

College Neurodivergency and Admissions

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Neurodiversity and disabilities make up the missing pillar of modern diversity, inclusion, and equity programs and historically, have been disproportionately overlooked in college admissions and college support programs.

Things were still looking exceptionally grim for neurodivergent students in the early 2000s. Back then, colleges, as well as their disability offices and students, had little to no idea of the workings of autism and other neurodivergent conditions. There were only two college programs designed to support autistic college students. These programs provided a decisive opportunity to allow neurodivergent students with developmental delays such as trouble with independent living skills, and are usually the only way to feasibly attend college away from home.

In 2000

There were only 2 college programs for students with autism.

Many disabilities offices were uninformed on autism and what students were neurodiverse.



BUT PROGRESS IS IMINENT

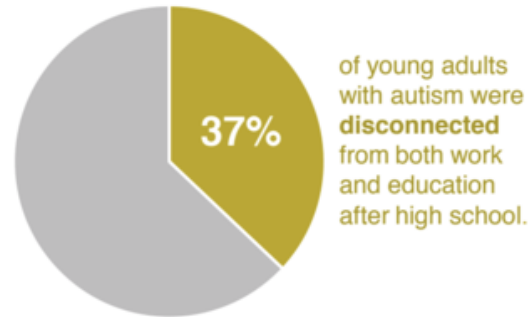
Yale found that in 2000 there were only two programs for autistic people.

In a National Autism Indicator Report from 2015, researchers found that approximately 36% of autistic young adults attended any kind of post-secondary schooling. Then 70% of those who continued their schooling opted to go to a two-year college.

Our key findings

- Over one-third of young adults were disconnected during their early 20s, meaning they never got a job or continued education after high school.
- Young adults on the autism spectrum had far higher rates of disconnection than their peers with other disabilities. Less than 8% of young adults with a learning disability, emotional disturbance, or speech-language impairment were disconnected, compared to 37% of those with autism.

The purpose of transition planning is to connect students to work, continued education, or other outcomes.



Graphics from 2015s National Autism Report shows that more than 1 in every 3 autistic people have disconnected from both work and education after highschool, showing the pressing need for support for autistic students.

Significant advances were made after that, with over 30 college programs for autism and other neurodivergent conditions being established since 2016. Most colleges also provide enhanced services such as accommodations that can greatly aid neurodivergent students. Accommodations, such as permission to record lectures, homework and test-time extensions, and access to separate testing environments. Additionally, more and more colleges are considering neurodivergence and disabilities in their diversity and equity admissions. Today in 2023, there are around 75 programs in 29 states for neurodiverse individuals at college.

In 2016

There were 25 programs across the country to support neurodiverse students at colleges.

Even more with enhanced services.



THE TIMES ARE CHANGING

At the time of the 2016 Yale Autism Seminar, there were 25 specialized programs in colleges for autistic and other neurodivergent students.

However, there is still much progress to be made. A lot of college admission offices, even ones who consider socioeconomic, racial, and sexual equity and diversity in their admissions still ignore disability and neurodivergent equity and

diversity in those admissions. Fortunately, this gap is closing as more and more colleges and their communities are becoming aware of this indispensable issue.

As more and more college disability centers are gaining knowledge and capabilities to assist neurodivergent students, a lot of disability centers are also evolving to focus on building neurodivergence cultural communities on top of providing traditional accommodations and services. These communities host events that nurture interactions between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals and raise awareness about neurodiversity.

The University of Montana is a brilliant example of a college that has programs providing useful services to neurodivergent individuals. This campus has the MOSSAIC program which specializes in supporting people with autism and related disorders. It also hosts weekly student gatherings on Tuesdays with peers who are both neurotypical and neurodivergent, featuring board game nights, ice cream walks, ice skating, and more. These gatherings are designed to allow both neurotypical and neurodivergent students to find support and develop friendships with each other while creating a more inclusive environment for neurodivergent individuals.



Neurodivergent and neurotypical students collaborating in class at the University of Montana.

Another university, the University of Tennessee Chattanooga (UTC), also has a similar neurodiversity support program similarly named Mosaic, which was developed to holistically support the needs of attending students with autism. It offers services that include coaching and supervised study hours, social skills and independent living courses, and even staff assistance in residential dorms. UTC also has installed many sensory rooms where students can decompress quietly. Numerous other colleges are implementing similar things.



A happy group of neurodivergent and neurotypical students chilling together at one of UTC's swimming pools.

Despite many colleges now having neurodiversity support programs, many neurodivergent students still have to cross many major barriers to obtain access to these programs. Firstly, these programs are often expensive, costing students up to \$7000 a semester on top of tuition and other expenses.

Mosaic is a fee-for-service program and relies solely on fees to fund things like staff salaries, programming, operating expenses, etc.


The program fee for Mosaic is **\$5,000 per semester**. This fee is in addition to tuition and housing expenses required by UTC. Fees must be paid in full before the start of each semester.

For those who are accepted into the program, there is a one-time, **non-refundable seat fee of \$500**. This amount goes towards the \$3500 Mosaic fee. Specific instructions on how to pay the seat fee are included in the acceptance letter.

Price for Mosaic program enrollment on UTC's website. \$5000 a semester is a fairly hefty price.

This poses some glaring accessibility issues for neurodivergent students from lower-middle to lower classes. Beyond financial restrictions, neurodivergent students still struggle with the brutal high-school to college transition which is known for being a great challenge for even neurotypical students.

Who is the Driver?



- Middle & High School
 - Parents/Guardians
 - Teachers
 - Counselors
- College
 - The Student

Yale SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Child Study Center

CollegeAutismSpectrum 2016 DO NOT REPRODUCE

SLIDE 5

Yale Autism Seminar emphasized the transfer of responsibilities of a neurodivergent student's education from their parents to themselves upon entering college/adulthood.

Even though there still is substantial considerable progress that needs to be made, awareness, support, and equity for neurodivergent and other disabled students in colleges have been expanding at an unprecedented rate, with significant progress made in the last decade. These college neurodiversity support programs have greatly contributed to this cause, but we all must still invest increasing amounts of effort to change. As witnessed by historical civil rights movements, stagnation in progress is a real possibility that must be avoided at all costs with continued reformation and augmentation. More colleges need to have their disability centers provide better and better for neurodivergent and disabled students. More services such as sensory-soothing dorms, counselors, and class accommodations surrounding attendance, notes, and tests should be established. At the end of the day, we need academic accessibility and equity for everyone, including neurodivergent and disabled students.

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