



## The WV Autism Training Center's College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder at Marshall University Core Tenets and Practices

The College Program (est. 2002) 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 Marshall 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 a "future planning meeting." 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 everyone. 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.

### The College Program Application Process:

The invitation to become a part of the College Program is a process that requires an investment in getting to know potential students and their families, providing everyone sufficient time to become familiar with program staff and philosophy.

After a complete application is reviewed (which includes a minimum of a clinical psychological evaluation, an achievement assessment, an intelligence assessment, and a developmental and behavioral history), The College Program will reach out to applicants to schedule interviews. Applicants will not hear from The College Program until the deadline for submissions have passed.

The parents or guardians of each applicant are invited to participate in the face-to-face interview and are included in the discussion unless the applicant is firm that he or she be interviewed alone. Program staff structure the interview around several areas of emphasis,

and rate how successfully the applicant might carry out each activity; 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:** Focused on managing time, money, and navigating the campus and community

**Socialization skills:** Focused on becoming involved with clubs and organizations, making plans for upcoming events, and broadening areas of interest and focus

**Safety:** Focused on student vulnerability and recognizing a personal or medical crisis

**Diversity:** Focused on assessing the maturity with which an applicant approaches and understands sexuality and how respectful a student is of sexual, religious, and cultural diversity

**Stress:** Focused on the recognition of personal symptoms of stress and anxiety, how a student adjusts to those symptoms, and traits of resilience

**Personal Insight:** Focused on applicants' understanding of their ASD diagnosis and to what degree the applicant can plan for making their own decisions

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

### **Staffing:**

In addition to professional, full-time Student Support Specialists (SSS) that provide leadership, direction, and supervision to students, The College Program also employs graduate assistants (GA) to serve as close mentors. Many GAs are recruited from educational disciplines that teach up-and-coming professionals in the fields of mental health counseling, psychology, communication disorders, social work, and health sciences, but GAs from all disciplines are welcomed. GAs are the backbone of The College Program, working 20 hours or more each week to assist assigned students with ASD.

### Basic Support Services:

The CPSASD provides support to students as they live an otherwise typical college lifestyle. Students attend regular Marshall University classes, live in the 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 (up to several times/week) with staff to determine and carry out the best strategies of support while maintaining the college experience they desire. Although services are individualized, they generally are fit into four categories of support: academic, social, career preparation, and independent living.

Academic Supports may include:

- ✓ Course advising, based on the learning strengths, abilities, and interests of each student
- ✓ Students and program staff 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 teaching methods for each student
- ✓ Consistent interaction with professors/advocacy support

Social Supports may include:

- ✓ Social coaching/mentoring
- ✓ Weekly Social Skill Group involvement
- ✓ Assistance with student involvement in campus organizations, clubs, and extra-curricular activities
- ✓ Weekly social outings led by program staff

Independent Living Support may include:

- ✓ Supporting students as they navigate through the day-to-day aspects of a college lifestyle, such as time management and organization skills
- ✓ Assisting students as they navigate living independently, such as money management, laundry, or hygiene

Career Preparation Support may include:

- ✓ Weekly Career Preparation groups
- ✓ Assistance exploring degree programs and the careers they can lead to
- ✓ Assistance seeking volunteer, internship, part-time, or full-time work
- ✓ Connecting students and graduates with neurodiverse hiring initiatives

## Skill-Building Groups:

The College Program offers several weekly groups throughout each semester to assist in the development of important skills while providing a safe place for learning and socialization.

While groups may evolve and change dependent on student needs, our weekly staple is “Discovery Group.” Below are examples of weekly discussion topics in Discovery Group.

### **Time Management and Smart Goals**

- What is time management and why is it so difficult?
- Executive functioning – what we need to know about scheduling, organizing, and prioritizing
- How do I spend my time? [Academic Success Time Budget Sheet]
- Find your prime time.
- Smart Goal Setting – a step by step approach
- Tools and resources I didn’t know I had

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

- All about me and all about you – Dialog vs. Monolog
- Under-sharing vs. Oversharing
- How does it affect your relationships if you share too much? What about if you do not share your values, likes, and dislikes?
- The importance and struggle of finding the balance

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

- “Theory of mind” and how it effects social communication and relationship building
- Trying to understand other’s thoughts/motivations (e.g. the reason why someone did something) and 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 your own)

### **Relationship Building & Communication Skills**

- Early phases of relationship building
- 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 is done

### **Relationship Building & Romantic Relationships**

- Approaching someone I would like to talk to
- Body language: What those subtle movements and expressions mean
- Yes, I am interested! (Now, what does that look like?)
- I hope you are 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 are perceived

- Introducing myself: The ins and outs of doing it right
- Talking to professors vs. talking to friends
- 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
- Understanding and analyzing the issue/ Understanding the other side
- Disagreeing correctly

#### **Stress and Anxiety**

- Understanding and recognizing personal triggers
- What does it feel like and look like to be stressed?
- How would others recognize when I am stressed and what can help
- Sensory sensitivities and stress

#### **Anger Management**

- Understanding and taking criticism
- Recognizing and understanding my feelings
- How to appropriately express my feelings
- I have control - my thoughts, my feelings

### Counseling:

The College Program's Licensed Professional Counselor and WV Autism Training Center's Licensed Psychologist support the mental health needs of students through weekly or as-needed 50-minute counseling sessions. Services designed to meet basic mental health needs may also be provided by graduate students or interns earning degrees in Mental Health Counseling who are trained to understand ASD and who are supervised by a Licensed Professional Counselor.

Counseling services may also be accessed through Marshall University's Counseling Center. If that route is chosen by the student, The College Program 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.

### Residence Services Liaisons:

Each semester, The College Program staff provide training to personnel in Resident Services about Autism Spectrum Disorder and the most effective ways to interact with students with ASD. Staff work closely together to ensure the quality of life for students living on campus remains high, and that challenges are anticipated and addressed in a progressive manner.

### Professor Liaisons:

College Program staff meets with each students' professors during the first week of class, and presents to them a Student Profile, a consent to exchange information, and basic information about Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Student Profile provides valuable information about the student, and the accommodations that student may require. Staff will also connect weekly with professors throughout the semester through emails, face-to-face meetings, or telephone calls. Updates are provided regarding academic progress for each student which helps shape implemented supports.

### **Student Profile**

**Name:** John Doe

#### **Effective teaching strategies and important information:**

- Responds best to written and verbal instructions that are concise, clear, and concrete.
- Responds best when he feels safe and comfortable in an environment, and when professors ask straightforward, closed ended questions that contain little or no ambiguity.
- Understands and completes assignments most successfully when they (1) contain concrete instructions regarding the assignment and (2) have a definite deadline for completion.
- Will require help with consistent and regular communication with professors. John will need reminders to troubleshoot proactively to remedy any classroom or assignment issues. Please connect with John's graduate assistant or supervisor if support or strategies are needed.

#### **Requested accommodations:**

- Due to challenges with processing speed, anxiety or distractions, John will request permission to take tests at the Autism Training Center (Old Main 307) and have a graduate student or program administrator proctor the exam.
- John will require extended time for tests and may request additional time to develop lengthy written assignments.
- Because cognitive disorganization, a graduate assistant from The College Program will be contacting you regularly to check on and monitor progress. Josh often does not remember or absorb verbal announcements. It's very helpful to provide written reminders via Blackboard or email. It is also useful to add his graduate assistant's email to your class roster so that he or she can receive any mailings you may send out to John.
- John benefits from supplemental notes from the professor or a note taker. Disability Services or The College Program will let you know if a note taker is not available in order to see if there is a student who would want to sign up to be a note taker.
- It helps if John sits near the front of the classroom to avoid distractions. John may fidget during class due to under- or overstimulation. The need for stimulation may result in his use of phone or laptop. Providing reminders that non-academic use of electronics in the classroom isn't permitted will help John to refocus on the lecture.

### Campus and Community Supports:

The College Program is proud to offer a comprehensive training for campus and community groups called *Allies Supporting Autism Spectrum Disorder*. This training has a primary focus of working with college campus faculty, college students, community organizations, and employers to serve and create awareness regarding individuals with

ASD. We want to enable groups to deepen their support of diversity 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 a safe and welcoming spaces for individuals with ASD. Trained allies will promote understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of individuals with ASD in their professional and personal lives. New allies receive a sticker (as seen below) to display with pride.



### 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 College Program recognize that each of these personalized goals form the basis for success. We, therefore, measure success based on each individual student's definition. During the early Future Planning session, and in follow-up assessment meetings, students define their measures for success and The College Program team provides tailored supports to meet those goals.

### 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 Marshall University was successful?

### Positive Behavioral Support:

Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) provides the framework through which The College Program provides services and makes decisions regarding support. PBS plans focus on proactive and educational approaches.

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

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