


**AHEADD**  
**Achieving in Higher Education  
 with Autism/Developmental Disabilities**  
[www.aheadd.org](http://www.aheadd.org)

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## Program Overview


- History, Mission and Philosophy of AHEADD
- Traditional vs. 'Nontraditional' Accommodations
- The AHEADD Model™
- Q & A



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## History of AHEADD


- Founded in 2002 by Carolyn Komich Hare
- Piloted the program in response to one parent's inquiry regarding the availability of specialized support for her daughter Val, a student with AS, who would be returning to CMU following a year's leave
- Val graduated 2 years later, having earned her degree, as well as having contributed to the evolution of the core concepts of AHEADD.



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## History of AHEADD


- Since 2002, AHEADD has tirelessly documented its successes and failures statistically and anecdotally, ultimately resulting in the development of the AHEADD Model
- AHEADD is a comprehensive and effective private support structure available for students with HFA/AS, NVLD, LD, and ADD who want to attend college but may flounder in the absence of the support made available to them through high school
- 2008-2010, Expansion of AHEADD to NY (Albany and LI), OH, CA, MD, FL, DC, NC and Philadelphia. Plans to expand to Chicago and Boston fall 2010.



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**"Since its inception into the Carnegie Mellon community, AHEADD has proven invaluable in the development of students' social and academic success. Their individualized approach and followup with students, professors and departments is first class! Our department has the expertise to manage accommodations, but AHEADD goes above and beyond the traditional accommodations provided by our office and has allowed some students to experience successes they may not have otherwise achieved."**

-Larry Powell  
 Carnegie Mellon University  
 Disabilities Resources




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## Mission

Currently, accommodations in higher education lack consideration of characteristics that affect the ability of certain students to achieve their potential.

There are students who require comprehensive, individualized, and ongoing support to address difficulties in the areas of organization, social skills and communication.

AHEADD's mission is fill this void in a manner that respects students as adults, complements the traditional college accommodations plan and maximizes use of existing campus resources.



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## Mission (continued)

As AHEADD grows to meet the needs of greater numbers of students across the country, it will continue to set the standard for exemplary support of exceptional students. We also intend to provide this support in consideration of families' financial burden as a result of having a child with a disability.

AHEADD consistently researches and pursues opportunities to reduce out of pocket costs for our clients.



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## Philosophy

AHEADD's philosophy:

- To work effectively with our students we must first know them as individuals and respect each as a young adult.
- To understand a student's thoughts, feelings, and concerns and then facilitate problem solving and progress that will be meaningful, effective and enduring for that student.
- To partner with each of our students in support of achieving their academic and personal goals, and do so in a way that maintains the integrity of university standards.



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## What are the challenges college students with developmental disabilities may face?

- **Social skills/communication** (including the ability to make new friends, live with roommates, engage in dormitory living, explore dating and sexuality, make choices regarding drugs and/or alcohol, resist peer pressure, communicate with professors, etc.)
- **Executive functioning** (which includes the ability to organize notes, workload, and course schedule, manage time for work, recreation and relaxation, access campus resources, such as tutoring and counseling, plan time for self-care, budget money, etc.)
- Higher risks for **mental health** issues (such as stress, anxiety and depression, which may be induced by having to cope with deficits in social and executive functioning)



Change in legislation from **IDEA to ADA**

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## What strategies may benefit college students with developmental disabilities?

- Support students in the areas in which they face their biggest challenges, in **communication/social skills, executive functioning, and mental health**
- **Self advocacy** is one of the most important strategies that students must acquire while in college; it is also one of the most difficult tasks because it requires communication as well as disclosure

## What is the responsibility of schools in educating students with disabilities?

- **Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)**, authorized in 1990, provides a federal mandate to educate children with ASDs until they receive a high school degree
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** decides how universities provide services to students with ASDs, which includes universities learning to address the social and organizational difficulties of this population



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## AHEADD 'Bridges the Gap'

- **TRADITIONAL VS. 'NONTRADITIONAL' ACCOMMODATIONS**



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## AHEADD 'Bridges the Gap'

### • TRADITIONAL ACCOMMODATIONS

- extended time
- technology aids (tape recorders, etc)
- distraction free testing environments
- preferred seating



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## AHEADD 'Bridges the Gap'

### 'NONTRADITIONAL' (INDIVIDUALIZED) ACCOMMODATIONS

- establishment of a network of support
- facilitated communication with professors
- self-advocacy skill development
- social skills instruction
- regular assistance with organizational skills
- increased academic and personal accountability
- regular communication with professors to discuss progress
- structured peer support
- life skills education



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## The AHEADD Model™

The AHEADD Model™ of support involves four core elements:

1. AHEADD Professional Staff Involvement
2. Development of Campus/Community Support Network
3. Utilization of Campus Resources
4. Peer Mentoring



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## AHEADD Professional Staff Involvement

- Twice-weekly, individual meetings to address personal and academic goals established at the beginning of each semester, increase academic accountability and ensure that the student is content with his/her overall quality of life.
- These meetings are also aimed toward assisting students to develop individualized strategies for managing various aspects of their college careers, including:
  - Self-advocacy; faculty/classroom communication
  - time management/organizational skills
  - opportunities for social interaction and development of social skills
  - utilization of campus and community resources



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## Development of Campus/Community Support Network

- Staff establishes communication with Disability Resource Services and faculty and supports student in advocating for accommodations and problem solving as issues arise.
- Staff is available as a resource to the Disability Resource Services and faculty in helping to problem solve, insure that student has a realistic perception of how they are doing in class, and to help facilitate communication.



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## Utilization of Campus Resources

- Staff help students navigate the college campus, access the available resources and learn how and when to use them. These may include:
  - Disabilities Resources
  - Student Health and local medical professionals
  - Counseling and Psychological Services
  - Academic Development/Learning Center for content tutoring and writing assistance
  - Academic Advisors and Faculty Mentors
  - Extracurricular Activities and Clubs
  - Career Counseling
  - Work-study program



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## Peer Mentoring

- "Typical" college students volunteer their time to provide an empathetic social opportunity and outlet for students enrolled in AHEAD.
- The Mentors also contribute valuable insight into challenges that our students may be facing during social situations which AHEAD's staff can then incorporate into discussions during the twice-weekly meetings.



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## Helpful Tips for Success in College

- Acquaint yourself with the disabilities services office and learn about their services
- Consider disclosure, on an as-needed basis
- Find activity-based clubs
- Smaller is not always better
- Choose a campus first, then establish your network of support
- Take care of yourself
- Find someone you trust and can talk to



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AHEAD will be applying to become an Autism Scholarship Provider for the 2010/2011 school year. We are excited to work flexibly, through the scholarship program, with students who are enrolled in high school but are attending an institution of higher education.

If you have questions, please contact:

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**“Able autistic individuals can rise to eminent positions with such outstanding success that one may conclude that only such people are capable of certain achievements. Their unswerving determination and penetrating intellectual powers, part of their spontaneous and original mental activity, their narrowness and single-mindedness, as manifested in their special interests, can be immensely valuable and can lead to outstanding achievements in their chosen areas.”**

(Hans Asperger 1944)



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