The Learning Academy Program

Learning Academy students receive a combination of individualized and group instruction, hands on experiential activities and interactive peer mentoring.

**Topics include:**

- **Understanding disability** and how it individually affects a person’s learning
  - Becoming familiar with accommodations and supports that assist in the workplace
  - Developing time and stress management
  - Building organizational skills
- Understanding and practicing communication skills in all aspects of career and community interactions
- Identifying conflict and appropriate ways to manage and resolve it
- Understanding why people work and the value of work
- Self-assessment activities to determine interests, aptitudes and abilities
- Finding out how values, interests, aptitudes, abilities and personalities affect career
- Understanding career clusters and preferences within a cluster
- Exploring information about careers and conducting extensive research on selected career
- Learning what employers seek in employees and identifying and enhancing those skills
- Understanding what is involved in disclosure of disability
- Completing an internship in the area of preferred career with supervision and mentor support
- Developing a strategy for a job search, matching skills with potential employment opportunities
- Creating a resume, cover letter and other written materials necessary for implementing the search
- Implementing a career search using traditional and electronic methods
- Developing interviewing skills
- Researching and understanding benefits, paycheck deductions and options

*“Each person has his own level of improving. I have observed a slow, but strong improvement in my student.”*  
Learning Academy Mentor

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The Learning Academy at the University of South Florida is a 30 week program designed to provide a structured employment-focused curriculum for individuals diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, between the ages of 18-25 after they have graduated from high school.

The Learning Academy provides services, supports and experiential opportunities that will enable participants to develop and achieve employment goals and enhance independence. Employability skills addressed are self-knowledge, organization, time management, goal setting and attainment, conflict resolution and success on the job. Participants also engage in multiple career assessment activities to identify their strengths, skills, talents, interests and learn how they translate to work. Preparation for job attainment includes interviewing skills, resume development and finding employment.

Real life experiences and expectations through internships and peer mentoring complement the class work to provide generalization of skills and support personalized goals.

**Outcomes for participants include:**

- A clearly defined employment plan with follow up activities to measure achievement of identified goals
- Specific knowledge of one’s strengths, abilities and preferences related to employment
- Strategies to set and achieve employment goals
- Awareness of and experience with customized techniques to enhance employment success
- Career research and exploration and job seeking skills

*“My son has shown a remarkable increase in socialization and communication skills. He is also developing independence faster than mom can keep up with. It’s great!”* — Learning Academy Parent
Student Participation Requirements:
• Attend all scheduled classes
• Complete assignments and projects
• Participate in all group activities
• Complete required mentoring time
• Complete required internship hours

Eligibility Requirements:
• Completed high school and is between age 18-25
• Has a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder
• Has transportation to and from USF campus in Tampa
• Has a functional communication system
• Is independent in personal self-care
• Has a clear desire to work or attend college and can commit to a 30-week program
• Has a proven ability to participate appropriately in classroom and/or work settings demonstrating conduct that exemplifies independence, motivation and stability

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“The Learning Academy helped me identify my career goals by exploring my talents and skills.”
- Learning Academy Student.