Supporting Autistic College Students through the
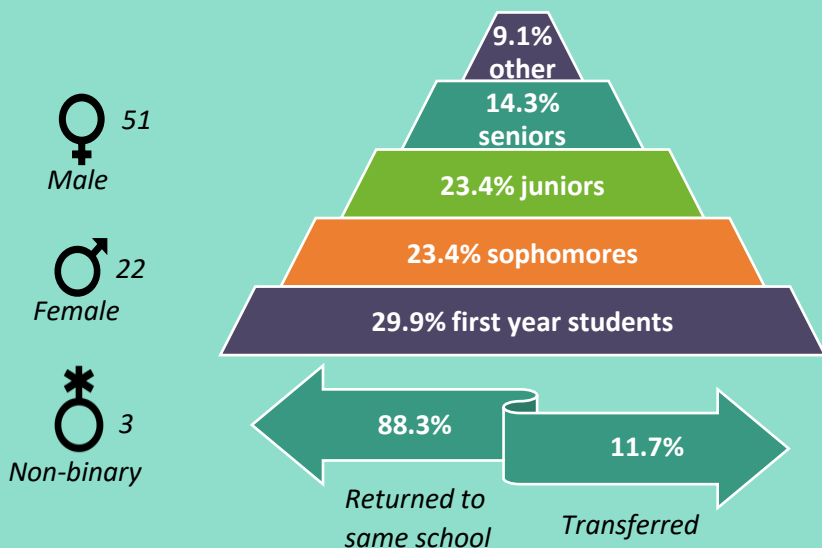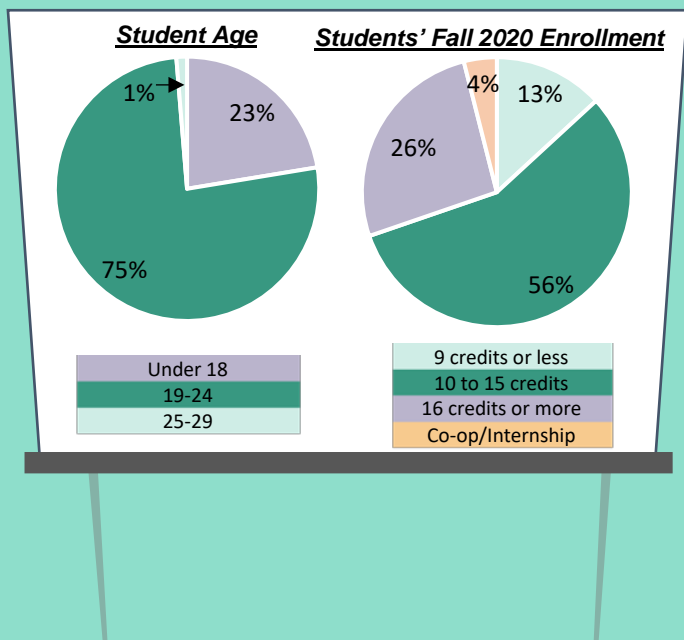
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ALLIANCE
Autism College to Employment Programs

The Alliance of Autism College to Employment Programs (aka The Alliance) is an association for research-minded practitioners dedicated to autistic college students' success and building inclusive campus communities.

The Alliance conducted a nationwide online survey study that assessed the anxiety levels, needs, and concerns of autistic undergraduate students regarding a variety of COVID-19 pandemic-related factors. This tip sheet explains the results and provides examples to help support students.

Student Age

- 1%
- 23%
- 75%

Under 18	
19-24	
25-29	

Students' Fall 2020 Enrollment

- 4%
- 13%
- 26%
- 56%

9 credits or less	
10 to 15 credits	
16 credits or more	
Co-op/Internship	

♀ 51 *Male*

♂ 22 *Female*

⚧ 3 *Non-binary*

9.1% other
14.3% seniors
23.4% juniors
23.4% sophomores
29.9% first year students

88.3% *Returned to same school*   11.7% *Transferred*

Survey respondents…

- 43% had a GPA of 3.6 or above

- 70% participated in an autistic support program
  - Of those, 35% preferred a combination of in-person and online support

- Resided at home:
  - 48.7% before COVID-19 restrictions
  - 47.4% during COVID-19 restrictions

Ethnicity

American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.3%
Asian	10.5%
Black	6.5%
Latinx	3.9%
White	85.5%
Other	2.6%

76 students responded from 14 states

Alliance Steering Committee Members:
Laurie Ackles, *Rochester Institute of Technology*
Amy Edwards, *Drexel University*
Cherie Fishbaugh, *West Chester University*
Brian Freedman, *University of Delaware*
Pam Lubbers, *University of Delaware*
Sara Sanders Gardner, *Bellevue College*
Jane Thierfeld Brown, *College Autism Spectrum*

Research conducted by:
Jessica Monahan, PhD, *University of Delaware*
Kelsey Baldwin, MA, *University of Delaware*
Brealyn Garrison, *University of Delaware*

For more information about the ***Alliance,*** email info@collegeautismspectrum.com

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Figure 1. Quantitative survey data. Respondents rated their level of anxiety for each of the eight factors using the following scale:

0=not anxious at all, 1=somewhat anxious, 2=anxious, 3=very anxious.
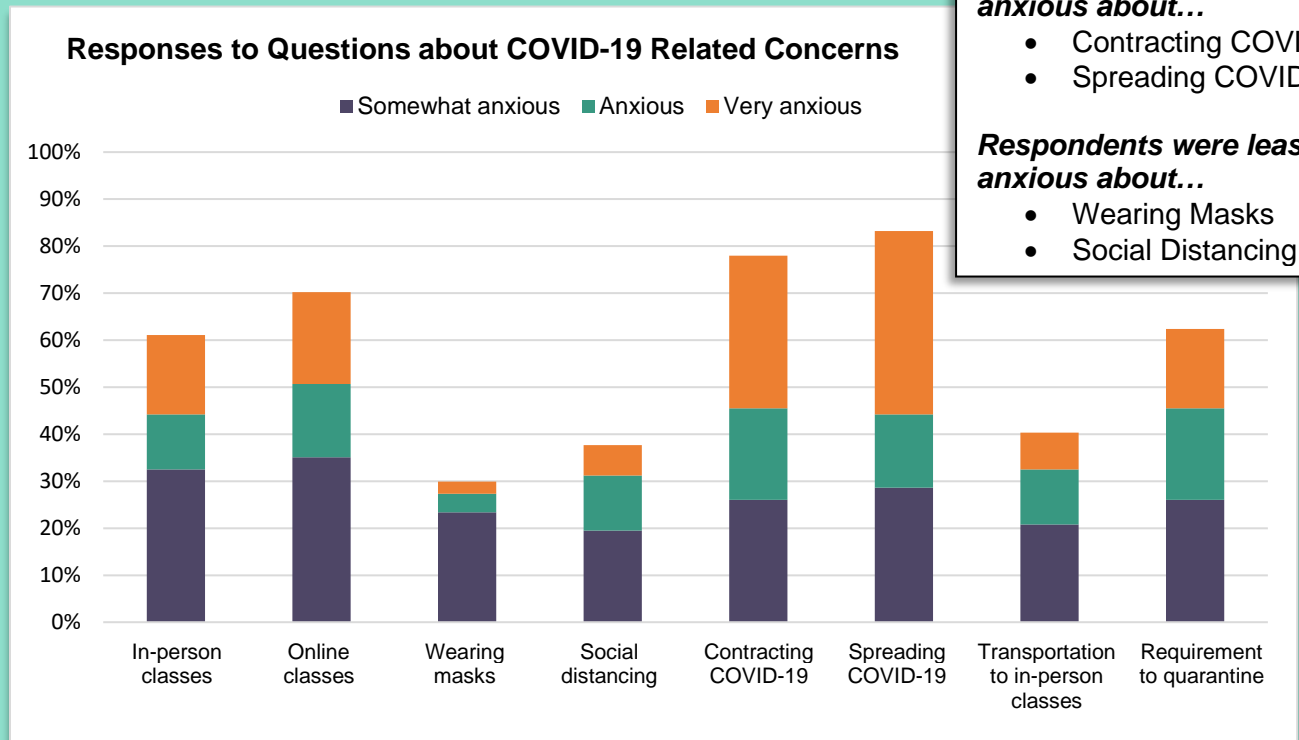
Respondents were most anxious about…
- Contracting COVID-19
- Spreading COVID-19

Respondents were least anxious about…
- Wearing Masks
- Social Distancing

Responses to Questions about COVID-19 Related Concerns

■ Somewhat anxious ■ Anxious ■ Very anxious

Number of respondents who answered these survey questions ranged from 63 to 76

Figure 2. Qualitative survey data. Respondents answered three open-ended questions. The three most prevalent themes for each item are shown below.

What are some ways your support program or university can help you be successful (academically, socially, and emotionally) during the semester?

- Academic Support and Considerations
- General Support
- Social Support

What are some of the concerns you have about online classes?

- Attendance and Work Completion
- Logistics (how to access classes and learn online)
- Quality of Learning

What are some of the concerns you have about in person classes?

- Catching COVID-19
- Miscellaneous (uncertainty, hesitancy, general ambivalence, etc.)
- Others Not Following Safety Procedures

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Tips and Suggestions

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

To Provide…

Support for Executive Functioning	Access to Staff	Tutoring Opportunities	Check-Ins
For…			
Providing an easy way for the student and support person to plan the term, set academic and social goals, break down each course and integrate into a total plan for the term that includes all courses, and review progress as the term continues	Keeping lines of communication open, reaching a support person in case of urgent need, getting answers to questions that feel urgent, supporting access to other resources	Continuing access to tutoring services, encouraging use of existing academic supports, determining barriers that may exist, supporting student in scheduling and attending tutoring	Creating regularly scheduled virtual check-ins (individual or group) to ensure the student is on track, understands their weekly plan, has the opportunity to connect with others, and is working to build responsibility and interdependence

Use/Suggest…

- Planning apps, or processes - Google Docs, Sheets, Calendar - My Study Life - Learning Management System (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, etc.) Assignment trackers - Goal setting - Backwards planning	- Schedule appointments online - Text message app - Virtual office hours - Support person available via chat during work hours - Remote staff can utilize Google Voice in place of office phone to ensure staff are readily available to students by phone	- Academic support services - Online tutoring - Faculty office hours - Teaching assistants/GA	- Virtual meeting platforms - Breakout rooms for information sharing or teamwork - Visual supports such as checklists, calendars, agendas, whiteboards, and applicable handouts

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ALLIANCE Autism College to Employment Programs

Tips and Suggestions

WELLNESS AND HEALTH SUPPORT

To Provide…

Anxiety Management	Mental Breaks	COVID-19 Preparedness
For…		
Helping students manage the anxiety that can hinder success	Encouraging technology and study breaks to help prevent feeling drained or overwhelmed	Providing reassurance, information, and resources about COVID and related institution safety plan
Use/Suggest…		
↓ Mental health counseling ↓ Mindfulness (e.g., meditation, breathing, yoga, apps) ↓ Identify triggers and calming strategies ↓ Self-care routine (e.g., sleep, nutrition, movement)	↓ Activity (e.g., exercise, change of scenery, journaling, drawing) ↓ Schedules for breaks (e.g., focus keeper, Pomodoro focus timer) ↓ Social connection (e.g., call, talk, text, video chat)	↓ Institutions' online training re: COVID-19 precautions and trusted sources (e.g., CDC) ↓ Staying healthy (in light of COVID concerns) through discussion, workshops, information-sharing

SOCIAL SUPPORT

To Provide…

Virtual Engagement Events	Social Networks
For…	
Staying connected and socially engaged	Staying active and connecting with peers who have similar interests
Use/Suggest…	
↓ Gaming platforms (e.g., Kahoot, Jackbox, Scriblio, Xbox-live) ↓ Group chats (e.g., Group Me, Discord) ↓ Watch parties (e.g., Netflix, Disney+)	↓ Campus clubs/organization (e.g., interest, service, Greek life) ↓ Campus events and activities (e.g., campus life, residence life) ↓ Connections with academic groups and peers with similar majors (e.g., study groups, academic clubs)

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