

# 4+1 PROGRAM IN AUTISM STUDIES

## Program Description

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. Depending on their undergraduate major and senior comprehensive project, students in this 4+1 program might also have opportunities to coordinate their comp and their master's capstone project, providing a richer and more advanced research experience than would otherwise be possible.

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. Almost any undergraduate major or bachelor's degree can be combined with the Master of Autism Studies in the 4+1 Program in Autism Studies. For more information on the Master of Autism Studies, see the Master of Autism Studies section of the bulletin.

## Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this program.

## Application Requirements

- Application form.
- Personal statement.
- Writing sample or video interview response.
- The most competitive candidates will have maintained at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA in undergraduate coursework, though experience with autism (e.g., being autistic, working in an autism-related field, or being a caregiver) will also be taken into account.

Applications for the summer term open September 1. Applicants are responsible for completing the application form and providing all supporting materials (see the Saint Mary's College graduate programs website for more details). The application deadline is March 31.

For Master of Autism Studies program requirements and course descriptions, see the Master of Autism Studies section of the bulletin.

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 (AUST 500 Gateway: Autistic Experiences and AUST 520 A Biopsychosocial Understanding of the Autism Spectrum) during the summer between their junior and senior years (summer 3), and will take one or two additional autism studies courses (normally, AUST 510 Autism and Humanity and/or AUST 611 Autism and Ethics) during the fall and

spring semesters of their senior year (year 4). 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 graduate cohort they will be joining.

## Programs

- 4+1 Program in Autism Studies (<https://catalog.saintmarys.edu/undergraduate/programs/autism-studies/4-1-program-autism-studies/>)

## Department Chair

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## Faculty/Professional Specialists

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## 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, 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; 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, No Child Left Behind, 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.

## Autism Studies Courses

### **AUST 500 Gateway: Autistic Experiences (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.