

## **CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 2-11-21**

Thurs, February 11, 2021 | 2pm Eastern time

### **People in Attendance**

- Alex Jacobs (LMU)
- Alex Schmied (University of Delaware)
- Alex Sturm (LMU)
- Anita Rehberg (Harper College)
- Aylin Ulker (MUSC)
- Becky Colgan (Gettysburg College)
- Beth Nyhan Santos (Lesley University)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | UW-Madison)
- Bridget McElroy (Neurodiversity in the Workplace)
- Cassidy Edmonson (University of Delaware, LEND trainee)
- Cecilia Gigante (NYU)
- Cheryl Widman (University of Illinois at Chicago)
- Christy Giambastiani
- Dave Caudel (Vanderbilt University)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Jacqueline Shinall (Rutgers University)
- Jamie Niman (Iowa State University)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jess Monahan (University of Delaware)
- Jessica Schwartzman (University of Calgary)
- Jessye Herrell (Tech Kids Unlimited)
- John Caldora (University of Kentucky)
- Joyce Pope-Cain
- Kathy Szechy (Wayne State University)
- Katie McDermott
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Kimberly Bracey (University of Memphis)
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- Laura Graham Holmes (Hunter College)
- Laurie Ackles (Rochester Institute of Technology)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Liz Schmidt (Boston University)
- Meghan Montgomery (3LPlace.org)
- Natalie Lilien (Cornell University)
- Nick Top (Utah Valley University)
- Nicky Lord (University of Toronto)
- Patrick Dwyer (UC-Davis)
- Riley Hubsch (LMU)

- Sasha Zeedyk (CSUF)
- Summer West (Universitat Kassel, Germany)
- Susan W. White (University of Alabama)
- TC Waisman (University of Calgary)
- Wes Garton (University of Delaware)
- Yasamin Bolourian (UC Riverside)

## 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)
- Autism/UD Training Update
  - TC shared that 90 faculty participants have engaged in the autism training. Data collection has concluded. For more information, check out <https://autismresearchinternational.wordpress.com>

**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!

- Jamie Niman discussed being interested in last month's CANVAS presentation and wanted to explore more about survey instruments. Jamie is an accessibility coordinate who supervises soft skills coaching, and came across resources on accessible survey instruments that had adaptations to factors like graphics
- [Creating Accessible Survey Instruments for Use with Autistic Adults and People with Intellectual Disability: Lessons Learned and Recommendations](#) from AASPIRE / [AutPROM toolbox](#)
- Lee and colleagues are working on a project related to autism-friendly campus certifications. If interested in engaging in brainstorming sessions, reach out to Lee.
- Aylin is an occupational therapy student at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, and wanted to introduce herself. She is interested in the notion of an autism-friendly campus certification; Aylin asked for folks in the community to share resources.

## Research Presentation

- **Using Formative Research to Develop HEARTS: A Healthy Relationships Promoting Intervention for Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum**
- Presented by Dr. Laura Graham Holmes (Assistant Professor, Hunter College)

## Presentation Notes

- Dr. Laura Graham Holmes had been working with Dr. Emily Rothman at Boston University on work related to dating violence and related issues. Much of Laura's work is in the autism and sexuality landscape. They united their interests on the research intervention that became Project HEARTS.

- Laura shared existent research on healthy relationships, dating violence, and intimate partner violence to establish work on this front. However, less work has centered on unhealthy friendships. The college years are especially crucial in implementing interventions that could address such challenges. For autistic youth, past scholarship has recognized the prevalence of bullying and peer aggression. Ultimately, social relationships represent areas of difficulty. To date no interventions have centered on more advanced relationship skills.
- The HEARTS Process entailed six steps: interviews with autistic youth, interviews with autism providers, a focus group with autistic advisory board members, drafting the HEARTS curriculum, obtaining feedback from advisory board and class co-facilitators, and determining the feasibility pilot-test of the HEARTS workshop.
- This study was aimed to collect formative data.
- Eligible participants (N=25) were ages 16-22, lived in the US, English-speakers, had a verified autism diagnosis, reported they had one or more close friends based on the definition provided, and could participate in interview independently.
- Seven service providers (who had two or more years working with autistic youth in this age range) also participated.
- 56% of youth participants had been employed.
- 48% had been enrolled in college.
- 30-60 minute Zoom interviews were conducted; autistic youth had the option to use the chat function.
- Interview questions centered on problems in their social lives (youth), and how they have identified common social issues (service providers).
- The team engaged in inductive coding strategies.
- Five key themes emerged.
- The first theme: youth had some motivational challenges in making and maintaining friendships. For example, one college student did not always want to have social commitments, even with such skillsets.
- The second theme: overcoming anxiety rooted in prior bad experiences. Often youth resisted engaging in new friendships based on fear; past schooling experiences had left some emotional scars.
- The third theme: taking emotional risks. Participants sought to deepen relationships, making them more meaningful and intimate. Embedded in this was a desire to be more open in disclosing autism, for example. Sharing personal matters was a significant factor here.
- The fourth theme: cultivating reciprocity. Youth found that even possessing good friendship skills did not always translate to developing such rapport, which was disappointing at times.
- The fifth theme: creating, maintaining, and respecting boundaries. People take responsibility for their own actions. Every relationship has boundaries.
- Participants were asked how trainings should be delivered (based on gender). It seemed that most aligned with the idea of trainings featuring all genders to be in attendance.
- Regarding teaching preference, most participants aimed for a team approach (both an autistic and non-autistic facilitator); all wanted at least one autistic facilitator.

- When seeking expert feedback from individuals, including parents of autistic young adults, they indicated that chronological age is less relevant than social, emotional, and perspective-taking skills in making for a cohesive group.
- Five autistic individuals living in the U.S. and U.K. served on an autistic advisory board, offering input throughout each stage of the study's development. For instance, the board recommended having some content on the training regarding asking for and accepting apologies. Board members also appreciated content on boundaries, trauma, and grieving relationships.
- At this point Laura and Emily are running a pilot intervention for HEARTS, a six-session format via Zoom. Each 1.5-hr. session encompass a mix of didactics, activities, and discussion. Participants can engage verbally or via chat. Non-autistic and autistic co-facilitators exist for each group, encompassing 10-20 people. Participants range from age 18-44. They noticed some participants in the nighttime classes were diagnosed later. Other differences across the nighttime and daytime classes exist, too.
- Session topics focus on defining healthy relationships, beginning relationships, relationship anxiety, boundaries, neurohealth, and ending relationships.
- Laura shared an example of what a session looks like, including materials needed and learning objectives to reach. They illustrated a power and control wheel.
- The pilot intervention study is going well so far.
- They are currently recruiting for an alcohol research study, as well as a HEARTS intervention. Contact Laura for more details

## Q&A

- John: "Have you considered a session about moving relationships to the next level and what to consider when doing that?" That has been indeed a consideration. One activity centers on building intimacy and moving it to a deeper level.
- Susan: "very interesting talk-thank you! Is curriculum available and maybe I missed it-but pubs yet?" A dating curriculum is available. The publication will be disseminated to the CANVAS community. Laura will send around the updated HEARTS materials after they finish the first round of pilot and update materials.
- Brett: "how did age play a role in students' managing of relationships (e.g., high school versus college)?" COVID-19 limited some participants' engagement in opportunities. However, roommates or siblings often were good mechanisms in helping them be more social.
- Susan: "have you considered HEARTS' interface with 'Tackling Teenage Together'?" They had viewed HEARTS as a component that could be latched onto other interventions, like the PEERS one. Tackling Teenage Together focuses a lot on sexual education, and it has its merits in offering a foundation on how to navigate those situations.
- Kristen: "Do you feel that any aspects of the curriculum and ways that people engage with it are impacted positively and/or negatively by the online modality?" Laura hopes to

gauge participants' understandings of how modality influences engagement. Sometimes there are challenges in staying engaged with computer usage all the time.

- Alex: “What do you think about extending curriculum to talk about online dating? or dating apps?” Laura likes that idea. There is an OAR sexuality resource, including an online dating resource that she worked on. <https://researchautism.org/sex-ed-guide/>
- Nicky: “Did any of the participants stay in contact after the group? Were any friendships developed from the training?” Great question - we will ask participants at follow-up!

### **Upcoming CANVAS Meetings**

- Thurs, March 11 at 6pm ET
  - **Autistic Adults' Success Factors for Employment and Beyond**
  - Presented by Dr. Craig Thompson (Curtin University) & Dr. Melissa Black (Curtin University)
- Thurs, April 22 at 12pm ET
  - **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)
- Thurs, May 20 at 2pm ET
  - **Getting Ready for College: The Intersections of Neurodiversity and Other Sites of Differences**
  - Presented by Dr. Hyejung Kim (Assistant Professor, Teaching, Learning and Educational Leadership; Binghamton University)