



The Achilles Project

Strength-Based Instruction with
Academic and Psychosocial Support

**AN INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
FOR TWICE EXCEPTIONAL (2e) STUDENTS
AT NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE (NCC)**

ABSTRACT

(1) THE 2E STUDENT: Who is this program for? The Achilles Project is a postsecondary educational program for 2e students, those individuals who show areas of strength and challenge, and profound discrepancies between the two. They demonstrate high ability and may have a medical diagnosis/special education classification, be an underachiever and/or have an atypical learning style. Many of these students remain unidentified because their strengths and weaknesses mask each other.

(2) SPONSORS AND STAFF: Who created this program? Who is staffing it? The 2e Initiative Task Force, which represents a college-wide, collaborative effort among administrators and faculty, created *The Achilles Project*. Staff includes: (a) instructors from three academic divisions: Arts & Humanities, Sciences & Math, and Social & Behavioral Sciences; (b) counselors, tutors, and advisors providing academic, personal, and career support services from the Reading/Basic Education Program and Student Personnel Services Department; and (c) consultants in instructional and adaptive technology, and in clinical and experimental Reading.

(3) THE NEED FOR THIS PROGRAM: Why did we start it? This program meets three needs, those of the institution, society, and the student: (1) It meets the unique educational needs of the increasing postsecondary population of 2e students, particularly those on the autistic spectrum; (2) by developing these students' areas of strength while providing needed supports, it enables them to make valuable, even extraordinary, contributions; and (3) by using differentiated instruction (an approach addressing individual differences in learning, processing, and communicating about information), it helps these students become successful learners.

(4) GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES: What do we hope this program will accomplish? The overarching goals are student success in independent functioning, academia/employment, and relationships. Its immediate goals include: development of students' areas of strength; improved academic performance, organizational and study skills, social competence and communication skills; more positive classroom attitudes/behaviors; enhanced self-development; and an increased sense of campus affiliation.

(5) DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM : What is the program? The Achilles Project uses a holistic educational approach, addressing students' academic and social-emotional needs, and their areas of strength and weakness. It uses a block program (two courses in a high-interest subject, a third in the weakness area, a fourth in study skills, and a fifth that meets distribution requirements with opportunities for mentorship, independent study, and career-related internship). Courses 1 and 3 are taught using differentiated instruction, an individualized instructional method, in classes instructionally enhanced for students enrolled with different needs. Accommodations, tutoring, and teaming are also provided as supports. Social skills and support groups, and faculty and peer mentoring, are also offered.

(6) STUDENT IDENTIFICATION: How do we identify students for “The Achilles Project”? A body of evidence showing students' areas of strength and deficit, as well as their discrepancies with respect to potential vs. performance, strength vs. weakness, and intellectual vs. emotional domains, provides the basis for identifying participants. Objective measures may include: awards; special ed classification; DSM-IV diagnosis; IQ vs. achievement test scores; reading vs. English vs. math Accuplacer scores; significant discrepancies between IQ subtest scores, and between IQ subtest scores reflecting integrative vs. dispersive types of intelligence; math vs. verbal SAT scores; consistently high vs. consistently low course grades in particular subjects; and honors courses. Subjective measures may include: 2e behavior profile, portfolios, interview, and teacher reports.

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Dear Student,

Enclosed please find information about Nassau Community College's *Achilles Project*, our innovative program for high-ability students with pronounced discrepancies between their areas of strength and weakness (*twice- exceptional* or *2E* students). Please note that the particular areas of strength/ weakness vary among *2^E* students ~ Examples include:

- Strength: A particular academic subject, performing arts, visual arts, computers, athletics
- Weakness: A particular academic subject, neurobiological disorder, poor executive or social functioning, specific LD

Achilles was designed to develop the potential, increase the motivation, improve the self-esteem and academic performance, and define career direction for students who have underachieved in traditional educational programming:

Academic component:

- **Dually differentiated curriculum:** Teaches to students' strengths while supports their weaknesses
 - Two strength-related courses, one in a high-interest subject; another in their preferred learning style
 - Weakness areas addressed through courses in their area of challenge and study/organizational skills with tutoring, accommodations, and counseling
- **Differentiated instruction:** Student readiness levels, interest, and learning style shape instructor content delivery, student processing of material, and format in which students demonstrate mastery.

Psychosocial component:

- Academic/personal **counseling/advisement** and a **support group/social skills** program with peer mentoring. Addresses issues in independent functioning, particularly self-advocacy, and stress management
- **Faculty teaming:** Classroom instructors and advisors/counselors and tutors troubleshoot regarding students' issues.
- **Faculty mentoring** through independent instruction or internship modality
- **Faculty trained** in characteristics/educational needs of the *2^E* student and in differentiated instruction

Based on *Achilles'* positive results during its inaugural semester, we're confident that we're effectively serving these students. Many who previously were unsuccessful at school have succeeded; one with a history of "Withdrawal" grades who earned A's in this program, commented, "I don't really want to transfer from NCC. I feel like I belong to a group, I like the support, like attention from my teachers." She ultimately did graduate with a 4.0 and transfer to an excellent four-year college, NY University, where she continued to earn a 4.0 and make Dean's List.

Many *2E* students are unidentified, due to their abilities and disabilities masking each other. If you think that you might be this type of student and want to learn more about our program, please contact me. I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Sincerely,

Dr. Valerie Lagakis, Project Coordinator

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If you would like to participate in this program, please contact:

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THE ACHILLES PROJECT

Strength-Based Instruction with Academic & Psychosocial Support

AN INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR TWICE EXCEPTIONAL (2E) STUDENTS

Note. Students who are required to take 2 or more remedial courses are ineligible for this program.

Who are 2E Students?

2E students show an area of strength, a deficit area, and significant discrepancies between those areas, between their potential and performance, and/or between their intellectual and emotional domains. There are many types of 2E students.

- Some show a discrepancy between different academic areas, for example, excellent performance in English/history vs. poor performance in math/science.
- Some are talented in academics, or the visual or performing arts, or creative writing or athletics.
- Some have had DSM-IV diagnoses/special education classifications, ex. LD, OHI, Asperger's Syndrome/high-functioning autism, ADD, AD/HD, Tourette's Syndrome, OCD, bipolar disorder, depression.

2E students underachieve due to their potential vs. performance discrepancy and/or emotional factors, and may have an atypical learning style (ex. learn best by visual processing or hands-on learning, rather than lecture).

What is the Educational Program?

Uses Holistic Approach

- *Meets academic & social-emotional needs*
- *Teaches to student strengths while supports areas of weakness*

Academic Component

* *Individualized curriculum*

* *Strength-based instruction*

- High-interest subject & preferred learning style
- Differentiated instruction
- Faculty mentoring (research projects, internships)

Social-Emotional Component

* *Counseling that addresses 2e*

students' unique needs, career issues

* *Social Skills workshops*

* *Peer mentoring*

* *Support group*

- Supports for areas of weakness

- *Tutoring*

- Organizational & study skills

- Faculty teaming

- *Classes instructionally enhanced for students with different needs*

Sample Student Program

- Science Honors (strength-area)
- Art (if visual-spatial learning style)
- Math supplemented by individualized tutoring (area of challenge)
- "The College Experience" with study skills
- English (free choice)

THE ACHILLES PROJECT: ADMISSIONS
1. CRITERIA FOR ADMISSIONS

Body of evidence drawn from the following through a structured interview and review of records (high school transcripts with grades and SATs/ACTs, evaluations with IQ subtest scores, IEPs, NCC Accuplacer scores)

- 1. Regents diploma**
- 2. Maximum of one remedial NCC course** (based on NCC Accuplacer scores: ENG, RDG, MAT)
- 3. Above-average intelligence**
- 4. Strength area**
 - Baum's structured interview showing above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment
 - Performances, exhibitions, and/or portfolios showing creativity
 - Recognition (letters, awards)
 - Transcript: An A average and Honors/AP courses a in particular subject
- 5. Weakness area**
 - Evaluations showing processing deficit or DSM-IV diagnosis or special education classification
 - Transcript: Consistent record of D/F grades in a particular subject
- 6. Pronounced discrepancy between strength and weakness areas**
 - Accuplacer, SAT, ACT: Significant discrepancies between areas
 - Achievement Scores: If significant discrepancy between IQ and lowest achievement score
 - IQ Scores
 - i. Rocky Mountain pattern: If higher scales scores are 13+ with at least one of 15+; lower are less by at least 4 scaled score points
 - ii. If integrative intelligence subtests (spatial manipulation, pattern sequencing, abstract conceptualization) are at least 4 scaled points apart from dispersive intelligence subtests (conventional knowledge, detailed memory, quick detailed processing, meaningless sequencing)
 - Neumann's checklist of typical 2^E characteristics
 - Transcripts
 - i. HS: If grades in 1+ subjects > A, and grades in 1+ subjects < C
 - ii. College-level tests vs. transcripts: If Accuplacer is in high range vs. transcript grades are low (<C, 4+ W or I)
- 7. Students may also be required to meet additional criteria determined by the Coordinator of the Achilles Project.**

2. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

. Apply to The Achilles Project

The process begins approximately a year ahead of time.

While student is in high school (October/November of prior year), documentation must be sent (by email or the post office) to Dr. Valerie Lagakis

1. Sign *Release of Information* form below/return to Dr. Valerie Lagakis (NCC, The Achilles Project [M 200], One Education Drive, Garden City, NY 11530) with academic **records** (including HS transcript and SAT/ACT scores) and most recent psychological evaluation, including IQ testing, and IEP ~ at any time during the year. Note. **Documentation must be current (the past three years)** because Achilles uses documentation to determine 2e status, needed accommodations, and current functional and psychological states.

2. If student meets criteria for being twice exceptional, Dr. Lagakis will call to schedule an **intake interview** ~ at any time during the year. **Early registration is best to maximize the chance of enrolling in desired courses.**

From **the second week of March** through the first week of April, she will meet with the student to **register** him/her for fall classes for the Fall semester.

1. **Apply to NCC through the Admissions Office** (Complete the application; send application fee to that office) ~ at any time during the year. The Admissions Office will notify you when to:

2. **Schedule Accuplacer tests** in ENG, RDG, MAT

Note. If applicant requires accommodations such as extra time for tests, please register at the **Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD)**, where a CSD counselor will be assigned to him/her to guide student through the process. Please make an appointment (516.572.7241 or 572.9874) to bring documentation to the Center for Students with Disabilities to begin the process.

Notify Dr. Valerie Lagakis of results. Only one remedial is allowed to meet Achilles Project criteria.

Visit www.ncc.edu for **directions** to NCC; stop at Public Safety to get a temporary **parking permit** when you meet with Dr. Lagakis.

The Achilles Project Admissions Criteria

1. I acknowledge that I will follow the admission requirements outlined by The Achilles Project.
2. I acknowledge that I am seeking admission to Nassau Community College because I am interested in enrolling in The Achilles Project.
3. I acknowledge that The Achilles Project was the reason for my interest in attending Nassau Community College. Therefore, I am requesting admission to Nassau Community College as an Achilles Project student.
4. I understand the Achilles Coordinator will determine my eligibility based on documentations, reports, interviews and other Achilles Admissions criteria. I am fully aware that I may not be admitted due to not meeting these admissions criteria.

Signature _____ Date _____

Guardian's signature if under 18 years old _____

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

I hereby authorize Dr. Valerie Lagakis and the staff of *The Achilles Project* to have access to my records including but not limited to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), academic and psychological testing, high school transcripts, college applications, and teacher/counselor/principal letters/reports. Sources of this information may include, for example, my high school, private psychologist, NCC Center for Students with Disabilities, my parents and myself. This information will be kept confidential and used for purposes of *The Achilles Project*.

Student (Signature) Student NCC ID Number (or Social Security # if no NCC banner #)

Applicant (print name) Witness (if you are less than 18 years old)

Student Cell # _____ Parent/s Cell # _____

Home phone # _____ Email _____

Parent/s Email _____ | _____

Home address _____

