

Bright Path Program Student Guide

Helping High School Students on the Autism Spectrum Navigate College Selection

Welcome to the Bright Path Program

Congratulations on taking the next step toward your future! The transition from high school to college is exciting but can also feel overwhelming, especially for students on the autism spectrum. This guide is designed to help you find the college that best suits your academic, social, and personal needs.

Step 1: Understand What You Need

Start by reflecting on what's important to you in college. Here are some areas to consider:

- **Academic Interests:** What subjects excite you? Does the college offer programs in your area of interest?
- **Support Services:** Does the school offer specialized autism support services, such as coaching, academic accommodations, or social skills programs?
- **Campus Environment:** Do you prefer a large or small campus? Urban or rural setting?
- **Living Arrangements:** Would you like to live on campus, commute, or attend an online program?
- **Social Opportunities:** How do you want to engage with peers? Do you need a quieter, more structured social environment?

Write down your priorities to guide your search.

Step 2: Research Colleges

Use the following resources to explore colleges:

- **College Websites:** Review their disability services, programs for autistic students, and academic offerings.
- **College Autism Programs:** Many schools have specialized programs, like structured support or peer mentoring.

- **Campus Visits:** If possible, visit campuses to experience the environment and meet staff.
 - **Bright Path Program Database:** Utilize our curated list of autism-friendly colleges.
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Step 3: Questions to Ask

When researching colleges or meeting with staff, consider these questions:

1. **Disability Services:**
 - What accommodations are available for students with autism?
 - Are there counselors or specialists familiar with autism on campus?
 2. **Academic Support:**
 - Are there tutors, writing centers, or additional resources?
 - What is the class size and professor availability?
 3. **Housing:**
 - Are there quiet dorms or single-room options?
 - Is there support for independent living skills?
 4. **Social Support:**
 - Are there autism-specific social groups or mentorship programs?
 - How inclusive is the campus community?
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Step 4: Support Programs to Look For

Here are examples of programs designed for students on the spectrum:

- **Peer Mentoring:** Provides a supportive peer guide.
 - **Executive Function Coaching:** Helps with organization, time management, and goal-setting.
 - **Transition Programs:** Summer or year-round programs to ease the transition to college life.
 - **Quiet Zones or Sensory Rooms:** Designated areas to relax and recharge.
 - **Career Services:** Supports with getting internships, job placements, and workplace accommodations.
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Step 5: Application Process

1. **Choose Schools:** Narrow down your list based on your research.

2. **Document Accommodations:** Work with your high school's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 coordinator to gather documentation of your needs.
 3. **Write Your Essay:** Share your unique story, focusing on your strengths and growth.
 4. **Schedule Interviews:** Some colleges offer interviews, which are great for discussing how they can support you.
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Step 6: Prepare for the Transition

- **Build Independence:** Practice self-advocacy by explaining your needs to teachers or counselors.
 - **Learn Skills:** Focus on time management, budgeting, and self-care.
 - **Get Familiar with Resources:** Know how to access disability services, student organizations, and campus maps.
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Bright Path Recommended Colleges

Here's a list of autism-friendly colleges with strong support programs:

1. **Landmark College** (Putney, Vermont):
 - **Program:** The entire institution is dedicated to students with learning differences, including autism.
 - **Highlights:** Offers associate and bachelor's degrees with personalized support.
 - **Website:** [Landmark College](#)
2. **Beacon College** (Leesburg, Florida):
 - **Program:** Exclusively serves students with learning disabilities and ADHD.
 - **Highlights:** Provides bachelor's and associate degrees with comprehensive support services.
 - **Website:** [Beacon College](#)
3. **Defiance College** (Defiance, Ohio):
 - **Program:** ASD Affinity Program.
 - **Highlights:** Offers academic coaching, social skills training, and peer mentoring.
 - **Website:** [Defiance College](#)
4. **University of Alabama** (Tuscaloosa, Alabama):
 - **Program:** Autism Spectrum Disorders College Transition and Support (UA-ACTS).
 - **Highlights:** Provides individualized support focusing on academics, social skills, and independent living.
 - **Website:** [University of Alabama](#)
5. **Eastern Michigan University** (Ypsilanti, Michigan):

- **Program:** College Supports Program.
 - **Highlights:** Offers academic support, social skills development, and career preparation.
 - **Website:** [Eastern Michigan University](#)
6. **Marshall University** (Huntington, West Virginia):
- **Program:** College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
 - **Highlights:** Provides academic, social, and independent living support.
 - **Website:** [Marshall University](#)
7. **Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)** (Rochester, New York):
- **Program:** Spectrum Support Program (SSP).
 - **Highlights:** Offers academic coaching, social and executive functioning support, and career services.
 - **Website:** [RIT SSP](#)
8. **University of West Florida** (Pensacola, Florida):
- **Program:** Autism Spectrum Disorder Support Program.
 - **Highlights:** Provides academic coaching, social skills training, and sensory-friendly study spaces.
 - **Website:** [University of West Florida](#)
9. **Rutgers University** (New Brunswick, New Jersey):
- **Program:** College Support Program (CSP).
 - **Highlights:** Offers academic and social support, life skills training, and career development services.
 - **Website:** [Rutgers CSP](#)
10. **Kent State University** (Kent, Ohio):
- **Program:** Autism Spectrum Disorder Support Program.
 - **Highlights:** Provides academic support, social skills training, and peer mentoring.
 - **Website:** [Kent State University](#)
11. **Clemson University** (Clemson, South Carolina):
- **Program:** Spectrum Program.
 - **Highlights:** Supports academic, personal, social, and professional development for students with autism spectrum disorder.
 - **Website:** [Clemson Spectrum Program](#)
12. **University of Arizona** (Tucson, Arizona):
- **Program:** Project FOCUS (Focusing Opportunities with Community and University Support)
 - **Highlights:** Provides access to academic courses, community-based internships, and campus life social events to increase students' independence, communication, and employability.
[College of Engineering](#)
 - **Website:** [University of Arizona - Project FOCUS](#)
13. **Arizona State University** (Tempe, Arizona):
- **Program:** SPE 394: Autism Spectrum Disorders Higher Ed

- **Highlights:** A 1-credit class specifically designed for students with Asperger's, covering coping strategies, study skills, and independent living skills within a higher education setting.
[Uniquely Abled Project](#)
 - **Website:** Arizona State University - Disability Resource Center
14. **Gateway Academy** (Phoenix, Arizona):
- **Program:** Specialized education for students with autism spectrum disorders
 - **Highlights:** Offers a private education for students from 6th through 12th grade with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, providing individualized attention with a 5:1 student-to-teacher ratio.
[Wikipedia](#)
 - **Website:** [Gateway Academy](#)
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Additional Resources

- **Bright Path Advisors:** Contact our advisors for personalized guidance.
 - **Online Support Groups:** Connect with peers on platforms like SpectrumU or College Autism Network.
 - **Books & Websites:**
 - *“Navigating College: A Handbook on Self-Advocacy”*
 - Websites like thinkcollege.net or autismspeaks.org.
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Bright Path Promise

We're here to help you find your way and succeed in college. Remember, every path is unique, and we'll support you every step of the way.

For questions or assistance, contact Elizabeth Paulus at ep@collegeboundaz.org or visit <https://collegeboundaz.org>

Good luck on your journey!