

AUTISM ACHIEVEMENT ACADEMY



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Our Team



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Julia works as the graduate assistant in the Rainbow Center at UConn and is a student in the Higher Education Student Affairs Masters program.



Gabrielle Erestain

Gabrielle works as the graduate assistant in the Student Activities Programs Office at UConn focusing on Late Night programming and is a student in the Higher Education Student Affairs Masters program.



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Lisa works as a graduate assistant in the Center for Career Development at UConn and is a student in the Higher Education Student Affairs Masters program.

Our Charge

There has been a significant increase of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder attending the institution, but services for this population have not evolved. How can we better support this growing student population?



(Source: Haverford College)



(Source: Western Nebraska Community College)

Our Solution

Autism Achievement Academy (AAA) is a Disability Services program aimed at providing personal, social, and academic integration into the campus community developed with input from Residential Life, the Office of Student Activities, Counseling & Mental Health Services, and University faculty.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

What is ASD?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex, pervasive, and multifactorial neurodevelopmental condition¹.

How is ASD diagnosed?

Atypical behavior forms the basis of diagnosis, with diagnostic criteria focused on difficulty in social skills and stilted patterns of behavior¹.

What diagnoses are captured in the term “Autism Spectrum Disorder”?

Diagnoses of Autistic Disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), were removed as diagnostic classifications in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual and collapsed into either Autism Spectrum Disorder and Social Communication Disorder¹.

How prevalent is ASD?

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, occurring with 1 in every 68 births in the country².

Challenges for Students with ASD in College

Transitioning to a New Environment

- Emotional adjustment³
- Knowledge of new resources³
- Institutional fit & sense of belonging³

Social-Communication Skills

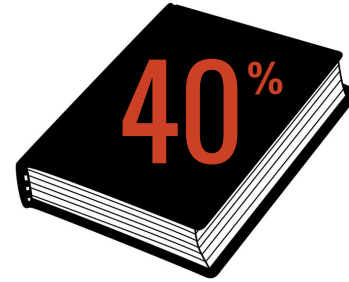
- Building connections and relationships with peers³
- Navigating new social interactions³

Executive Function Skills

- Planning ahead⁴
- Organization⁴
- Decision-making⁴

Self-Advocacy

- Self-awareness³
- Recognizing need for help and asking for assistance³



of students with ASD enroll in college but graduate at lower rates than their peers⁵



of college students with autism who went straight to a 4-year college had graduated or were on track to graduate⁶

Creating a Conceptual Model

Gibson's Disability Identity Development Model (2005)

Individuals with disabilities experience three phases of identity development related to their disability:

1. Passive Awareness
2. Realization
3. Acceptance⁷

TAKEAWAY: It's important to provide college students with strategies to navigate the emotions that come with the realization and acceptance phases, since these are the phases where most are, developmentally.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981)

A transition is "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles." The four major factors that influence one's ability to cope with a transition are situation, self, support, and strategies⁸.

TAKEAWAY: Individuals who successfully cope with transition are flexible; this can be a challenge for students with ASD, so we need to teach them a variety of strategies and make sure they're comfortable using them.

Chickering's Seven Vectors (1969)

College students experience growth along seven vectors at different rates and times:

1. Developing competence
2. Managing emotions
3. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence
4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships
5. Establishing identity
6. Developing purpose
7. Developing integrity⁸

TAKEAWAY: Because students move back ward and forward along each of these seven vectors at different paces, individualized programming is vital to meet the needs of all students.

Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging Model (2012)

Sense of belonging is a “student’s perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued, and important to a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). It’s a cognitive evaluation that typically leads to an affective response or behavior⁹.”

TAKEAWAY: Social support and feeling welcome are important, so peer-to-peer interaction and a physical space where participants always feel welcome should be vital components of our program.



MISSION

The mission of the Autism Achievement Academy is to create a positive environment in which every student meets personal goals while fostering retention and success through individualized counseling and support services.

STUDENT TAKEAWAYS

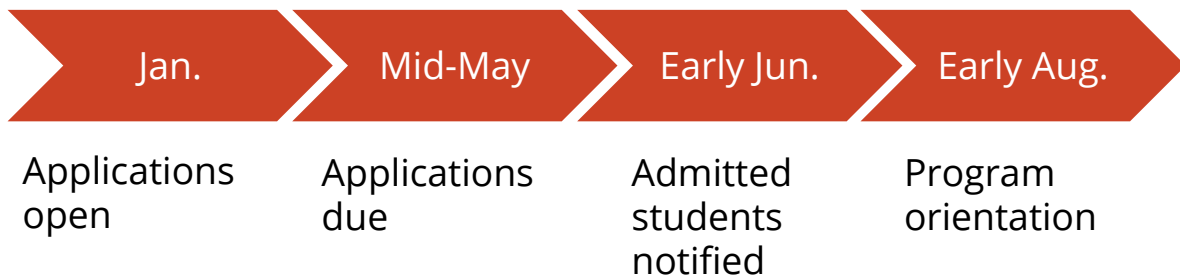
Self-Advocacy⁴
Social Skill Development³
Academic Success¹⁰
Executive Function Skill Development⁴

VISION

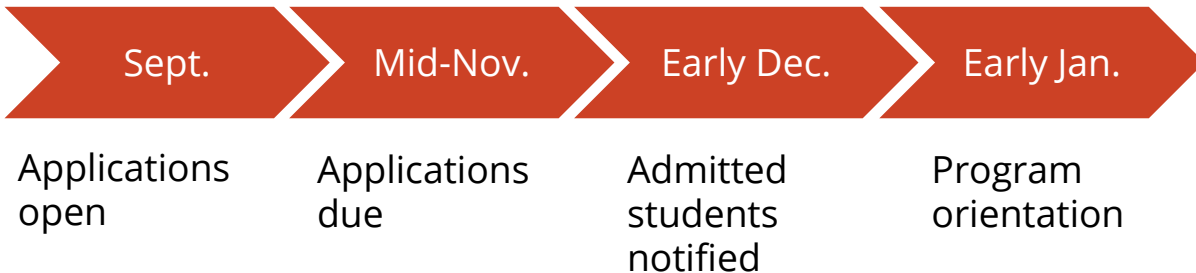
The Autism Achievement Academy's vision is personal, social, and academic integration in the campus community and the world for students with ASD.

Application Timeline

Fall Applicants:



Spring Applicants:



Admission Criteria

A completed AAA application includes:

- Proof of matriculation into the university
- Documented diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Supplemental questionnaire
- Copy of IEP/ 504 Plan

Maximum program size:
100 students

Program Components



Program Orientation

A two-day immersive experience introducing new program participants to residential life on campus, and academic, health, and recreational campus resources



One-on-Ones with Graduate Students

Individualized meetings focusing on academic and independent living skills



Study Halls

Group sessions encouraging academic skill implementation, social interaction, and executive function skill development



Social Programs

Fun, interactive events fostering peer-to-peer relationship building



Intentional Outreach and Education

In-service training opportunities offered to faculty, staff, and administrators aiming to create an inclusive campus environment for students with ASD



Program Orientation

(Two days prior to the
start of each semester)

Purpose

- Program participants will be introduced to AAA and move-in to their residence halls two days prior to the start of the semester & begin to cultivate a sense of community among other program participants and staff
- Personal, social, and academic integration to campus

Personal

- Introduction to recreation services on campus
- Introduction to counseling and mental health services on campus
- Campus traditions and history

Social

- Evening socials for program participants
- Opportunity for interaction with other program participants
- Introduction to student activities services (student clubs & organizations)

Academic

- Faculty panel to introduce academic and technology resources on campus
- One-on-ones with graduate assistants

Purpose

- Program participants create individualized specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART) goals at the beginning of each semester
- Graduate assistants will have access to a bank of proven strategies developed in collaboration with Residential Life, Office of Student Activities, Counseling & Mental Health Services, and University faculty to teach students as appropriate

Advising Frameworks

- Individualized Education Plan (IEP) → Individualized College Plan (ICP)
 - IEPs are federally mandated for students with disabilities (including ASD) in K-12 schools, so students are familiar with layout and content
- Person Centered Planning (PCP) - planning tool for individuals with disabilities; preferences and desires of the individual are of utmost importance



One-on-Ones with
Graduate Assistants
(Weekly)



Study Halls

(Twice a Week)

Purpose

- Program participants engage in two 1-hour study hall sessions per week
 - Practice implementing academic-related strategies learned from graduate assistants
 - Learn and practice executive functioning skills
 - Socialize among small group of 4-5 participants

Peer Mentorship

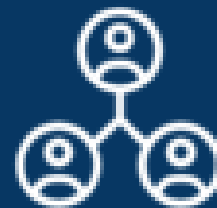
- Undergraduate interns leading study halls will be trained in executive functioning skill development strategies and be available to teach them to program participants as appropriate
- Undergraduate interns will also be in contact with graduate assistants so they can check on the implementation of academic-related strategies

Purpose

- Program participants will attend social programs in order to get to know other program participants and undergraduate interns, and practice social skills
- Social programs will be offered bi-weekly and strongly recommended for new program participants in order to develop a sense of belonging with the goal of increasing retention
- Social programs are optional, as some may be overwhelming for certain program participants

Program Planning

- Social programs will be planned, implemented, and attended by undergraduate interns to provide peer-to-peer socialization opportunities
- Undergraduate interns will be required to research best practices in fostering social interaction among college students with ASD



Social Programs (Bi-weekly)



Intentional Outreach and Education (Summer)

Purpose

- In-service training will be offered to academic departments and administrative offices to increase awareness throughout campus about how to best serve students with ASD in college
- Educating the campus community about needs of students with ASD aims to create a more positive environment for these students throughout campus

Implementation

- Providing in-service training sessions will be one of the major responsibilities of graduate assistants who remain on campus over the summer
- Graduate assistants will update the presentation at the beginning and middle of each summer to ensure the campus community is being provided with the most accurate and up-to-date information

Participant Learning Assessment

Surveys will be administered to all program participants at the end of each semester to assess their learning. Graduate assistants will be responsible for analyzing survey results and implementing appropriate program changes for following semesters.

Questions Focusing on Participant Learning

- What were your goals for this semester in AAA?
 - To what extent do you feel you had ownership over the goals you set in AAA?
 - To what extent do you feel your goals matched the needs you expressed to AAA staff?
 - To what extent do you believe you made progress toward each of these goals?
- What strategies have you learned this semester?
 - How, if at all, did the strategies you learned help you make progress toward your goals?
- How helpful have the AAA study halls been to you?
- How many AAA social events did you participate in this semester?
 - How did you like these social events?
 - What type of social programs would you like to see AAA offer in the future?
- Do you feel you have had success in AAA overall?
- If you could change one thing about the AAA program, what would it be?

Program Staff & Responsibilities



Program Coordinator

- Train and supervise GAs and undergraduate interns
- Coordinate and develop program
- Collaborate with campus partners
- Report to Director of Disability Services
- Bi-weekly meetings with GAs and undergraduate interns
- Bi-weekly one-on-ones with GAs
- Bi-annual AAA assessment



Graduate Assistants (GAs)

- One-on-one meetings with program participants, as well as time to prepare beforehand and take notes afterwards
- Bi-weekly one-on-one meetings with Program Director and corresponding undergraduate interns
- Conduct in-service trainings
- Bi-weekly GA staff meeting
- Administrative duties and special projects



Undergraduate Interns

- Oversee study halls with small groups of program participants, with a focus on executive function skills
- Alert Program Director of concerns about participants
- Plan, attend, and facilitate social events
- Bi-weekly undergraduate interns meeting
- Bi-weekly one-on-one meetings with corresponding GAs

Roles of Our Campus Partners

Residential Life

- Allow for and facilitate early-move in for AAA program participants prior to orientation
- Require all Residential Life staff to attend in-service trainings
- Contribute strategies related to independent living



Office of Student Activities

- Provide AAA students with leadership development opportunities and resources for involvement on campus
- Present to program participants during orientation
- Contribute strategies related to time management, social skills



Counseling & Mental Health Services

- Prioritize providing services to student referrals from AAA staff
- Present to program participants during orientation
- Contribute strategies related to health, wellness, stress management



University Faculty

- Serve on panels during orientation
- Attend and encourage participation in in-service trainings for faculty members
- Contribute strategies related to study skills, reading skills, writing skills, memory, concentration



Program Budget

Academic Year Program Budget

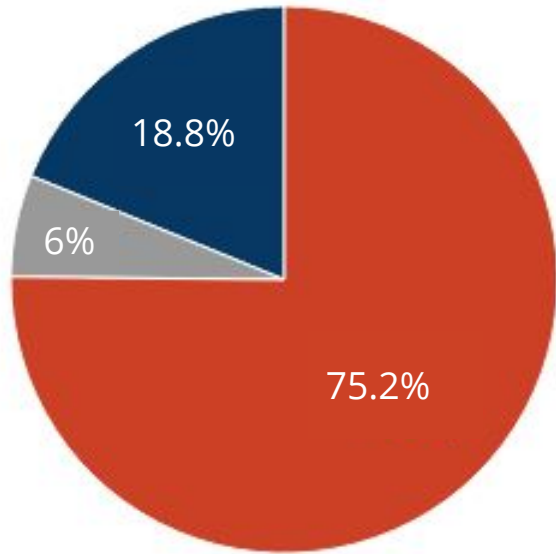
Program Coordinator Salary + Benefits	\$56,000
Graduate Assistant Stipend (x10)	\$148,350
Undergraduate Total Hourly Wages (x10)	\$64,800
Social events (x18)	\$1,800
Program Materials	\$5,000
Total	\$275,950

Orientation Program Budget

Social events (x3)	\$300
7 meals, 40 people	\$2,800
Graduate Assistants, 3 months (x3)	\$14,835
Undergraduate Interns, 3 months (x2)	\$4,380
Early Move In (\$60/participant)	\$6,000
Total	\$28,315

Total Cost of Project: **\$275,950** + **\$28,315** + **\$28,315** = **\$332,580**
(Academic Year) (Fall Orientation) (Spring Orientation)

Funding Sources



- Cost to Participants
- Grant Funding
- Remaining Need

Our program will cost participants just \$1,250 per semester.

We hope to receive grants valued at \$20,000. We have identified several grants that fund projects like AAA.

The gap between total cost of the project and expected income from participant fees and grants is \$62,580.

Our Request

For AAA to meet the needs of our program participants, we seek:

- ❑ Physical location(s) conducive to one-on-one appointments, a full time staff member office, work spaces for graduate assistants and undergraduate interns, and study halls
- ❑ The financial support to fully fund our project: \$62,580
- ❑ Your acknowledgement of the needs of these students, as well as the capability of our program to meet those needs

Future Assessment

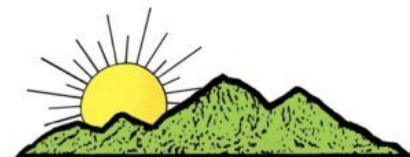
Every two years, an assessment of the overall AAA program will be conducted by the Program Coordinator. This assessment will determine whether or not AAA is functioning effectively and is acting on the most up-to-date best practices in working with students with ASD.

The West Virginia Autism Training Center (WVATC)

The WVATC, a national leader in providing support for college students diagnosed with ASD², provides a benchmarking guide for college and university programs designed to support students with ASD. The guide analyzes multiple aspects of the program in order to define it as effective, including:

- Campus living supports
- Academic supports
- Non-academic supports¹¹ (social skills, knowledge of campus services, etc.)

AAA will utilize this benchmarking tool, as well as any additional resources WVATC produces, to complete program assessments.



*The West Virginia
Autism Training Center
at Marshall University*

Future Plans



Online Module Component

- Online learning platform
- Self-directed learning prior to their first year at the university
- Provides information on disability services and campus resources at the university
- Transition support will be offered before a student's first year

Summer Bridge Program

- Transition support
- Exposure to independent living
- Structured daily activities

Residential Learning Community

- Partnership with Residential Life
- Ease the personal and social integration into the campus community

More Resources

- Increase in program size and staff members
- Additional funding to support students

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