

# **The WV Autism Training Center's College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder at Concord University**



## **Core Tenets and Practices of an Effective Program**

The College Program provides individualized skill building and therapeutic supports to degree seeking students with Autism Spectrum Disorder through a mentored environment while navigating a college experience at Concord University.

### **Person-Centered Planning:**

Through a team-work approach, a framework for supports is created prior to the first semester of enrollment. Each student, along with family members and university staff who support them, participate in future planning. A plan is developed to guide the team toward strategies that provide support, and which focus on goals that may lead the student into competitive employment and more independent living.

### **Periodic Assessment of Individualized Support:**

Integral to providing effective support on a college campus is the recognition of, and respect for, the uniqueness of each individual. Designing flexible supports to fit the needs of each student as they progress through their college experience is vital for success, as is the recognition that needs often change with experience and through learning.

### **Assessing Skills**

The invitation to specific applicants to become a part of the CPSASD is a lengthy process that requires an investment in getting to know potential students and their families, and

providing each of them sufficient time to become familiar with program staff and philosophy.

After a complete application (which includes a minimum of a clinical psychological evaluation, assessments of achievement and intelligence, and a developmental and behavioral history) a student interview is required. The parents or guardians of each applicant are invited to participate in a face-to-face interview, and are included in the discussion unless the student insists on being interviewed alone. Program staff structures the interview around several areas of emphasis, and rate how successfully the applicant might carry out each activity discussed in term of support required along a 5-level Likert item; scores range from (1) *never without support*, to (5) *always, without support*.

Skill areas assessed include:

**Academic**: Focused on general academic organization and classroom etiquette skills

**Independent Living**: Is the applicant able to manage time, money and navigate the community

**Socialization skills**: How independent is the applicant in becoming involved with clubs and organizations, making plans for upcoming events and broadening areas of interest and focus

**Safety**: Is the student highly vulnerable to being taken advantage of; what is his or her ability to recognize a personal or medical crisis; and is the applicant likely to participate in wellness activities

**Sexuality**: Focused on assessing the maturity with which an applicant approaches and understands sexuality, how easily the applicant distinguishes it from more common social constructs like friendship, and how respectful a student is of diversity

**Stress**: Assesses how easily the applicant recognizes personal symptoms of distress and how independently the student is able to make adjustments to that stress. Traits that make up resilience are explored

**Personal Insight**: Assesses an applicant's understanding of how the symptoms of ASD affect his or her life, and explores to what degree the applicant is able to plan for and direct his or her own academic decisions

Although rankings may play a role in determining areas of strength and challenge, they are not used to make final determinations for inviting applicants to become a part of the CPSASD. That decision is based heavily on if those involved in the interview—the applicant, his or her family and staff from the CPSASD—believe the applicant and the program are a good match.

***\*The capacity the CPSASD has at that time regarding the number of students that can be supported plays a key role in the number of applicants accepted each year.***

## Basic Support Services

The CPSASD provides support to students as they live an otherwise typical college lifestyle. Students attend regular classes, live in typical residence halls and use the resources available to them within the university community. Students receiving supports from the College Program can expect to meet regularly with staff to carry out the strategies of support. Although services are individualized, they generally are fit into three categories of support: academic, social and independent living.

Academic Support may include:

- ✓ Course advising, based on the learning strengths, abilities and interests of each student
- ✓ Students, program staff and team members working together to determine reasonable accommodations beneficial to each student
- ✓ Strategies designed to teach students organizational skills
- ✓ Providing information to professors regarding the most effective manner for teaching specific students
- ✓ Consistent, periodic (often weekly) interaction with professors

Social Supports are:

- ✓ Developed to meet individual needs and interests
- ✓ Focused on the interest of the student, and provides assistance for student involvement in campus organizations, clubs and extra-curricular activities

Independent Living Support may include:

- ✓ Teaching effective adaptive living skills
- ✓ Supporting students as they navigate through the day-to-day needs of a college lifestyle
- ✓ Assisting students as they navigate residence life;
- ✓ Assistance and encouragement regarding an active involvement in community (both on campus and off campus communities), and the development of support strategies that will assist the student in being more independent in those environments.

## Peripheral Support Services

Providing individualized support campus-wide and within a framework of the mainstream means assistance must be provided from a holistic, pervasive perspective. It is important that planning take place to ensure services outside the basic areas of academics, social and independent living are addressed.

### Skills Building Groups:

The development of a skills building group is important for providing valuable information to assist students as they navigate a college campus. It's also important for providing a social network through which students can connect with others.

The CPSASD conducts skills groups called "Discovery Group". Themes of managing a stressful college lifestyle, as well as the transition out of college are discussed.



Topics for the Discovery Group change from year to year, but are often centered on discussions similar to these examples:

#### **Welcome back,**

- Welcome to the new members
- Introduction, Name, major, Something interesting that happened
- Group rules
- Me, myself, and I – Worksheet exploring likes, believes and personal values
- Topics that you would like to explore, understand or refine you knowledge in

#### **Time management and Smart Goals,**

- What is time management and why is so difficult for us?
- Executive functioning – what we need to know about scheduling, organizing and prioritizing...
- How do I spend my time? - Academic Success Time Budget Sheet, what am I missing and where do I spend most of my time?
- Find your prime time. Why is it good to know?
- Smart Goal Setting, a step by step approach
- Finally, who and what can help you better manage your time? Tools and resources I didn't know I had...

### **Developing a Social Radar, Part 1,**

- All about me, All about you – Dialog vs. Monolog
- It's all about sharing – But how much should I share?
- Under-sharing vs. Oversharing
- How does it affect your relationships if you share too much, or don't talk about yourself, your values, likes, dislikes at all
- The importance and struggle of finding the balance

### **Developing a Social Radar, Part 2,**

- What is Theory of mind and how it effect social communication and relationship building
- Trying to understand: Other people's thoughts, Motivations (e.g. the reason why someone did something), Intentions (e.g. what the person planned or meant to happen)
- Notice how others feel: Mood stages (e.g. tired, ill, fed up..), Reactions to events (e.g. excited about a good grade, upset following a sad event), Reactions to other's behavior, including yours (e.g. hurt feeling, boredom)
- Working out wishes and preferences of others: Things they want, Things they enjoy,
- Things the find interesting/boring/frightening

### **Relationship Building, Communication Skills,**

- Early phases of relationship building-What does it look like?
- Reminder - Enough about me, Tell me about you!
- When and how to start, keep up and end a conversation
- Understanding and reading body language during a conversation
- Focused interests and how they impact relationships
- Small talk, and how it's done

### **Relationship Building (Romantic Relationships),**

- Approaching someone I'd like to talk to: Here's how it's done
- Body Language: What those subtle movements and expressions really mean
- *Yes, I'm interested!* (Now, what does that look like?)
- *I hope you're interested!* (Now, what does that look like?)
- Developing and maintaining relationships
- *Dating With Asperger Syndrome: Decoding Girl-world*

### **Building My Reputation On Campus,**

- Actions and words: their influence on how you're perceived
- Introducing myself: The in's and out's of doing it right
- Talking to professors vs. talking to friends: what's the difference?
- What is my reputation, and how do I change it?
- Role models and how they influence your behavior

### **Decision Making, Conflict Resolution,**

- Independent decision making
- Questions I should ask (myself) before making an important decision
- Consequences of a wrong decision
- Conflict resolution, who is it done?
- Understanding and analyzing the issue, Understanding the other party involved in the conflict
- Disagreeing correctly

### **Stress and Anxiety,**

- Understanding and recognizing personal triggers
- What does it feel, and look like to be stressed
- How would others recognize when I am stressed and what can help
- Sensory sensitivity and stress, what is the link...
- Preventing and coping with stress

### **Anger Management,**

- Understanding and taking criticism but avoid being hurt
- Recognizing and understanding my feeling
- How to appropriately express my feelings
- I have control - my thoughts, my feelings!!!

### **Counseling / Mentoring:**

College students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may have significant challenges related to stressors common to a campus lifestyle, and due to difficulties with effectively expressing those concerns to others. Counseling may be accessed through Concord's Counseling Center. The CPSASD staff is available to provide information and technique advice to the counselors in that office that may not have experience with someone diagnosed with an ASD.

### **Liaison with Residence Services:**

Each semester, the CPSASD staff provides information to personnel in the Residence Services office about Autism Spectrum Disorder and the most effective ways to interact with students with ASD. Staff from the two offices work closely to ensure the quality of life for students involved in the CPSASD remains high, and that challenges are anticipated and addressed in a progressive manner.

### **Campus and Community Supports:**

The CPSASD initiated a Safe-Space inspired training program, called *Allies Supporting Autism Spectrum Disorder*. This training has a primary focus of working with college campus faculty, staff, and community organizations to serve and create awareness regarding individuals with ASD. We want to enable campuses to deepen their support by enhancing understanding of the disorder, discover strategies known to be helpful, and create welcoming spaces to foster

development. This project provides training and technical assistance to help develop individual or group ability to provide a safe and welcoming space for individuals with ASD. Trained allies will promote understanding and acceptance of individuals with ASD in their professional and personal lives in order to spread the ally mentality.



### *Liaison with Professors:*

College Program staff meets with each professor who teaches a student in the CPSASD during the first week of class, and presents to them a Student Profile, along with some basic information about Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Student Profile provides valuable information about the student, and the accommodations that student may require. A generic example:

#### **Student Profile**

**Name:** John Doe

**Home state:** Georgia

**Current Academic Standing:** Incoming Freshman

**Declared major:** Undecided

#### **Teaching strategies known to be effective:**

- John is most successful in smaller groups, where he can feel as though he is a part of a community effort. Teaming him up with classmates would most likely create for him an environment in which he can feel useful, and a part of things.
- John takes tests quite well, and gives good public presentations. He would most likely excel with assignments that are multiple choice, or even in a public speech format.
- Having a mentor is very important to John. Knowing a professor or a classmate is there to provide encouragement, advice and serve as a role model makes him feel more comfortable and allows more success in the classroom.
- John may need time during class to get up and walk around to release stress or anxiety due to being in the same setting for long periods of time. Though he may seem distracted, in fact, allowing him to stand and pace helps him to concentrate on the task at hand.

- Allowing John to draw or doodle during class instruction time to help him absorb things with his auditory senses. This is also a way for him to concentrate and helps to calm him during moments of moderate to high anxiety during the class.

**Strategies that have not been successful:**

- Being a part of a large class often causes John to feel disconnected to the class and the professor.
- Scheduling tests or assignments to be turned on consecutive days of the week, instead of in at the end or beginning of each week may be difficult for John due to his processing speed.

**Requested accommodations:**

1. Due to challenges with stress, anxiety and distraction, John may request permission to take tests at the Autism Training Center (318 Old Main) and have a graduate student from the College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder proctor the exam.
2. John may request extended test taking time, and additional time to develop lengthy written assignments.

During the semester, graduate assistants with the CPSASD interact weekly with professors. Through emails, face-to-face meetings or telephone calls, updates are provided regarding academic progress for each student. That information helps shape the supports that continue over the course of the schedule.

### Staffing

In addition to professional staff that provides leadership, direction and supervision to the CPSASD, students enrolled in the program work closely with graduate assistants (GA's). Some GA's are recruited from educational disciplines that teach up-and-coming professionals how to help clients set goals, and develop a path toward those goals.

Many GA's come from the Communication Disorders program at, while others are from disciplines like Counseling, Psychology and Education. GA's are the backbone of the CPSASD, working 20 hours or more each week to assist assigned students with ASD. GA's help students break down assignments into manageable portions, develop and maintain an academic organization system and provide mentoring in regard to social needs.

### Measuring Success

What makes for *success* in college may well depend on the individual student. Many believe graduating from college is the true measure of success, while others assess their progress on a semester by semester basis. Some students place higher value on social growth than on academic achievement, while others measure success by how prepared they are for a career after graduation.



Staff of the CPSASD recognizes that each of those goals (and others) could well form the basis for success. Therefore, we measure *success* based on each individual student's definition. During the early Future Planning session, and in follow-up assessment meetings, students with ASD are asked to define what success means to them. That goal then becomes our measure for success. Simply, if the student reached his or her definition with our support, then our efforts were successful.

In the future there may be a better measure for what success is and what success is not. Until that measure arrives, however, the student collaborating with us in a person-centered program makes the call.

Questions to consider:

- (1) What single goal is most important to you in this first semester?
- (2) How will you know when it has been successfully achieved?
- (3) At the end of your time here, how will you know that your college experience at Concord University was successful?

### **Techniques and Strategies**

**Positive Behavioral Support:**

Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) provides the framework through which the CPSASD provides services and makes decisions regarding support. The technology is a collaborative, assessment-based process used to develop effective, individualized interventions for students who have challenging behavior, or who require systematic support to adapt most fully and live more independently. PBS plans focus on proactive and educative approaches to support.

The PBS process involves the commitment of a collaborative team, with core members consisting of: the student, family members and College Program staff responsible for implementing interventions. Direct service providers (such as professors, tutors, therapists and other professional staff) may serve as vital and effective members of the team process. Team members work effectively to:

- Establish a collective vision regarding the goals of intervention
- Communicate, resolve conflicts, and share in decision making
- Commit to the implementation and on-going evaluations of interventions
- Effectively assess and utilize resources and natural supports

The support team, facilitated by a staff of the College Program, (1) identifies goals of intervention; (2) gathers relevant information; (3) develops summary statements; and (4) implements strategies and monitors outcomes.

Students involved in The College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder may expect to have a team meeting prior to the beginning of each semester of study. Mini-reviews may be necessary as situations in the life of a particular student change, or when it becomes clear that support systems must be modified.

### Commonly Used Support Techniques

Supports that are most effective typically share some common traits: they are visual, use language that is concrete, and are developed through collaboration between students and program staff. Some examples of simple strategies that have helped with organization, personal insight and stress management follow.

#### Calendars:

##### Wednesday

	TASK	ROOM
9:00		
10:00	Wake up/get ready	
11:00	<b>English 102</b>	Corbly 408
12:00	<b>Geography 350</b>	Harris 202
1:00	Lunch	
2:00		
3:00		
4:00	<b>Study Hall</b>	ATC
5:00	↓	

##### Thursday

	TASK	ROOM
9:00		
10:00	Wake up/ <b>Shower</b>	
11:00	↓	
12:00	Lunch	
1:00	Pick up art supplies	ATC
2:00	<b>Art 217</b>	Smith 612
3:00	↓	
4:00	↓	
5:00	Drop off art supplies	ATC

##### Friday

	TASK	ROOM
9:00		
10:00	Wake up/get ready	
11:00	<b>English 102</b>	Corbly 408
12:00	<b>Geography 350</b>	Harris 202
1:00	Lunch	
2:00	Meet with Ben	ATC
3:00		
4:00	Discovery Group	
5:00	College Program social	

##### Saturday/Sunday

	TASK	ROOM
	<b>Homework on <u>Saturday</u></b>	
	Study Hall	
	<b>Shower on <u>Sunday</u></b>	

#### Study Hall:

Students with ASD seem to perform best when they have a safe place to go to complete homework or other academic activities. For the CPSASD that place is a Study Hall. With routine hours seven days per week and supervised by a GA who knows the students well

and can help answer basic academic questions, the Study Hall has been very effective. Effort is put into ensuring students feel comfortable in the location, and that the atmosphere is one of learning.

### Guided Journals:

Journals are terrific tools to develop self awareness and work through emotional issues. Journaling for some with ASD, however, can be too open-ended and less effective. One way to overcome that challenge is to develop a guided journal that provides some structure for the student. An example is:

#### **Morning Journal**

1. As I prepare to start my day, I realize that I:
  - Feel really calm, and enthusiastic about the day.
  - Feel somewhat calm, but with a controllable level of anxiety, frustration or other similar feelings.
  - Feel overwhelmed—or close to overwhelmed—and probably should do something that will help me relax, or call College Program staff for advice or support.
2. I understand that sometimes the unexpected can occur. Classes can be cancelled suddenly and without an immediate explanation, and plans that I have made can fall through for a variety of reasons. If unexpected events occur today, I will handle that by: \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Staying focused is important in helping me stay organized, and keeping my level of anxiety low. One thing I plan to do today that will help me stay focused on my goals is: \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I would rate my level of optimism today as:
  - A—Very high! I'm enthusiastic and eager for the day.
  - B—Pretty high. I'm ready to learn and experience life.
  - C—Good. I'm doing just "OK."
  - D—Pretty low level of enthusiasm, and I'm not very optimistic.
  - F—Very pessimistic, and I probably should mention this to the College Program staff.

#### **Evening Journal**

1. As I finish up my day, I realize that I:
  - Feel really calm, and enthusiastic about the day.
  - Feel somewhat calm, but with a controllable level of anxiety, frustration or other similar feelings.
  - Feel overwhelmed—or close to overwhelmed—and probably should call College Program staff for advice or support.
2. One thing that occurred today that I did not expect was: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
3. I handled that unexpected event:
  - Very well!
  - Pretty well.
  - OK.
  - Not so well.
  - Poorly.
4. If I had the event to do over again, I would do it:

- The same way.
- Differently, and here's how: \_\_\_\_\_.

### Social Stories:

Students with ASD often report that in order to be successful, they simply need the information necessary to navigate through the academic and social climates on campus. Some social stories may be used to remind students about information they already have, while others can be used to help students develop new insights.

#### Example 1

##### **Classroom Etiquette** (Talking in class)

Going to class can be a fun and interesting experience. A classroom is also a place where several students have opinions, and information they want to share. I can make the most of my class time and be considered a smart, thoughtful classmate by practicing some simple acts of classroom etiquette.

These are some things I can do:

- ✓ I can raise my hand and be called on before I speak up in class.
- ✓ I will give others a chance to speak because I can learn from them too! Limiting the number of times I speak give others a chance to participate, and maintains my reputation as a thoughtful classmate.
- ✓ If I have too many questions (perhaps more than three), I can write them on paper and discuss them with the professor after class or during office hours. I'll remember it's not polite to interrupt my professor or classmates when they are talking.
- ✓ I'll remember my professor is busy, but willing to help me learn. I can help him by sending only one email per week and addressing my all my concerns at once.

When I do these things my classmates and professor will respect me and class will be enjoyable for everyone.

One thing I should always remember: My opinions are valued, and enhance the classroom experience. I am an important part of the class and offer great insight. My voice can be heard in class without saying much at all.

#### Example 2

##### **My Reputation on Campus**

Living on campus can be both fun, and a challenge. Its fun and interesting to live alone, but living alone can also be a challenge. I don't have parents or family members nearby to remind me to do things any longer, and must rely often on myself to stay focused and organized.

Living on campus with people I don't know well is also a challenge. It's important to behave in a way that helps me create a reputation I can be proud of. I know I don't want to have a reputation for being loud or difficult.

Instead, I want my reputation on campus to be:

- Someone who is intelligent
- Someone who is dependable, trustworthy and respectful of the property of others
- Someone who has patience
- Someone who is thoughtful of other people, and respectful of their needs
- Someone who handles anxiety well

- Someone who handles unexpected change in a graceful, dignified way

Today, I'll work on making a positive reputation by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Academic Support Techniques:**

Techniques that have been effective with helping students in Concord University's CPSASD to perform better in the classroom and address social or independent living needs include: (1) checklists, (2) social planners, (3) self-assessments, (4) essay templates, (5) written instruction, and (6) accountability forms.

**Essay Template**

**Introduction Paragraph:** Answer the question given as directly as possible in the first sentence and then in the second sentence list 3-4 reasons that support your answer. (These 3 -4 reasons will be explained in the body of the essay)

**Body:**

- **Paragraph 1:** First sentence---state the first reason from the introduction paragraph that supports your answer. Then in the next 5-8 sentences explain in detail this reason and how it contributes to your answer. Give examples.
- **Paragraph 2:** First sentence--- state the second reason from the introduction paragraph that supports your answer. Then in the next 5-8 sentences explain in detail this reason and how it contributes to your answer. Give examples.
- **Paragraph 3:** First sentence--- state the third reason from the introduction paragraph that supports your answer. Then in the next 5-8 sentences explain in detail this reason and how it contributes to your answer. Give examples.
- **Paragraph 4:**--- First sentence--- state the fourth reason from the introduction paragraph that supports your answer. Then in the next 5-8 sentences explain in detail this reason and how it contributes to your answer. Give examples.

**\*only include a fourth paragraph if you have 4 reasons in your introduction paragraph.**

**Conclusion:** Conclude the essay by summarizing your essay in 3 or 4 sentences.

**Classroom Monitoring:**

**Academic Standing Report**

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Class:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Professor:** \_\_\_\_\_

Week # _____	Attendance and Participation	Assignments	Current Standing
Week ending Friday, _____, 2016	This week was: <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable	<input type="checkbox"/> Everything is turned in as scheduled <input type="checkbox"/> There is work not turned in	<input type="checkbox"/> Passing <input type="checkbox"/> Not passing

**Comments or concerns:** \_\_\_\_\_

## College Program Application Process

An application to The College Program is considered “complete” and will be accepted only if it includes:

- A clinical psychological evaluation (school-based, or psycho-educational evaluations, will not be accepted) dated within three years of this application;
- The results from an intelligence evaluation, such as the WAIS III , accompanied by subtest scores and a detailed, narrative report;
- Results from achievement testing (for example, the Woodcock-Johnson Achievement and the Peabody Individual Achievement tests);
- The most recent IEP, if one is in place for a current student.
- For students who have previous college experience: an *unofficial* transcript from that institution, or other documents that detail classes taken and grades earned.

Each completed application will be reviewed thoroughly by staff to ensure all University and College Program requirements are met. Those applicants who do meet the requirements—and who have documentation that suggests The College Program may be a good fit for their specific needs—may be invited to campus for a face-to-face interview. Based upon that interview and the information gathered from the application process, some prospective students will be invited into The College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder at Concord University. Formal notification of the decision will be made by mail.

Application to the CPSASD is separate from and in addition to the application to Concord University. Applications must be received by a February 1 deadline for those interested in applying for the upcoming Fall semester. Spring enrolment is unavailable. For information about applying to Concord University, please visit: <http://hub.concord.edu/admissions/>

## Fees and Payments

- The program fee for students accepted into the CPSASD is \$4,500 per semester.
- The “Discovery Group” skills building sessions are \$500 per semester.

Fees must be paid in full before the start of each semester. A Billing Statement outlining the terms of the payment will be sent out to the responsible party. Checks should be made payable to Marshall University, and mailed to:

Rebecca Hansen, Ed.D.  
The WV Autism Training Center  
The College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder  
Old Main Rm. 316  
One John Marshall Drive  
Huntington, WV 25755

Scholarships for the CPSASD are currently unavailable. One avenue of payment that may be considered is through the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) (or “Vocational Rehabilitation,” as it is called in some states).

### **Program Website**

Please visit the CPSASD Program website for more information about the supports provided at Concord University to enrolled students with ASD, for more in-depth stories of success and an extensive list of resources.

Please visit our website at:

[www.marshall.edu/collegeprogram](http://www.marshall.edu/collegeprogram)



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