



Who we Are

We are a group of higher education practitioners who research Neurodiversity out of interest, but learn infinitely more from the individuals with whom we have the opportunity to work with every day. The lessons they teach us are invaluable and we would like to share those lessons with you.

Each fall semester, we welcome 10-15 new students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) onto campus as part of the Mosaic program at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Through our relationships with these students, we have grown at least as much as each and every student with whom we are in contact. We have been able to do so through the development and ongoing maintenance of a comprehensive support program specifically designed for this group of college students. We know the impact for students with ASD is varied from person to person, but we have found a way to reach students on an individual level. Although we effectively reach the 10-15 students that choose UTC and are accepted into our Mosaic Program, there are many young adults in middle/high school, students who choose a community college, or students who do not have an ASD diagnosis that could benefit from similar support.

Through Navigate-U, we have developed a similar model of support based in our community in Chattanooga. Our professionals can work with young adults who are neurodiverse as they transition through the various stages of life. In addition to their work in higher education, this group of professionals has published strengths-based curriculum for young adults with ASD consult regularly with k-12 schools, colleges, and employers to help them effectively work with this diverse population. We celebrate neurodiversity and truly embrace that everyone has a different mind and different way of viewing things. If we celebrate these differences in thinking, just as we celebrate biodiversity and cultural diversity, we can truly see this group excel.

Personal

Life and all the tasks associated with it can be difficult to manage. This difficulty becomes even more prevalent during times of transition. Our Executive Function Coaches use specific techniques to help students learn the tools to be successful. Task completion involves many steps and a person can become derailed at any point. EF coaching is all encompassing and directly impacts every area of a person's life. Through the support of our knowledgeable coaches, individual can develop tools and strategies to keep themselves on track.

- Individualized coaching sessions
- Evidence-based strategies for executive function challenges
- Highly knowledgeable and experienced coaches

Weekly

Begin by discussing previous week's tasks and accomplishments; develop a to-do list of upcoming tasks/assignments with strategies and steps to get those tasks completed. These sessions may include frustrations associated with specific tasks and strategy development for managing those emotional responses as they relate to all of the requirements presented in life. Coaches help individual navigate through daily life practicing budgeting, social interactions, daily routines, hygiene, healthy living, etc. Each session will end with a specifically outlined weekly schedule to keep all tasks and appointments on track.

Twice Weekly

These sessions will include the support outlined in the above description, but also include more structure and accountability. They will often begin with accountability check. This may look like examining grades or feedback for specific tasks/assignments and identifying the barriers for success. Once identified, communication strategies will be developed with the individual to advocated for the potential to improve. Coaches will not communicate for the individual, but will facilitate that communication through social stories and conversation scripts. In addition, upcoming tasks/assignments will be reviewed and arranged based on value and importance in a prioritized to-do list. An email accountability plan will be developed between the coach and individual to ensure that the plan is being followed.

4X Weekly

These sessions will include the support outlined in the above description, but also include coached task completion. Executive Functioning includes six significant steps and any individual can get derailed very easily at any stop. A coach at this level will present a visual representing the stops and coach the individual through each step for task completion. While the focus at this level can include communication strategies for self-advocacy, the primary emphasis is on completing current and future work

Professional

Our consultants have seen the strengths associated with a neurodiverse way of thinking first-hand. We are able to offer support for the professional realm for individuals who are neurodiverse and those who employ them.

- Custom workshops for potential employers
- Individual job coaching and employer support

We have designed workshops to help potential employers develop an understanding of the true qualities and strengths inherent within the population of individuals who are neurodiverse. While communication strategies may need to be different, work environments need to be varied, the level of coaching may change, but at the core, these individuals have an incredible amount of skills, strengths and talents to offer any potential employer.

In addition, we can work with individuals through job coaching to obtain and retain gainful employment. While there are inherent strengths and skill sets in this population of individuals, there are also social and communication difficulties that may occur to disrupt employment. Through mediating conversations and coaching work strategies, this population of individuals can be successful and can contribute greatly to the place of employment.

Educational

Creating supportive programming on any college begins with understanding your campus culture. The way a campus views Autism Spectrum Disorders and the willingness to provide the services beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act - Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA-AA) will shape your efforts to provide supportive programming for students. The level of programming that a campus can support depends on an array of factors and will differ from campus to campus. Any support, though, beyond required accommodations through the ADA-AA for individuals on the spectrum will benefit not only those students you work with directly, but will also influence your campus' awareness of the impact of neurodiversity and help bridge meaningful relationships with faculty and administration as they learn more about neurodiversity on campus. We can provide specific program development support in educational and professional settings.

- Consultants have years of higher education experience
- Prepare for conversations to gain support from administration
- Build a program from the basics or take a program to the next level

Higher Education professionals often speak about the importance of bringing an outside perspective to campus in the beginning stages of program development. It is

difficult to see an expert in your own backyard. Because of this, we brought an individual to our campus to assist us in establishing the need on our own campus. This person provided many focused talks to administration, faculty, police, housing, staff, etc. In addition, she spent every afternoon working with our team on program development. At the end of our visit, we had an established direction with buy in from the campus community.

If you are considering developing any form of support for students with ASD on your campus, it would be beneficial to your efforts to bring our team to your campus to have these candid conversations with the various stakeholders. With professionals from outside your university talking about the necessity of providing this support, you may have a better chance at gaining campus support.

Whatever direction you choose, we can be the voice you need to solidify the need for this population. In a time of scarce resources, it is difficult to make an argument that another program is needed, but if we can present that this program can become self-sustaining in a short amount of time, your efforts may be better received.