

Supplemental Material S1. Description of START program.

The "Summer Transition Program for Autism to Promote Retention and Training"(START) is a full-year transition program, designed to create identity-focused community, promote academic achievement, and provide authentic, respectful social experiences for Autistic students. START is a multifaceted program, designed to meet the individual student's needs as they navigate the transition from secondary to college-level accessibility.

Here we describe the main components of START in detail.

Application Process: The START model is designed for 10-12, first year (freshman) or transfer (still must be considered first year at the designated university) students. Applicants must possess their own desire to fully engage with and participate in the learning and social activities and opportunities provided through the START program to be considered for placement.

- Students and families first attend a formal "Prospective Student Meeting" hosted by START administration through the university's office of Diversity, Access and Inclusion (DAI).
- Prospective students then complete the (Intake Form/Documentation) of the DAI eligibility process. The Intake Form meets the self-disclosure requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing space for students to acknowledge their disability and any other intersecting identity they consider relevant. It allows students to share comprehensive information about their academic history, experiences with or without accommodations, ongoing treatments, goals, challenges, strengths, requested accommodations, and authorized contacts. If students meet eligibility requirements, then students are invited to complete a START virtual information session.
- Students then must fill out and submit the START application.
- Finally, students participate in an informal, structured virtual interview between the student, and administration. The START virtual interview provides a structured conversation between the student and the program leader to understand the student holistically, including their interests, goals, experiences, feelings about their autistic identity, comprehension of the START program, and genuine desire to participate. This interview may reveal if students are being externally pressured to join (by family members) which may be discussed. The START program fully respects the student's *autonomous decision* to participate, recognizing its importance for their success.
- Completing the application process does not guarantee placement. DAI may determine that the student may better benefit from other resources available to students outside of START, ranging from mentorship, to counseling, tutoring, course offerings, and more.
- Placement determination, and notifications will occur on a rolling basis.

I. **Summer Orientation:** The Summer programming begins with a week-long dedicated orientation to the campus.

- Beginning with move-in day Monday, where students can move in early to their dorms or campus living. Parents are welcome to stay with students this first day.

- Tuesday is a welcome brunch for families and students where they are provided with an overview of START including Fall and Spring programming. START students are introduced to key faculty members who contribute to START programming.
- Wednesday through Friday are a series of workshops provided by campus leadership, faculty, and expert staff. Workshops are geared to address topics particularly important for first year university students including: residential life, facilities, counseling center, academic planning and social communication. Students also engage in meals collectively, campus tours, and social experiences (game nights).
- Leading us into Labor Day weekend - students are encouraged to stay on campus if residing here. START staff are available for consultation and support if needed. Students are encouraged to explore the campus in groups and individually.

II. **Fall Course Programming:** START students enroll in "USC 160-Academic Skills/Consultations" which is a 1-credit 6-week virtual course designed to address executive academic skills necessary for school success.

- This course is designed to support students to improve time management, study more effectively, or address common challenges like procrastination, motivation, or test anxiety.
- START students take this course together and it is taught by a START administrative team member.

III. **Spring Course Programming:** START students enroll in "CMD 492 Social Communication in Higher Education" which is a 1-2-credit 13-week hybrid course designed to address social communication skills necessary for school success.

- This course is designed to support the social communication aspects of higher education.
- The course is co-facilitated by the course instructor (a START administrative team member) and 10 graduate students in Speech Language and Hearing Sciences (SLHS).
- The course includes an in person 60- minute meeting time each week as well as 10, 30-minute virtual sessions in which each START student is paired with an SLHS student for an individual session.

IV. **Summer Internship Experience:** At the end of their first year college experience, START students are eligible to participate in a *paid internship* in an area of interest, or as a scaffolded, first-time job experience.

- Internship hours may vary, depending on the site/role/student's needs.
- Internships typically occur over the course of the summer, though scheduling is flexible.
- Internship preparation, site identification is provided by the state's Office of Rehabilitative Services (ORS) who are partners with the START program.

