

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES OFFICE

Academic Success Center



MERRIMACK
COLLEGE

The
ACTIVATE
Program

JANUARY 2022





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THE ACTIVATE PROGRAM

Accessibility Services Office



1 TO 1 COACHING

Weekly meetings with an ASO staff member provides students a point person for questions and help in navigating the nuances of college life.



ACTIVATE MENTORS

Paid positions are offered to returning Activate students to mentor new Activate students, providing a rich, welcoming and safe first-job experience.



GWNN GROUP

GWNN, a self-named student group, meets weekly to play board games and socialize as a group to foster belonging and relationships amongst members.



FYE COURSE

Each fall, there is a section of the First-Year Experience course specifically for neurodiverse students in Activate taught by an ASO staff member and a Peer Mentor.



SOCIAL EVENTS

Throughout the year, the Activate Peer Mentors host a number of social events including movie nights, paint nights and other social outings for other Activate students.

A PLACE FOR CONNECTION

Our goal is to create an evolving program where our neurodiverse students belong, have a space to build their own identity and network of community, and feel they have pride in themselves and their diversity.

AUTISM AS NEURODIVERSITY

“If you have met one person on the autism spectrum, you have met one person on the autism spectrum.” This is a wonderful saying that captures the array or spectrum of our students. Autism is more like a trend of similarities noticed in the world’s neurodiversity than a fixed set of features. Given certain environments or situations, an individual on the autism spectrum may exhibit a variety of behaviors. However, there is such a vast array of how this plays out in someone’s life.

Thus, a program for autistic students must be dynamic and adaptive, involving the students themselves in the development process and must grow to support the students’ changing needs. And as it is a loose trend, some students without an autism diagnosis but who may exhibit similar behaviors may also benefit from Activate.





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1 TO 1 COACHING

Regular meetings with an ASO staff member provides students a point person for questions and help in navigating the nuances of college life.

Every person's transition to college is different and filled with its individual hurdles and victories. While there may be similarities amongst group members, there are a lot of nuances in each student's transition experience. For this reason, we offer regular check-in meetings to Activate students in order to tailor conversations and the focus to meet the student where they most need it. Some topics that may be covered in more depth in a weekly meeting include:

- Navigating the social landscape of college
- Battling loneliness or a lack of a sense of belonging
- Working through the stigma around autism (or something related to autism)
- Classroom expectations
- Living on campus and the residential experience
- Maintaining mental health wellness
- Appropriate conversations with faculty and peers
- Advocating for oneself (some for the first time)
- Working through time management and study skills
- Assistance securing on- and off-campus work, internships and career exploration
- Developing resilience and grit

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Across the country, autistic students are leaving college with little to nothing on their résumés. This makes it very challenging for these students to get a job later on. To combat what some refer to as the "Empty Résumé Syndrome," Activate has built in opportunities for designated paid mentorship positions, which can be a good first step into the job world.

Jobs are filled with new experiences, and all of that change and unfamiliarity can be intimidating. The Activate Mentorship positions are offered only to students in the Activate program and provide a safe and welcoming first-job experience. The student is supervised by an ASO staff member and will meet weekly to discuss important job readiness skills, work communication and understanding expectations, time management skills in a work environment.

The added benefit of this position is for the new Activate members to have a peer to turn to and learn from.

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To further connections and relationships, GWNN is a key part of the Activate program. Each week, Activate students gather as a group to catch up and play various board games. The group makes a collective decision on the game(s), thus promoting skills like compromising, flexibility, and communicating.

About Our Name:

The students named the group GWNN (pronounced "gwyn"), which stands for Group With No Name. As some students in the group carry stigma around autism, they wanted the group name to be unrelated to any specific diagnosis or label. With such an ambiguous name, whether a sign is posted, group sweatshirts or merchandise are given, or someone asks about the group, nothing in the group name would specifically connect any given group member with autism.

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FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

First-year Activate students will have the opportunity to take a section of FYE that is specifically for Activate students, taught by an Accessibility Services staff member and a Peer Mentor.

What is FYE?

All Merrimack students are required to take a section of the First-Year Experience course. This course is taught by a staff member and a peer mentor and serves to support each student through their transition into college life. FYE encourages self-exploration, active engagement and understanding of the world.

The Activate section of FYE supports neurodiverse students through their transition into college, while also building a community and fostering a sense of belonging our first-year Activate students. FYE will help students acclimate to campus life and set each student up for a successful and fulfilling college experience.

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SOCIAL EVENTS

Throughout the semester, the Activate Peer Mentors work with ASO staff to host a number of fun social events for Activate members to attend and connect with one another. Events occur both on and off campus, and mentors will often bring a group of Activate students to events and trips hosted by the Office of Student Involvement.

Past events and outings have included:

- Paint Nights
- Movie Nights
- Virtual game nights
- Laser Tag
- Apple Picking
- Game Nights
- Off-Campus meals
- Jeopardy nights

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CONTACT US!

Have questions or want to learn more? Please reach out to us via email and follow us on social media!



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