



CAMPUS LINKS

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

ABOUT THE CAMPUS LINKS PEER PROGRAM

Being a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be a challenge. While students with ASD may excel academically, they may struggle with social aspects of campus life, such as meeting new people and interacting with professors.

In the fall of 2012, Grand Valley State University (GVSU) introduced an innovative peer program called Campus Links. The program connects students who have Autism Spectrum Disorder with students who have been trained to serve as their coaches and mentors. Campus Links mentors help students adjust to new environments and routines more quickly in the hopes mentees will have a more fulfilling and enriching college experience. The program is unique among similar programs because the program participants — mentors and those diagnosed with ASD — live together in on-campus housing, providing daily support.



HOW CAMPUS LINKS WORKS



Campus Links is a program of GVSU's Disability Support Resources (DSR) office. Students with ASD, peer mentors, and housing resident assistants are oriented to the program prior to the academic year. Peer mentors and mentees participate in ongoing informational sessions from GVSU resources that are coordinated by DSR. Systems have been established that help the mentor maintain regular contact with the GVSU student with ASD to promote a positive college experience. Selection criteria for both mentor and mentee have been created to help communicate expectations and responsibilities prior to the application and selection process.

Please see the inside back of this brochure for a list of general requirements for mentees and peer mentors as well as commitment requirements for each group.

PROGRAM GOALS

- Retain degree-seeking undergraduate students with ASD
- Create academic and classroom support through improved coordination of DSR accommodations and services
- Facilitate a positive environment for academics
- Respond to the individualized needs of the students
- Support faculty members with resources to assist in the classroom



MENTEES

General Requirements

- Documentation of a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Admitted as a degree-seeking student at Grand Valley State University
- Completed program application, and provide supplementary documentation
- Commitment to at least one academic year living on campus and working with the program
- Motivation and interest in participating in a support program for GVSU students with ASD
- Desire to live away from home in an independent campus community with a moderate level of support
- In-person interview with program staff to include: a discussion of performance in both academic work and social engagement, current or anticipated challenges, and interests and career goals

Participant Commitment

- Attend an orientation to the program at the beginning of the academic year
- Follow a daily check-in system to connect with the mentor

- Attend sessions focused on how to be successful in college
- Attend monthly problem-solving meetings, as needed
- Maintain regular communication with the program resident assistant
- Connect with university departments, as directed and needed
- Persistence toward achieving academic and social goals
- Keep Wednesdays from 4–7 p.m. open weekly
- Meet with DSR advisor once a month
- Participate in all service learning projects

Participant Benefits

- Make an easier transition into the college atmosphere
- Establish and develop personal preferences through goal setting
- Create networks with staff and faculty members to maintain academic support and resources throughout their college experience and beyond
- Establish peer connections to become more independent
- Increase their awareness of strategies and skills for use in the social college atmosphere

PEER MENTORS

General Requirements

- Minimum GPA: 2.8
- At least sophomore class standing
- Two letters of recommendation from an academic or professional reference
- Solid connection to GVSU campus community with knowledge of clubs, events, and services
- Time and motivation to participate
- Past mentoring experience is highly desirable but not required
- Solid social skills with awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses
- Active listening skills
- Ability to give thoughtful, sensitive feedback
- Ability to work with both individuals and a team
- Excellent problem-solving skills
- Mentors interested in college credit should notify DSR during the application process to learn more

Peer Mentor Commitment

- Commit to a minimum of one academic year
- Attend two training sessions and emergency protocol training at the beginning of the academic year
- Follow a daily check-in system to connect with a mentee in the program
- Attend monthly problem-solving meetings with staff and mentee, as needed
- Maintain regular communication with the program resident assistant
- Collaborate with university departments, as directed and needed
- Keep Wednesdays from 4–7 p.m. open weekly
- Participate in all service learning projects

Disability Support Resources
405 James H. Zumberge Hall
Allendale, MI 49401

Phone: **(616) 331-2490**
Email: dsrgvsu@gvsu.edu
Fax: **(616) 331-3880**

A department of the Division of
Inclusion and Equity



Grand Valley State University is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution. It encourages diversity and provides equal opportunity in education, employment, all of its programs, and the use of its facilities. It is committed to protecting the constitutional and statutory civil rights of persons connected with the university. 1/16

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