

Autism in College



Serving the full spectrum of learners

Eric Endlich, Ph.D.

eric@topcollegeconsultants.com

Disclaimer

I have no affiliation with, nor financial interest in, any of the colleges/programs mentioned. I do not accept compensation from any school for recommending or placing students. **I work with families to find the best-fit programs for students.**



About Dr. Eric Endlich



- College admissions consultant
- Clinical psychologist
- Clinical Advisory Board member, Asperger/Autism Network (AANE)
- Co-author of book on autistic adults
- National presenter at autism conferences
- Taught at Boston College and Tufts University

**"Your development has to go at its own pace.
It just doesn't happen to be the usual pace."**

Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*



How to find autism-friendly colleges & universities

Visit [TopCollegeConsultants.com](https://www.TopCollegeConsultants.com) for an extensive list



Why focus on autism in college?

- **50,000** autistic students graduate high school in the US annually
- **36%** enroll in college (vs. **75%** of peers)
- Most do not earn a degree
- **40%** of those who disclose their autism receive special services or accommodations



(Source: National Autism Indicators Report, 2015)

What about work?

- 58% work between high school and early 20s (vs. 99% of their peers)
- Most work part-time, averaging \$9/hour.
- About 40% who disclose autism receive accommodations at work



Core college readiness indicators

Students must be able to:

- *Independently* identify when they need help in any area
- *Independently* seek out services, despite obstacles
- *Independently* apply the supports they've accessed*



*Courtesy of Jake Weld, Mansfield Hall Director of Admissions

How college differs from high school

High school

- ❑ Many hours in class
- ❑ A few hours of homework
- ❑ Time is very structured
- ❑ Many supports in place

College

- ❑ Few hours in class
- ❑ Many hours of homework
- ❑ Time is unstructured
- ❑ Students must seek out supports



What skills do students need in college?

- Academic/study skills
- Self-awareness: strengths & challenges
- Self-advocacy: seek resources, schedule/attend appointments
- Organization: data, time & money management
- Motivation
- Emotion regulation
- Self-care



Emotional Readiness

What to know:

- Conditions you are prone to
- “Red flags” of distress
- Go-to strategies
- Available supports



Applying to College: Testing Accommodations

- Include testing accommodations in education plan
- Identify school contact person
- Obtain testing that documents diagnosis & needed accommodations
- Leave time for test reports and appeals
- Remember test-optional schools



Accommodations in College

- Consider when to disclose diagnosis
- Education plan (e.g., IEP, 504) doesn't transfer to college
- Recent documentation of diagnosis/disability is needed
- Research requirements/services
- Contact college disability center
- Accommodations may suffice



Educational Options After High School

- Vocational training (e.g., trades, healthcare, computers)
- Non-degree certificate program
- Transition/gap year program
- College plus external supports
- Support program at college
- Specialized college
- Mainstream/no supports



Certificate Programs in college settings

Suitable for students who:

- May have mild intellectual disability
- Need additional employment training
- Desire a college-like experience



Certificate Program

Example: Project Forward

- Cape Cod Community College in Massachusetts
- Commuter program
- Vocational focus
- Established 1988
- Internships: food prep, office skills, animal care, landscaping, hospitality and more
- Option to take college courses

Certificate Program - Residential

Such programs:

- May be more intensive/comprehensive compared to a commuter program
- May offer more opportunities to learn social skills



Certificate Program – Residential

Example: Threshold Program

Lesley University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

- ✓ Program is typically two years, with ongoing alumni opportunities after graduating
- ✓ Students can take regular college courses and join clubs

Typical students have:

- ✓ Demonstrated learning differences
- ✓ Finished high school (diploma or certificate of completion)
- ✓ Received special education services (e.g., IEP, 504)
- ✓ Scored below average on testing (e.g., IQ from 70-90)

College readiness/transition programs

Such programs:

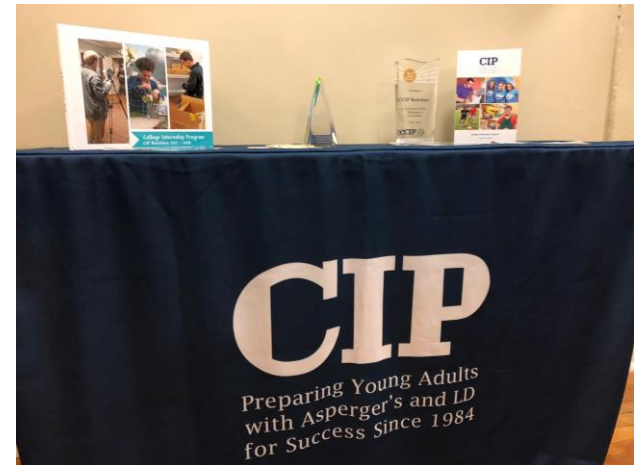
- May occur the summer before freshman year
- May fill a gap year before college
- Give students organizational and other skills to succeed in college



College Transition Program

Example: College Internship Program

- 5 locations nationwide
- Independent living component
- Career or academic track options
- Full year or summer option
- Post-program support
- Family support



Another option:

Attend a mainstream college and obtain *outside* support

- **Mansfield Hall** – several college options; communal dorm-like residence (VT, WI, OR)
- **Beyond Booksmart, New Frontiers** – coaches provide remote help to students in any college
- **Focus Collegiate** – intensive support for students in Boston-area colleges



Comprehensive Programs for Autism/Learning Differences

- May involve significant additional cost
- More coordinated services
- Social component
- Support throughout college



Academic Support Program

Example: Lynn University – Boca Raton, FL

- Institute for Achievement and Learning (IAL) – since 1991
- Nearly 20% of Lynn students enroll in IAL
- Academic coaches are certified professionals
- Students get 2 coaching and 2 tutoring sessions weekly



Autism Support Program

Example: Drexel University

- Philadelphia, PA
- Urban university
- Help with co-ops and career placement
- Social skills instruction
- Peer mentors
- No fee



Specialized Colleges

Landmark and Beacon

- Small-college setting
- Fewer majors available
- All instructors and staff know this population
- More accommodating



Takeaways

- **Assess** and enhance college readiness
- **Encourage** students to self-advocate
- **Know what a student needs:** an alternative to college, a transition program, an autism support program or simply accommodations



Ready to look beyond high school?

There's a program or college out there for almost everyone!

For more assistance choosing and applying to programs, contact us at:
info@topcollegeconsultants.com

(617) 515-3568 or (833) WE-APPLY.



Resources

- **A Guide to Assessing College Readiness (Landmark College)**

https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/styles/iidc/defiles/INSTRC/Webinars/College-Readiness_Assessment.pdf

- **Autism-Friendly College List**

<https://www.topcollegeconsultants.com/autism-in-college/>

- **Planning for College: A 4-Year Guide for High-Schoolers with IEPs**

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/choosing-starting-school/leaving-high-school/planning-for-college-a-4-year-guide-for-high-schoolers-with-ieps>