



**Autism Speaks®**

**FAMILY SERVICES**

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL  
OPPORTUNITIES GUIDE

The logo for Autism Speaks Family Services. It features the text "Autism Speaks®" in blue, "FAMILY SERVICES" in large red and teal letters, and "POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES GUIDE" in white. A blue puzzle piece icon is positioned to the right of the "FAMILY SERVICES" text.



**AUTISM SPEAKS®**

It's time to listen.

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# About This Kit

This guide is designed to help you and your family explore the different opportunities and learning environments after leaving high school. With only about one third of youth with autism attending college in young adulthood\*, Autism Speaks wants to offer the best possible resources on this topic to help you explore all of the various options available to you.

Throughout this guide, you will find information from experts in the field and those working in various learning institutions to help give you an inside look into different postsecondary programs. You will also find information on topics such as how to obtain services, advice for parents, peer to peer advice, life on campus and the differences between college and high school. We hope this resource will help guide you through your high school years and the years following graduation.



*“The road after high school is wide open to you...  
there are no rules...no right or wrong way to travel...  
no time limits...and for most of us, it will be a life  
long journey”.*

*- Barbara Kite, M.Ed.*

\*Postsecondary Education and Employment Among Youth With an Autism Spectrum Disorder  
Paul T. Shattuck, Sarah Carter Narendorf, Benjamin Cooper, Paul R. Sterzing, Mary Wagner and Julie Lounds Taylor  
*Pediatrics*; originally published online May 14, 2012;  
DOI: 10.1542/peds.2011-2864



# Introduction



by Stephen Shore, Ed.D.  
Author, Assistant Professor  
of Special Education  
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*This guide, along with the resources listed at the end, will help you establish a firm ground-work for recognizing when challenges occur, explaining your needs in a way that allows others to understand and be supportive, and clarifying why the accommodation or more information is needed.*

*For those of you headed towards vocational/technical schools, life skills programs, or perhaps even directly into employment, the concepts brought forth in this guide will be of great assistance as well. In fact, even in everyday life, the process and importance of self-advocacy remains the same.*

A professor outlines a complex assignment or your supervisor gives you a long list of tasks to complete a job. Soon, you are lost in a verbal maze of directions and deadlines. What do you do? You immediately realize that there is just too much to remember. You might then ask for a moment to whip something out to take these instructions down with. Next, you might explain to him or her that you may not remember all of the details you've been given.

These common scenarios contain the three basic elements of successful self-advocacy—recognizing a problem, arriving at and implementing an effective plan to address it, and disclosing the reason you need a modification or a clearer understanding of the situation.

While engaging in higher education is often rewarding on a number of levels, colleges and universities can also be a landmine of self-advocacy challenges for individuals on the autism spectrum and with other related conditions. For example, when entering a restaurant, I first scan for noise and recessed lighting fixtures in the ceiling. For me, a noisy restaurant is overwhelming to my sense of hearing, and sitting under a recessed lighting fixture is like looking into a spotlight. If there is too much noise, I will either ask to sit in a quieter place or perhaps even choose a different place to dine. If I find myself under a recessed lighting fixture, I will ask the person I am with if they mind switching seats with me and explain that the light is too bright for my eyes. The explanation has two purposes: First, it would be unfair to expose the other person to a potential sensory violation without fair warning. Second, I am disclosing why I am asking to make the seat change.

Good luck in your advocacy efforts. We're here to help. The self-advocacy abilities you develop and hone will be very helpful in furthering your education. These skills will continue to be of great assistance to you after graduation when it comes to relationships, employment, involvement in the community, and in all other aspects of life.



# Preparing for Postsecondary Education

## Preparing for College While Still in High School

*If you are planning to go to college, it is essential to remember that in order to apply, you will need to obtain a high school diploma or a General Education Diploma (GED). An IEP diploma will not be recognized by institutions of higher education.*



Make sure that all standardized tests have been taken; both ACT and SAT, and SAT subject tests. Some colleges will require these for admissions. If you think you may need extra support taking standardized tests, oftentimes accommodations can be arranged. In order to ensure that the right accommodations are in place, you and your parents or guardians should work with the school to fill out the necessary disability paperwork to make these requests. Be mindful that this needs to be done several months in advance of sitting for the examination.

Find out if colleges that you may be interested in require IQ or achievement test scores to receive accommodations under Section 504 (see more information about Section 504 later in this kit). Your high school may be able to arrange for this while you are still under IDEA. Assess if you need any learning support classes before going on to college. Some students do this at college, while others spend an extra year in high school, sometimes called “post-graduate” program or PG. Summer courses may be an option for you if there is a college in your area. These classes can help to prepare you for the upcoming transition.

Work closely with your guidance counselor to begin to explore all available options. One option is dual enrollment. A dually enrolled student is a student who is still officially a student at high school, but is also taking one or more classes at a college for credit. Transition teachers from the school will work with you outside of school. Your weekly schedule might include taking classes, looking for a job or working, learning to use public transportation and working out at a health club. Dual enrollment allows you to begin to get used to the college setting, life and workload, while still in high school.



# Choosing the Right Program

*It is essential to ask the right questions as you explore postsecondary education options. The Autism Transition Guide: Planning the Journey from School to Adult Life by Carolyn Bruey and Mary Beth Urban gives the following advice:*



*Photo courtesy of Keelin Daly from the ABILIS program in Greenwich, CT.*

- Talk to the guidance counselor at your school.*
- Attend local college fairs and ask about disability support services.*
- Ask your teacher about where some of their past students have attended college.*
- Ask other students with ASD or their parents.*
- Consult local autism organizations to see about listings of colleges that offer supports.*
- Make sure to arrange visits to any potential schools where you can speak with staff and students. The school may also be able to help connect you to other students with ASD and their families.*

- Investigate if the school has the proper supports and services available for you to have the most successful and rewarding experience possible.*
- Keep in mind that there are many different types of institutions that you could possibly attend. These include: vocational school, community or junior college, technical institutes, state schools or liberal arts schools.*
- Be sure to understand the difference between 2-year versus 4-year programs.*
- Factors that come in to play when selecting a college can also include location and finances.*
- You and your parents should not hesitate to visit the selected college and the one you will eventually attend as many times as you need to in order to familiarize yourself with the college.*



## **Below is a checklist of topics that you and your family may want to take into consideration when discussing the transition from high school to college.**

*The checklist is adapted with permission from Jerri Roach Ostergard, Transition Specialist, Worcester (Massachusetts) Public Schools as found on the Think College website. You can see the checklist [here](#).*

- Research and understand what choices you have. Visit programs, talk to other students, families, watch videos, etc.*
- Set postsecondary education and career goals through the use of person-centered planning.*
- Ensure that you are enrolled in academic courses throughout high school that will prepare you for college courses. While not a requirement, experience tells us that students with more inclusive academic experiences in high school do better once in college.*
- You and your parents should know the difference between the laws that govern education at the secondary level (IDEA = entitlement) and at the college level (ADA = otherwise qualified).*
- You may want to participate in and, if possible, lead your own IEP. Participation means planning the meeting, working with a teacher to identify your own goals and supports, presenting your goals at the meeting, welcoming the team or learning about the forms.*
- Learn to advocate for yourself while in high school, which will prepare you for when it needs to be done in college.*
- Obtain college catalogue(s) and review them carefully with your parents and with support from high school staff (e.g. guidance counselor, transition coordinator) as needed. Visit campus activities while in middle or high school, sports, recreational, entertainment activities.*
- Ensure that documentation of your disability is up-to-date. This may be required by the college.*
- Discuss with your parents the nature of your disability and how it affects your school work. Practice how you refer to your disability and identify what supports you need.*
- Encourage teachers to document what accommodations and technology you use now and what you may need in college (e.g. reader, note taker, scribe, books-on-tape, speech-to-text software, screen reader, tape recorder, PDA, etc.). Create a list of these accommodations and supports.*
- Visit colleges with your parents so you have good information to make a final choice.*



- You should meet with college Disability Services Office (DSO) staff to talk about documentation and learn about how accommodations in college are different from those in high school.
- If there is a specific program on the campus for students with intellectual disabilities, arrange to meet with the staff. Find out how participants in the program participate in general college life and academics.
- Discuss goals, learning needs and how to access specific accommodations that are available for all students, including academic supports (e.g. tutoring, writing support), with your parents and DSO staff before classes begin.
- Figure out and set up transportation prior to the start of school (e.g. driving, car-pooling, learning to use public transportation, travel vouchers).
- Be aware of financial aid resources available to your family and make sure that funding for all costs is arranged before school starts (e.g. tuition, books, fees, transportation). Identify how financial support you may receive impacts other benefits (e.g. SSI, SSDI).
- Know what services are available through adult human service agencies (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation – tuition, books, transportation, employment supports – One-Stop Career Centers, Individual Training Accounts, Developmental Disability agencies). Representatives from these groups should be at the transition IEP, PCP, etc. You should have the phone numbers for relevant agencies in their cell phone.
- Be prepared for the fact that your family needs written consent from you to obtain access to your records at the college level.



## The following chart provides a clear illustration of the differences between high school and college with respect to expectations of students:

### HIGH SCHOOL

### COLLEGE

<b>HIGH SCHOOL</b>	<b>COLLEGE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Teachers will usually grade and check completed homework.</li><li>2. Teachers may remind students of incomplete assignments.</li><li>3. Teachers may know students' needs and approach students when they need assistance.</li><li>4. Teachers may be available before, during or after class.</li><li>5. Teachers have been trained in teaching methods.</li><li>6. Teachers often provide students with information missed during absence.</li><li>7. Teachers present material to help students understand what is in the textbook.</li><li>8. Teachers often write information on the board or overhead to be copied for notes.</li><li>9. Teachers often teach knowledge and facts while leading the students through the thinking process.</li><li>10. Teachers often take time to remind students of an assignment and/or test.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Professors may assume homework is completed and that students are able to perform on a test.</li><li>2. Professors may not remind students of incomplete assignments. (<i>Hint: It's up to students to check with their instructor to see if the course requirements are being met.</i>)</li><li>3. Professors are usually open and helpful, but they expect students to ask for assistance when they need it.</li><li>4. Professors may require students to attend scheduled office hours.</li><li>5. Professors have content knowledge but have not necessarily received any training in teaching methods.</li><li>6. Professors often expect students to get information from classmates when they miss a class.</li><li>7. Professors may not follow the textbook, but lecture in order to enhance the topic area. (<i>Hint: Students need to connect the lectures to the textbook.</i>)</li><li>8. Professors may lecture nonstop. If they write on the board, it may be to support the lecture, not summarize it.</li><li>9. Professors often expect students to think independently and connect seemingly unrelated information.</li><li>10. Professors expect students to read, save and refer back to the course syllabus. (<i>Hint: Syllabi are an important way of knowing exactly what is expected, when assignments are due, and how assignments will be graded.</i>)</li></ul>



# Seeking a Suitable College or University

by Stephen Shore, Ed.D.

*Some of the many variables to consider when choosing the right college include size, type of campus, geographical location, suitable programs and courses of study. These are the same aspects everyone else looks for. Those individuals with autism and other disabilities must add on the facet of determining whether the disabilities office can provide for their needs. Here are some things to consider regarding the disabilities office.*

Some answers to look for include what documentation is needed. Some will require a recent full-scale neuropsychological exam whereas others will be satisfied with a note from a qualified professional stating the diagnosis. Find out how recent the documentation must be. Documents suggesting reasonable accommodations will be helpful.

It is also important to know what type of assistance is needed. Staff members at disability offices understand and are prepared to provide academic accommodations. Assistance related to independent living skills or social interaction is much less common.

If you continue to run into barriers at several disability offices amongst colleges then it might be possible that you are not quite ready for college.

## Different Strokes for Different Folks



Some colleges and universities have programs specifically for individuals with autism and other disabilities providing services beyond what is available at the school disability office. Referred to as “internal” programs, these campus-based organizations offer fee-based added assistance including support groups for social interaction, academics, and sometimes vocational. Students may be housed in dormitories whereas others may live off campus. Some examples of the many “internal” programs available include *Bridges to Adelphi* at Adelphi University in New York, the *College Program for Students with Asperger Syndrome* at Marshall University in West Virginia and the REACH program at the University of Iowa.

Based off campus, “external” programs provide additional support in the areas of schedule and financial management, nutrition, what to do with leisure time and community involvement. Students attending these programs tend to live in housing provided by the organization as well. Costs are higher because of the more intensive nature of these programs. Some examples of these programs include the *College Internship Program* and the *College Living Experience*. No program or model is inherently better than the other. It’s more of a question of what is the best fit for you!



# Types of Postsecondary Education Programs



There are several postsecondary educational paths that you can take and may want to carefully consider. Each type of program offers supports and classes that will provide you with the skills that you may need to reach your goals and dreams. It is important to do your research beforehand to try and find the type of program that best meets your needs. No two programs are exactly alike so be sure to take some time to visit different institutions, interview students, meet with the office of disability services and talk to staff. All of these things will help you to make an informed decision on the place that is right for you.

## Four-Year College or University

There are more and more colleges that do provide support services for students with disabilities. However, students and their families are encouraged to research to make sure that the supports offered meet their individual needs. College students with autism may need assistance learning the advocacy skills required to ask for supports and accommodations. A counselor or peer-counselor may be able to assist with this, or someone from the school's office of disability services. In rigorous academic classes, students may want to request the assistance of a tutor. Tutors are often available through the university and can be located through various avenues.



# Four-Year College or University with an Autism Specific Program

by Bonni Alpert

Assistant Dean, Student Disability Services  
Western New England University

*The transition from high school to college is an exciting time of growth and development; however, it can also be a somewhat daunting experience for students on the autism spectrum.*



All colleges and universities have developed some means by which students can request and receive specific disability-related accommodations. The goal of these accommodations is to level the playing field so that students with disabilities can have equal access to the programs and activities offered in their college environment.

Examples of such accommodations may include:

**Extended time and a distraction-reduced environment for exams**

**Note-takers for lectures**

**Access to certain assistive technology**

**Housing accommodations**

In addition, many colleges and universities are becoming aware of other issues that students on the spectrum may experience that could significantly impact their successful transition within the postsecondary environment. These issues may be the direct result of challenges related to social, communication, and daily living skills (hygiene, organization and time management). As a result of this awareness, some institutions have implemented programs that go above and beyond the mandated “access” accommodations to help students identify and develop strategies to work on targeted goals/skills as a way to support them in the transitioning experience and to help them engage and connect in the postsecondary environment. Whether the program involves a peer mentoring relationship, a living-learning residential experience or specifically assigned classes, these programs share an understanding that students on the autism spectrum often have a unique set of social needs that cannot necessarily be met through the provision of traditional academic accommodations.

Despite the availability of necessary accommodations and support, the key to success for all college students is to communicate well with professors and to ask for help when it's needed. In college, expectations are higher, grading is harder, independence is required and student responsibility is expected.



## Greater responsibility in college means:

**Students are more independent and are accountable for their behavior both in class and out, including dorms and extracurricular activities.**

**Students have to make more choices and decisions independently (without the help of mom or dad).**

**More independent reading and studying are required.**

**Students establish and attain their own goals.**

**Students must be motivated to succeed.**

**Students are responsible for independently completing assignments and handing them in on time.**





# Four-Year College or University with No Autism Specific Program

by Lorraine E. Wolf, Ph.D.

Director of Disability Services & 504 Compliance Officer

Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry

Adjunct Associate Professor of Rehabilitation Sciences

Boston University

*Some students on the spectrum require very supportive dedicated ASD programs. Others may not need or desire such close involvement of their support teams. Other students want an academic major that is not available at one of the growing but still limited number of schools with that level of programming. These students may find themselves at a traditional 4-year college or university.*

Students whose symptoms are milder in nature, who have lived successfully away from home (sleep away camp, travel or school) and who are emotionally and socially mature enough to deal with a challenging academic and residential environment are good candidates for schools that have no specialized ASD programming. Families will find that students are neither coddled nor abandoned, however, they need to be able to step up, own their disabilities and be excellent self-advocates.

For example, while accommodations will be available, students will have to be more active in requesting and arranging them. Faculty will not be informed about the nature of the diagnosis unless the student does it him or herself. The administrative or residential support staff will not know the diagnosis either and campus personnel may not know anything about ASD. In the absence of a dedicated “go to” program, students need to be able to find their own niche, create their own support team and most importantly, ask for help.

In researching such colleges, families should absolutely visit with the disability services office and ask specifically about their experience with students on the spectrum, the level of knowledge on campus, academic and residential policies and support and most importantly, whether there is someone in the disability services office who can act as a touch point for the student should it be needed. Recall that on such a campus, the student is in charge of his or her experience and that includes deciding not to use any of the resources that are available. Unlike a fee-for-service program, staff will not reach out to this student and may not know that a student is in trouble, unless the student notifies them.

**This brings us to the most important point for families—establishing guidelines for their student regarding using all available supports and being confident their student is up to the challenge.**

“The actual college experience can be one of the most profound events in these young adults’ lives. The opportunity to live with peers and the exposure to the other opportunities that are afforded in this environment really provides a great foundation for adult life. Parents consistently tell me that they see a lot of personal growth when their son/daughter comes home for the first time during the Thanksgiving break. After he or she is home during the Christmas break, parents state that the student is helping around the house and anxiously



waiting to return to school and his or her new friends. After the first year, the comment is usually ‘What happened to my kid?’ or ‘He or she has really grown up.’ We also see this growth in other areas of the student’s development such as a commitment to excel in academic and career areas. These students understand that if they want to maintain this level of independence, they will need to support themselves in a career of some sort.

*Finally, I believe that the college experience serves as a major reality check to these students, as they begin to see the value of becoming a productive adult who can obtain employment, enjoy relationships and lead a happy and well-rounded life.”*

*- Jeff Ross, M.Aed, Director, Student Support Services, Taft College*

## Cooperative Education

from ASERT Collaborative, a Pennsylvania Bureau of Autism Services Initiative  
Eastern Region

Cooperative education programs use the integration of classroom learning and hands-on practical experience. Cooperative education is a key component in many postsecondary settings. Students enrolled in these programs are able to work in employment settings while participating in academic programs of their interest. Cooperative education not only allows students to gain work experience for academic credit, but it also gives students the opportunity to get paid for their work, learn more about their field of interest and understand a direct connection between what is learned in the classroom and its application in real work settings.

Cooperative education differs from an internship in a variety of ways. Internships do not always pay for their experience and are not always required for academic fields of study. In cooperative education, a practical work experience is not only a requirement for academic credit, but it also includes strict guidelines from the program of study to ensure that students are gaining the most valuable work experiences possible.

Cooperative education is beneficial for students looking to gain real work experience while still in school, as it allows them to test drive their careers before graduation. For students interested in participating in cooperative education, it is important to research if their postsecondary institutions offer programs in their fields of study, how they will be placed into cooperative opportunities and the curriculum timeline.



***Below is an example from The Accreditation Council for Cooperative Education of what cooperative education schedules may look like:***

### ***Full-Time Alternating***

The institution will have in place formalized alternation of periods of full-time classroom study with periods of full-time work experience approximately equal in length to the classroom periods.

*Baccalaureate programs Curriculum includes at least one academic year of multiple terms of full-time work experience. (Normally totals at least 30 weeks, depending on the institution calendar.)*

*Two-year academic programs and graduate-level programs. Curriculum includes a minimum of two work periods, one of which is not a summer term. (Normally totals well over 15 weeks due to the "two-work-period" definition.)*

### ***Parallel***

The student will be classified by the educational institution as, at least, a half-time student. The institution will have in place a formalized plan for a work experience component which will encompass approximately one-half of a regular work-week in length.

*Baccalaureate programs Curriculum includes four or more work/school combination periods scheduled over, at least, two academic years. (Normally totals at least 60 weeks, depending on the institution calendar.)*

*Two-year academic programs and graduate-level programs Curriculum includes two or more work/school combination periods scheduled over, at least, one academic year. (Normally totals at least 30 weeks, depending on the institution calendar.)*

### ***Combination Alternating/Combination Parallel***

Combination Alternating plans meet the defining features of full-time alternating models; in addition, they include one or more parallel components. Combination Parallel plans meet the defining features of parallel models; in addition, they include one or more periods of non-alternating full-time work.

*Baccalaureate programs Curriculum includes multiple combinations of parallel and full-time work-experience periods. (Including non-Summer terms that result in the approximate equivalent of 30 full-time workweeks.)*

*Two-year academic programs and graduate-level programs Curriculum includes multiple combinations of parallel and full-time work-experience periods. (Including non-Summer terms that result in the approximate equivalent of 15 full-time workweeks.)*



# Community College

by Aubrey Zamiara, Psy.D.

Director of Services for Students with Disabilities

Monroe Community College

Rochester, New York

*Regardless of the program the student plans on attending, it is important to refer to all the information and resources that are available on the college websites. Despite the multitude of resources available for students, it is important to understand that it is the student's responsibility to self-identify and request support from the various Student Services' offices.*

The postsecondary transition can be an extremely overwhelming time for both students and parents.

Prior to high school graduation, students are faced with so many options and pathways to consider.

Moreover, it is crucial that students on the spectrum receive appropriate guidance and assistance to self-assess and identify their present and future individual goals. One excellent option for students to consider is attending a community college.

With a student-centered focus, the primary mission among community colleges is to educate, prepare and ensure that all diverse student learners achieve their academic goals. Thus community colleges offer numerous student support services which include tutoring, student skills workshops, college orientation seminar courses, academic advising, counseling, career and transfer planning and specific services for students with disabilities.

**It is highly recommended that students on the spectrum self-identify with the on-campus disability office for support and accommodations immediately after applying for admission to the college.**

During the admission process you may be required to complete the Placement Test prior to course registration, unless the Admissions Office grants a test waiver. The goal of the Placement Test for new students entering a community college is to determine the right course selection and placement into English and math courses that best fit the student's knowledge and ability in these areas.

Another benefit of attending a community college is the smaller class sizes when compared to universities. Smaller classes are particularly beneficial for students on the spectrum as they allow students the opportunity to enhance their specific learning needs and styles. These smaller classes promote greater opportunities for rapport building among faculty and peers. Also, community college tuition and fees are significantly lower than four-year colleges and universities. This affordability makes attending a community college the right choice for many students, especially since the first two-years of college is typically a time for self-exploration among various classes, majors and career paths.

Some community colleges offer on-campus housing. Living on campus can be a great experience and opportunity for students who are comfortable with living independently. However, there is also the option of commuting from home. If living on campus initially is not in the student's best interest, it can always be considered at a later time when the student feels more comfortable and familiar with the campus surroundings.



## Vocational/Technical/Trade Schools



Vocational or technical schools can provide individuals with disabilities with the opportunity to experience hands-on learning in a variety of fields.

There are some career and technical education programs that provide this hands-on training along with academic skills such as reading, writing, math and problem solving skills. These programs also provide workplace experience such as internships and mentorships. It has been reported that participating in vocational or technical classes during the last two-years of high school, especially classes that offer occupational-specific instruction, is a successful transition strategy. It may be helpful to work with your school district to find out about programs in your area. For more information about the benefits of vocational schools check out John Elder Robison's personal perspective later in this guide.



# Life Skills Programs

by Linda Rogen, M.P.H.,  
Director of Programs & Services  
Bobbi Guercia, M.S.,  
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Vista Vocational

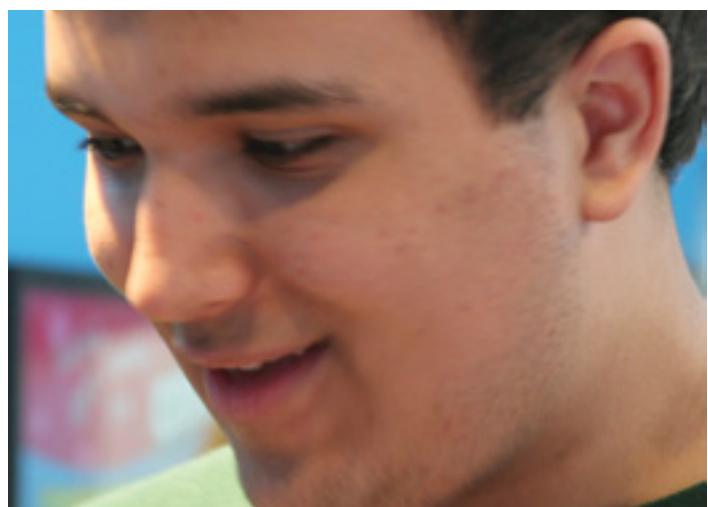
*Independent Living Programs for people with autism are postsecondary programs that offer services and supports to help individuals live and work successfully. Instruction needs to incorporate best practices identified for working with people on the autism spectrum. While similar services are offered by most Independent Living Programs, each program addresses them differently. Comprehensive Independent Living Programs should have the following basic components:*

## Education

Programs offer people with autism a variety of learning opportunities from curriculum-based instruction to community-based learning experiences. Teaching should be explicit, experiential and at an appropriate level for the individual with autism to learn. Assistive technology should be utilized to enhance learning and function. Instruction may occur individually or in small or larger groups. Functional academics are taught to enhance independent living and vocational functioning. Education may also include specific academic instruction at a postsecondary level associated with a local university or college or at a basic secondary level to assist individuals achieve needed diploma-related skills. Each program differs in its approach to formal education experiences from those that associate themselves directly with a college or university to others that offer it as an adjunct or additional programmatic option.

## Life Skills

Individuals on the spectrum need clear, incremental hands-on instruction on how to live on their own. Basic life skills training occurs in areas such as money management, cooking, shopping, room organization and transportation. Instructions should also include the important executive function skills or thinking skills such as organizing, planning, prioritizing and decision making related to each life skill being taught. Life skills training should occur in natural environments where the skills being taught relate directly to the type of environment in which the individual is going to live.





## Vocational

Working enables individuals with autism to earn their own money, gain positive self-esteem and recognize their worth in society. Employment training will include on-site experiences in a variety of work settings, both paid and non-paid. Scaffolding techniques and job coaches or professional supports should be utilized to ensure proper transition in the work place. Individuals with autism learn the vocational “soft skills” necessary for all jobs, as well as job specific skills required for employment. The focus is on individual vocational placements and supported group employment.

## Social/Self-Esteem

People with autism want meaningful relationships though they often have difficulty understanding the “hidden curriculum”, applying appropriate social behavior to each situation and developing satisfying friendships. Programs should offer counseling, group opportunity for social skill development, peer support and formal instruction that develops self-esteem, helps individuals read and respond to social cues and learn the fundamentals of relationships, including how to form and maintain them. Behavioral plans that target key social skills or behaviors within a peer or community context will be important in clearly defining the desired social skill and peer development goals for the individual and the program.



## Leisure

The scope of life for an individual on the autism spectrum must extend beyond the internet, video games and the television. Individuals with autism are taught about options for their free time, how to make choices around activities and how to initiate recreational activities. Programs should offer leisure activities which provide enjoyment, exposure to the wider community and a chance for physical involvement. These offerings should be considered part of the instructional framework as the abstract thinking, social skills and cognitive flexibility needed to deal with situations as they occur naturally are skills unto themselves. Structured leisure activities should take individuals on the spectrum into the natural community. Building peer and other social relationships will enhance self-esteem, build confidence and skill in dealing with unknown situations and offer individuals the opportunity to make decisions about their lifestyle choices for the future.





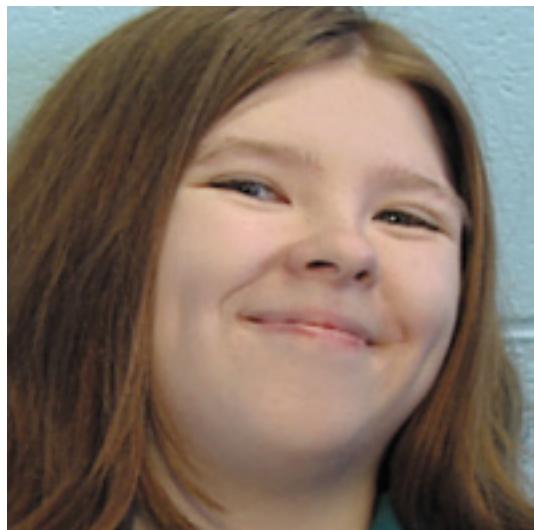
# Obtaining Services and Asking for Accommodations

by Stephen Shore, Ed.D.

*No matter what type of path you take after high school, one skill that will be very important is self-advocacy and learning how to ask for services and accommodations. Many postsecondary educational institutions may not provide the same type of guidance that you were accustomed to in high school. So learning how to ask for things will ensure that you have a successful and positive experience. Here you will find some simple tips and ideas on how to ask for what you need!*

## Three Steps to Self-Advocacy in Seeking Accommodations

Building on the work of *The Integrated Self-Advocacy Curriculum* (Paradiz, 2009) and *Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum* (Shore, 2004), the following 3-step model may be helpful.



### 1. SCAN:

Where is the challenge? What is causing the difficulty? Challenges may present themselves in any of these three domains:

- A. Sensory issues**, or how we perceive the environment
- B. Cognitive Processes**, or how we think
- C. Socio-emotional, or perception** social cues and how we feel

### 2. ADVOCACY:

Explaining your needs to promote greater understanding in a way that enables the other to provide assistance.

### 3. DISCLOSURE:

The reason for your asking for an accommodation or greater understanding. Disclosure may be...

- A. Partial, and only note the specific characteristic of autism affecting a given situation.**
- B. Full, which includes mentioning the diagnosis**



*Photo courtesy of Keelin Daly from the ABILIS program in Greenwich, CT.*

## Example:

*Let's return to the introduction where the overwhelmed individual asks for some time to get a paper and pen or even an iPad to take down some information and then explains that he won't remember all the details.*

- 1. SCANNING** the situation or environment, the individual realizes there is too much information to remember, making this a challenge in the cognitive domain.
- 2. The student is ADVOCATING** for himself by developing and implementing a plan of asking for a few moments of time to pull out paper or pencil to record the information being given by the professor or supervisor.
- 3. The student is DISCLOSING** by informing the professor or supervisor that he will not remember all this information without writing it down. This was a partial disclosure in that only the aspect of autism causing the difficulty was mentioned. Had the individual revealed his autism diagnosis and how that affects direction, that would have been a full disclosure, which in this case may have been too much information.

Sometimes accommodations can be as simple as moving your seat away from a noisy ventilation system if you are having auditory sensitivities or placing your seat near the door if there might be a need to leave the classroom for a short period of time. While arranging to sit away from a noisy ventilation system can often be done without explanation, if you have to frequently leave the room during a class, it might be good to notify the instructor beforehand so that he or she has a greater understanding of your needs.



# 504 Plans

*Most colleges and universities have a department that ensures the school's compliance with both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is important to become familiar with the school's disability-related resources so that you can be sure to advocate for the services and supports to which you are entitled.*

Section 504 and ADA are civil rights laws designed to help protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination in school, work and public accommodations. Section 504 applies to any school that receives federal funding. Students with disabilities cannot be denied appropriate services or supports that may be necessary to meet their needs or that would be available to students without disabilities. In order to be eligible for Section 504 protections, a student has to have a physical or mental impairment that limits at least one major life activity, as well as a history of this impairment in a major life area. Reasonable accommodations can include:

**Taped books**

**Readers or scribes**

**Note-takers**

**Access to the instructors notes**

**Extended time for assignments and tests**

**Use of a calculator**

**Preferential seating**

**Other similar supports**

You may want to keep in mind that Section 504 does NOT require an institution to compose a written plan, but most places will do this. In order to receive accommodations under Section 504, you and your advocate must request them. Even if you had services in high school, this does not ensure that you will have them if you go on to a postsecondary educational setting.

Some postsecondary educational institutions will provide supports usually through an office set up to aid students with disabilities. However, the level of supports as well as the efficiency and effectiveness vary from school to school. It is important for you and your family to research the supports available and determine if they will be appropriate for success in this educational setting.

It is essential to remember that once a student has left high school and is enrolled in an institution of higher education, IDEA requirements no longer apply. Section 504 and ADA will protect you, but it is your responsibility to make sure appropriate accommodations are requested in college. There may be no greater opportunity for self-advocacy than during this process. You will be best served by speaking up for yourself and articulating your needs. College counselors are more readily willing to listen when you, not your parents, approach them.

**Remember that your “voice” will make a difference. It is very important to share your anxieties or areas where you need help. You may also want to make a list of your most significant concerns about college. You should share these concerns with your advisor. Creating a solid support system may lower the chances of future problems.**



## How to Pay for College

Paying for postsecondary school, whether it's technical school or an associate or bachelor's degree, can be challenging for adults with autism. There are multiple sources to consider before you decide you need to pay out of pocket. Resources to pay for postsecondary school may not be evident at first glance, so it's important to speak to the right contact person at the agencies that you are exploring for funding. Two of the most important resources to research include The U.S. Department of Education and State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies.

In addition, there are resources that can help you determine other local supports. They can include your state's University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and your state's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

*"After high school, students with disabilities who pursue higher education face new challenges in obtaining services. While in high school, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that students are receiving an education tailored to their needs, with supports designed for their success. There is involvement from staff and parents and the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) helps to set goals and measure progress. Once a student leaves high school and enters postsecondary education, the legal standards and the procedure to obtain services changes dramatically."*

*Rather than IDEA, the laws governing college education for students with disabilities fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Unlike IDEA which mandates education and services for students, the ADA and Section 504 focus on non-discrimination and equal access. This is achieved through accommodations designed to create access to participation without changing the standards or core structure of the learning institution. Examples of accommodation include extra time for tests, note takers or recording devices for lectures.*

*Another key difference is that college students must acknowledge, disclose and document their disability to receive services and accommodations. In college, students must seek out those services and accommodations on their own. Students entering college need to be aware of the school's specific documentation requirements and ensure that they disclose their disability in a timely manner with the proper documentation. Failing to disclose a disability cuts students off from accommodations that could make the difference in their successful college experience."*

by Paul T. Shattuck, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, Brown School of Social Work  
Washington University in St. Louis





# Life on Campus

by Valerie Paradiz, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Autistic Global Initiative

Autism Research Institute

*Most colleges and universities have a department that ensures the school's compliance with both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is important to become familiar with the school's disability-related resources so that you can be sure to advocate for the services and supports to which you are entitled.*



While you are deciding which postsecondary path is the best fit for you, you may also want to look into the other aspects of life on campus outside of the academic programs available at each institution. These might include how the day to day routines will go, what type of assistance is available and what you can do to prepare before you go. If you are going to a college campus, you can ask the student services office, as well as the office of disability services. If you are attending a transition, vocational or life skills program, the staff there will be able to walk you through this. In addition, it's also a great idea to work on any skills you think will enable you to make your experience as successful as possible.

## Campus Supports for Students with Disabilities

If a college or university does not offer ASD-specific programming, your family should assess how supportive the Disability or Student Services Office will be. Some larger universities have an ADA Coordinator's Office, replete with ADA counselors who assist students in accommodation planning. One word of caution: although many colleges offer well-organized support for students with ADHD, depression or dyslexia through their Student Services or Disability Offices, the majority of colleges are still grappling with how to serve the rising numbers of applicants with autism. Community colleges are often good starting points for individuals on the spectrum, if your family is seeking less expensive options. Many special programs are emerging on community college campuses every year.

## Psychological Counseling Center

If your family is considering a college that does not offer a specialized ASD program, you may want to place a call to the campus counseling center and to gather information online or through the admissions office. Among the matters to consider: Does the counseling center have professionals who are trained in supporting individuals with autism? Are group counseling options available on campus? How long may a student receive counseling support on campus? If sessions are limited, can my family make arrangements for extended sessions or receive a list of referrals for therapists in the community?



If you are already in therapy or have had psychological counseling in the past, you might benefit from counseling on campus, particularly during the initial weeks of adjustment to the demands of school and social life. Additionally, some campus counseling centers offer needs assessments (often online) that your family can complete and submit to the counseling services center before you arrive at college.

## Supports Off Campus

You might also tap into local autism society chapters, Autism Speaks U or other community programs and organizations for individuals with disabilities. Some questions to consider: Do any local organizations run an adult or young adult recreation club or group? Are there social skills groups, coaches and mentors, or other supports available in the community or with professionals who are specifically trained in ASD? How can you become involved in the club or organization? If you are living far from home, are there families in the area who have young adults or teens on the autism spectrum who might serve as part of your circle of support?



## Independent Living Skills

You may worry about living skills such as organization and time management upon entering college. It is important for you to work to begin to develop these skills in the transition plan while still in high school. These skills can include: managing time, setting priorities and organizing assignments and free time.

It is very important for you to maintain structure in your life in college. Structure is still there in college, but it needs to be more self-imposed. There is quite a bit more free time in college. Very often, the amount of time spent on homework and studying exceeds the amount of time spent in the classroom. You will need to be able to create new routines to adjust to the many changes in daily life that happen between high school and college. Self-advocacy is essential. If you are living on your own, you may need to cultivate skills relating to independent living skills such as cleaning, managing finances, solving problems and doing laundry. It is essential to note that these types of independent living skills should be worked on prior to leaving high school.

## Additional Supports on Campus

Your family might also wish to investigate whether campus support programs available to all students are adequate to support you. Questions to ask might include: Are there peer mentors on campus assigned to fellow students with disabilities or mentors with background or interests in disability studies, psychology, special education, physical, occupational or speech therapy, or even someone majoring in the ASD student's area of deep interest? What specific supports or programs does the tutoring center offer? Does the center help students learn to plan for study time, create lists, organize schedules and belongings, and develop strategies for test-taking and submitting long-term projects such as research papers or lab experiments?

Many campuses now have disability clubs that are self-run by individuals with a variety of disabilities. These clubs might be a good source of social activity for you. Some also sponsor campus awareness campaigns that you might wish to join.



# Learning to Live Independently: A Personal Perspective

by Kerry Magro



My living situation seems to be constantly changing. Over the past six years I've lived in eight different places. Those places include five dorms, two apartments – one by myself and one with two roommates – and my house I grew up in. I have to tell you, living independently can be a CRAZY process. For those with autism who have a tough time with transitioning like me, it could be even worse.

For me though, it's been one amazing ride, which I wouldn't have been able to get through without doing my prep work first, and plenty of it. That's why it's essential to learn the necessary skills to manage living independently. It starts with sorting through what you know and don't know and then doing the prep work. To develop a plan for independent living, I suggest you start with an assessment of yourself or a discussion with someone who knows you very well.

Since I always say kids on the spectrum are at all different places, I'd start with the basics and move down the list. I can't tell you how many times I've heard that kids go off to college by themselves and forget the basics of bathing and grooming when someone isn't around to remind them. Self-help skills like bathing, shaving, brushing teeth are the basics. Tying a tie or shoelaces and buttoning (my weaknesses) were overcome a little by pre tied ties and Velcro shoes, but buttoning not so much.

So let's say we have that mastered and are at the door ready to go out. Do we have keys to the house to get back in? If we can't get back in, do we have an emergency refuge somewhere to go to call someone to let us back in? Do we know where we are going and how to get there? I never rode a public bus until I went to college and my parents rode the train back and forth to my college with me not once, but twice, not only to prepare me, but also to make sure I wouldn't feel embarrassed around kids who did these things routinely. I also kept a note card when I was traveling alone to remind me the route and how to get there.

Transportation is a necessary skill to have as well. If you don't own an automobile or know how to drive, then it's important to do some research on public transportation in your area. Figure out what is close to you whether it's a train, bus, taxi, etc. and set yourself up a schedule of how long it will take you to get to your destination. Look into whether the price of each is reasonable for you. This can be done very easily online through places like Google maps or mapquest.com. If looking online isn't an option, another skill to learn is how to read a map. (You won't believe how many people don't know how to!) You can get a map in most outlet stores.



These transportation skills go hand in hand with learning some precautionary safety skills. Emergency skills should also be looked at. A list of emergency numbers and tips should be left in a visible area both in your home and on you when you are traveling.

One of my first times traveling to my internship in NYC, I got pulled over by a cop who was screaming at me because I jaywalked across 7th Avenue. I didn't hear him because I had my headphones on. Carrying identification and something that indicates to authorities that you are disabled is not a negative, but a positive in my opinion. A great trick is to have something on your door for first responders that let them know you are disabled. Many local police and fire departments have these available.

Money is another big one. Learning the different denominations of paper money and change is so important. Money literacy courses are actually taught in some schools and some local credit unions offer courses to kids by opening accounts while still in high school.

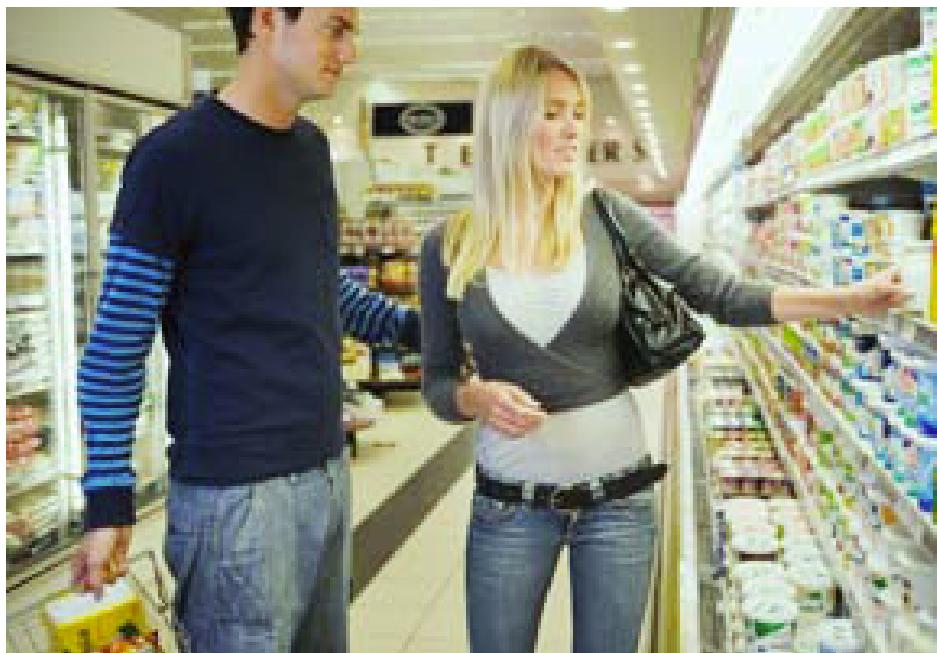
If you are living independently, it is important to be comfortable with grocery shopping. It is essential to make lists of what you need. If you are on a campus, a meal plan will provide the basics, but some practice going to the store and ordering online or by phone will certainly help. I found that asking for help in grocery stores is easy since people are always looking for products in stores and employees almost always respond well.

In terms of skills to learn, it's important to have a general knowledge of appliances – things like using a stove, microwave, washer/dryer, vacuum, etc. You don't have to be an expert in any of these, but these all can be an important need at some point.

Many living skills go hand in hand with organizational skills. The key to independent living is to be able to do things for yourself and that means being able to organize. Skills like organizing your house and managing your time are critical. I have found an online calendar that I can update via both my computer and my phone is very helpful. This allows me to make notes and list tasks so I can be prepared ahead of time.



Another helpful tip is to learn how to mirror your surroundings. This is one of the best ways to adapt to your new living arrangements. Take some of the most key things in your house and try to replicate them. The importance of the "home away from home" feeling is something that can never be overstated. I was always obsessed with basketball, so I have collected a bunch of basketball collectibles over the years. This helped my transition immensely.



Time management skills have been a huge area of progress for me. When living alone, these skills helped me process my free time and figure out the best times for eating, going out to events with friends and setting aside time to relax! Don't forget to schedule time to sleep. With so much free time, it's all too easy to stay up all night watching videos or playing games.

Finally, I can't stress enough the importance of openly communicating and networking with the individuals around you. Everyone must possess some social skills. It is important to know people like your landlord and neighbors, even if you don't end up being best friends with them. Knowing these individuals when certain situations occur can help you.

The main thing to remember is that there isn't a set of skills to learn that will work best for everyone because autism is very broad and affects people differently. If I could leave you with one piece of advice, it is to encourage you to always try to stretch yourself and what you do. Sometimes many of us get stuck in our own worlds and don't think about the world around us (i.e. "tunnel vision"). That's why you can never be afraid to challenge the norms you live in. There are things that might move around from time to time but mostly will always stay flat on the ground. I call these constants my "rocks."

This may seem like a lot, but with these skills you can fully take advantage of living by yourself in the best scenario possible! Hope for the best but prepare for the worst and enjoy having your independence as much as possible! It's an amazing feeling!



# Peer-to-Peer Advice

*Sometimes the best way to get great information is from our peers. Asking those who have journeyed down the same path can give us a better glimpse into our future plans. We reached out to individuals on the spectrum with experience in postsecondary education to pass along some advice to those considering their options.*

## **Jeremy, Community College Student**

**Q:** What did you choose to do after leaving secondary school?

**A:** I frankly wanted to go to community college to know more about communication. I also wanted to write about my experiences as a person with autism.

**Q:** What type of program are you currently attending (or what type did you attend)?

**A:** I attended community college for 3 semesters. I was taking courses towards an AA degree.

**Q:** How did you decide which program would be best for you?

**A:** I visited three community colleges and met with Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS). I asked questions and greatly felt their attitude and knowledge about my type of autism and based my decision on that.

**Q:** What sorts of questions did you ask in order to judge what would be the most appropriate place for you to attend?

**A:** I wanted to know what kind of accommodations I would be allowed. I nicely asked if I could bring a trained support staff person. I asked about the professors. I nicely explained my need to leave the classroom for breaks to self-regulate when necessary. I explained how I communicated by typing or pointing to letter boards.

**Q:** What do you wish you knew before starting that program?

**A:** I really frankly wished I knew the stress of going to college. It was a lot of work and not much fun. I did not have friends like in high school.

**Q:** Do/Did you receive any type of specialized support services at this program? Were they helpful to you?

**A:** I provided my own trained support person. They provided a note taker (another student in the class) so I could have notes. I was given more time to complete my papers and to take tests, but I did the same amount of work as the other students; nothing was modified.

**Q:** Did you choose to disclose your autism diagnosis to the program administrators, your professors and/or your peers? What led you to this decision?

**A:** Truly it is important for the student to be a strong advocate for him or herself, and to realize the importance of making sure he or she is emotionally regulated as well as regulated in other areas. Kindly for more advice people can read the chapter “The Adult Learning Environment” in my book I co-authored called *A Full Life with Autism* (Macmillan 2012).



## Alec, Community College Student working towards Bachelor's Degree

**Q:** What did you choose to do after leaving secondary school?

**A:** My original choice was to attend a four-year private Christian college, but I eventually decided to attend PACE.

**Q:** What kind of program are you currently attending (or what type did you attend)?

**A:** I am currently attending a community college to complete all of my General Education requirements, earn my Associate's Degree, and work towards my Bachelor's Degree in Special Education.

**Q:** How did you decide which program would be best for you?

**A:** I decided (or accepted) that I wasn't ready for a full course-load after high school, so I went to PACE to take the program's courses along with a limited number of college courses at National-Louis University to start earning my degree.

**Q:** What sort of questions did you ask in order to judge what would be the most appropriate place for you to attend?

**A:** I honestly don't remember the questions I asked myself, if any. I was so focused on preparing to attend one of the other four-year colleges I got accepted to that I never really put much thought into it. My family and I eventually answered those questions over time as I attended PACE, and in some ways we still do today (ex: where to live, what job(s) to search and apply for, what school to attend for my Bachelor's Degree, etc.).

**Q:** What advice would you give to current prospective students with ASDs who are interested in attending a similar program?

**A:** Programs such as PACE are a crucial foundation towards an independent lifestyle for any adult on the autism spectrum. It can help get them started on a path to accomplishments and success that they probably never dreamed would be possible. My advice is to attend such a program. See it as a challenge, tackle it head on, and never give up on what you want to achieve in life.

**Q:** What do you wish you knew before starting this program?

**A:** The biggest thing I wish I knew before attending PACE was that I should've been more prepared to learn more about myself, and enjoy my time at PACE rather than worry about school, workouts, or ways to be active in the community, and nothing beyond that. I honestly didn't think PACE was still the right program for me even after I just started off there. I figured out quickly that I had to learn more about myself first through different social situations with my peers, and also improve in my life skills (such as organization and cleanliness) and on the job by gaining experience through different seasonal internships through the school year.

**Q:** Do/Did you receive any type of specialized support services at this program? Were they helpful to you?

**A:** I received special services on a limited basis, such as stress management and job coaching. Both of these services the program offered were very helpful in helping me through future social and/or academic situations, and for me getting a job just a few months after I graduated from PACE (which I have now had for a year and a half to this date).



**Q:** Did you choose to disclose your autism diagnosis to the administrators, your professors, and/or your peers? What led you to this decision?

**A:** Yes, I chose to disclose my diagnosis for two reasons. First and foremost, I was very comfortable talking about my life living with autism. I really just wanted to give a message in talking about my diagnosis that I have had so much success in life despite my struggles. I also wanted to make people more aware of autism (even if they were unaware of it in the first place) and encourage them to learn more about autism on their own time. Also, my diagnosis was listed in my application to the program, so everybody already knew that I had autism. There was really no point in hiding the fact.

## **Ken, Four-Year University Student**

**Q:** How did you decide which program would be best for you?

**A:** I visited the colleges I wanted to go to and see which program I liked the best. I thought it was the right distance away, not too close but not too far. It's much less expensive than a private school and the school's disability office impressed me. Some of the other schools I looked at did not impress me.

**Q:** What sort of questions did you ask in order to judge what would be the most appropriate place for you to attend?

**A:** I asked the SSD (Services for Students with Disabilities) about obtaining accommodations. I asked how they could help keep me organized.

**Q:** Did you choose to disclose your autism diagnosis to the administrators, your professors, and/or your peers? What led you to this decision?

**A:** I do disclose to my professors and to my resident advisor (RA), but do not disclose to my friends. I tend to keep that private.

**Q:** What advice would you give to current prospective students with ASDs who are interested in attending a similar program?

**A:** I would advise them to know how to get accommodations. I would also advise them to take easier courses their first semester, take the minimum amount of credits to be a matriculated student.

**Q:** What did you choose to do after leaving secondary school?

**A:** I decided to go to Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York.

**Q:** Do/Did you receive any type of specialized support services at this program? Were they helpful to you??

**A:** To get accommodations, I contact my professor at least a week in advance (either after lecture, in office hours or by email). From there, they arrange a room. Sometimes Services for Students with Disabilities are involved. I get accommodations by talking to my professors. I have a note from the disabilities office telling my accommodations, and I give it to my professor during their office hours. I also had a structured study hall for a semester. My main issue there was that I needed a computer to work, and my computer overheats a lot without a fan. My recommendation is to get an external fan, dorm rooms can get hot since many are not air conditioned.



# Advice for Parents

by Valerie Paradiz, Ph.D.

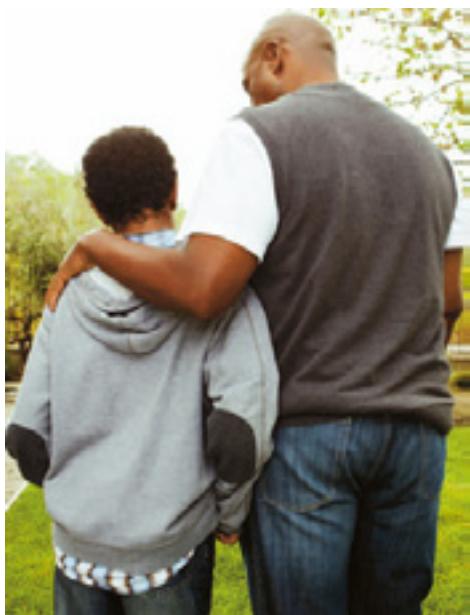
*As parents, you have helped get your young adult to this very exciting transition stage. Now that he or she is leaving high school and going off to some type of postsecondary educational institution, you might be looking for some information that will help you as well. Below is advice from one parent to another and from professionals in the field of postsecondary education about the transition after high school and finding the right place for students on the spectrum. Each parent has had a unique experience, but there are similar themes to help guide parents who are embarking on this same journey. Hopefully the advice below will assist parents in getting their children to the right place after high school and helping them succeed once they get there.*



## We All Have A Path

Many families are not aware of the very significant life change that awaits their child with autism when high school ends. Once students on the autism spectrum leave high school, any accommodations or supports they might receive in a postsecondary educational setting are no longer mandated or funded under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In fact, a large number of families and students face significant reduction in educational services and supports at this very sensitive moment of transition, and within this change, we also begin to move through the often challenging emotional aspects of passage into adult life.

I have experienced this transition both as a person with autism, and, many years later, as a parent of a son on the spectrum. In my case, I was not yet diagnosed with autism when I began attending college at University of Colorado at Boulder. High school had been a positive experience for me in terms of my studies, and to a certain extent, in terms of my friendships. My social experience as a high school student was aided dramatically by the fact that I had three sisters and two brothers all of whom were very close in age to me. In the mornings, when my sisters and I got ready for school, they would talk about boys and friends and sports and cheerleading and all the other social aspects of being a teenager in high school. I learned a lot from them, even though I felt unlike them in my social tendencies and preferences. I liked being at home much more than they did, and prom and homecoming weren't events I felt passionate about participating in. Often, my sensory differences—specifically auditory processing, vestibular, and tactile sensitivities—prevented me from feeling I could participate in many things, such as parties, pep rallies or sports.



When I left home to go to college, my social life changed overnight. I no longer had my siblings to rely on to pave the way to making friends or to being accepted into groups. To compensate for this, I began to study more and more, which was just fine in terms of achieving good grades, but my studying became obsessive and unhealthy. People in my dorm would tease me for being a nerd and never wanting to have fun. Not long into the first year of college, I had become so isolated that I experienced my first significant period of depression that required psychological treatment. Somehow, I had lost the thread on how to have and maintain friendships, or perhaps I had never properly learned how to do this because my siblings had made that process so very easy for me.

In this way, my challenges transitioning after high school involved both social and mental health issues. For my son, who is now 23-years-old and successfully attending community college part-time, similar obstacles also presented themselves.

After high school, he explored a few options and decided to attend a postsecondary program in Minnesota that emphasized living with roommates and developing life skills. The environment and culture of the program ended up being the wrong fit for his personality and his particular transitional needs. He wanted to go to college, though in fact, college was still an abstraction that would require a lot of him to make concrete and possible. In the program in Minnesota, his mental health issues began to play out in the way I had experienced my first transition from home. He became very isolated and withdrawn socially, more so than he had been at home and in high school. With time, our family recognized that he had to leave Minnesota and pursue a different path.

Such experiences are part and parcel of the transition process because we all learn through experiences of needing to revise or correct our current plan in order to move forward. Such experiences, when they have successful outcomes, build confidence and provide concrete examples in problem-solving and taking responsibility for one's own happiness. Life for all adults, autistic or not, is very much about this ongoing process of identifying and making adjustments when they need to be made. Every person with autism has a path; making the adjustments is the journey.

What took me by surprise during this period of transition and moving into postsecondary education—both in my own case and in my son's—were the obstacles that depression and other mental health difficulties can pose. This would be my second main point to share with others embarking on exploring postsecondary educational directions. Keep in mind that although you have a good plan in place, mental health challenges may emerge unexpectedly, or they may require more attention than they did prior to this big life transition. Should signs of depression begin to develop, don't delay. Seek out effective assistance immediately with professionals who have a history of supporting individuals with autism. Both for my son and me, nothing could have been more counterproductive in our educational progress than delaying treatment and therapy or receiving assistance from a mental health professional that knew very little about ASD.

Finally, I must always remind myself as a parent that good things take time. It's important to allow the transition process to take its course while providing the support that is needed.



This is one important message I have for other families and for people with autism moving through transition now and considering postsecondary educational options: sometimes the first plan might not work out, and that's ok. Comparing a person with autism's progress in a postsecondary educational program to the societal benchmarks that are present in our culture can create more harm than good for a family and for a person with autism. For example, after my son left the transition program in Minnesota, it required three full semesters of part-time study at the community college (while living back at home with me) before he was able to "connect all the dots." In that first year, I viewed his successes less in an academic light

and more in his growth in learning all the new skills that were required to be in college, such as navigating the campus, knowing all the administrative offices and their functions, paying attention to drop/add dates, and much more. These were tough months for him, but by the fourth semester, he was able to focus more on academics, and had devised, through trial and error, methods of organizing his study times and submitting required assignments according to each professor's guidelines (which vary from professor to professor).

He also chose not to disclose his disability at the community college. While I would not advise this path as a blanket solution for others, it was the path that my son chose, and I had to respect this. He had been in special education classrooms nearly all of his school experience. As he grew older and more mature, he began to share with me how backward he felt our national school system is because its very structure of segregating disabled students from nondisabled students is inherently discriminatory.

Now, in college, he was of age to make his own decision as to whether he wanted others to know about his disability. He wanted to depart from the kind of exposure he felt all through his school years. Had he gone to the Student Services office to disclose his disability, he would have been able to request certain accommodations, such as extended time for long assignments and tests. For him, it was important to prove to himself that he could study and function in an entirely integrated setting and succeed. Respecting this decision also required a great deal of strength on my part, as I watched him experience setbacks in class because his professors were not aware of his differences. A few times, he had to drop courses because he was failing or because the social aspects of group work were still too overwhelming for him to manage with all the additional organizational skills he had to learn. However, he grew and matured through these disappointments, revising his plan again and again, until he got it right. Now, at 23 years, he's confident as a student on campus. He manages all his coursework and college administrative responsibilities without assistance from family members or others. This semester, he feels ready to consider which associate's degree or major he will pursue.

Good things take time. I am very happy for him as he experiences the benefits of his hard work, at the pace and on the path he chose as a responsible, independent person.



# Tips for Parents

by Barbara Kite, M.Ed

Assistant Director PACE@ National Louis University

## Plan ahead:

It is never too early to learn about the different kinds of programming available for your student. There are a variety of programs that will meet your student's needs at different times of his or her adult life. You may need one type of program immediately after high school and something totally different for the twenties and the thirties.

## Know your goals:

What is it you want for your student? Independence? A four-year degree? A job?

## Go and look:

Be sure to visit the programs that you are interested in. There is a good chance what you THINK the program is in actuality may be quite different.

## Ask questions!

Not all programs are what they appear to be.

## Think about cost:

After 21, most services or private programs have a cost. Unless you are going to use government programs, the programs will cost and the price can be high. Scholarships and financial aid may be limited. FASFA, the government financial aid system, is only for degree seeking programs. So unless you are working on your college degree, you may have to be creative when it comes to financing your student's postsecondary experience.

## Make a list:

Think about what environment you want your student in. Do you see him or her at a community college? Or going away from home? Does he or she need a program that offers academic support? If your student lives away from home...will he or she need instruction in how to live with someone else and navigate a campus? How long has the program been around? Consider that whatever YOU learned by osmosis is what you need someone to teach to your student.



# More Advice for Parents

by Jane Thierfeld Brown, Ed.D.  
College Autism Spectrum

We counted down the birthdays. Max never liked the celebrations. No singing allowed. No people besides immediate family. He does like the presents though. We celebrated each birthday and the gains he had made that year. In the back of my mind there was always this nagging thought, "Six more years until 21. Five more years until 21..." And now Max is 21.

He graduated from a wonderful program – a parent's dream come true type of school that he attended for over 10 years. Max was comfortable there and knew his teachers well (only two different teachers in 10 years!). He could walk the building independently and work off site with some success. None of this came easily of course. It took years to build. And now it is over and we start again.

I have an unusual perspective on transition. I have worked in disability services in colleges for 34 years. I also co-direct College Autism Spectrum, working with students, families and colleges across the country. The work with students and families as they transition to college is stressful, but it is wonderful to see the family's dedication while working with parents concerned about how this next step will happen for their sons and daughters. Training the college staff and faculty – these things are my passion. I usually explain it as working on one end of the spectrum and living on the other...and having a very good understanding of the in between.

Max started his adult program one week ago. The anxiety and questions are enormous. Is he happy? Is he safe? Will he be ok? Questions parents of adult children on the autism spectrum will always have. Yet we make the best decisions we can with the information and resources available at the time. Parents of people on the spectrum are amazing and strong people. We all need to remember that, especially during transitions.



# Alternative Learning for People With Autism: A Personal Perspective

by John Elder Robison  
Author



*Anyone who looks at the graduation and employment statistics for people with autism is bound to be disappointed or frightened, depending on their perspective. Barely half of us graduate high school. Even fewer stay the course to attain a college degree. When we go to work, we tend to get stuck on the bottom rung, if we get onto the ladder at all. It is not a pretty picture. But it doesn't have to be that way, as my life experience shows. I'm an adult with autism, and I've been supporting myself just fine for 40-some years. Not only have I done that, I've also founded a business that supports a dozen other people, built a fine home, raised a family and looked out for them too. All that, as a ninth grade dropout.*

Hearing that, you might wonder what's wrong with that picture. How did I get so far, with so little? And why are so many fellow autistics struggling to find their own way today? Those are good questions; deserving of thoughtful answers.

I begin with this suggestion: It all starts with education. When the educational system doesn't work – when a person fails to make the transition from school to productive and fulfilling work – our system has failed. Whose fault is that? If you're a failing student, you know what the school staff says: It's our fault. The lazy students.

I believe the truth is rather different. I believe the system fails autistic people because today's standard teaching techniques don't work for us, and most schools don't deliver viable alternatives. The result: All too many of us reach adulthood without an essential foundation of knowledge or a set of basic vocational skills. Without those things, how could anyone succeed in today's world?

I know I couldn't. The only reason I was able to find success was that I educated myself – something few people can do. I was lucky to grow up in a college town, with parents who taught at a major university. I had the run of the campus, and access to all the self-learning opportunity I could handle.

Most teens who fail at school never get an alternative chance like that. And the question for today is, What do we do for them? For if we do nothing, they will in all likelihood grow up disabled; lacking the skills to earn a decent living.

Educators need to understand what it means to be different; to grow up with autism. We've all heard the abstract phrases like, "autistic brains are 'wired differently'." What, exactly, does that mean? In my case it means that I learn by doing things. The best way for me to solve a problem is to pick it up and handle it.



Here's an example: I struggled for weeks with algebra and math in school. I'd listen to the teacher, look at the book, and still get all my answers wrong. It was very frustrating. Learning from lectures and text was not working. Then I found the Binomial Cube. It's a physical thing Montessori teachers use to impart math concepts. I was fascinated. In what seemed like a matter of minutes, I mastered the thing, and the ideas in the math book suddenly seemed obvious. Armed with that insight I could solve the textbook problems – but not the way the teacher wanted me to. My own way.

Unfortunately, understanding wasn't enough for school. I had to show my work and follow the accepted method. I still couldn't do that, so I failed class. But I kept acquiring more knowledge – learning by doing – and I became a successful self-taught engineer. Learning by doing is a very powerful concept; it's probably the most effective way for people like me to acquire useful skills.

## How Can a Young Person Do That Today?

If a child is young there are many options. My own son thrived in Montessori school, as do many other different children. The options seem to narrow as students move toward high school. Individualized learning is replaced by Common Core Standards, and an increasing level of regimentation. At the same time, students are asked to work harder. Homework becomes the norm, and theory replaces practice in many classrooms. That's where the system breaks down for kids like me.

Theoretical examples in books were boring. I wanted real problems I could see, and handle. Simple trigonometry problems from the textbook stumped me. Not because I lacked the innate ability . . . rather; I needed a context to apply my thinking and reach a solution. Replace the problem with a practical example – find the area of this odd-shaped field – and I was off and running.

That's a perfect example of learning math by learning a trade – in that example, land surveying. Schools that teach trades are called vocational academies, or CTE – Career Technical Education.

The best ones follow the traditional model: working beside a master craftsman to learn the necessary skills. Picking up a trowel and learning how to plant a garden. Getting out a lug wrench and learning how to change a tire. Some people may get theoretical knowledge from books; I'm not one of them. I learn how to do things by trying, failing, and trying again till I get it right. The presence of a master tradesman to give me hints and guidance will speed the process but the key is taking a real-life puzzle into my hands and solving it.

My own vocational education was informal but effective. I still remember the pride I felt when I repaired something successfully, and my chagrin when my efforts went up in smoke. Even today I recall the frustration I felt as I struggled with theory in books. That's what my school tried to force on me. Yet I grasped theory intuitively with things I could handle. That's what shaped my ideas of vocational training.



However, my vision of vocational education for kids with challenges is not your auto shop or carpentry class of the sixties, in the midst of traditional high school. At-risk teens need the support of social skills training and one-on-one counseling to navigate the minefields of interpersonal relationships. The social challenges can be even bigger than the academic ones. In the vocational arena it's not enough to teach the craft alone. We need to "teach the work environment" so graduates will be at home in the workplace.

Some trades are simple while others are complex. Every person has the potential to find his level of capability and satisfaction in a trade. One may be adequately challenged caring for a large lawn. Another may become a surgeon. In both cases, they began with a little bit of knowledge from books and honed their skills by using their hands and minds together, with an older teacher as a guide.

Kids build dams and canals in the beach sand, and fill them with buckets of water. Some get older, and use that knowledge to make irrigation canals. A few learn mathematical modeling and go on to design public water systems. Complex as the final design may be, it starts with simple hands-on experimentation.

Different kids also need freedom to learn at their own speed. I found my school's book learning incredibly boring. But when I combined ideas from books with examples I could hold in my hands my mind caught fire, and I raced down new and exciting paths. Kids like me should be encouraged to do that.

That's particularly true for people with autism, who have a tendency to focus very intently on topics of particular interest. When that concentration is directed at something with career potential it turns a childhood disability into an adult gift.

My belief in the power of vocational education is the reason I have started a trade school for young people who are different. Our school takes knowledge I have gained from 30 years practicing a trade – auto repair and restoration – and combines it with the latest special education and social skills thinking to help young people learn real and valuable skills.

We're starting with what we know – auto mechanics, vehicle inspection, small engine repair, and auto detailing. Over the next five years we hope to expand into other trades as well.

We start this assumption: To succeed in today's world a person needs to be polite, presentable, and possessed of a basic set of job skills. In my opinion, those are the most important things a high school can teach, and they've been largely lost in the pursuit of an abstract set of "common core" knowledge. I don't challenge the value of the Common Core; I merely believe it's a mistake to place it at the fore for people with autism or other challenges.

The Common Core may teach someone how to solve the sides of a triangle, or where to find the capital of Kansas, but those things won't open many doors in the workplace. Knowing that, we focus on more practical skills, like how to cook a meal or how to look good in a job interview. We'll teach students how to inspect a car, how to act on a dinner date, and how to mow a lawn. Those are examples of real skills that will serve our



graduates all their lives. We hope to expose our students to enough variety that something will strike their fancy. When that happens, we'll follow up with more in-depth training.

We want to teach our students how to do things that will help them, help others, and lead to social acceptance and employment at a decent wage.

## **Our training is and will remain focused on the marketplace. If you know how to wire a building or repair a car you will always be able to find a good job.**

For some of our graduates, that will be enough. They will use our training to get a job, and go right to work. Others will see our program as a stepping stone, and they'll continue their education at a college or perhaps the military. Either way, vocational education will be the thing that gets them going.



I'll close with this thought: For all of human history young people learned trades at the side of older masters. Then modern schools and the concept of abstract book learning came along. Some kids really thrived, and went on to become stars in college and after. But kids like me languished. Meanwhile, vocational education fell out of favor, derided as simplistic or obsolete. But the critics overlooked this simple truth: for some people, it worked. For thousands of years kids with autism and other differences learned practical skills from older tradesmen and went to work. Today, most vocational training has vanished, and different kids grow up disabled.

It's time to bring back alternate ways of teaching. It's time to recognize there's no one educational model that works for everyone. Kids who learn their own way are not failures. They are just different.

*John Elder Robison is an autistic adult, and an advocate for people with neurological differences. John is the founder of J.E. Robison Service, an auto service and restoration company in Springfield, Massachusetts. He's also a co-founder of John Robison Schools and Northeast Vocational, at the same location.*

*John is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of Autism Speaks, and a member of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee of the US Department of Health and Human Services. He's an advisory board member for CSESA, the Center for Secondary Education for Students With Autism, and he's the author of three books about life with autism – Look Me in the Eye, Be Different, and Raising Cubby.*



# A Retrospective on Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

an interview with Ruth Christ Sullivan, Ph.D.  
Founder, West Virginia Autism Training Center  
Marshall University



## Could you tell us a little bit about you and your son, Joseph?

I started my career in autism advocacy as soon as my son Joseph was diagnosed. When it was time for Joseph to start school, we were living in upstate New York. He was six years old. We were lucky that there was a very nice high school and elementary school, a wonderful principal and a young superintendent. He was forward looking and knew a lot about the new theories of special education at the time. There was no law at that time ensuring that Joe would receive his education in the public school alongside his peers, but that was his philosophy.

We moved to Huntington, WV, and again we weren't immediately accepted. No one here had heard of autism. My husband had an interview for a position at Marshall University, and I asked him to ask around town if anyone had anything for autism. There was a class in the regular education school with a special teacher for kids with autism. I think it was the first one in the United States! We decided to earn less money in order to come to Huntington because of this classroom. Luckily, Joe had wonderful teachers all throughout high school. The teachers, superintendent, principal never questioned it. And Huntington High School had never had a student with autism before.

The services that Joseph was receiving also freed me up to work to get laws passed to help other people with autism to get services – not just Joe. I was organizing all over the place, so people knew who I was. I had co-founded the National Society, and started state organizations. So I had already gone to the legislature and had asked for hearings at the Capitol. They thought there was an epidemic of autism in WV! But it was a great experience.



## What options were available when your son was college-aged and you had to make decisions about where he should go after high school? What was the state of this industry then?

First of all, the difference between autism then and now has been ‘night and day’! They couldn’t even spell autism back then. After high school, there were no formal programs available to young adults with autism – only what we created. Joe graduated with his class, and at the ceremony the whole class stood up. It was wonderful. Luckily, during high school, someone had suggested that while he was still in school, Joe should work a part-time job in the local library because he was very good with numbers - he’s a master of where things go and a master with numbers, so this was his cup of tea!

Joe was pretty high functioning, but I did not think college was the right place for him. After Joe finished high school, the library hired him and paid him for his work. He is very accurate and doesn’t misplace things. He does tend to talk out loud and he may not always be the best employee. But he is a very interesting person to be around because he’s a savant – he can tell you any day of any year that you name, do complex mental math, etc. People are always talking about having seen him around town.

## Can you tell us about the College Program at Marshall University, and how you helped found it and the WV-ATC?

When Joe and his peers got out of high school, there was no place to go – especially for young adults with Asperger Syndrome, who are often intellectually able to go to college although they still need help. They don’t know how to navigate the social realm at all.

So I went after legislation to start an autism training center here at Marshall University – the first in the country. There were no teachers with special training because there were no programs. We got it started, and we had a very good director who is just retiring after 23 years. And now the autism training center has been replicated across the country and across the world. World-renowned figures in the field of autism come to the autism training center. There are courses on how to teach kids with autism within the public school system. This way, the local schools can each have teachers with experience and expertise. There is a degree in special education with a specialty in autism.

Now, in the last 10 or more years, the training center actually supports students at Marshall University with ASDs. They have eight students there, and when they come for orientation, the autism training center can help the students and the parents look around campus, select their courses, meet the faculty ahead of time, etc. They also have their own special club on campus and the parents have meetings. It’s been quite successful. We have a very supportive university president who comes to all of the meetings with parents. And it’s integrated well enough now that it’s not a big spectacle.

Joe now works at the ATC three days per week and still works at the library shelving books. He receives hand-written reports and he types them up. It’s repetitive and it’s lots of numbers. But that’s his cup of tea and he’s having fun! It’s a job that suits him very well. The training center has worked out very well for Joe.



## Where do you see things going in the future in regards to programming and services options for postsecondary students with autism? How much further does this field still need to develop?

I think we need to have more and more universities and colleges recognize that ASD is a learning disability, but it's not like the others. The behaviors are so different. People with other learning disabilities may have perfectly normal social skills. People with autism learn by rote, and universities need to recognize this unique learning style. One of the most important things for an autism program is to make the students feel ordinary. There aren't special graduations – students with autism walk with everyone else. It's not perfect. A lot still needs to be done. 1:1 support is very expensive, I know. But it's come a long way.

I thank God every day for letting me live long enough to see this. There are no questions anymore about if kids out of high school can go to college, or even whether they should go to high school. They are in the public schools, with trained staff today. Back then, there were always teachers that did not have formal training, but there were some naturally gifted teachers. And they treated their students well.

# RESOURCES

## RESOURCE WEBSITES FOR COLLEGE PROGRAMS

### *CollegeAutismSpectrum.com Programs for Students with Asperger Syndrome*

A list from Higher Education and Autism Spectrum Disorders, Inc. of summer bridge, 2 year and 4 year programs for students with Autism (specifically Aspergers) Most programs detailed below.

### *Lars Perner Schools for Autism*

An index of 25 college programs detailing the services they offer to students with Autism as well as contact information and website links for the schools.

### *Community College Consortium on Autism and Intellectual Disabilities*

Advocacy website for community colleges to better serve students with Autism. Links to resources including current programs at select community colleges in the U.S. Program Spotlights highlight especially effective programs.

### *Think College! College Options for People with Intellectual Disabilities*

## BRIDGE PROGRAMS FOR TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

### *College Internship Program (CIP), multiple sites*

Comprehensive post-secondary transition program for Autism, Asperger's, ADHD, etc. Both full year and summer programs at six sites in the United States.

### *Autism College and Community Life Acclimation and Intervention Model (ACCLAIM) Program of the Watson Institute (PA)*

Four week program on a college campus for college bound students with Asperger's and Autism focusing on therapeutic, learning, and social areas.

### *Transition to Independent Living Program (TIL), Taft College (Taft, CA)*

Standalone program for college aged students who qualify with Regional Center. 22 month program in a college setting to work towards career and independent living skills.

### *University of Alabama ASD College Transition and Support Program (UA-ACTS) (Tuscaloosa, AL)*

Transition program for admitted students with Autism diagnosis to prepare them for traditional education at UA. Three weekly mentor sessions focused on academic support, social skills, and daily living.

## STANDALONE COLLEGE PROGRAMS

### *Spectrum College Transition Program (Scottsdale, AZ)*

Residential (or day) college in AZ specifically for students with executive function deficits, asperger's, autism, PDD-NOS where they can attend college independently while receiving targeted services.

### *Wisconsin Independent Learning College (WILC) (Waterford, WI)*

Private college for students with Autism. Specialized curriculum that focuses on Academics, Vocational support, and Independent living skills.

**SUPPLEMENTAL  
COLLEGE PROGRAMS:  
(Institution-based)**

*Drexel University Autism Support Program (DASP) (Philadelphia, PA)*

Drexel offers peer mentoring (up to 5 hour per week) and Self-Advocacy and Social Skills Workshops, all of which are free and do not require disability documentation.

*SEAD Program at UConn (Storrs, CT)*

Weekly support from a Graduate Assistant to assist with transition and social participation and advocacy. \$3,200 per semester, or reduced level \$1,700 per semester.

*Bridges to Adelphi Program, Adelphi University (Garden City, NY)*

A supplemental support program for students at Adelphi University with neuro-social and non-verbal disorders. Students must be accepted and enrolled in Adelphi, and pay fee for service for Bridges.

*College Support Program for Students with Asperger Syndrome at Marshall University (Huntington, WV)*

Supplemental support program at Marshall University for students with Asperger's. For an additional program fee (\$4,000/semester), they attend college with their peers but can receive full time support for academic, social, and independent living needs.

*College Success Program at Eastern University (St. Davids, PA)*

Supplemental support program at Eastern University for students with documented diagnosis of Asperger's, Autism, or PDD\_NOS. With additional fee of \$6,500/semester, students have access to Orientation, counseling, skills and support groups, assessments, study sessions, etc.

*COMPASS College-based Support for Students with Asperger's at Fairleigh Dickinson University (Hackensack, NJ)*

Supplemental support program for first two years of school at Fairleigh Dickinson for maximum of 6 students with Asperger's diagnosis. Additional fee of \$6,000 per semester provides mentorship plus two hours individual academic support, one hour individual counseling, one group therapy session per week.

*Asperger Initiative at Mercyhurst (AIM) Program (Erie, PA)*

Supplemental program for students with Autism diagnosis.

*Access Plus Program at Nova Southeastern University (Fort Lauderdale-Davie, FL)*

Supplemental program for students with Autism. Additional \$8,000 per semester for academic, residential, campus/social, psycho-educational, and vocational support.

*Spectrum Support Program (SSP) at Rochester Institute of Technology (Rochester, NY)*

Supplemental program for students with documented Autism diagnosis. Three levels of support with decreasing services over time and reduction in cost. Level 1 \$1200/term, Level 2 \$1000/term, Level 3 \$500/term, Executive Functioning Support \$400/term

**SUPPLEMENTAL  
COLLEGE PROGRAMS:  
(Institution-based)**

*College Support Program (CSP), Rutgers University (New Brunswick, NJ)*

Supplemental program, fee \$2500 per semester for students on Autism spectrum. Offers range of service including weekly meetings with coordinator, goal planning, mentorship, social events, workshops, referrals for academic support and counseling, and more.

*University of Arkansas Autism Support Program (Fayetteville, AR)*

Supplemental program for students with Autism, Asperger's, PDD-NOS, non-verbal and some learning disabilities/ADHD. Students are fully integrated in University of Arkansas, but receive comprehensive services to help with academics, social skills, transition to adulthood, etc for a \$5,000/semester fee.

*MoSAIC Program, University of Tennessee Chattanooga*

Supplemental program for students with ASD. Yearlong course focusing on functioning and social skills, in addition to social strategy activities and supervised study sessions.

*College and Circle of Support, Western Kentucky University (Kelly Autism Program) (Bowling Green, KY)*

Supplemental program for students with ASD which provides private room in residence hall, study tables with staff, and personal mentors. There is a fee of \$2250 per semester to participate.

*OASIS Program, Pace University (NYC)*

Supplemental program for students with ASD, LD, NLD, etc to help them succeed at Pace University. For a fee per semester, students receive all-inclusive services including academic, vocational, social, etc. While fully integrated, students live with OASIS students freshman year, and anyone they wish after that.

*Peer Mentoring Support Program, Western New England University (Springfield, MA)*

Offers mentors to students with ASD, meeting at least once a week. Pairs create goals and individualized plans, and mentor serves as a vital resources and social support on campus.

*Achieve Degree at The Sage Colleges (online but based in NY)*

A four-year online bachelors program for "nontraditional" students such as those with ASD. Structured course program which results in a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies. Students also receive up to 3 hours per week of one on one support from a BCBA mentor (via Skype, telephone, email, etc)

**SUPPLEMENTAL  
COLLEGE  
PROGRAMS:  
(unaffiliated)**

*College Living Experiences (CLE)*

Designed to supplement postsecondary education by providing comprehensive academic, social, and transitional support. CLE has 6 sites in the United States (in TX, CA x2, CO, FL, D.C.) Students live in apartments close to CLE sites and receive services while also attending college. (CLE is not associated with any postsecondary institutions)

*Achieving in Higher Education (AHEADD)—Autism Education and Research Institute (AERI)*

Support program to supplement a student's college education, either direct service or remote (can serve students anywhere). Twice a week meetings, assistance with social relationships and access to campus services, peer mentoring (optional).

## GUIDES AND HANDBOOKS

*Going to College, A resource for teens with disabilities*

A preparation site for high school students with disabilities who want to go to college. Uses videos, modules, and defined tasks to focus on knowing yourself, understanding college life, and planning for college.

*Life's Journey Through Autism, a Guide for Transition to Adulthood Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center and Danya International, Inc.*

A thorough manual for parents, educators, and others regarding the transition, including legal information, transition planning, employment, college, life skills, and other topics.

*Autism Transition Handbook*

Transition guide developed by Devereux to cover all topics about transition to adulthood including but not limited to a timeline, legal information, and post-secondary education.

*Preparing to Experience College Living Factsheet, Autism Society*

Brief information on independent living, academic, and social skills for transitioning students.

*Access to Postsecondary Education, Ahead.org*

A planning handbook developed by the Kentucky Department of Education. Contains timelines and checklists, worksheets and questions to consider, and information on the process. The guide also lists resources at Kentucky colleges and information about rights and documentation. (Similar guides exist for other states. [Wisconsin](#))

*Understanding Asperger Syndrome: A Professor.'s Guide*

*Transition to Adulthood: Guidelines for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) by the Ohio Autism Task Force with the support of the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) Transition to Community Task Force*

# GENERAL RESOURCE WEBSITES

*National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center*

*\*Secondary and Postsecondary Outcomes of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder Annotated Bibliography*

List of annotated articles about transition aged individuals with ASD, broken down into areas like Postsecondary Education and Vocational.

*Autism After 16*

Information, articles, blog posts about transition age students with ASD. Clear descriptions of terms and strategies, with resources and current news.

*Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence*

Provides resources for individuals with ASD, families, and service providers. Specific links to resources and information for transition aged students in "Adolescents" and "Adults" sections.

*National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (Transition to Adulthood Section)*

Website with resources for all ages, but with multiple links and resources specifically targeted at transition age youth. Information about IEPs, legal issues, and education, employment, etc.

*The Health Resource Center at the National Youth Transition Center Online Clearinghouse on Post-Secondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities*

## ARTICLES, BOOKS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

*Transition Planning and College for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Autism NOW article)*

A succinct and thorough article covering transition planning, goals and implementation, and preparing for college.

*Living with Autism: Life After High School Autism Society*

*Autism Into Adulthood .— Making the Transition by Jennifer Van Pelt, M.A. Social Work Today*

Shore, S. M. (2004). *Ask and tell: Self-advocacy and disclosure for people on the autism spectrum*. AAPC Publishing.

Adreon, D. & Durocher, J.S. (2007). *Evaluating the college transition needs of individuals with high-functioning autism spectrum disorders. Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42(271).

Camarena, P.M. & Sarigiani, P.A. (2009). *Postsecondary educational aspirations of high-functioning adolescents with autism spectrum disorders and their parents*. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 24(115).

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Taylor, J. L., & Seltzer, M. M. (2011). *Employment and post-secondary educational activities for young adults with autism spectrum disorders during the transition to adulthood*. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 41(5), 566-574.

***The Autism Transition Guide: Planning the Journey from School to Adult Life*** by Carolyn Thorwarth Bruey, Psy.D. and Mary Beth Urban, M.Ed.

***Guiding Your Teenager with Special Needs Through the Transition from School to Adult Life: Tools for Parents*** by Mary Korpi

***Growing Up on the Spectrum: A Guide to Life, Love and Learning for Teens and Young Adults with Autism and Asperger's*** by Lynn Kern Koegel, Ph.D. and Claire LaZebnik

***The Syracuse Community-Referenced Curriculum Guide for Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities*** by Alison Ford

# RIGHTS AND THE LAW

*U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights: Protecting Students with Disabilities*

*Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*

*U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights: Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities.*

# ADVOCACY/SELF-ADVOCACY

*People Make it Happen (Transition Coalition Advocacy Guide)*

A document prepared by the Transition Coalition at the University of Kansas, intended to demonstrate what multiple stakeholders can do to advocate for students with disabilities during the transition process. There is information for community members, peers, advocates, support staff, administrators, postsecondary staff, community service providers, family, and students themselves,

*WNY Collegiate Consortium of Disability Advocates*

# DISCLOSURE

*The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities*

A workbook developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) to help youth learn more about disclosure and make informed decisions. It is broken down into sections including why disclosure is important, pros and cons, legal rights and responsibilities, and situational disclosure like postsecondary, vocational, and social.

*The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Families, Educators, Youth Service Professionals, and Adult Allies Who Care About Youth with Disabilities*

A workbook developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) aimed at helping adults who support youth with disabilities to understand disclosure and to guide youth through the process of deciding whether to disclose. The workbook is broken down into similar sections as the youth version.

*Pathfinders for Autism Article: Disclosure, How and When to Disclose Your Autism*

A brief overview of disclosure in different settings—covers the basic requirements and the process.

# ASKING FOR/GETTING SERVICES

*College Coach: Excellence in Educational Advising*

## FINANCIAL AID

*College Funding for Students with Disabilities*

*Quick Guide: Which College Loans Are Best?*

*Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants*

*Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities*

*CollegeScholarship.org Autism Related Scholarships*

*Please note this list does not have every postsecondary resource on it. If you have other programs or information we should include please let us know! Email us at [familyservices@autismspeaks.org](mailto:familyservices@autismspeaks.org).*

### ***A special thank you to:***

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