

AIM Advance

12/05/2025

Important Dates

- Dec. 5: Fall classes end
- Dec. 7: Weekend classes end
- Dec. 8-11: Finals Week
- Jan. 14: Spring and Mini 3 begins
- Jan. 17: Weekend classes begin
- Jan. 19: MLK Day: 1.) Mini 3 and evening classes in attendance 2.) No regular full semester day classes
- Jan. 20: Student add/drop for Spring and Mini 3
- Jan. 21: Administrative add/drop for Spring and Mini 3

Winter Break 2025

DINING HOURS OF OPERATION

Grotto Commons

CLOSED Saturday 12/15 & Sunday 12/16
OPEN Monday 12/15 - Friday 12/19 for modified lunch 11:30 AM to 1 PM
CLOSED Saturday 12/20 & Sunday 12/21
OPEN Monday 12/22 - Tuesday 12/23 for modified lunch 11:30 AM to 1 PM
CLOSED Wednesday 12/24 - Sunday 1/4
OPEN Monday 1/5 - Friday 1/9 for modified lunch 11:30 AM to 1 PM
CLOSED Saturday 1/10 and Sunday 1/11
OPEN Monday 1/12 for modified lunch 11:30 AM to 1 PM
OPEN Tuesday 1/13 at 11 AM for Meal Swipes
OPEN Wednesday 1/14 normal hours of operation

501 Grille

OPEN Friday 12/12 from 7 AM to 9 PM and will be the last day of board swipes
CLOSED Saturday 12/13 - Tuesday 1/15
OPEN Wednesday 1/14 normal hours of operation

Coffee Bar

OPEN Friday 12/12 from 7:30 AM to 4 PM
CLOSED Saturday 12/13 - Tuesday 1/15
OPEN Wednesday 1/14 normal hours of operation

The Roost

OPEN Friday 12/12 from 4 PM to 10 PM
CLOSED Saturday 12/13 - Tuesday 1/15
OPEN Wednesday 1/14 normal hours of operation

Board swipes end at close on Friday, December 12th. They will begin on Tuesday January 13th at 11 AM at Grotto Commons.

The Roost Express

OPEN Friday 12/12 from 10 AM to 3 PM
CLOSED Saturday 12/13 - Tuesday 1/15
OPEN Wednesday 1/14 normal hours of operation

Anchor Express

OPEN Friday 12/12 from 2 PM to 1 AM
CLOSED Saturday 12/13 - Monday 1/12
OPEN Tuesday 12/13 from 4 PM to 12 AM. Swipe at Night begins at 9 PM
OPEN Wednesday 1/14 normal hours of operation



Message from the Executive Director

We hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving! It's hard to believe the semester is already coming to a close—final exams are just around the corner next week. I want to extend my personal congratulations to all of our students for their hard work and dedication this fall. We wish you the very best on your exams!

If you haven't already, you'll soon receive an email from me that includes a brief video update. I tested out this format earlier in the semester, and it was well-received, so instead of sending a novel-length message, I hope you'll take a few minutes to watch the video for some key updates.



Safe travels home, and hurry back—campus is far too quiet without you!

~ Ryan Palm '07
Executive Director of Brad McGarry Center for Neurodiversity

Message from the AIM Director

Hello AIM Families!



finishing the semester strong as finals approach.

We're grateful for the opportunity to support these talented young adults and look forward to an exciting new year ahead.

Happy Holidays!

- Laurie Baker
Director AIM & CREATE

PEACES Survey

One of the largest and longest running surveys on the experiences of autistic college students is entering their third and final stage of data collection. Mercyhurst has no direct participation in this survey, but we certainly value the contributions this research has made to our field. As such, we are sharing an invitation to participate in their data collection. You can read more about this survey process in this attached document.

[PEACES Survey Link](#)



NeuroLaunch

NeuroLaunch is wrapping up an incredible semester – we are so proud of the amazing work our participants have completed! This semester we had students working remotely for national organizations, on-site for local nonprofits, and for on-campus departments. We have seen great strides in their readiness for post-college life, and we're eager to pick back up in the spring. Students were emailed a form to express interest in a role for spring semester- the deadline is today, Dec. 5. A special thanks to Allison Metzcar who has put in many hours orchestrating logistics, approving timesheets, providing job coaching, and much more!



Weekly AIM Events

Full Spectrum Fitness!

Full Spectrum Fitness continues to be an exciting and meaningful part of what AIM offers each semester. This program has supported many students in caring for themselves—mind, body, and spirit. We are whole individuals with needs across many dimensions, and FSF embraces that holistic approach.

Coach Kaeden leads students through pillar prep, core-building, and a series of strength and conditioning exercises. He has also been mentoring Jack Martin, who is learning some of his coaching techniques. Beginning in the spring semester, Jack will offer an additional after-hours session in the Rec Center gym for students who are unable to attend Full Spectrum Fitness during the day.

Come join us!!

When: Tuesdays & Thursdays 10-11 a.m.

Where: The MIC (Mercyhurst Ice Center)



Full Spectrum Fitness



Pickleball Tuesdays in the Rec Center

Pickleball has continued on Tuesdays at 1 p.m., and the friendships that have formed along the way have been one of the best parts of the experience. We're excited to share that Pickleball will continue in the spring—more fun and connection to come!

Cooking & Camaraderie

In November, Michele led our session by encouraging students to give their Hello Hurst Kits a try! These kits are available to students as part of their dining plan, and many forget just how many perks they have access to. Hello Hurst Kits make it easy to prepare a full, fresh meal right at home—no grocery trip required.

Hello Hurst Kits

Skip the store and enjoy fresh, chef-curated meal kits right on campus! Each kit includes two servings of high-quality ingredients, ready for you to cook in your own space.

- Available Monday–Friday at The Roost
- Order easily through the GET app
- Great for busy schedules and healthy eating

Kits can be purchased using Dining Dollars, Flex Points, Bonus Bucks, or a credit card.



Cooking & Camaraderie

It's a simple way to learn new cooking skills, share a meal with a friend, and enjoy convenient, flexible dining right at your fingertips.

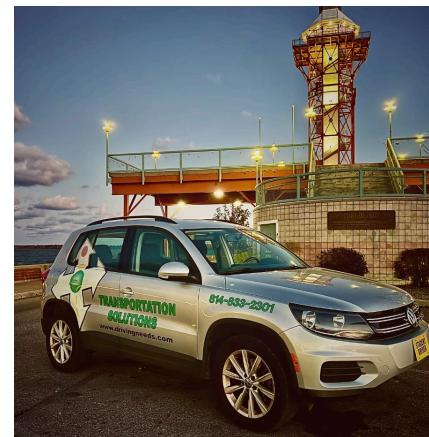
For our final class, Soren and Tacie chose a cozy "warm tummy" theme! Students made a hearty Zuppa Toscana soup with cheese tortellini, along with Caprese salad, breadsticks, and homemade Alfredo sauce. Everything was delicious and enjoyed by all. For dessert, we kept it simple and comforting with classic break-and-bake cookies.

These opportunities to cook together and gather around a shared table remind us how much connection and community can be found right here with one another in our AIM family.

Transportation Solutions

Ready to take the wheel?

AIM is teaming up with Transportation Solutions so you can drive toward independence! With Transportation Solutions, you'll build confidence, master the road, and unlock freedom. Expert guidance, personalized lessons, and real results - let's get you moving! Gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence you need behind the wheel. Contact your Support Coordinator to find out more!



BOOST Study Hall

BOOST will operate with adjusted hours next week during Finals. Monitors will be available on the following days and times:

Sunday: 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Monday: 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Tuesday: 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

As always, students are welcome to use the BOOST lounge for studying at any time, regardless of scheduled BOOST hours.

What's Up Wednesday

At the end of November, students enjoyed an ornament-painting session for What's Up Wednesday. What's Up Wednesdays offer a wonderful opportunity to feed both our creative and social needs. This program was the brainchild of Michele Garvey, who also led the charge on our Mercy Apartment makeovers. She envisioned a space where students could feel at home—whether they had a specific creative project in mind or simply wanted to relax and spend time with others.

We often hear from students when they arrive at AIM, they are unsure of where they might "fit" socially. However, there is a kind of magic that happens during these sessions. Some students painted one ornament and savored the full two hours, while others painted four or five. There is no pressure and no performance anxiety—just an easy, welcoming environment.

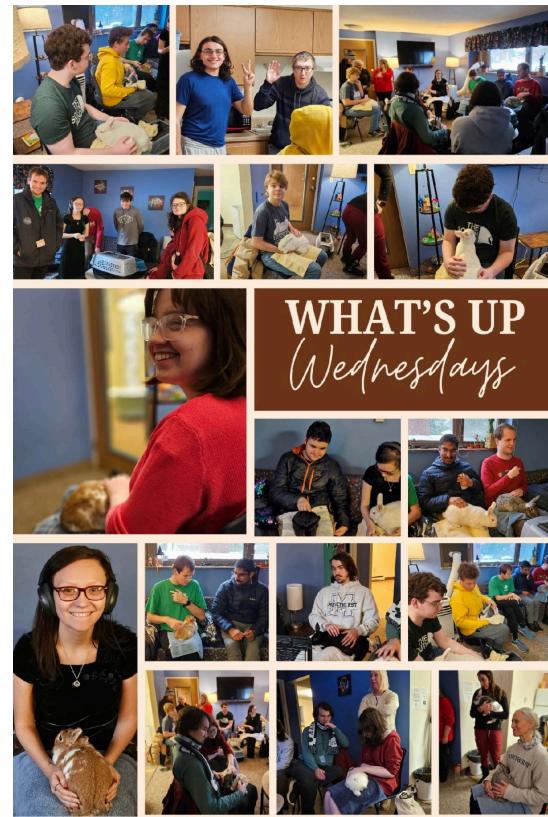
The conversation flows naturally, covering everything from current happenings to classes to holiday traditions and more. Some students even stop by just to join the discussion, knowing this is a space created especially for them.

For our December What's Up Wednesday students enjoyed a very Zen Wednesday filled with moments of calm and "paws," thanks to visits with therapy bunnies and a relaxing yoga session. The goal of the evening was to help students prepare their minds and bodies for the upcoming finals week.



The evening began with a visit from EARS (Erie Area Rabbit Society & Rescue), an organization dedicated to rescuing, rehabilitating, and rehoming bunnies in the Erie area. We were joined by volunteers Michelle, Kaitlyn, and Christine—and of course, the stars of the night: Adira, Calypso, Chief, Pickett, Daffodil, and Fleetwood (yes, named after Fleetwood Mac!). Students each received a bunny to hold on their laps, with towels provided to help minimize the spread of fur. Smiles, however, were in no short supply as students bonded with their furry visitors.

Interacting with bunnies has been shown to lower cortisol—one of the body's primary stress chemicals—while boosting feel-good hormones like oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine. Their quiet, gentle nature also encourages calmness and helps keep us grounded in the present moment.



Continuing the theme of mindfulness, students participated in a yoga session led by Solveig Santillano, Associate Professor of Dance at Mercyhurst University. She guided the group through gentle movement, breathwork, and guided relaxation, thoughtfully modifying poses to ensure everyone could take part. By the end of the evening, students felt grounded, refreshed, and ready to return to their studies with a renewed sense of calm and focus.

Something to Think About...

Your student has been living as an independent adult for the past three months—making daily decisions about when to get up, whether to attend class, what to eat (pizza again?), and how to spend their free time. Freshman year is full of trial and error, growth, and self-discovery. It's also the perfect time to begin renegotiating your relationship with your student.

What does this mean? As students return home for winter break, it's important to remember that the person you dropped off in August may not be the same one walking back through your front door. They've grown accustomed to not asking permission, making choices independently, and living outside a family routine. While these are healthy steps toward adulthood, transitioning back home can feel awkward or tense without open communication.

Before conflict has a chance to arise, consider inviting your student to have a conversation—somewhere relaxed and neutral, like a quiet coffee shop or small diner. Let them know you'd like to talk about your relationship and explore what might have changed. The most important part of this conversation is speaking and listening without judgment or rigid expectations.

It's worth noting that the idea of "renegotiating your relationship" extends beyond college transitions. Every relationship—family, workplace, friendships, dating partners, aging parents—changes over time, whether we talk about it or not. Sharing your thoughts, needs, and expectations can reduce frustration and strengthen understanding.

So take a little time this holiday season to connect intentionally. A thoughtful conversation can go a long way in supporting your student's growth and deepening your relationship.

Career Insights

Career Path

AIM's Career Path Classes are designed to help individuals identify, plan, and navigate their educational and professional journeys. These classes typically cover various aspects of career development, providing guidance and resources to help participants make informed decisions about their career choices and progression.

Freshman: We continue to have meaningful and engaging conversations in our weekly Healthy Relationships sessions. Prior to Thanksgiving, students participated in both large and small group discussions about going home for break. In small groups, they worked through real-life scenarios, exploring how they might respond in different situations and how to set healthy boundaries.

These conversations continued this past week as we shifted into discussing social media—how to navigate online interactions, set boundaries, identify who you're really talking to, and stay safe overall.

Students also reflected on the kinds of support and space they may need during breaks now that they've begun college, such as having time to themselves, staying out later, and communicating clearly about what topics they feel comfortable discussing with different people. Through small group activities, they shared personal examples and advice with one another, creating a supportive environment for learning and growth.

The second half of the semester has been full of thoughtful conversations, scenario-based learning, and students offering one another encouragement and meaningful insight. When we return from winter break, we will resume our weekly sessions and continue building skills for creating and navigating healthy relationships.

We wish everyone a wonderful, restful break and look forward to seeing you in the new year!

Sophomore: Our amazing sophomores crushed the Resume Workshop! They learned how to transform their experiences into standout resumes that grab attention and open doors to exciting internship opportunities. We'll continue refining resumes throughout the semester as we explore vocational pathways and prepare for what's next.

Sophomore Career Path students are ready to shine—and to take the next big step toward their future careers!

Junior: This week, students explored the many strengths and unique abilities individuals on the autism spectrum bring to the workplace. Through discussion and reflection, they identified qualities such as reliability, strong attention to detail, deep focus, honesty, and creative problem-solving. Students also learned how these strengths align with what employers value most. The session encouraged them to recognize their own talents with confidence and see how their individuality can be a powerful asset in building a meaningful career.

Seniors and Graduate Students: Seniors and graduate students continue to have dedicated workshop time in Career Path. These sessions provide space for students to focus on whichever career-related tasks are most relevant to them at this stage - such as applying for jobs, preparing graduate school applications, updating or refining their LinkedIn profiles, writing or revising cover letters, and more. AIM Staff are present throughout these workshops to offer guidance, answer questions, and provide individualized support as needed.

Wednesdays from 3 pm - 3:50 pm

Freshman Seminar: Old Main 210

Sophomore Career Path: Sullivan 3

Junior Career Path: Sullivan 2

Seniors and Graduate Students Career Path: Sullivan 1

AIM CAREER POINTS

WHAT?

Points that you can redeem for professional necessities

HOW?

Earn points by attending AIM Vocational opportunities

- Weekly Interview Question = 5 points
- Career Path = 10 points
- Meeting with Allison or Ryan = 20 points
 - Can assist with resume, interview preparation, mock interviews, LinkedIn, cover letters, etc.
- Day Trips = 50 points
- Week-Long Trips = 200 points
- Completing tasks in Prentus = 25 points

Additional opportunities will be posted throughout the year along with how many points you will gain for participating

REDEEM

100 points = \$10

You can redeem your points for items that benefit you professionally. Email the Amazon link to Allison and Ryan along with a brief description of how this would benefit your career development.

Examples: padfolio, blazer, tie, sketchbook, notebook, etc.

PRENTUS

Start earning points today by setting up your Prentus account. See/email Allison Metzcar or Ryan Palm for more information.

QUESTIONS:

ALLISON METZCAR - AMETZCAR@MERCYHURST.EDU
RYAN PALM - RPALM@MERCYHURST.EDU

AIM Career Points

This year, we launched a new initiative called "Interview Question of the Week" designed to help students practice and refine their interview skills. Each week, students are encouraged to reflect on a common interview question and consider how they might respond. Students who submit their practice responses via email will earn 5 Career Points each week. To support them, both Allison Metzcar and their Student Support Coordinator are available to provide feedback and guidance on crafting strong answers.

The question this week is "Tell me about a time that you made a mistake. What did you learn from this?" Email Allison at ametzcar@mercyhurst.edu.

Preparing for Adventure

Ryan and Allison have been hard at work planning the Junior and Senior Vocational Trip to Columbus and Cleveland, taking place December 14–19. These trips are an excellent opportunity for students to prepare for their upcoming launch into the professional world. They also help students build stronger bonds and friendships through the shared adventure of travel.



Students have been participating in prep sessions for this upcoming vocational experience. If your student has not yet taken part in one of our many travel opportunities, please encourage them to do so!

Stay tuned—after the holidays we'll be sharing pictures from our trip!



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AUTISM INITIATIVE AT MERCYHURST

Phone: (814) 824-2000

Address: 501 East 38th Street
Erie, Pennsylvania 16546

Autism Initiative at Mercyhurst University | 501 E 38th Street Erie | ERIE, PA 16546-0001 US

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