

Social Opportunities for The University of Tulsa Students within the Center for Student Academic Support

The University of Tulsa's student population currently includes approximately 180 students who are registered with the Center for Student Academic Support with some specific need or disability. All students registered with CSAS are eligible to receive the benefits of the programs below. CSAS staff are available to discuss any of these opportunities with students to help students find their niche and promote student success. CSAS staff can make recommendations for program involvement to students with specific needs, including, but not limited to, social anxiety and distress, obsessive tendencies, and poor communication skills.

Program Mission

The Social Opportunities Program aims to assist students with disabilities in achieving academic, educational, and social success through intentional and collaborative opportunities for support and skill development.

Skill Development Targets

- Transition to college environment
- Academic and study skills improvement
- Social skills and problems
- Health and wellness
- Positive recreation
- Housing and living with roommates
- Independent living
- Enhancing speech patterns
- Work and career preparation
- Communication and presentation skills
- Self-confidence
- Involvement and volunteering
- Time management
- Goal setting
- Stress management
- Organization
- Self-advocacy
- Interacting with professors/teachers
- Anxiety

Program Components

I. Graduate Student Liaison

a. The Graduate Assistant (GA) serves as a liaison for students who specifically identify themselves as desiring additional one-on-one assistance in the areas of social, academic and general education support. The GA is typically a Ph.D. student pursuing a degree in clinical or counseling psychology.

b. The Graduate Assistant meets with each participating student once a week to identify their specific needs and then seek out the best resources to facilitate assistance. Students have the opportunity to check in with a person who knows them and their schedules and who provides an additional source of support and accountability. Students can discuss a variety of issues, but some of the most common ones include classes, time management, study skills, goal setting, organization, self-advocacy, interacting with professors, stress management, and anxiety. The Graduate Assistant provides academic counseling and connects students with sources for any needed assistive technology, accommodations, or other academic and support services (e.g., tutoring, academic advising, student activities, residential life).

c. The GA also organizes weekly workshops and activities for students which utilize campus and community support services and focus on the following with input from participating students and their interests/needs:

1. **An Opportunity to Work on Social Problems:** Students will be able to participate in Asperger Support Group meetings. Students with social needs often benefit from social stories and role playing. This time begins with students simply expressing needs – e.g., a difficult professor, a roommate conflict, a dating situation. Then, the group facilitator coordinates with the group to role play these different issues and allows students a safe place to practice working through them. These activities also include opportunities to engage socially through movie nights, pizza parties, and other social events and group outings planned by the students. Support meetings for students with Aspergers are weekly and held in the residence halls. These meetings may also include short trips to area attractions and events.

2. **Recreation:** Students benefit from setting aside time for recreation and relaxation. In coordination with the Recreation Center, students are given a tour of facilities and learn about campus and community opportunities such as intramural sports, Pilates, yoga, and the benefits of exercise. Studies have shown that working out with a partner is an excellent way for these students to work on social interaction issues and garner health benefits.

3. **Working on Speech Patterns:** Some students may express a need for additional help in the area of verbal communication. Faculty from the Communication Disorder Clinic can discuss voice inflection, use of slang language, or ways to overcome certain speech patterns. Students have opportunities to role play and work on carrying on a two-person conversation.

4. **Wellness:** Many students who use CSAS services benefit from additional education regarding appropriate social interactions, reading social signs and cues, sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol, appropriate conduct, stress management, managing medications, drug interactions, anxiety, appropriate use of the Internet and gaming, personal hygiene, isolation, depression, making friends, dating, etc. Coordinated efforts with the Alexander Health Center and Counseling Center provide opportunities for students to learn about these issues and discuss concerns in a safe environment.

5. **Academic Assistance:** Students receive individualized course planning as well as access to tutors, academic skill building workshops, and weekly one-on-one academic support meetings. Students who qualify will be eligible to receive academic accommodations such as notetaking assistance and testing accommodations. CSAS will

collaborate with faculty to address special learning needs of students in the program. Students will also receive priority enrollment to get classes that best fit their schedules and needs. Many students benefit from writing skills training but might not seek it out on their own. Faculty from the English Department and Writing Center can provide tips on writing effective papers and putting feelings and personal perspectives on paper. Faculty from students' various majors can be available to discuss specific issues and recommendations regarding academic planning.

6. **Housing and Living with Roommates:** The Residential Life Staff are another resource for these weekly meetings. Members of the staff can come and speak about setting limits with roommates, sharing a room with a stranger and dealing with differences and conflicts. Additionally, students can learn skills for independent living. Students have the option to live in suite-style housing with other students participating in the program. This is beneficial for transitioning to the college environment and for promotion of social skills.

8. **Career Counseling:** The Career Center staff are available to discuss resumes, job interviews, ideas for summer employment, appropriate dress for interviews and how to carry oneself in an interview setting. Students can role play and practice in a supportive environment.

9. **Oral Presentations and Self Confidence:** Faculty and staff in the Communication Department and Communication Disorder Clinic can provide information on preparing to give presentations for classes or interviews. This time is used to discuss ways to make an oral presentation in the classroom and improve self-expression and combat anxiety and nervousness. Students can role play and practice with the assistance of supportive faculty/staff and peers.

10. **Volunteering Opportunities:** Many studies have shown that people derive multiple benefits from community service work while contributing to the good of others. The Volunteer Center and Student Activities can connect participating students with various opportunities to volunteer and thus meet new people, work toward achieving a goal together as a group, and socialize while participating in a positive and engaging experience.

II. **Peer Mentor Program**—development in progress

a. The current Graduate Assistant has been tasked with creating a program which would provide one-on-one relationships to students within the CSAS community to help them achieve a more complete university experience.

b. Once the program is established, future Graduate Assistants will be charged with its management, growth and any needed adjustments.

c. The Program will include an Advisory Committee which will consist of CSAS students, CSAS parents, community experts, staff, graduate students and peer mentors from related fields. This Advisory Committee will help ensure that the program embraced a "campus as curriculum" concept and recognize the needs of each individual student involved. The "campus as curriculum" concept ensures that all areas of campus life from academics, to social settings, to fitness, to hygiene, etc., are included in each student's peer mentor relationship.

d. The Peer Mentor Program would begin at campus orientation in the Fall and Spring.

Students will be able to indicate an interest in the program when they register with CSAS and consequently will be paired with a peer mentor at that time. The peer mentor can assist the student through orientation to ensure clarity and help with the college transition process as a whole. This will also give the peer mentor a chance to see where the student may require the most assistance throughout the semester.

e. Funding includes a small program fund for use at group activities (for pizza, copies of materials, etc.). Peer Mentors will participate as volunteers or possibly for internship/course credit.

III. Resource Center—development in progress

The Center for Student Academic Support is creating a digital and physical resource center for parents, students, and mentors throughout the TU community with books, articles, and videos about various topics related to people with special needs. While this is a work in progress, the Resource Center is collecting reference materials for students, peer mentors, faculty, and parents who seek further information about the impact of a disability in a collegiate setting. Prospective and current students can benefit from materials about campus and community resources to physicians, counselors, clergy, and support groups.