



Peer-to-Peer Advice

Sometimes the best way to get great information is from our peers. Asking those who have journeyed down the same path can give us a better glimpse into our future plans. We reached out to individuals on the spectrum with experience in postsecondary education to pass along some advice to those considering their options.

Jeremy, Community College Student

Q: What did you choose to do after leaving secondary school?

A: I frankly wanted to go to community college to know more about communication. I also wanted to write about my experiences as a person with autism.

Q: What type of program are you currently attending (or what type did you attend)?

A: I attended community college for 3 semesters. I was taking courses towards an AA degree.

Q: How did you decide which program would be best for you?

A: I visited three community colleges and met with Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS). I asked questions and greatly felt their attitude and knowledge about my type of autism and based my decision on that.

Q: What sorts of questions did you ask in order to judge what would be the most appropriate place for you to attend?

A: I wanted to know what kind of accommodations I would be allowed. I nicely asked if I could bring a trained support staff person. I asked about the professors. I nicely explained my need to leave the classroom for breaks to self-regulate when necessary. I explained how I communicated by typing or pointing to letter boards.

Q: What do you wish you knew before starting that program?

A: I really frankly wished I knew the stress of going to college. It was a lot of work and not much fun. I did not have friends like in high school.

Q: Do/Did you receive any type of specialized support services at this program? Were they helpful to you?

A: I provided my own trained support person. They provided a note taker (another student in the class) so I could have notes. I was given more time to complete my papers and to take tests, but I did the same amount of work as the other students; nothing was modified.

Q: Did you choose to disclose your autism diagnosis to the program administrators, your professors and/or your peers? What led you to this decision?

A: Truly it is important for the student to be a strong advocate for him or herself, and to realize the importance of making sure he or she is emotionally regulated as well as regulated in other areas. Kindly for more advice people can read the chapter “The Adult Learning Environment” in my book I co-authored called *A Full Life with Autism* (Macmillan 2012).



Alec, Community College Student working towards Bachelor's Degree

Q: What did you choose to do after leaving secondary school?

A: My original choice was to attend a four-year private Christian college, but I eventually decided to attend PACE.

Q: What kind of program are you currently attending (or what type did you attend)?

A: I am currently attending a community college to complete all of my General Education requirements, earn my Associate's Degree, and work towards my Bachelor's Degree in Special Education.

Q: How did you decide which program would be best for you?

A: I decided (or accepted) that I wasn't ready for a full course-load after high school, so I went to PACE to take the program's courses along with a limited number of college courses at National-Louis University to start earning my degree.

Q: What sort of questions did you ask in order to judge what would be the most appropriate place for you to attend?

A: I honestly don't remember the questions I asked myself, if any. I was so focused on preparing to attend one of the other four-year colleges I got accepted to that I never really put much thought into it. My family and I eventually answered those questions over time as I attended PACE, and in some ways we still do today (ex: where to live, what job(s) to search and apply for, what school to attend for my Bachelor's Degree, etc.).

Q: What advice would you give to current prospective students with ASDs who are interested in attending a similar program?

A: Programs such as PACE are a crucial foundation towards an independent lifestyle for any adult on the autism spectrum. It can help get them started on a path to accomplishments and success that they probably never dreamed would be possible. My advice is to attend such a program. See it as a challenge, tackle it head on, and never give up on what you want to achieve in life.

Q: What do you wish you knew before starting this program?

A: The biggest thing I wish I knew before attending PACE was that I should've been more prepared to learn more about myself, and enjoy my time at PACE rather than worry about school, workouts, or ways to be active in the community, and nothing beyond that. I honestly didn't think PACE was still the right program for me even after I just started off there. I figured out quickly that I had to learn more about myself first through different social situations with my peers, and also improve in my life skills (such as organization and cleanliness) and on the job by gaining experience through different seasonal internships through the school year.

Q: Do/Did you receive any type of specialized support services at this program? Were they helpful to you?

A: I received special services on a limited basis, such as stress management and job coaching. Both of these services the program offered were very helpful in helping me through future social and/or academic situations, and for me getting a job just a few months after I graduated from PACE (which I have now had for a year and a half to this date).



Q: Did you choose to disclose your autism diagnosis to the administrators, your professors, and/or your peers? What led you to this decision?

A: Yes, I chose to disclose my diagnosis for two reasons. First and foremost, I was very comfortable talking about my life living with autism. I really just wanted to give a message in talking about my diagnosis that I have had so much success in life despite my struggles. I also wanted to make people more aware of autism (even if they were unaware of it in the first place) and encourage them to learn more about autism on their own time. Also, my diagnosis was listed in my application to the program, so everybody already knew that I had autism. There was really no point in hiding the fact.

Ken, Four-Year University Student

Q: How did you decide which program would be best for you?

A: I visited the colleges I wanted to go to and see which program I liked the best. I thought it was the right distance away, not too close but not too far. It's much less expensive than a private school and the school's disability office impressed me. Some of the other schools I looked at did not impress me.

Q: What sort of questions did you ask in order to judge what would be the most appropriate place for you to attend?

A: I asked the SSD (Services for Students with Disabilities) about obtaining accommodations. I asked how they could help keep me organized.

Q: Did you choose to disclose your autism diagnosis to the administrators, your professors, and/or your peers? What led you to this decision?

A: I do disclose to my professors and to my resident advisor (RA), but do not disclose to my friends. I tend to keep that private.

Q: What advice would you give to current prospective students with ASDs who are interested in attending a similar program?

A: I would advise them to know how to get accommodations. I would also advise them to take easier courses their first semester, take the minimum amount of credits to be a matriculated student.

Q: What did you choose to do after leaving secondary school?

A: I decided to go to Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York.

Q: Do/Did you receive any type of specialized support services at this program? Were they helpful to you??

A: To get accommodations, I contact my professor at least a week in advance (either after lecture, in office hours or by email). From there, they arrange a room. Sometimes Services for Students with Disabilities are involved. I get accommodations by talking to my professors. I have a note from the disabilities office telling my accommodations, and I give it to my professor during their office hours. I also had a structured study hall for a semester. My main issue there was that I needed a computer to work, and my computer overheats a lot without a fan. My recommendation is to get an external fan, dorm rooms can get hot since many are not air conditioned.