

## ENHANCE GOES VIRTUAL!



Our fourth full academic year kicked off in the midst of a global pandemic so like the rest of the world, we needed to get creative with our traditional new Student Orientation so we met on Zoom instead of our usual in-person event at the Berrie Center. Using breakout groups, our peer mentors were able to do a virtual meet and greet with our students while parents had the opportunity to chat with Suzanne Calgi, Coordinator of the ENHANCE program and some staff members from Counseling and Health Services and the Office of Student Services (OSS). While we missed the brunch and campus tours, we are keeping our fingers crossed for an in-person event for this August. The ENHANCE program was challenged this year to make the transition to virtual learning and programming engaging for our students. To do that, we came up with games and activities for our weekly social hour that were both fun and Zoom-friendly. While we missed sharing pizza lunches during our Thursday Connections meetings, we made it work from home with BYOL (bring your own lunch). New this year were the addition of virtual “drop-in” study groups where students could get help from peer mentors when prepping for exams and writing papers. We also added an extra peer mentor session each week to try and head off any feelings of loneliness and isolation our students might be feeling. As the world – and our campus – opens up, we are looking forward to welcoming students back in-person activities.

## SPOTLIGHT ON.....

### NOAH MAZZEO



Noah Mazzeo '21 has the distinction of being the first graduate of the ENHANCE program. This is just one of the many highlights from the college career of this talented and hard-working Ramapo Roadrunner.

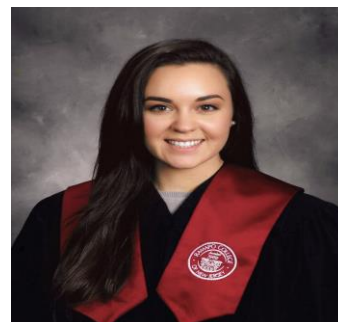
Noah graduated with a 3.8 average as a Communications major and was the recipient of several prestigious academic honors, including the Warren Family Scholarship, the President's Cabinet Scholarship and the Peggy Holden Memorial Award. He also was inducted into three honor societies on campus: the Lambda Pi Eta National Honor Society, the Golden Key International Honour Society and the Tau Sigma National Honor Society.

On the extracurricular side, Noah, a sports lover, was a PA announcer for the Roadrunners baseball team and shared his musical talent as an alto sax player in the Pep Band.

Noah has secured a summer position with the Jersey Blue Claws, a minor league baseball team and plans to attend grad school at Temple University in the fall studying Sport Business.

Congrats to Noah – we in the ENHANCE program are very proud of your accomplishments!

## ACADEMIC WORKSHOPS WITH Jillian Marchione '20



### ***What is your educational background and what drew you to working with people on the spectrum?***

I graduated from Ramapo College in 2020 with a degree in Elementary Education. During my undergrad I volunteered for the ENHANCE program as a peer mentor. I loved working with this population so much that I decided to change my career path from teaching to becoming a BCBA who works with individuals on the spectrum. Since then, I have worked as a one-to-one aide, an ABA social group volunteer, an early intervention ABA therapist, and the ENHANCE Executive Functioning Skills Coach. I am now enrolled in a graduate program at Felician University for ABA and Autism Studies and conduct research at Felician's on-campus Autism Center, I-CAdRE. I have found these roles to be extremely rewarding and have developed a passion for helping individuals on the spectrum. I look forward to continuing to work with and support this population as I advance in my career.

### ***What types of skills are your workshops designed to teach ENHANCE students and how do you think they help in college and beyond?***

Some executive functioning skills that we cover in these workshops include time management, planning, organization, flexible thinking, and task initiation. These are skills that every college student needs to develop in order to be successful in and out of the classroom. What is great about executive functioning skills is that we use them in our everyday life and not just in an academic setting. For example, time management skills are used to help us prioritize things that are most important first and complete the less important tasks after. One exercise we do in our workshop to demonstrate this is the "rocks, pebbles, and sand" activity. This is a common analogy used to teach prioritization skills.

### ***Do you have a favorite memory or story from your time working with ENHANCE?***

My favorite memory while working in the ENHANCE program was attending the end of the year party. This is a fun event held at a student lounge area on the Ramapo College campus. We eat pizza, socialize, and play games like Mario Kart, foosball, pingpong, and pool! This is a great way to end the year and wind down after taking finals with our ENHANCE friends

## Q&A with Raquia Brewster, ENHANCE Peer Mentor



### **What made you want to work with ENHANCE? Do you have prior experience with the Autism community?**

*I wanted to work with the ENHANCE program because I enjoy helping others, everyone was welcoming, and I wanted to get involved on campus. I did have prior experience with my younger cousin, who is on the Autism Spectrum, however I did not have any experience working with college students on the Autism Spectrum.*

### **What are your responsibilities as a Peer Mentor with the program? What is your favorite thing about working with ENHANCE students?**

*My responsibilities as a Peer Mentor are meeting my students individually on a weekly basis for 1 hour, attending weekly social events with all ENHANCE students, and attending weekly training with the ENHANCE Coordinator. My favorite thing about working with ENHANCE students is being able to see how each student grows from one semester to the next. All of our students are able to accomplish goals, try new things, and become acclimated to Ramapo. I truly enjoy being able to teach, help, and mentor our students; as well as being able to learn from my students.*

### **What else are you involved in at the college?**

*I am an Orientation Program Coordinator, Peer Facilitator, Italian Club President, and Psi Chi Vice President (Ramapo's Psychology Honor Society)*

### **Anything else you would like to share?**

*Being a peer mentor for ENHANCE has been amazing for the past two years. I have watched my students grow and I have grown too myself. This program is a place I can call home and I hope others are able to feel this as well.*

## DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH

In October, to recognize Disability Awareness month, Suzanne Calgi, Coordinator of ENHANCE hosted a panel that featured several of our ENHANCE students who participated and spoke about their experience with autism and fielded questions from the audience.

Panelists talked about coming to terms with their diagnoses, and the challenges they faced in school and socially with reading cues and facial expressions, managing sensory overload, etc.

Students also shared their feelings about terminology as well, with some preferring to be identified as “an autistic person,” while others go by “neurodivergent” because it includes things like ADD or processing disorders.

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*“Different is not deficient”*

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The panelists also expressed frustration with generalizations, for example, that autistic people lack empathy, which they believe are are harmful and stigmatizing.

Overall, students wish for more understanding and acceptance and hope that society can celebrate the diversity of people with autism. One of the panelists put it best when he stated “different is not deficient.”

Thank you to the ENHANCE students and everyone who participated in an important educational experience for our campus!

**Save The Date!**  
**New Student Orientation**  
**Friday, August 27<sup>th</sup>**  
**11:30 am**  
**Location: TBD**