - Serving as co-chairperson of the new Committee with Director of Disability Services
 - Assisting with assessment strategy
- Required qualifications: Master's degree in Social Work, Psychology, or related field; 2-3 years work experience.
- Preferred qualifications: Assessment or research experience; supervisory experience; experience at higher education institution.

Staff Hiring

Disability Specialist, Office of Disability Services

Offer personalized case management to students with disabilities, primarily students with ASD

- Primary Responsibilities include:
 - Provide appropriate counseling for students with ASD
 - Create and Implement training for students/faculty/staff
 - Serve as an advisor to student organization for students with ASD
 - Supervise LINK peer-mentoring program
- Required qualifications: Master's degree in Social Work, Psychology, or related field; one to two years work experience or equivalent
- Preferred qualifications: Academic or work experience working with individuals with ASD.

Training and Office Partnerships

Based on assessment results, the Disability Inclusion Coordinator will meet with campus units to create individualized plans for how departments can better support students with ASD.

- Disability Services
- Res Life
- Orientation
- Police
- Advising
- Student Activities
- LBGTQ Office

Transition to University

- Bridge the gap by partnering with secondary education institutions
 - Offer personalized and/or sensory-sensitive campus tours
 - Informational presentations at high schools
 - Checklist to prepare for college (communication plan with family, faculty, staff, etc.)
- Orientation experience
 - Professional and student staff members are trained to recognize needs of students
 - Private spaces for decompression and/or individualized presentation delivery
- Arriving on Campus
 - Early move-in at residence halls
 - Connect with offices in
 - Meet with Disability Resource Specialist to create routine
 - Opportunities to meet professors and essential staff members early

Individual Case Management

We recommend:

- Implement a University Education Plan (UEP)
 - Similar to Individualized Education Plan, but not a legal document
- Peer Advocates
 - Opportunities to interact with peer mentor and larger campus community
- Provide workshops to promote student success
 - Academic (time management and study strategies)
 - Personal Development (living on- or off- campus, finances, cooking, etc.)

Budget and Funding

Transforming the university requires both programmatic, and financial investment. Fortunately, we have several options for funding the proposed initiatives.

Funding Opportunities

To offset costs to the university, administrators should explore various funding options, including:

- University capital campaigns through Endowment Association
- Peer mentoring grants
- Federal grants (Americans with Disabilities Act, Department of State Disability Rights Office)
- State (Vocational rehabilitation programs, health department)
- Corporate Partners and Sponsors (e.g. Walmart Foundation grant, Marriott vocational partnership)
- Organization for Autism Research
- Autism Speaks Family Services Community Grants

Three Year Budget

Item	Type of Expense	Purpose	Amount
Peer Advocate Program Support	Annual	Supplies, promotional materials, event costs, etc.	\$2,000
Survey participation prizes (<i>optional</i>)	One time	Promote participation in campus climate survey	\$500 <i>optional</i>
Disability Specialist	Annual	Salary and benefits for staff	\$50,000 - \$55,000 <i>Depending on qualifications</i>
Inclusive Programs Coordinator	Annual	Salary and benefits for staff	\$65,000 - \$75,000 <i>Depending on qualifications</i>

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