

CERTIFICATE IN AUTISM STUDIES

Certificate Description

It is a well-publicized fact that diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have skyrocketed in recent decades. The latest figures published by the Centers for Disease Control indicate that 1 out of every 36 children in the U.S. has been diagnosed with ASD. This reflects an increase of more than 5500%—over 50-fold—from pre-1990 estimates of 1 out of every 2000 children in the U.S., and similar incidences have been found in countries around the world. In this context, the need for understanding autism spectrum disorder and for skilled caregivers and service providers is clear.

The Graduate Certificate in Autism Studies (GCAS) program will respond to these critical needs in a way that reflects Saint Mary's distinctive identity as a Catholic, women's, liberal arts college. It is increasingly agreed that any serious attempt to understand autism must include the perspectives of people who are themselves on the spectrum alongside the findings of autism science. The curriculum of the GCAS will, therefore, include a course on *Autistic Voices* as well as a course on *A Biopsychosocial Approach to Understanding the Autism Spectrum*. In *Autism and the Human Person*, students will encounter Catholic philosophical and theological views about the nature of the human person and consider ways in which these views can both enrich and be enriched by reflection on autistic persons in their rich particularity. The ways in which gender and identity shape autistic persons' lives will also be a point of focus in this course. Finally, because best practices in autism services employ interdisciplinary approaches, and autism professionals are routinely called upon to work collaboratively in interprofessional teams, the GCAS will also introduce students to the interprofessional field of autism interventions.

Graduate Certificate in Autism Studies (12 Graduate Credits)

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
AUST 500	Autistic Voices	3
AUST 510	Autism and the Human Person	3
AUST 520	A Biopsychosocial Understanding of the Autism Spectrum	3
SLP 524	Autism Spectrum Disorders	3
Total Credits		12

One of these courses may be taken at the undergraduate level.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the Certificate in Autism Studies program, students will:

- Understand the lived experiences of autistic persons; reflect on the interplay among these experiences and broader theories of human nature, society and culture; and examine ethical theories and practices relevant to autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- Be able to find, understand and evaluate scientific research about ASD, its causes, its treatment, common co-morbid conditions, etc.

- Understand the major scientific and social scientific theories of ASD and of relevance to ASD.
- Understand important models or approaches used in treating ASD (e.g., ABA, DIR, TEACCH, sensory integration, etc.); make decisions about the appropriateness of individual models/approaches for individual persons with autism that take into account scientific evidence, levels of efficacy, clinician's experience, ethical considerations, and the wishes of the client and/or caregivers; and practice/implement these models/approaches at a level commensurate with the student's professional and/or personal engagement with autism.
- Understand therapeutic disciplines and their techniques for assessing and treating ASD; make decisions about the appropriateness of individual techniques/methods/interventions for individual persons with autism that take into account scientific evidence, levels of efficacy, clinician's experience, ethical considerations, and the wishes of the client and/or caregivers; practice/implement these techniques at a level commensurate with the student's professional and/or personal engagement with autism.
- Understand and respond in constructive and just ways to the complex intersectionalities of autism and gender, such as: differences in prevalence rates for autism among males and females; differences in the experiences of autistic women and men; factors—psychological, sociological, economic, political, etc.—that impact how people of different genders respond to their roles as caregivers of autistic people; and factors that shape how people of different genders respond differently to the call to be service providers for autistic people and approach their work differently.

Certificate Courses

AUST 500 *Autistic Voices* (3)

This course will help students to broaden and deepen their perspectives on the varied lives of autistic people. Through a combination of experiential learning and studying first-person accounts of life with autism, students will examine a diverse range of autistic lives and explore ways in which gender, culture and other factors impact life with autism.

AUST 510 *Autism and the Human Person* (3)

What can autism teach us about being human? And what can theories of human nature teach us about autism? In this course, we will build upon the exploration of autistic experiences undertaken in "*Autistic Voices*," and begin to investigate ways in which our understanding of autism can both enrich and be enriched by a broader understanding of the human person. Topics to be addressed might include: person first vs. identity first language; models of disability; neurodiversity, autistic identity and autistic culture; the history of autism; philosophical theories of human nature, society and culture; Catholic understandings of the human person, and/or Catholic social teaching. Prerequisite: AUST 500.

AUST 520 A Biopsychosocial Understanding of the Autism Spectrum (3)

There has been a tremendously successful movement for autism awareness; however, the public's knowledge of the autism spectrum has not paralleled the public awareness campaign or the tremendous scientific progress we have made in understanding the autism spectrum. Moreover, there has been a vast amount of misinformation and folk science theories that have been promoted in the media. This course is designed to examine our scientific knowledge of the autism spectrum from multiple levels of analysis, including (but not limited to) biological, psychological, cultural, and cross-cultural research. We will critically examine the etiology, development, and diagnosis of ASD. We will view the ASD diagnosis in the context of the individual, family, community, and culture.

SLP 524 Autism Spectrum Disorders (3)

Students are provided an introduction to characteristics and communication of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), including recommended practices/framework for assessment and facilitation of communication for individuals with ASD.