

# Project REACH- Resources and Education on Autism as CUNY's Hallmark

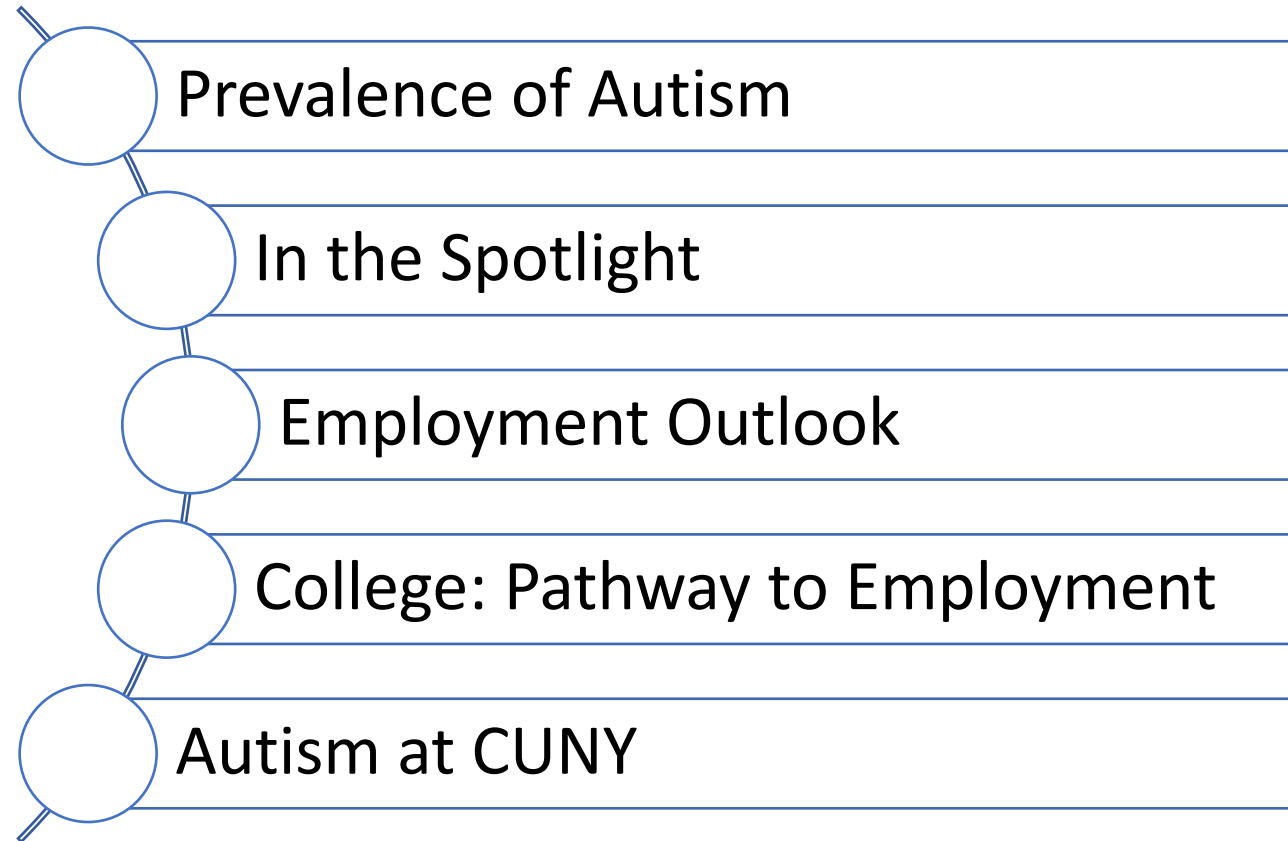
**Reaching Out: From Campus to Community**  
**CUNY Neurodiversity Conference**  
March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018



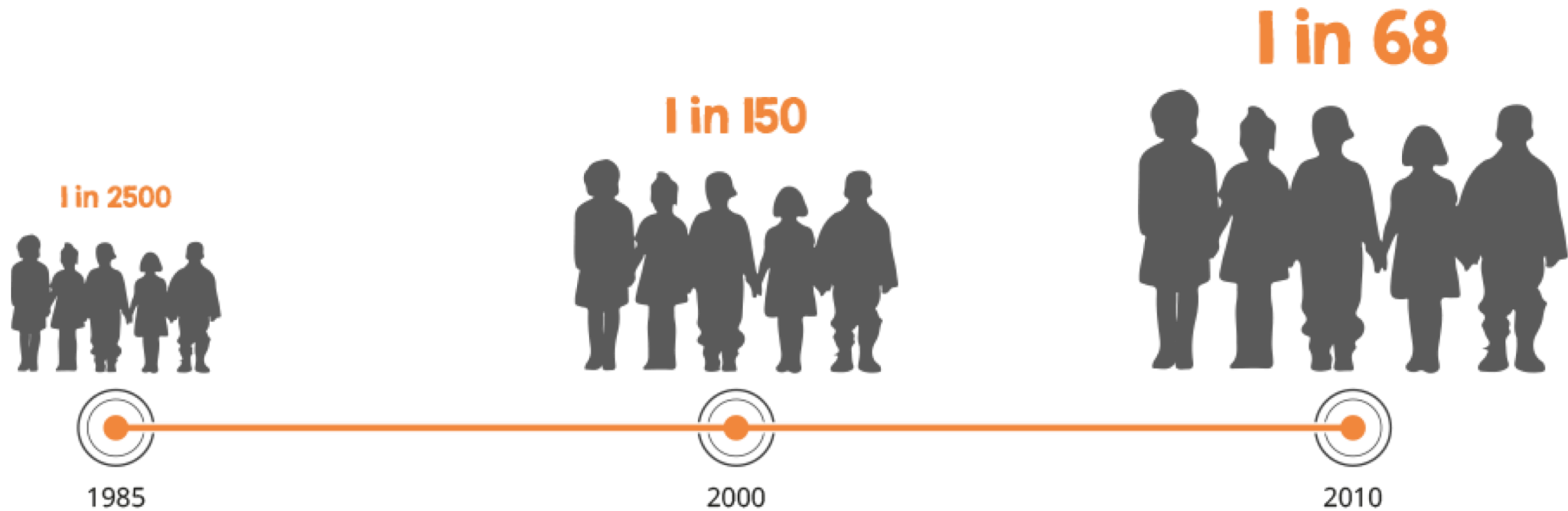
## Resources and Education on Autism as CUNY's Hallmark

- Design and implement replicable programs that enhance supports and services at CUNY for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- Enhance CUNY's capacity to support its growing population of college students on the spectrum.
- Educate faculty and staff about students with ASD.
- Improve the quality of the college experience for students with ASD.
- Integrate career planning and readiness skills to enable successful career transitions as students achieve their academic goals
- Facilitate the development of best practices for job seeking and placement

# A Look at Autism Spectrum Disorder



# Prevalence of Autism





# In the Spotlight



GUGGENHEIM FOR ALL  
Reaching Students on the Autism Spectrum

# Employment Outlook



## Drexel Autism Institute National Autism Indicators Report 2017 for young adults receiving DD Services:

- Paid, community-based employment was the least common outcome for adults with ASD. Only 14% held a job for pay in the community.
- Over half (54%) participated in an unpaid activity in a facility (where most other workers had disabilities)

[Image Source: Postsecondary Employment Experiences Among Young Adults With an Autism Spectrum Disorder RH: Employment in Young Adults With Autism \(2013\)](#)

Anne M. Roux, Paul T. Shattuck, Benjamin P. Cooper, Kristy A. Anderson, Mary Wagner, Sarah C. Narendorf

# Moving the Dial: Neurodiversity Hiring Initiatives

**Jose Velasco, Head of SAP Autism at Work Program  
on CBS Sunday Morning News:**

“Very quickly, we started getting resumes from people that had degrees in history and literature, in graphic design, attorneys, the whole gamut of jobs. They are good at just about every role.”

“I have been in this industry for close to 30 years, and I can tell you it’s probably the single most rewarding program that I have been involved with.”



JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.



# College: Pathway to Employment

2016 NYS Employment Rates - Individuals Ages 21-64			
	All Education Levels	Some College (Including A.A.)	Bachelor's Degree (or higher)
<b>No Disability</b>	77.9%	77.2	85.3%
<b>With Any Disability</b>	33%	36.8%	51.3%
<b>With Cognitive Disability</b>	23.3%	28.1%	39.8%

Source: Cornell Disability Statistics- [disabilitystatistics.org](http://disabilitystatistics.org)

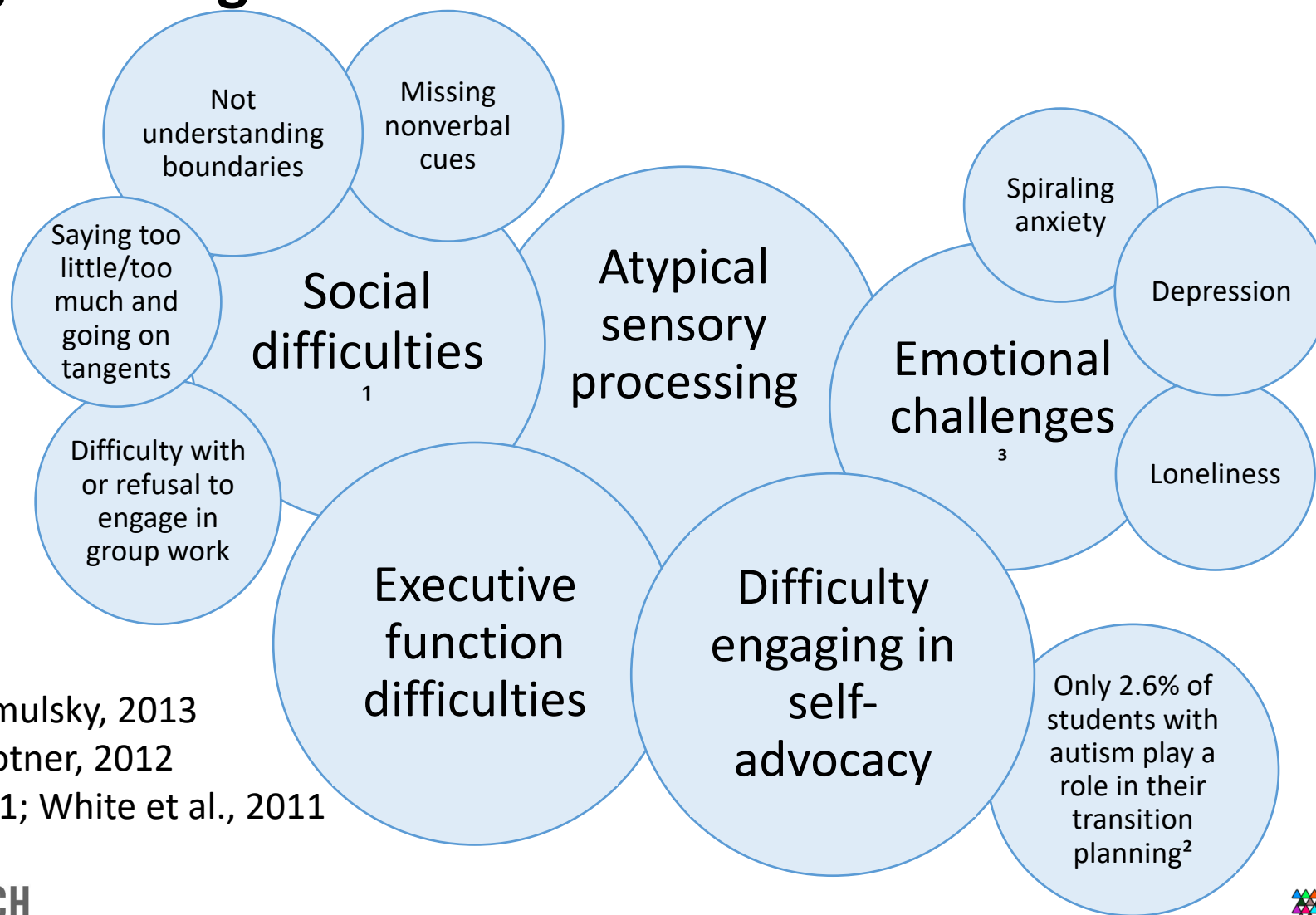
# Autism at CUNY

## Totals from All Campuses

School Year	Number of Reported Students	Percentage Increase Each Year
2012	229	
2013	360	57%
2014	409	14%
2015	504	23%
2016	589	17%
2017	663	13%
6-year Total Increase: 190%		

- For every student identified, there may be 3 times as many enrolled.
- Actual population may be approximately 2,754.

# Challenges College Students with ASD Face



<sup>1</sup> Gobbo & Schmulsky, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Shogren & Plotner, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Glennon, 2001; White et al., 2011

# Project REACH Campus Programs



**Borough of Manhattan Community College** - *Progressing Autism Spectrum Services*



**Brooklyn College** - *Collaborative Autism Spectrum Program*



**College of Staten Island** - *Building Bridges Initiative*



**Kingsborough Community College** - *Transition to College Support*



**LaGuardia Community College** - *Academic and Social Student Integration for Success Team*



**Project P.A.S.S.**  
Progressing Autism Spectrum Services



## **PASS Team**

**Grace Harris** - Project PASS Coordinator

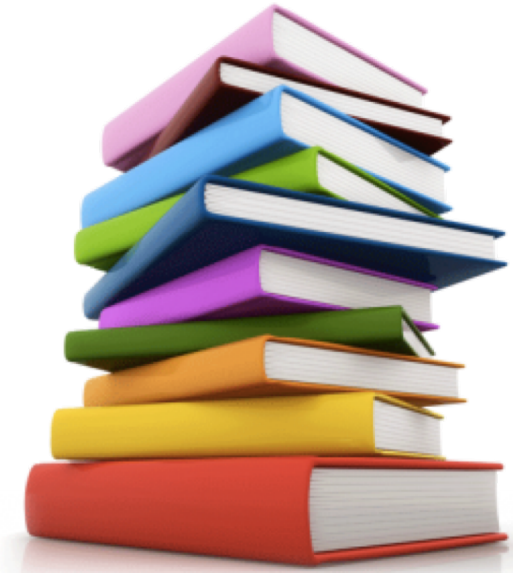
**Heidi Durkin** - Student Disability Service Specialist

**Jessica Spalter** - LEADS Advisor

**Mark Mueller** - Learning Specialist

## Academic Skills

- Review syllabi and assignments to ensure understanding
- Study help and skills training on specific areas targeted for improvement
- Integrated assistance with the learning specialist to address specific deficits



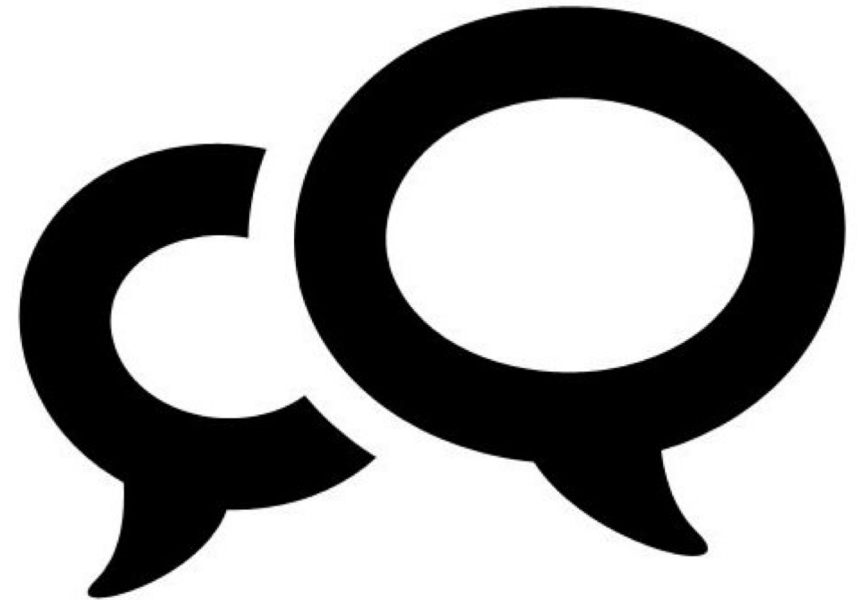
## Self Advocacy

- Encourage student to speak to the professors, mediating as necessary
- Strengths-based focus in meetings
- Involve students in decision making process, develop attainable goals



## Social Skills

- Encourage and reinforce social understanding by presenting alternate explanations for situations where the student may misinterpret non-verbal cues
- Role play social scenarios
- Encourage reciprocal speech using students areas of interest and strength to build conversational skills



# Executive Functioning

- Encourage and build on prioritizing tasks and sequencing
- Develop time management skills
- Use multimodal sources to provide information and evaluate individual learning approaches to best assist student



# Team Collaboration

- Collaboration with other departments ensures students needs are being met.
- Reach out to professors if the student is unclear of professor's instructions
- Conflict resolution with students encourages adaptive pedagogy with professors to circumvent issues
- Notify professors of staff involvement with students to encourage collaboration
- Engage with faculty to identify additional resources that the student may need to meet academic benchmarks
- Students encouraged to seek out existing college resources



# New Developments 2017-2018

- Increased faculty awareness and receptiveness
  - Met with professors and provided resources on working with our students. Marked increase in professors availing themselves of this guidance and sharing with colleagues. Reflects an exciting improvement from past hesitation to embrace resources.
- Encouraged professors to utilize Universal Design principles to make courses more accessible to not only our students, but all students
- Presented at two peer mentors trainings on how to effectively work with students from our office, providing tips on disability etiquette and how to effectively assist a student on the spectrum
- Developed progress reports to track students meeting academic benchmarks and identify issues where PASS coordinator can increase support

# Collaboration with CUNY LEADS / Beyond the Limits

- Increased Project PASS collaboration with CUNY LEADS (Linking Employment, Academics, & Disability Services) resources
- Beyond The Limits- club for students with disabilities and/or advocates to connect over shared experiences and interests
- Supports students in connecting with ACCESS-VR
- Two Project PASS students currently hold officer positions in the Beyond the Limits Club





# Partnerships for Employment

Historic House Trust (HHT) of New York City

Nonprofit partner to the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation  
dedicated to the preservation of historic houses owned by NYC,  
including 23 historic site museums

Internship opportunity for BMCC students, targeting students with  
disabilities, with the goal of making HHT's sites, events & programs more  
accessible by creating virtual tours of the sites to be posted online.

Pilot program to continue in the fall, collaboration inspired HHT to include  
disability sensitivity training to all staff

All of our students who applied were accepted!



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## How To Get Students On The Autism Spectrum To Succeed In College



PHOTO BY: RITA OBEID

Students who are part of Project REACH meet weekly to discuss study strategies and ways that autism affects them socially and academically.

# Building Bridges to College Initiative: *Peer Mentoring Overview*



## One-on-One Mentoring

- Peer mentorship tailored to individual student needs.
- Allows students to engage with a trusted peer and develop skills.
- Mentor training focuses on building equality, modeling planning/social/leadership skills.
- **Universal Design:** Students with and without autism are mentees and mentors.

## Group Mentoring

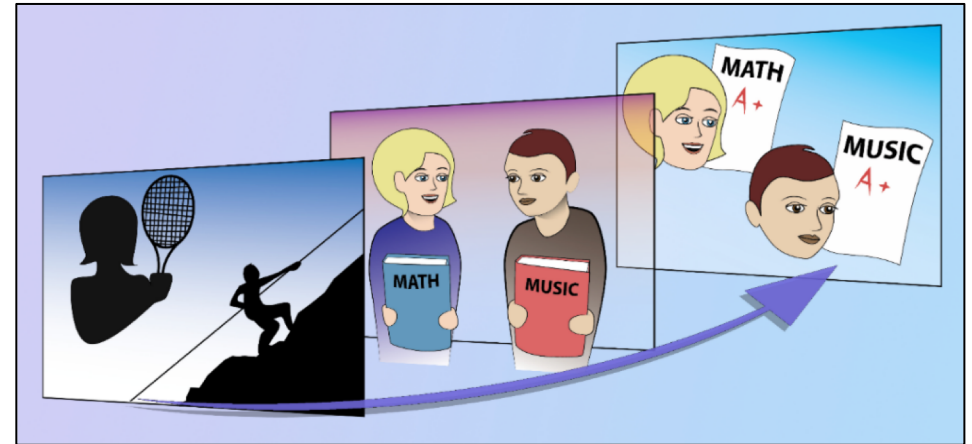
- Creates a diverse and accepting community wherein students can practice skills.
- Structured self-advocacy/social skills curriculum loosely adapted from PEERS Model, Integrated Self-Advocacy curriculum & theatre techniques.
- **Participatory Curriculum:** Continuously adapted based on feedback from students.



## Mentors Co-Wrote GSTA Chapter: *Sharing Insights with Graduate Student Teachers Association*

“When I was a mentee, Project REACH was in its first couple of years. I realized that not only was I learning to become a self-advocate, I was my own self-advocate all along but did not know it...One of my peers helped me transition into being a mentor. One of the most important things that I learned as a mentor was patience and understanding; I realized that I was guiding someone else for the first time and I wanted to know how to help them.”

*Miranda Alicea (transitioned mentee to mentor)*





## Would you like to learn more about self-advocacy?

- Please rank how interested you are in learning more about self-advocacy from (not interested)-10 (very interested).
- Please write down specific things you'd like to learn about self-advocacy.

# Transportable Practice:

## Assessment of Peer Mentoring Program @ CSI

- Although programs for autistic college students often charge hefty fees, they rarely assess if programming is actually effective (Barnhill, 2016).
- At CSI, program development and modification is based on assessments with mentees and mentors at the beginning and end of each semester
- **Online surveys/standardized measures:** Demonstrates benefits but students' voices do not shine through.
- **Structured interviews:** Students share their insights about their college expectations, experiences and challenges.
- **New since 2016:** Hunter satellite program- doctoral student coordinator, Ariana Riccio, mentors two autistic students at Hunter.
- Assessments of student writing, writing self-efficacy, and reading skills
- **New in 2017:** Participatory group of autistic student researchers has been revising assessment materials and developing research questions

# Student-Reported Successes

Mentees with and without ASD have reported significant **decreases** in anxiety and social symptoms

Mentees have reported significant **increases** in self-advocacy, academic self-efficacy, perceived social support, and knowledge about autism

## Example Post-test Interview Quotes:

*"If I can't understand something, [my mentor] puts it **in terms that I can understand**.  
[I worked on] **time management**, like having a clear schedule."*

- 19yo, Male, ASD

*"Basically I **learned social skills** through watching other people do it... **[My mentor]**  
is a cool guy. He's patient. He's very helpful and understanding and he's reliable."*

- Male, ASD & ADHD

Gillespie-Lynch, K., Bubnitz, D., Donachie, A., Wong, V., Brooks, P. J., & D'Onofrio, J. (2017). "For a Long Time Our Voices have been Hushed": Using Student Perspectives to Develop Supports for Neurodiverse College Students. *Frontiers in psychology*, 8, 544.



# Need for Project REACH on More Campuses

## Absence of Autism-Specific Supports at Hunter College

- Academic accommodations through the Office of Accessibility, but lack of networking and substantive interaction for and between neurodiverse individuals
- Students on the spectrum must take initiative in finding programs and groups themselves: counselors often uninformed about such resources

## Participatory Research as a Prospective Solution

- Enables socialization between neurotypical and neurodiverse students while simultaneously encouraging classroom strategies; peer and faculty mentorship

# Our ASD Training for Students/Faculty

- Introduction to diagnostic manuals (the DSM and the ICD), prevalence, and changes in diagnosis
- Presence of autistic traits in the general population
- Possible causes of ASD
- Common myths about ASD
- Challenges faced by adults with ASD
- Effective ways to teach people with ASD
- Neurodiversity
- What the future may hold for people with ASD

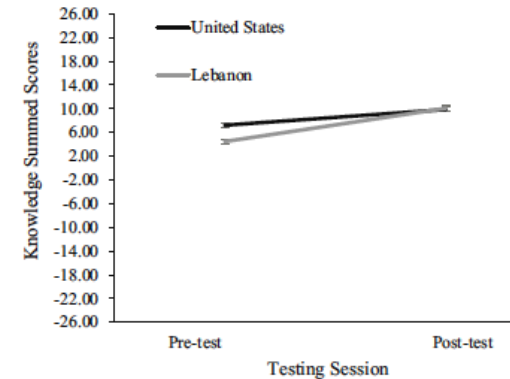


Fig. 1 Changes in knowledge with ASD training: pre-test and post-test scores on the Autism awareness survey

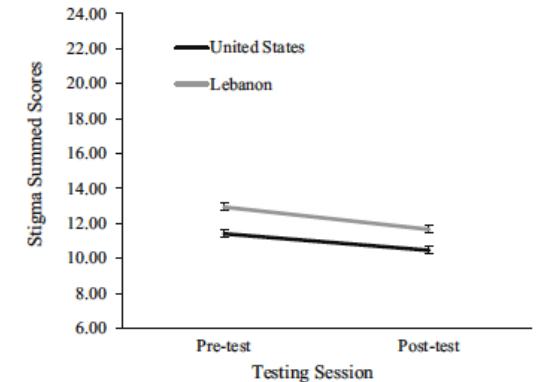


Fig. 2 Changes in stigma with ASD training: pretest and posttest scores on the Social distance scale

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/2741396061\\_ASD\\_training\\_Open\\_access](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/2741396061_ASD_training_Open_access)

We all have some autistic traits



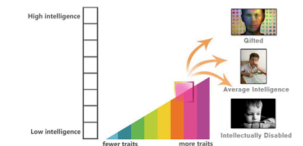
Gifted people and systematic thinkers like scientists tend to have more autistic traits



ASD is diagnosed when traits limit everyday functioning and when enough traits are exhibited



Intelligence varies among people with ASD just as it does among people in general



# Next Steps @ CSI

- **Collaborative adaptations/evaluations of our ASD training for:**
  - Autistic people, education students/teachers/school psychologists, parents, high school and college students
- **Opportunities for REACH mentees to develop work/research skills**
  - Autistic students are developing and evaluating an autism training. **They will deliver their training at CSI on 4/10 at 2:30 in 1P-109**
    - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef8jLuYNQKA&feature=em-upload\\_owner](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef8jLuYNQKA&feature=em-upload_owner)
  - REACH mentees are helping develop/evaluate a video game to help autistic youth develop collaboration and emotion recognition skills.
  - Autistic students are helping Ariana Riccio design/evaluate a Summer Transition Program at Tech Kids Unlimited to help autistic adolescents develop skills needed to succeed in technology jobs.
  - REACH students are developing research projects and are authors on presentations at major conferences: American Educational Research Association & International Society for Autism Research in 2018

# Training Materials Developed @ CSI

[Summer Transition Program Manual](#)

[Chapter on Universal Design for ASD](#)

[Online ASD Training](#)

[Chapter Wherein Mentors Share Insights about Mentorship](#)

[Collaborative Symposium at EPA about Project REACH](#)

**Peer-Reviewed Papers:** Studies evaluating online ASD training internationally, study identifying interview skills autistic students need help with, study using ASD training to demonstrate that autistic people are autism experts, study about summer transition program.

# Academic & Social Student Integration for Success Team(ASSIST)

ASSIST actively promotes a campus-wide environment of inclusion and understanding of neurodiverse students and seeks to enhance access to services for students on the autism spectrum.

Students increase self-knowledge in the areas of

- executive functioning
- self-regulation
- social interaction
- self-advocacy
- career preparation



Community College

# ASSIST Program Components

- Psychosocial support and peer coaching services organized using Universal Design
- For people on the Autism Spectrum this requires a mixture of
  - positive psychology
  - motivational interviewing
  - cognitive-behavioral therapies
  - professional and peer counselor interventions

## New Developments 2017-2018

- Beginning an “Anime for Wellness” Group to help build ASD students build social skills
- Development of a Career Readiness Program in conjunction with the Career Center that incorporates coaching with career readiness skills and job internship/placement opportunities for our students – launching Spring 2018
- Group coaching activities for our students to build on social skills and to increase executive functioning and job readiness skills



# Coaching: Behavioral Health & Interpersonal Skills

- Helps to interpret a social interaction that occurred between faculty and/or student that confuses or upsets the student with ASD
- Reviews organizational issues, including internal and external obstacles to complying with a daily schedule or completion of a homework assignment
- Serves as stress modulator by helping student during class
- Seeks to control help seeking behaviors
- Promotes personal responsibility by providing another person who reality tests of whether social tasks have been attempted



# Elements of Positive Psychology

Explicitizing	Identifying character traits (strengths) using reframing
Envisioning	Identifying the traits the person wants to develop-desired traits and how to use existing traits
Empowering	The use of desired traits (strengths)
Evolving	Encouraging continued autonomous development

# Elements of Motivational Interviewing Techniques

- Creating a Relationship - **OARS**
  - O**- Open-ended questions
  - A**- Affirmations
  - R**- Reflection
  - S**- Summarization
- Focusing- establishing, cultivating and nurturing a sense of direction
- Evoking- identifying student's desire, ability, reasons and needs for change
- Planning- creating a change strategy and enhancing commitment

Miller & Rollnick, 2011



**Mentor Support for Students With  
ASD at Brooklyn College**  
Collaborative Autism Spectrum Program

# Collaborations on Campus

- Personal Counseling
- Health Clinic
- Speech-Language Hearing Center
- Center for Student Disability Services
- Magner Center for Career Development & Internships
- CUNY LEADS- Linking Employment, Academics, & Disability Services
- The Learning Center

# Collaborative Autism Spectrum Program

**CASP has provided support for students on the spectrum at BC since 2014, utilizing a range of supports:**

- Graduate Student Mentors - providing assistance with executive functioning - time and task management
- Social skills training and support groups - improving social skills and increasing social connections
- Access to counseling and Health Services- providing support around stress and anxiety management and promoting good health and wellness

**Provided in-service training for faculty, students, and administrators across a range of topics including:**

- Sexuality and relationships for individuals with ASD
- Faculty day presentations to support students with ASD in the classroom

**We have trained and supervised 25 graduate student mentors**

- Providing them with valuable educational and training experiences and stipends for their quality work

# Evolving Role of Program Coordinator

Then

- Coordinated in-service trainings
- Planned attendance to AHANY Spring Conference
- Raised campus awareness of ASD through faculty day presentation, workshops
- Creation of faculty guide brochure

Now:

- Regular meetings with each student registered in the program
- Provides a safe space for students with ASD
- Smooth transition for mentor referrals
- Ensures that students are made aware and utilize the individualized supports and resources available on campus

# Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum

- Strengths-based approach
- Supports based on individual student needs and preferences
- Increased collaboration with the Learning Center: mentors have been effective in linking students with tutoring services and encouraging their consistency with these previously underutilized services.  
The Learning Center provides free tutoring services and teaches valuable study skills to aid students with coursework, including writing assignments and exams.
- With students receiving adequate academic support, mentors have been able to focus more on organization and time management with the students

# Mentoring

## **Has continued to provide:**

- Platform to share experiences and knowledge
- Communication Strategies and Guidelines
- Opportunity to expand the collaborative nature of the program

## **New Directions - Mentor Handbook:**

- Created in 2016, consolidated educational and campus resources, communication tips, suggestions and guidelines into one comprehensive written document.

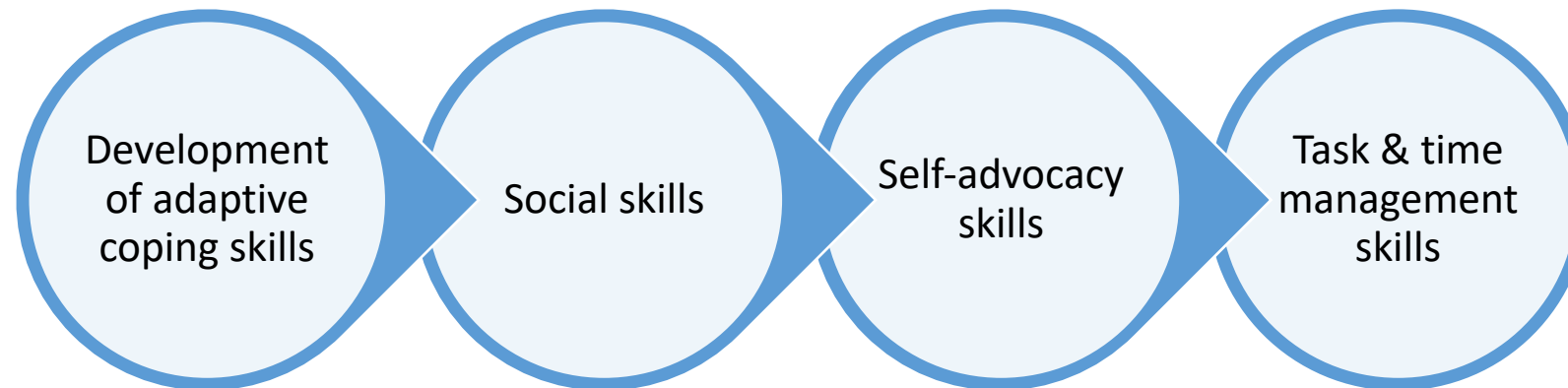


# Effectiveness & Success

In Spring 2017, 39% of students graduated with support from CASP

- 34 students continuing to receive support
- Average G.P.A for Spring 2017 – 2.91

Quantitative data collected from both pre and post measures showed improvement across areas of functioning:

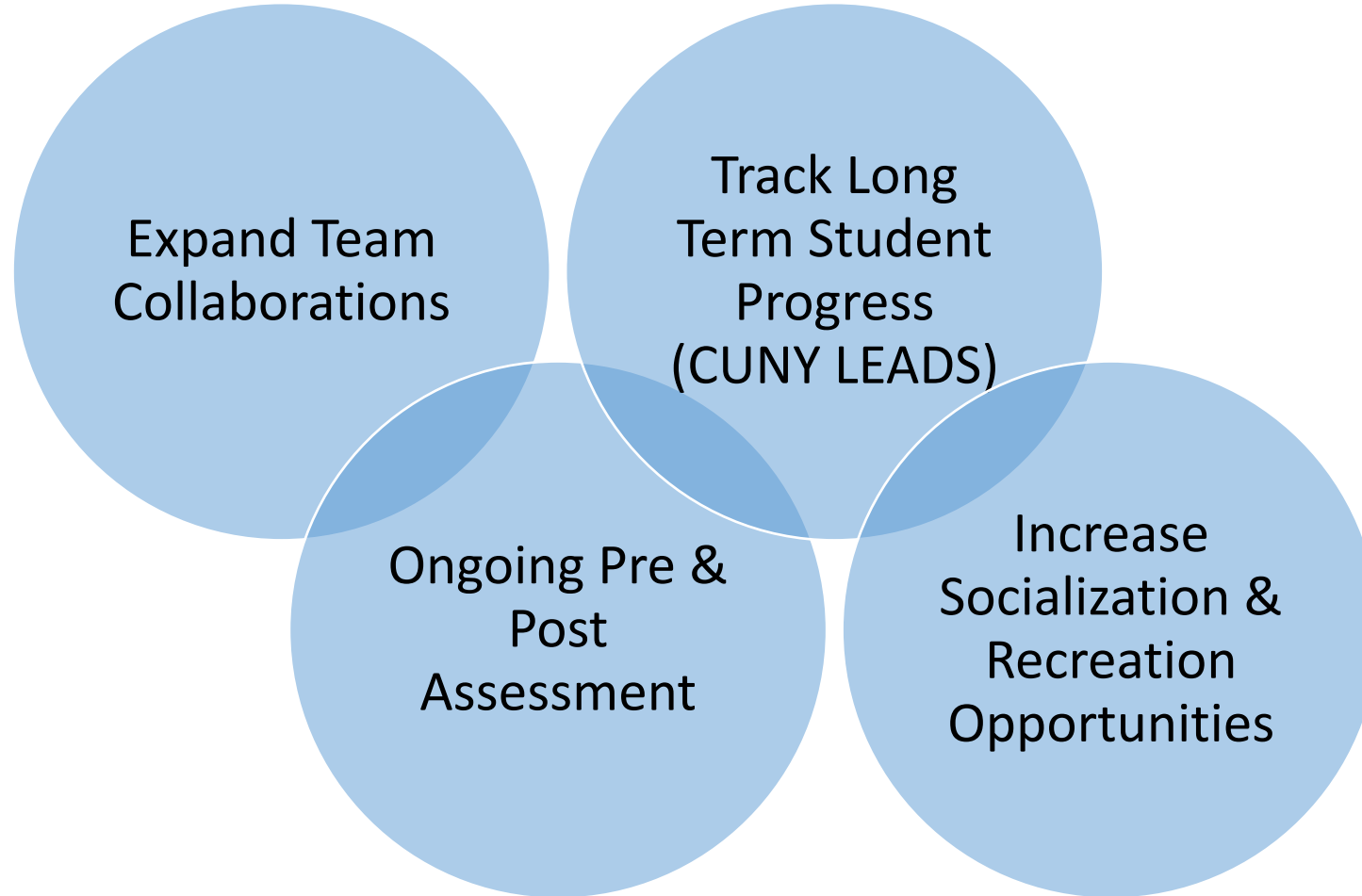


## Effectiveness & Success: Anecdote

“I felt like the experience in the Mentor program greatly benefited myself as a future speech-language pathologist and my mentee. In my graduate program, we focus on treating our clients in a strength-based manner. As I learned about my mentee, he and I constructed the structure of our future meetings together. We began each meeting by discussing how his academics and therapy sessions were going. Once the "business" aspect of the meetings were addressed, my mentee enthusiastically shared his new ideas for a story he was writing and welcomed my questions and feedback. Later in the semester, he trusted me with personal information about issues going on in his life outside of academics and therapy sessions because of the collaborative, trusting relationship that we had built over the semester. I was glad that I was able to be a listening ear for him, and this experience has helped me build my deep listening and collaborative skills that I hope to bring forth in my future career as a speech-language pathologist.”

-Mentor

## Future Directions: Program Sustainability





## Transition to College Support

# Goals

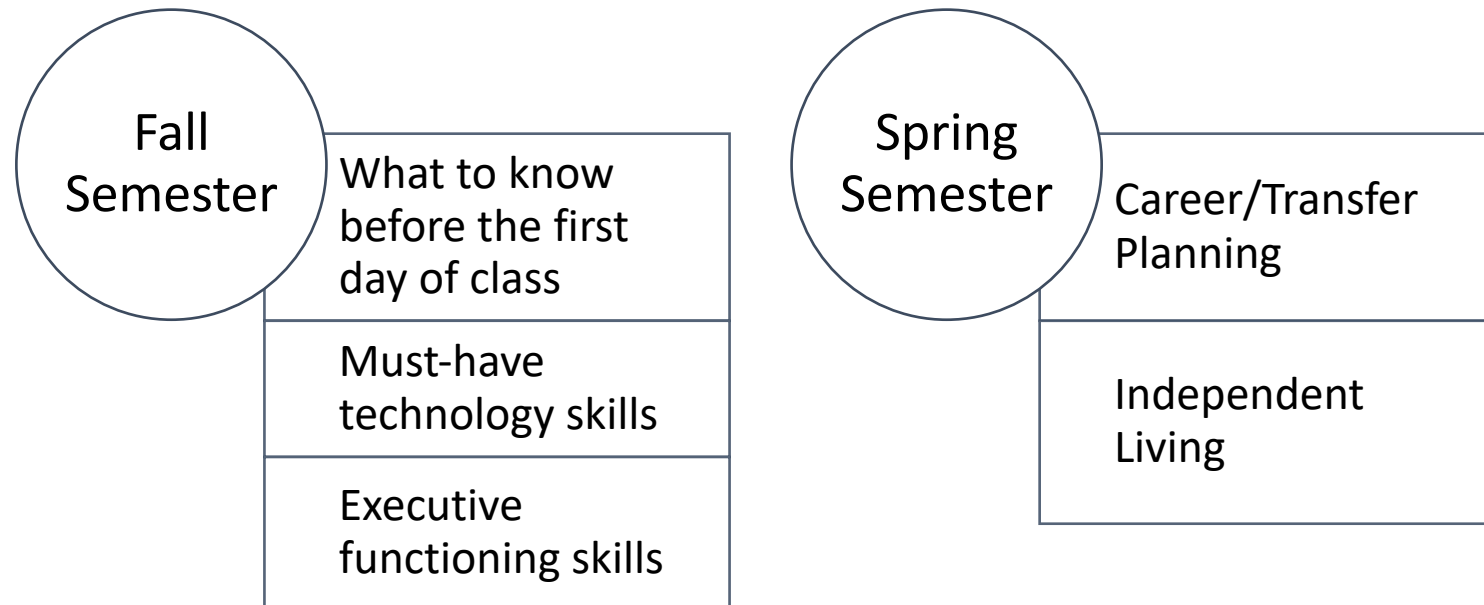
- Improve educational services and opportunities for students with ASD
- Assist student transition to college and participation in college community life
- Increase awareness and understanding of ASD among faculty, staff, and students

# Objectives

1. Present weekly workshops that support student use of college resources, technology, and academic skills essential to academic success
2. Create opportunity for students to improve their social and self-advocacy skills through formal and informal interaction in mentoring, workshops, and other KCC/TCS events
3. Encourage all TCS students to meet with CUNY LEADS counselor individually or as a group at least once per semester to prepare for career and/or transfer to senior college
4. Encourage students to participate in at least one KCC community activity each semester
5. Use college resources to disseminate information about ASD and UDL to faculty

# TCS Workshops

A series of interactive workshops, which are grouped into themes, and are presented in collaboration with other KCC programs, including CUNY LEADS, Career Services, Counseling Services, Single Stop, TRiO Student Support Services and Public Safety.



# Achievements

- **High Student Retention:** students returned to TCS for the same level of engagement and community they had experienced in previous academic years.
- **Development of Workshop Series:** with considerable input from students, the series has been adequately developed to address students' academic and career skills and to improve their independent living skills, where needed.
- **Mentorship:** most students who chose this option met with their mentors on a regular basis.



## Challenges

- Maintaining skilled base of student mentors
- Previous coordinator moved on, finding a new coordinator delayed by logistical issues

## Successes

- New coordinator and 2 new mentors
- Productive outreach strategies resulted in increased weekly workshop attendance
- Student active participation in workshops and other skill-building opportunities is on the rise
- Partnerships with CUNY LEADS and CUNY Unlimited expand resources available to students. New opportunity for collaboration with CUNY LEADS Plus is highly anticipated
- Successful collaboration as AAS becomes placement site for Melissa Riggio Program interns

## New Developments 2017-2018

- Developing faculty workshops about disabilities, including ASD, and accommodations in collaboration with the eLearning Center
- Working closely with eLearning Center to support faculty/staff in considering UDL (accessibility and usability) in class design, which will benefit students with ASD
- Plans in progress to create a working group of KCC faculty and staff with ASD experience to share/develop strategies for working with students on the spectrum

# Campus Contact Information

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Wellness Center

Health & Wellness Education, Grant Development Manager

**Find contact and more  
information at  
[www.cuny.edu/projectreach](http://www.cuny.edu/projectreach)**

Keep in touch, and  
see you next year!

Project REACH Team