

AUTISM STUDIES, MASTER OF AUTISM STUDIES - AUST

Program Description

The Master of Autism Studies provides students with a unique opportunity to examine autism from scientific, therapeutic, educational, and humanistic perspectives. Students gain deep expertise in autism spectrum disorder by completing a curriculum in which every course focuses on autism. Students also develop the skills needed to become leaders in the interprofessional field of autism services by completing rigorously interdisciplinary coursework and by exploring a broad range of evidence-based approaches to autism intervention. In addition to providing unparalleled interdisciplinary expertise in autism, the Master of Autism Studies is distinctive in the way it incorporates the voices of people on the spectrum into the curriculum as well as in the way it engages with the Catholic intellectual tradition and the mission of Saint Mary's College.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this program.

Application Requirements

- All applicants must have a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, or the international equivalent. The most competitive candidates will have maintained at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA in undergraduate coursework, though experience with autism (such as being autistic, working in an autism-related field, or being a caregiver) will also be taken into account.
- Submission of a completed application form.
- Official transcripts from every college or university attended.
- GRE scores (optional).
- Two to three letters of recommendation from people familiar with the applicant's academic and/or professional abilities, focusing particularly on the potential for success in this program.
- A personal statement that addresses the applicant's reasons for pursuing an advanced degree in autism studies, personal and/or professional objectives for engagement with autism after completing the degree, and how Saint Mary's aligns with these personal and professional objectives.
- Either A) a video interview or B) a sample of academic or professional writing that shows the applicant's ability to communicate effectively.

Applications for the summer term open in September. Saint Mary's College uses the GradCAS application system. The applicant must complete the application form, submit the application fee for GradCAS (no additional fee is collected by Saint Mary's), and provide all supporting documents through the GradCAS application system. The application deadline is March 31.

Master of Autism Studies (36 hours)

Code	Title	Credits
AUST 500	Autistic Voices	3
AUST 510	Autism and the Human Person	3
AUST 520	A Biopsychosocial Understanding of the Autism Spectrum	3
AUST 530	Quantitative Methods in Autism Research	3

AUST 535	Autism Research Design and Methods	3
AUST 540	Approaches to Autism Intervention	3
AUST 550	Occupational Therapy and Autism	3
AUST 560	Autism and Communication	3
AUST 570	Autism and Education	3
AUST 580	Social Policies and Social Services for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum and Their Families	3
AUST 611	Autism and Ethics	3
AUST 700	Capstone Project	3
Total Credits		36

Completion of a capstone project is also required.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the Master of 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, 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; and practice/implement these techniques at a level commensurate with the student's professional and/or personal engagement with autism.
- Understand educational policies, pedagogical theories, and pedagogical practices relevant to ASD; make decisions about the appropriateness of individual pedagogical practices for individual persons with autism that take into account scientific evidence, levels of efficacy, educator's experience, ethical considerations, and the wishes of the student and/or caregivers; and practice/implement these techniques at a level commensurate with the student's professional and/or personal engagement with autism.
- Understand federal and state laws relevant to ASD (including the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, etc.), as well as international policy statements and pastoral statements that shape our responses to autism (e.g., the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the World Health Organization World Report on Disabilities, and the Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities).
- Understand social policies and be able to access (or help provide access to) social services relevant to persons with autism in areas

of life including education, therapies, healthcare, housing, and meaningful work.

- 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.
- Understand and act in a manner consistent with the inherent dignity of autistic persons as described in the Americans with Disabilities Act, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities, and the Autism Studies program Statement of Values.

Program Director

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Faculty

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Autism Studies 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 Humanity (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 the gateway course, and begin to investigate ways in which our understanding of autism can both enrich and be enriched by a broader understanding of what it means to be human. 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.

AUST 530 Quantitative Methods in Autism Research (3)

Many scientific and therapeutic theories relevant to autism come from research that draws conclusions from statistical evidence. Therefore, it is important that people who seek to use such theories be both good consumers and good producers of data analytic techniques. This course will survey a variety of descriptive and inferential methods commonly found in autism research and study designs. Students will learn the theoretical and computational aspects of the techniques, perform them with appropriate computer software, and interpret the implications of the results. Special attention will be given to how statistical evidence has been used in published research studies on autism. Prerequisite: AUST 520.

AUST 535 Autism Research Design and Methods (3)

This course will give students a broad overview of the research methods used to understand and support the developmental optimization of people with autism and their families. The course will emphasize the skills needed to critically evaluate research that provides the evidence base for applied work with people with autism. Methodologies to be discussed will include both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods within a variety of experimental, quasi-experimental and non-experimental designs. Prerequisite: AUST 520.

AUST 540 Approaches to Autism Intervention (3)

Since Leo Kanner's and Hans Asperger's first clinical descriptions of autism, there have been numerous proposed theories and approaches to intervention. The search for a "cure" for autism has led to numerous ideas on how to improve the circumstances of individuals with ASD and their families. These approaches have varied greatly in terms of their theoretical underpinnings, approach to treatment, level of family involvement, empirical support, and ethics. This course is designed to explore historical and modern intervention approaches to ASD. The course will contain in depth evaluations of theoretical underpinnings of treatment models and practical workshops devoted to common intervention techniques. In this course, we will work as a class toward developing biopsychosocial understanding of ASD treatment, a model which values biological, individual, family, community, and cultural factors affecting treatment. Prerequisite: AUST 520.

AUST 550 Occupational Therapy and Autism (3)

This course introduces students to resources occupational therapy can offer to individuals with autism spectrum disorder in the home, school, community and/or clinical environments. Topics to be discussed include: evaluation; occupational therapy interventions that address the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, sensory and other aspects of performance; and measurement of outcomes. Prerequisite: AUST 540.

AUST 560 Autism and Communication (3)

This course provides students with an introduction to the development of communicative competence including linguistic domains of form (phonology, morphology, and syntax), content (semantics), and use (pragmatics). Social and emotional development and its impact on determining what is meaningful and relevant to learn while acquiring language will be emphasized. The course is designed to examine development and impairment of speech, language, and communication in individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and will focus on differential diagnosis, assessment, and evidence-based interventions within a family-centered approach. Prerequisite: AUST 540.

AUST 570 Autism and Education (3)

This course is designed to introduce the student to education as an integral field in the interdisciplinary approach to assessment of and intervention for individuals with autism. The historical, philosophical, and legal aspects of providing instruction for students with autism will be examined. Evidence-based interventions will be studied with an emphasis on professional judgment about the appropriateness of interventions for individual students. The importance of collaborative planning, intervention, and assessment among the educator, student, family, administrators, and other professionals will be highlighted. Prerequisite: AUST 540.

AUST 580 Social Policies and Social Services for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum and Their Families (3)

This course is designed to provide an overview of the various ways in which professional social workers may serve as an advocate and case coordinator for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families in settings such as schools, health care and residential care facilities, social service agencies, and advocacy organizations. This course will provide an opportunity to gain a working knowledge of evidence-based interventions, treatments and services, and government laws and social policies; such knowledge is critical in making appropriate referrals or coordinating services for families. In addition to focusing on the individuals affected by autism, special attention will be paid to the needs of the family and society. Some of the special topics to be explored are: autistic children in foster care, international and crosscultural perspectives on autism, rural communities, and interdisciplinary teamwork to support families.

AUST 597 Independent Study (1-3)**AUST 600 Practicum (3)**

Field experience observing and, when appropriate, working in an autism-related community placement under the supervision of program faculty and/or on-site staff. By permission of the autism studies program director only. May be repeated for credit.

AUST 601 Research (3)

Participation in autism-related research under the supervision of program faculty and/or other qualified professionals. By permission of the autism studies program director only. May be repeated for credit.

AUST 611 Autism and Ethics (3)

Beginning from the anthropology developed in "Autism and Humanity," this course examines ethical theories, ethical practices, and ethical problems relevant to autism spectrum disorder. Topics to be explored might include: happiness, family, friendship, and work in the lives of autistic people; the moral dimensions of laws, social policies, international conventions, and Catholic social teaching relevant to autism; medical ethics, professional ethics, and ethical issues related to treatment of ASD. Prerequisite: AUST 510.

AUST 700 Capstone (3)

Supervised preparation for completing the capstone requirement. The nature of the preparation will vary according to the nature of the capstone undertaken.

Degree PATHS TO COMPLETION

Students will normally complete the Master of Autism Studies degree on either a one-year (15 month) track or a two-year track. Undergraduates from Saint Mary's and other approved institutions may also complete the Master of Autism Studies degree as part of the 4+1 Program in Autism Studies. And students interested in becoming speech language pathologists who specialize in working with people on the spectrum may choose to complete the Master of Autism Studies degree as part of the

dual degree program that combines the Master of Autism Studies and the Master of Science in Speech Language Pathology.

ONE YEAR TRACK

Students pursuing the Master of Autism Studies on the one-year track will take two courses during the first summer term, four courses during the fall semester, four courses during the spring semester, and two courses during the second summer term. The following chart shows the sequence of courses students on the one-year track will typically take to complete the degree.

Course	Title	Credits
First Year		
First Semester		
AUST 500	Autistic Voices	3
AUST 520	A Biopsychosocial Understanding of the Autism Spectrum	3
Credits		6
Second Semester		
AUST 510	Autism and Humanity	3
AUST 530	Quantitative Methods in Autism Research	3
AUST 535	Autism Research Design and Methods	3
AUST 540	Approaches to Autism Intervention	3
Credits		12
Third Semester		
AUST 550	Occupational Therapy and Autism	3
AUST 570	Autism and Education	3
AUST 580	Social Policies and Social Services for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum and Their Families	3
AUST 611	Autism and Ethics	3
Credits		12
Fourth Semester		
AUST 560	Autism and Communication	3
AUST 700	Capstone	3
Credits		6
Total Credits		36

TWO YEAR TRACK

Students pursuing the Master of Autism Studies on the two-year track will complete their degrees in either six or seven terms of study. Students will normally take one to two courses per term for six consecutive terms; depending on their schedules and the nature of their capstone projects, students on the two-year track may choose to complete their capstone course and project either in the sixth term (in which case, AUST 700 Capstone Project would be added as a third course in the second semester of the second year.) or in a seventh term of study (first semester of the third year). The following chart shows the sequence of courses students on the two-year track will typically take to complete the degree.

Course	Title	Credits
First Year		
First Semester		
AUST 500	Autistic Voices	3

AUST 520	A Biopsychosocial Understanding of the Autism Spectrum	3
Credits		6
Second Semester		
AUST 535	Autism Research Design and Methods	3
AUST 540	Approaches to Autism Intervention	3
Credits		6
Third Semester		
AUST 550	Occupational Therapy and Autism	3
AUST 580	Social Policies and Social Services for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum and Their Families	3
Credits		6
Second Year		
First Semester		
AUST 560	Autism and Communication	3
Credits		3
Second Semester		
AUST 510	Autism and Humanity	3
AUST 530	Quantitative Methods in Autism Research	3
Credits		6
Third Semester		
AUST 570	Autism and Education	3
AUST 611 or AUST 700	Autism and Ethics (taken either second year third semester or third year first semester) or Capstone	3
Credits		6
Third Year		
First Semester		
AUST 700	Capstone	3
Credits		3
Total Credits		36

graduate cohort they will be joining. For more information, see the 4+1 Program in Autism Studies section of the bulletin.

DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM IN AUTISM STUDIES AND SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

The Master of Autism Studies and Master of Science in Speech Language Pathology dual degree program provides students with an opportunity to gain expertise in autism and become licensed and certified speech language pathologists while enjoying a savings of cost and time in comparison with what would be required if they pursued these degrees separately. Because this dual degree program combines the Master of Autism Studies and the MS in Speech Language Pathology, there are additional application requirements. For more information, see the Dual Degree in Autism Studies and Speech Language Pathology section of the bulletin.

4+1 PROGRAM IN AUTISM STUDIES

The 4+1 Program in Autism Studies allows students to complete a bachelor's degree and the Master of Autism Studies in five years with a savings of money and time compared with what would be required if they completed both degrees separately. Undergraduates from Saint Mary's and other approved institutions may apply to the 4+1 Program in Autism Studies during their junior year. If admitted into the program, students will take two autism studies courses during the summer between their junior and senior years (AUST 500 Autistic Voices and AUST 520 A Biopsychosocial Understanding of the Autism Spectrum, and will take one or two additional autism studies courses during the fall and spring semesters of their senior year (normally, AUST 510 Autism and Humanity and/or AUST 611 Autism and Ethics) Students will be charged the rate of undergraduate summer tuition for the courses taken in the summer between their junior and senior years. Since courses taken in the fall and spring of the senior year will be counted as part of the student's academic year coursework, students will not be charged additional tuition for these courses (as long as they do not exceed 18 credit hours per semester). After their baccalaureate graduation, students will complete all remaining Master of Autism Studies coursework in the fall, spring and summer of their fifth year. For courses taken in the fifth year, 4+1 students will be charged the per credit hour tuition rate equivalent to the