

PRAUD

Silvia Velasquez Casado
silvia@praud.co
www.praud.co

Abstract: A job coaching platform to close the 85% unemployment gap for autistic college graduates

I. Introduction

85%. That is the proportion of unemployed autistic college graduates. These are people who have a college degree but struggle to find jobs due to the stigma associated with their abilities. On the other side, there are ~100 college autism support programs in the United States where participants achieve between 75-92% employment rates. Wouldn't it be great to scale these programs across the US? Wouldn't it be incredibly beneficial for our economy to help these college graduates achieve financial independence? This is what PRAUD aims to do

PRAUD is for autistic college juniors and seniors who are struggling to find a job because of the unconscious bias that exists in our hiring ecosystem. Managers often have limited recruiting resources and are forced to make quick hiring decisions that miss the benefits of a diverse workforce. We aim to decrease the 85% unemployment gap amongst autistic college graduates by providing them with access to job coaching. Our belief is that autistic college students with appropriate counseling and accountability are much more likely to secure job opportunities and become financially independent.

PRAUD takes the employment components of college autism support programs that have a high employment rate and scales them across the United States. Our goal is that this job coaching support can reach every one of the ~16,000 autistic students who are entering college every year, and not just the ~160 who are enrolled in universities that provide autism college support programs.

II. Rationale

The number one need for autistic individuals is to have the dignity to work. With “The Great Talent Migration”¹ that the workforce is currently experiencing, we can no longer afford the unemployment or underemployment of autistic individuals. Unemployment of autistic college graduates is particularly concerning, given that at times, the minimum standard required for jobs in the corporate world is just a college degree. With approximately 1.6 million autistic college graduates in the United States, out of which only 300,000 are employed, there are around 1.3 million autistic college graduates who could technically be claiming unemployment benefits. An individual’s average unemployment claim ranges from \$4,200 to \$12,000,² which would position autistic unemployment costs between \$5.46Bn and \$15.6Bn.

Another interesting finding is that over 50% of individuals would not feel comfortable hiring someone on the spectrum, and 60% of individuals in the workforce do not know much about diversity. These findings help us realize that there is still a lot of educational work that needs to be done in corporations to normalize autism employment, and for employers to recognize the value that this population brings to the table.

III. Curriculum Methodology

The success of college autism support programs can be attributed to many factors. Beginning with the opportunity to get to know the skills and interests of each program participant, which provides enough background to find an appropriate job that meets the criteria for success. We have seen successful programs focusing on different elements, including social engagement, independence, self-advocacy, and executive functioning. There is also a social component to these programs, where students are assigned a peer buddy, or someone who helps them adjust to the environment and integrate into college life. And

finally, there is a process by which each employer is trained on best practices for the success of their student, and each student is monitored throughout their internship experience for additional support.

We have chosen our job coaches based on their occupational therapy background and expertise in working with autistic individuals. We believe this background is paramount to the success of the interactions throughout the PRAUD curriculum. In addition, we have decided to focus our program not with a lens of behavioral therapy, but rather with the focus on the employment skills that are necessary for success. Such skills include vocational exercises to determine the appropriate industry/role, a powerful resume, an effective branding/online presence, experience with informational interviewing, an impactful network, and a strategic framework for approaching the job search process. Our goal is to set a path for employment success for our students based on the key pillars mentioned above, which we believe help set a strong foundation for the job search process.

Ultimately, our curriculum focuses on employability skills and is adapted to autistic college students. The content we will deliver is beneficial not just to autistic students, but to any student who has career aspirations and needs to go through the job searching process. This is in line with the overall vision of disability inclusion, which states that whenever you make a process more accessible for someone with a disability, you ultimately make it more accessible for the entire population.

IV. Results assessment

PRAUD is a data driven organization that distinguishes itself by measuring the progress towards successful employment through a set of key performance indicators (KPIs). Some of these KPIs include: number of students who find a job at the conclusion of the program, attendance to individual coaching sessions, number of informational interviews conducted, completion of individual objectives through scorecard. These indicators serve as our competitive advantage, as we believe that what gets measured gets done. As part of our curriculum, we have developed feedback mechanisms to understand the progress

of each of our program participants after each session. These feedback loops and our KPIs will help establish a strong comparison between our program participants and the status quo and determine the key levers that help put our participants over the edge.

Our 2022 Fall Pilot Program will serve as our minimum valuable product to prove the curriculum methodology. Once we understand the key factors of success, we will continue our plans for scaling our efforts through leveraging technology and the job coaching gig economy.

V. References

¹Laker, Benjamin; “*The Great Resignation and Great Talent Migration*,” Forbes; Jan 26, 2022;

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/benjaminlaker/2022/01/26/the-great-resignation-and-great-talent-migration/?sh=218de1c43fef>

²Oswald, Jeff; “*What Does an Unemployment Claim Cost an Employer*,” Unemployment Insurance Services;

<https://unemployment-services.com/unemployment-claim-cost-employer/#:~:text=The%20real%20cost%20of%20unemployment,to%20%2412%2C000%20or%20even%20more.>