

Creative College Transition Programs for Underrepresented Populations

AHEAD 2025

Foundations

Successful Transitions

- Awareness of Disability
- Motivation to Attend and Succeed at Postsecondary Education
- Coordinated Student Centered Transition Plan
- Social Support

Successful Transitions

Environmental and Contextual Barriers

- Disability Related
 - Confidentiality in disclosing
 - Symptomatology
 - Internalized Stigma
- External/Systemic
 - Financial
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Access/Awareness of Support Services

Today's Presentations

Navigate: A Transition-focused Leadership Program for Students of Color

- **University of Maryland Eastern Shore**

College and Me (CAM): Serving Neurodiverse Students Through Campus Collaborations

- **Hardin-Simmons University**

Huskies BELONG: A STEM-focused Transition Program and College Freshmen Experience

- **Northern Illinois University**

n a v i g a  e

A TRANSITION-FOCUSED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR
STUDENTS OF COLOR

UMES: Who Are We?

Our Mission:

As a public 1890 land-grant Historically Black University that embraces diversity, UMES is committed to serving first-generation and underserved students and providing educational, research, and community engagement opportunities to transform the lives of its students who will impact the state, region, and the world.

Navigate: The Basics

- A transition-focused leadership program for students of color with disabilities
- 6-7 weeks in length; 45 minute program meetings
- Free, voluntary, not for credit
- Progressive program

General Outline



a transition-focused leadership program for students of color in higher education

Tuesdays @ 11

2/4 ➔ 2/11 ➔ 2/18 ➔ 2/25 ➔ 3/4 ➔ 3/25 ➔ 4/1

OIE Office

Free Pizza every week!

WEEK 1: PRE-FLIGHT ANNOUNCEMENTS

intro, office info, resources, pre-assessment

WEEK 2: CLAIMING YOUR SEAT

communication, conflict, and faculty interactions

WEEK 3: FLIGHT PLAN

time management, academic skills

WEEK 4: SAFETY MASK

stress management, q & a

WEEK 5: BAGGAGE CLAIM

identifying strengths, barriers, and needs

WEEK 6: CONNECTION FLIGHT

end of year info, closing remarks, certificates, post-assessment



Pre-Flight Announcements

Week 1: Preparation for the next 5-6 Weeks

- Program overview
- Pre-Assessment
- Student Intros
- SAS Office Overview (Staff, Procedures)
- Differences between high school and college
- Campus Partners and Resources

Navigate Pre Assessment



Navigate Post Assessment



Pre and Post Assessment



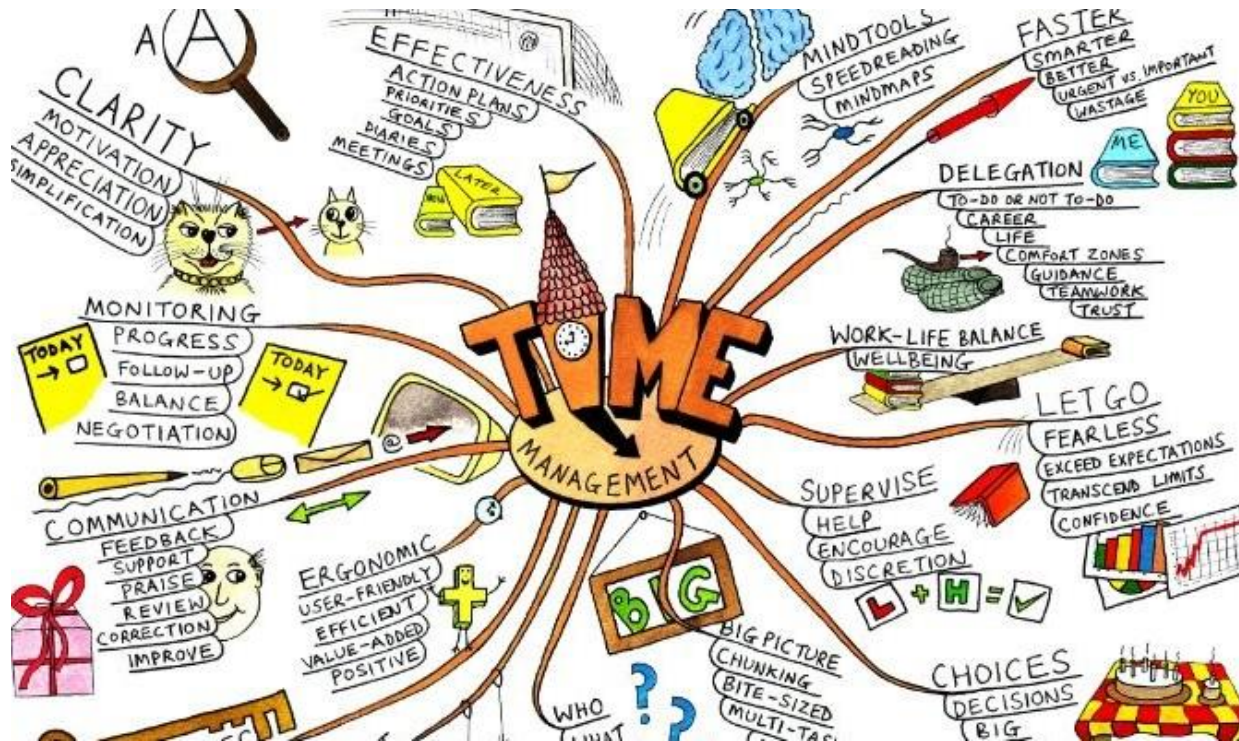
Claiming Your Seat

Week 2: What Communication looks like on a day-to-day basis with peers, instructors and staff

- Conflict
 - Managing conflict and confrontation
 - Role plays
 - Real life experiences and examples
- Identifying areas of growth related to communication

Flight Plan

Week 3: Ways that students can decrease academic stressors



- Time Management
 - Group discussion about strategies that work
 - Weekly Planner packet
- Academic Skills
 - Student techniques
 - Notetaking skills

Daily Planner

Date: _____

Top 3 Priorities for Today:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Schedule & Time Blocking:
(Use Pomodoro Technique or set timers to stay focused)

Time	Task/Activity	Done (✓)
8:00 - 9:00	_____	_____
9:00 - 10:00	_____	_____
10:00 - 11:00	_____	_____
11:00 - 12:00	_____	_____
12:00 - 1:00	_____	_____
1:00 - 2:00	_____	_____
2:00 - 3:00	_____	_____
3:00 - 4:00	_____	_____
4:00 - 5:00	_____	_____
5:00 - 6:00	_____	_____

Breaks & Self-Care Reminders:

- ☐ Move your body (stretch, walk, exercise)
- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Eat a nutritious meal/snack
- ☐ Take deep breaths or meditate
- ☐ Reward yourself for completing tasks

Weekly Overview

Week of: _____

Goals for the Week:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Prioritizing Tasks

Safety Mask

Week 4: Strategies for Stress Management; Q & A

- Review planners
 - What's working and what's not working
- Self-care plan
 - One week challenge
- Question and Answer
 - Topics that students may want more information about
 - Group discussions or facilitator guided, as group dynamics dictate

STRENGTHS MAPPING

WHAT MAKES ME HAPPY?	WHAT DO I DO DIFFERENTLY?
WHAT ARE MY FAVORITE QUALITIES?	WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO I HAVE ?

Baggage Claim

Week 5: Self-Reflection – Barrier and Strength Identification

- Review Self-Care Plan
- Info from Self-Care Plan and the Planner
 - What is working and what is not working?
- Strength and Barrier Mapping
 - Leaning into strengths – how can we capitalize?

Connection Flight

Week 6: Finally, we land...

- Celebration of our Navigators
- Post Assessment
- Open dialogue/ reflection of the program



Successful Transitions

AWARENESS OF DISABILITY

- Symptoms, Barriers, and Strengths
- Identification of services and needs

MOTIVATION TO ATTEND

- Familial and societal pressures
- Academics=Stress!

Successful Transitions

COORDINATED TRANSITION PLANNING

- Between high school student services and college of choice
- Between medical providers and college of choice

SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Engagement with other members of the disability community
- Engaging more appropriately with others to make connections

Intersecting Marginalized Identities

- Exploration of Identity
- Realizations of Identity through experiences
- Embracing Identity = Pride of Self

Pre and Post Data

- Grade Comparison
 - Fall 2024 Participants
 - +.41 average GPA improvement from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025 semester
 - Spring 2025 Participants
 - +.96 average GPA improvement from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025 semester
- 100% of Participants: **Very Satisfied** with their Navigate experience
- 75% of Participants: Navigate **Positively Impacted** their UMES experience
- Participants Reported:
 - **Increased Confidence** in identifying personal strengths, barriers and needs
 - **Increased Confidence** in managing stress and seeking help

Student Feedback

I've strengthened my ability on how to critically think about how I organize my schoolwork and other specific stuff in my life so that it would be productive towards the quality of my life.

It helped to strengthen my time management, communication skills, self-independence and overall having me be a more competent person.

Navigate helped me by starting to communicate better with my professors.

My favorite part of the curriculum is discussing what communication method works in a specific types of scenarios so that I have a stronger chance in avoiding unnecessary conflict in the future.

To get my work done as soon as it is posted on Canvas and to review notes each day for 30 minutes.

Future Planning

- Part II?
 - Workplace/Internship Accommodations
 - Online Resources – O*Net; JAN
 - Interpersonal Relationships
 - Financial Literacy
- Peer Mentors – Navigators?
 - Paid student workers as mentors
- Orientation Program?

References

- Dong, S., Harding, J., Sakowitz, L., Pokorny, A., Shadden, P. (2024). Transition Experiences for Freshmen with Disabilities in a Public Research University in the United States. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 37 (1), 61-72.
- Francis, G. L., Duke, J. M., Fujita, M., & Sutton, J. C. (2019). "It's a constant fight": Experiences of college students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 32(3), 247–262.
- Hong, B. S. (2015). Qualitative analysis of the barriers college students with disabilities experience in higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(3), 209–226. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2015.0032>
- Parsons, J. M., McColl, M.A., Martin, A., Reynard, D. (2023). Transition and Accommodation Experiences of Students with Disabilities: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 36 (2), 179-192.
- Squires, M. E., Burnell, B. A., McCarty, C., & Schnackenberg, H. (2018). Emerging adults: Perspectives of college students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 31(2), 121–134.
- Isadore, K.M., Galván, A., O'Shea, A. (2024). Exploring the Lived Experiences of Racially/Ethnically Minoritized College Students with Psychiatric Disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 37(4), 289-305.

College and Me (CAM)

**SERVING NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS THROUGH CAMPUS
COLLABORATIONS**

About HSU

Abilene, Texas

1,300 Undergrad Students

Student/Faculty ratio: 15:1

Private faith-based university.

More than 50 bachelor and minor programs.

10 Graduate degrees.



College and Me: CAM

- **WHO?**

Office of Disability Services/Speech Language Pathology Graduate Program

- **WHAT?**

Assist neurodivergent undergrad students to build connections/relationships inside and outside the classroom through self-advocacy and self-redirection.

- **WHEN?**

Students meet once a week with SLP grad students for approximately one hour.

- **WHERE?**

The SLP program has provided a space that allows students to feel comfortable and safe to share.

- **Why?**

Neurodivergent campus population growing.
Student engagement lacking.

- **Purpose.**

1. Build community between departments.
2. Cultivate self-advocacy and self-determination skills.

- **Goals.**

1. Assist students in building connections/relationships inside and outside of class.
2. Provide opportunities to integrate skills discussed during group sessions.
3. Increase retention of neurodivergent students.



Funding:

- Academic Foundation Grant
- Paid: Community activities, Snacks, and other campus activities.
- Paid: SLP grad students a small wage.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

Self-advocacy

- Recognizing strengths and weaknesses (Santhanam & Bellon-Harn, 2022)
- Communicating specific wants, needs, strengths, and weaknesses (Santhanam & Bellon-Harn, 2022)



Pragmatic Language

- Pragmatics is the way we use language during social interactions (Shipley & McAfee, 2025).



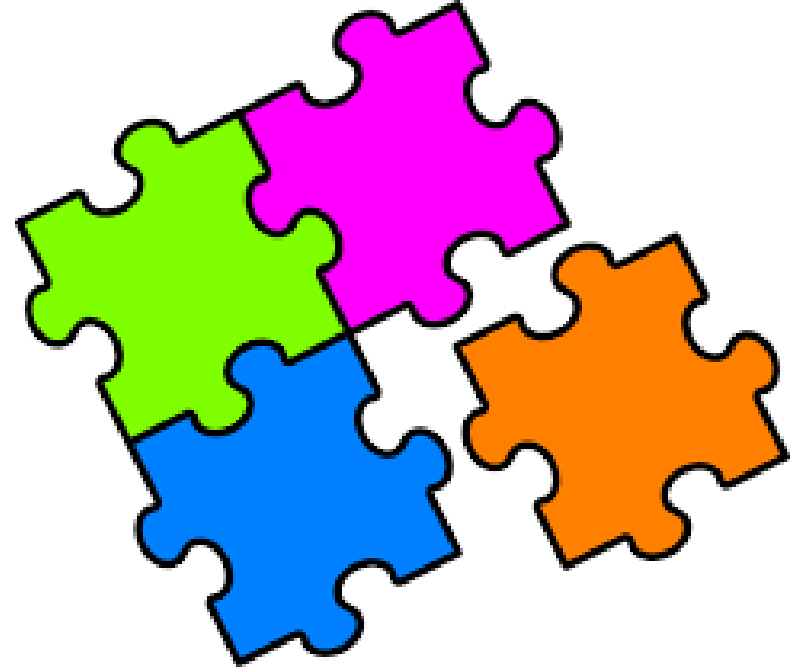
Initiating conversations

- Building social connections
 - Small talk, asking a question, giving a sincere compliment, and making a comment



Perspective Taking

- Theory of mind
 - Communication skill used to understand our own and other's thoughts, opinions, and feelings (Westby & Robinson, 2014)



Student Survey Results

What part of the program has been most helpful?

- Self-advocacy.
- Social connections.
- Creative or relaxing activities.

In what areas did you see growth in yourself?

- All students reported growth in time-management, independent living skills, and self-advocacy.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](#)

Student Survey Results, Cont.

Positive take-aways:

"CAM helped me achieve new perspectives and better understandings of myself and of what to do for myself."

"It's an excellent program to meet new people and learn important life skills. I would recommend this place to people struggling with everyday things like time management, making friends, or standing up for yourself and what you believe in."

CAM Future Plans

- Increase participation.
- Continue to work with 1st year SLP Grad students.
- Increase campus and community activities.
- Continue to develop new instructional modules.
- Build on the past year's success.

.....

Join Us for

COLLEGE AND ME

Caldwell Hall
Wednesdays | Room # 323 | 3:00 PM

WE WILL HAVE WEEKLY CONVERSATION GROUPS TO PROMOTE SELF-ADVOCACY AND SELF-DETERMINATION FOR NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS. WE ALSO AIM TO PROMOTE SOCIAL CONNECTION IN THE CLASSROOM AND WITHIN THE COMMUNITY!

References

- Santhanam, S. priya, & Bellon-Harn, M. L. (2022). Speech-language pathologist's role in understanding and promoting self-advocacy in autistic adults. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 31(2), 649–663. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_ajslp-21-00223
- ShIPLEY, K. G., & McAfee, J. G. (2025). *Assessment in speech-language pathology: A resource manual* (7th ed.). Plural Publishing, Inc.
- Westby, C., & Robinson, L. (2014). A developmental perspective for promoting theory of mind. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 34(4), 362–382. <https://doi.org/10.1097/tld.0000000000000035>