

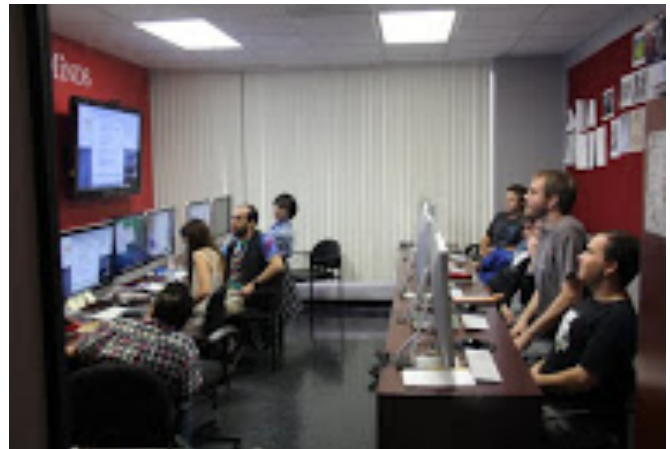
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EXCEPTIONAL MINDS

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Autism After High School, Exceptional Minds Begins Year Four
Despite a lack of public funding, specialized vocational school starts its fourth year as a model for educating the nation's 750,000 young people with autism about to age out of the public school system.



Sherman Oaks, California – Defying the statistical odds, and with public funding virtually nonexistent for such programs, [Exceptional Minds](#) begins its fourth academic year as the first vocational school of its kind for young adults with [autism](#).

Twenty-seven full-time students – all on the spectrum and in their 20s -- filled the Sherman Oaks nonprofit school on Monday to begin training for careers in visual effects, post-production and other digital arts fields. This marks a bellwether year for Exceptional Minds, which has become a model of education for the nation's 750,000 young adults with autism who will age out of the school system in the next decade.

“There were a lot of doubters in the beginning, but there were many more who believed in us and in the creative and technical brilliance of these individuals that so often goes unrecognized,” says Ron Burns, whose grandson attends Exceptional Minds as a part-time student and who has been on the school's board of directors since the school opened in 2011 with a handful of students.

Exceptional Minds starts the 2014/2015 academic year with a new working studio and state-of-the-art technology, owing much of its success to the support of the entertainment industry. Since private investors Bob Stevenson and Neil Young, who co-founded mobile gaming company Ngmoco, provided critical initial funding for this new approach to jobs training, others have followed. Exceptional Minds has received interest and support from StereoD, Method Studios, Annapurna Pictures, Stargate Studios, Pixel Magic, Film Roman, United Front, DreamWorks Animation, Paramount Pictures, and 20th Century Fox – as well as Adobe Systems, Autodesk and The Foundry, to name a few.

The school has also developed a close working relationship with the entertainment industry that has provided its students with experience – and, in many cases, movie credit. Exceptional Minds students have worked on several high-profile projects, including post-production for *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and Oscar-nominated movie *American Hustle*, plus the end-credit screen crawl for the 2012 motion picture *Lawless*.

Exceptional Minds graduated its first class in June. Since then, Exceptional Minds alumni have found paid work in the industry; for example, one student landed a job at Stargate Studios, a post-production house in South Pasadena.

“Our goal is to create a lifetime of learning, and it all starts with this very symbiotic relationship between the training and the actual work itself,” says the school’s vice principal Shish Aikat, referring to an underlying belief by the entertainment industry in the students’ creative ability and capacity for learning complex technology.

“We have been able to overcome stereotypes and misperceptions about autism through training and technology,” he adds.

A 501C nonprofit vocational school, Exceptional Minds is funded through private donations, grants and scholarships.

About Exceptional Minds (<http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org>):

Exceptional Minds is a non-profit vocational center and working production studio for young adults on the autism spectrum. It was chartered in 2011 to provide the training necessary for creatively gifted individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) who may not otherwise be able to make the transition from high school to careers. Exceptional Minds offers technical proficiency and work readiness training that prepares students for careers in graphic arts, animation, web design, visual effects and rotoscoping. Located in Sherman Oaks, California, Exceptional Minds is both an instructional learning facility and a working studio with hands-on student involvement in production projects, many for the film industry.

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