

Student with ASD wanting to go to college? What you need to know

Ben Polakoff

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Principal Investigators

William R. Jenson, PhD

Elaine Clark, PhD

John Davis, PhD

Grant Director

Julia Hood, PhD



# Student with ASD wanting to go to College?

## What you need to know

Since the 1990's the number of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder has been on the rise for a wide variety of reasons including better diagnostic tools and different diagnostic criteria . According to the most recent CDC survey 1 in 68 children currently have a diagnosis of an ASD (CDC, 2016), a rate that has remained stable since the last CDC survey in 2012 (CDC, 2012). In 2012 alone, over 50,000 adolescents with an autism spectrum disorder turned 18 years old. How many went to college? How many got jobs? Is it even possible for youths with an autism spectrum disorder even make it through

college, let alone get a job afterward?

### Current state of adults with autism spectrum disorder

In 2012 in a study by Shattuck, Narendorf, Cooper, Sterzing, Wagner, and Taylor they examined data from the National Longitudinal Transitions Study 2 (NLTS2), a nationally representative sample of individuals from various backgrounds, and compared individuals with an autism spectrum disorder to individual with learning disabilities, speech language impairment, and intellectually disabled. Of all young adults with an autism spectrum disorder that participated



only 34.7% had attended a 2- or 4-year college. 55.1% had obtained paid employment for at least some length of time. 34.9% had not participated in any education or any paid employment by age 23. It should be noted that female young adults with an autism spectrum disorder were more likely to attend college and/or have had paid employment. Of all students that stayed in high school until age 21, which is only a

small percentage of all young adults with an autism spectrum disorder, only 6.8% participated in any paid employment while 92.2% did not participate in any employment or education activities. It should be noted that this group is those that have the greatest social impairment and consequently would not be expected to participate as fully in the community as those that function at a higher level. Of the young adults with an autism spectrum disorder that left high school before age 21, 60% had participated in paid employment (Shattuck et al., 2012).



Experiences of postsecondary students with autism spectrum disorder



## Experiences of postsecondary students with an ASD

In 2015, Sayman published a qualitative analysis of a young woman's experience in postsecondary education without the assistance of any college services. For the sake of privacy, the young woman was called Jillian. Jillian had many difficulties during college that eventually led to her dropping out. Her first main difficulty was that she was unable to articulate what her disability really was, which hindered her ability to advocate for herself. According to Sayman, Jillian's lack of understanding of her disability also impeded her ability to understand what resources she needed to

succeed, as well as how to ask appropriately for those services.

### Socialization

Sayman also discussed Jillian's difficulty with interacting with peers at the postsecondary level. This difficulty interacting with peers led Jillian to often feel lonely while at school. Rarely would Jillian participate in social activities, which has led many other students to feel socially isolated.

### Other students

Cai and Richdale (2016) also examined the experiences of postsecondary students with an autism spectrum disorder, but also examined the experiences and opinions of the families of those students. These students and families came from two universities and covered four colleges located in Australia. Not all of



*Did you know that over 50,000 young adults diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder turned 18 in 2012?*



social needs had been met. However, over half of all of the students included in the study lost interest in attending institutes of higher education, but most of the students had still passed all of their classes.



the students included in the study were first year students, with many of them having already completed some postsecondary education. By the end of the study most of the students felt like their educational needs had been met, while most also felt that their social needs had not been met. Parents felt that neither their child's educational or



## What has been done about this?

Researchers have developed programs and ideas as to how to help students with an autism spectrum disorder succeed and have evaluated what factors are most likely to influence the success of such students.

VanBergeijk, Klin, and Volkmar (2008) discussed the importance of helping college students with an ASD by referencing the 1973 Rehabilitation Act as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act. With the enactment of those two laws, any institution that receives federal funding, including public universities, is legally required to provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities.

In the study by VanBergeijk and colleagues (2008) which surveyed universities across the United States they identified that one of the key components to the success of the transition from secondary education to postsecondary education was the development of an appropriate and comprehensive Individualized



Education Plan (IEP) before graduation from high school for those students receiving special education services. For those that were not receiving special education educations, the development of a solid 504 plan (under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act) prior to graduation from high school. While IEPs in their entirety do

not transfer directly across to the university setting, many parts of the IEP, such as educational accommodations will.

VanBergeijk and colleagues (2008) recommended that high school students with an autism spectrum disorder consider creating goals for independent living skills,





socialization skills, vocational goals, and mental health supports. Ultimately it is important to consider the fit between the student and the university.

## Programs and Services Available



Many universities have developed special programs just for students with an autism spectrum disorder. Other universities offer services to students with all kinds of different disabilities, but may be customized to fit a student with an autism spectrum disorder.

There are websites available that provide information about specific programs, but do not include all universities

with specific programs as the websites require the universities to contact the website to have their programs listed on the website.

A few websites that list special programs offered by universities:

- [www.collegeautismspectrum.com/collegeprograms.html](http://www.collegeautismspectrum.com/collegeprograms.html)
- <http://www.bestcollegesonline.com/blog/10->

[impressive-special-college-programs-for-students-with-autism/](http://www.impressive-special-college-programs-for-students-with-autism/)

- <http://sensoryswim.com/autism-friendly-colleges>

Many of the universities that offer special programs specific to students with autism spectrum disorder often charge extra for those services and generally only allow a small group of students into those programs.

**What about services that are offered to all students that can help a student with ASD?**

Barnhill (2016) surveyed 30 universities and colleges and reported which services are most commonly offered to students with an autism spectrum disorder. Barnhill listed 13 services



that were offered by at least 70% of all of the participating institutions. Accommodations included (with those most commonly offered listed first):

1. Advisor
2. Extra time on exams
3. Alternate testing site
4. Tutoring
5. Note taker
6. Technology supports
7. Preparation for employment
8. Reduced course load
9. Copy of professor's notes
10. Life skills instructions
11. Social skills instruction
12. Assigned peer mentors
13. Priority registration

Other services commonly offered to students with an autism spectrum disorder are:

1. Social skills group
2. Individual therapy
3. Group therapy
4. Nontherapeutic group
5. Supervised social activities
6. Housing accommodations
7. Summer transition program



Okay, so what universities actually offer these services?

As stated previously, all universities that accept federal funding are required to offer reasonable accommodations to students. Generally, universities will offer services that directly affect academic performance first (i.e., note takers, extra time on exams, alternate exam sites, reduced course load, etc.). Other

services that are offered are generally dependent upon funding available for those services, which leads many universities to charge for services that are not directly funded by

the university or by grants. Universities in the state of Utah that have offered such programming previously, at no extra charge, are Utah State University and the University of Utah. Salt Lake Community College has also offered programming for students on the autism spectrum at no extra charge to the student. Availability of services also depends on level of interest of the student population in receiving such services which has led universities to discontinue such programs. Specific



universities across the county that offer special programming for students on the autism spectrum are:

- Drexel University
- University of Georgia
- Mercyhurst University
- Eastern Michigan

This is by no means a comprehensive list, but serves as a starting point for investigation into the programs that exist for students on the autism spectrum.

**We've got a university selected and we've been accepted. Now what?**

Congratulations on being accepted to the university of your choice! A checklist of everything that you will need to do from here in order to get the help your student needs is included on the next page, but a detailed summary is included here.

One of the first things that you will need to gather is supporting documents that show that your student does indeed have a disability. These can be reports from psychological testing, school records such as 504 plans or IEPs, or potentially letters from service providers, such as a psychiatrist, that certify the diagnosis and existence of the disability.

At the same time, it will be important to decide what kind of help your student will need while at university whether it be social supports or academic supports. It would also be wise to become familiar with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which limits your access to your adult child's university records and information. Decide whether it would be appropriate for you to have access to that information, or if it would be beneficial to the development of your child to be in total control of his or her college education.

The next step will be to contact the university office in charge of making sure that services get provided to students with disabilities. Such offices have many different names that vary

from university to university, but may be called Center for Disability Services, Disability Resource Center, or something similar. Set up an appointment with the



Disability office to begin to consult and arrange for the appropriate services to be provided. Some services likely will not be provided by the Disability office, but may be provided by other resources such as the on campus counseling center, career services, money management, or other related offices. You will need to contact the other offices to arrange for those services to be provided to your student.

Once the services have been arranged for, it may be appropriate to follow up with



the appropriate individuals to make certain that the services are being utilized. Most likely that will be your student, but may include the Disability office.

## Checklist

### Supporting Documentation

- IEP
- 504 Plan
- Psychological testing report
- Letter from qualified service provider

### Familiarizing with FERPA regulations

- Access to School Records
- Is having access appropriate, or will it be a hindrance?

### Contact Campus Resources

- Contact Disability office
- Contact other campus resources

### Decide on appropriate services for your student

- Educational accommodations
- Social supports
- Career services
- Independent living skills

### Follow up

- Make sure that services are being utilized
  - Student
  - Disability Services?

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