

## **CANVAS Meeting Agenda, 4-22-21**

Thurs, April 22, 2021 | 12pm Eastern Time

### **Participants in Attendance**

- Alex Sturm (LMU)
- Amanda Wynter (Purchase College)
- Amy Edwards (Drexel University)
- Amy Radochonski (College Living Experience)
- Annette Bade (NSU College of Optometry)
- Auston Stamm (Saint Mary's College)
- Bella Kofner (College of Staten Island)
- Ben Schwartzman
- Bethany Bradley (RIT)
- Beth Felsen (Spectrum Transition Coaching)
- Brad Cox (Florida State University | College Autism Network)
- Brian Freedman (University of Delaware)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (UW-Madison | College Autism Network)
- Cassidy Edmondson (University of Delaware)
- Cecilia Gigante (New York University)
- Chandra Lebenhagen (Calgary, Alberta)
- Chip Kennedy (Merrimack College)
- Dave Caudel (Vanderbilt University | Frist Center for Autism and Innovation)
- Emily Rothman (Boston University)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Emily Paulson (UC Berkeley)
- Florencia Ardon (Cornell University)
- Henry Tsai (Austin Community College)
- Irene Sullivan (University of Toronto)
- Jamie Niman (Iowa State University)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jess Monahan (University of Delaware)
- Julie Scaff (Saint Mary's College of CA)
- Kaitlynn Penner (UC Santa Barbara)
- Kayden Stockwell (University of Virginia)
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- Lee Burdette Williams (College Autism Network)
- Leslie Bross (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)
- Lindsay Blankenship
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Maria Holguin (SARRC)
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (SDSU)
- Michelle Reed (SARRC)

- Nick Top (Utah Valley University)
- Nicky Lord (University of Toronto)
- Pamela Lubbers (University of Delaware)
- Rachel Schuck (UC Santa Barbara)
- Scot Marken (EdRedefined)
- Summer West (Universität Kassel, Germany)
- Suzanne Calgi (Ramapo College of New Jersey)
- Valeria Armendariz (SARRC)
- Yasamin Bolourian (UC Riverside)

A few other individuals also joined in, though their full names were not listed in the agenda or on the meeting call.

## **Meeting Plan**

### **CANVAS Updates**

- Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
  - Click [here to join](#)
  - Send email to the list by emailing [can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org](mailto:can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org)
  - [Updated college autism programs list](#) (as of Jan 2021)

**Share a Resource!** Are you conducting any research studies that you'd like the community to know about? Read an interesting article recently? Discovered a cool resource? This is your chance to briefly share that news with the CANVAS group! List your name and any relevant links below so others may access it at their convenience!

- Brett shared a [new journal article](#) by members of our CANVAS community on impacts of COVID-19 for autistic college students.
- Lee mentioned the launch of Autism Career Empowerment (ACE), developed by CAN and the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation. It's an online curriculum geared for people who work in career services for autistic students, though may not be as experienced, in terms of autism expertise. It's free of charge, and individuals can sign up for courses, each with modules. Learn more: <https://ace.vkclearning.org>
- Brad relayed his and colleagues' new article: Nachman, B. R., McDermott, C. T., & Cox, B. E. (2021). Brief report: Autism-specific college support programs: Differences across geography and institutional type. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-04958-1>
- Brad highlighted Brett having recently attained a postdoctoral research position at North Carolina State's Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research.
- Brad shared an article he came across recently: Duerksen, K., Besney, R., Ames, M., & McMorris, C. A. (2021). Supporting autistic adults in postsecondary settings: A systematic review of peer mentorship programs. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 85-99. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0054>
- Lee talked about the forthcoming College Autism Summit, once again virtually from Oct. 25-29. The call for proposals will be live on June 1. Stay tuned.

- Jess [shared an article](#) with the group.
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## **Research Presentation**

### **Social Skills Interventions for Young Adults: Fitting into a Neurotypical World?**

Presented by Dr. Jess Monahan (Research Manager, Spectrum Scholars; University of Delaware) and Dr. Brian Freedman (Associate Director, Center for Students with Disabilities & Director, Spectrum Scholars; University of Delaware)

## **NOTES**

- Jess mentioned using both identify-first and person-first language in their remarks.
- Their transparency statement and introduction statement entailed giving some background to who they are. Jess is the research manager at Spectrum Scholars, serving as an assistant professor, and conducts research on autism, social interactions, and mental health. She identifies as an individual with ADHD and anxiety, and has an autistic son. An autistic alum, a co-author on the paper just accepted with minor revisions for the Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities, helped with the discussion for the paper. Brian is the director of the Postsecondary Transition Unit in CDS, the co-direction of Delaware LEND, and an assistant professor. He leads innovative programs and research supporting transition-age youth. Spectrum Scholar is a college-to-career initiative, and they offer a multi-tiered system of supports for autistic college students, as well as neurodivergent students broadly.
- To date, no social skills reviews have examined the level of autistic input or feedback involved, Brian shared. Brian and Jess were interested in the level of input and feedback autistic people could offer on social skills interventions. This informed their study development.
- Brian reinforced the importance of needing autistic perspectives to inform research, and ultimately practice. Their lack of involvement in interventions can be problematic, especially because supports implemented without input may not target their specific needs.
- More research has emerged on the damage associated with autistic people engaging in camouflaging and masking behaviors. Brian cited literature that shows the commonality of this, and how it's correlated with anxiety and depression.
- Limitations entailed this study being a literature review drawing upon only peer-reviewed articles from the United States, not knowing if authors had autistic or neurodivergent identities (unless they disclosed these details), and that articles were excluded if no discussion of interventions featuring autistic input (even if they may have had them, but just not mentioned).
- Through reviewing the ERIC & PsycINFO databases, the authors yielded articles based on using particular keywords and looking at peer-reviewed journal articles (in the U.S.) published after 1990.
- Ultimately they reviewed 26 articles.
- Across all studies there were 342 participants, with samples ranging from 2-49 participants. About 78% of participants identified as male.
- 17 studies involved small groups, whereas 9 looked at one-on-one interventions.

- 11 studies featured autistic perspectives following interventions. In essence, they explored satisfaction, benefits, and recommendations associated with interventions. They found mostly positive feedback. Only three studies involved autistic input in the development of interventions.
- Outcome variables tended to include a variety of factors, such as social responsiveness and empathy. Measurement tools were many, ranging from observations to participant-completed logs.
- The authors found mixed results in the effectiveness of social skills interventions. They examined them based on a number of variables, such as mental health and self-determination.
- Primary findings entailed the following: all studies published within the last 20 years, with one exception; most participants were heavily white and male, even despite being coded for transgender, non-binary and additional gender identities; and half of studies examined causal relationships.
- Only three studies entailed autistic input; the vast majority didn't entail feedback.
- Jess and Brian share how including autistic voices will help in understanding what to be measuring.
- Examining interactional and relational processes are helpful in establishing authenticity, they gleaned.
- While many studies rely on caregiver reports, there is a dearth of research on family and autistic college students' relationships.
- Preliminary evidence is showing (from a study they are working on) that autistic college students don't seek parental involvement in interventions.
- One main takeaway is to reframe social skills instruction, in terms of accounting for factors like the double empathy problem. There is often a disconnect in people understanding one another. Autistic people may not feel comfortable being themselves due to lack of inclusive social norms. Consequently, they see the possibilities of interventions supporting autistic students in finding meaningful relationships (pointing to the work presented at an earlier CANVAS meeting by Dr. Laura Graham Holmes), teaching about how neurotypical social norms work, but reinforcing that these may not be *right* norms, and addressing knowledge, beliefs, and actions of neurotypicals.
- Jess recognized how autistic people are also navigating how to engage with autistic vs. neurotypical people based on comfort level.
- Brian shared that interventions need not be discontinued. Rather, they support autistic people having a more active role in sharing thoughts on interventions. Several practical implications entail receiving feedback during and after interventions, incorporating methods for measuring outcome that are desirable for autistic people, and engaging autistic people in the process. Research implications are many, and entail participatory action research, diversifying participant samples, and adding transparency statements, among others.

## Q&A

- **Beth: I'm trying to recall the timing -- were you able to consider the ASAN white paper on college success when you were writing?**
  - The search was conducted in early 2020, writing in Summer 2020

- **Yasamin: This research is so useful. Do you have any ideas on how to effectively teach things like authenticity in social interactions?**
  - Jess mentioned seeking to draw in different bodies of literature that relate to relational and language processes. It's often disconnected from special education and disability studies.
- **Scot: How are you defining "the autistic community" and the "autistic person's perspective?" I have seen professionally and personally that your language typically refers to self-advocates with Level 1 autism. I previously led a nonprofit supporting individuals with Level 2 and Level 3 autism and in many instances the feedback/input is different than for Level 1. Curious on people's thoughts on this.**
  - The authors did not include studies featuring people with co-occurring intellectual disabilities. Jess and Brian were interested in autistic, college-aged students. She is going to mention the narrow scope within the limitations. Brian mentioned the necessity of still ensuring that people with intellectual disabilities play an active role in interventions.
- **Lindsay: Do you still have a "social skills" component to your program?**
  - Jess shared that Spectrum Scholars does have social supports. There's also a peer mentoring program.
- **Kristen: Great study! Sorry need to leave a bit early today. Bottema-Beutel has great ideas about authenticity in her critique of social skills interventions. Bottema-Beutel, K., Park, H., & Kim, S. Y. (2018). Commentary on social skills training curricula for individuals with ASD: Social interaction, authenticity, and stigma. Journal of autism and developmental disorders, 48(3), 953-964.**
- **Mary: there's current study using CBPR approach with autistic Community to develop a measurement toolbox with collection of adapted outcomes measures across many construction. Current NIMH multisite study with Drs. Nicolaidis, Raymaker, Baker-Ericzen, Lounds-Taylor and many ASAN members:**  
<https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/briefs/benchmarks-to-inclusion/>

#### Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

- Thurs, May 20 at 2pm ET
  - Presenter details TBD.
- CANVAS meetings will follow our common "summer break" in June, resuming in July.