

# CANVAS Meeting Agenda, 5-20-21

Thurs, May 20, 2021 | 2pm Eastern Time

## PEOPLE IN ATTENDANCE

- Alex Davidson (University of North Texas)
- Becky Colgan (Gettysburg College)
- Bella Kofner (College of Staten Island)
- Bethany Bradley (RIT)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network)
- Brittany Jackson (Hiram College)
- Cherie Fishbaugh (West Chester University)
- Christy Giambastiani (Sonoma State University)
- Emily Raclaw (Marquette University)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jess Monahan (University of Delaware)
- Joyce Pope-Cain (ACC)
- Katie McDermott
- Kim Johnson (Lesley University)
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- Laurie Ackles (RIT)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lydia Evans (University of North Texas)
- Margaret Camp (Clemson University)
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)
- Michael Keating
- Nick Top (Utah Valley University)
- Patrick Dwyer (UC-Davis)
- Summer West (Universität Kassel)
- Suzanne Calgi (Ramapo College of New Jersey)
- Theo Bakker (VU)
- Trayle Kulshan (CityU-Seattle)

## MEETING PLAN

### CANVAS Updates

- Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
  1. Click [here to join](#)
  2. Send email to the list by emailing [can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org](mailto:can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org)
- Resources Shared with CAN Members
  3. [CNC machine operation program for autistic college students](#) (Nachman)
  4. [Treatment of Sleep Problems in Autistic Adults](#) (Williams)
  5. [First-Year Progression and Retention of Autistic Students in Higher Education: A Propensity Score-Weighted Population Study](#) (Theo Bakker - my second article for my PhD)

## RESEARCH PRESENTATION

- “Understanding Autistic College Students' Needs in the Times of COVID-19”
- **Presenters:** Dr. Jess Monahan, Cherie Fishbaugh, Laurie Ackles

You can [read the article here](#).

### Presentation Notes

- The presenters began by sharing their backgrounds. Laurie heads RIT’s Spectrum Support Program and is working on her doctorate in the School of Social Work at University of Buffalo. Jess serves as research manager of Spectrum Scholars at University of Delaware, and also services as an assistant professor and conducts research on young adults with autism. Cherie directs Autism Services at West Chester University, having a couple decades of experience in working with people with autism across the lifespan. Clinical and research expertise is in many spaces, including positive behavior supports and social relationships.
- The study served as a collaboration across practitioners and researchers.
- Limitations entailed survey data (response bias), a limited sample of 76 students, a nonrepresentative sample, and being a heavily-skewed white male sample.
- As a survey, there was no follow up. The authors recognized how that COVID-19 represents a rapidly-changing situation, and data emerged from the summer before students began the fall 2020 semester.
- Research questions were threefold: 1) how has the COVID-19 global pandemic impacted anxiety levels; what common concerns did they experience related to online and in-person learning; and what can institutions do to support their success?
- Five universities are part of the Alliance Autism College to Employment Programs. Autism support program staff developed the survey based on feedback from students. The survey entailed 15 demographic questions, 8 Likert-scale questions, many related to anxiety, and three open-ended questions about student’s course concerns and how support programs and universities could support them. The authors piloted survey items.
- Among the 76 students who completed the survey, they were located across 14 states (about half lived in Pennsylvania). Roughly 70% were supported by an autism program. Nearly half lived at home with their family.
- Three-quarters of students were 19-24 in age.
- 81% of students identified as white, 7.3% multi-racial, 5.8% Asian, and 5.8% Black/African-American.
- 68.1% male, 28% female, and 4% nonbinary.
- Most participants identified as white males.
- Most students were in their first year, though also a good portion were in their second and third years.
- 38.7% of students were taking 13-15 credits in Fall 2020, with 16-18 credits (22.7%) and 10-12 credits (17.3%) also popular. 12 credits represents FTE status.
- Students indicated they were least anxious about wearing masks and engaging in social distancing, though most anxious about getting sick from COVID-19 and spreading it to someone else. They found it poignant that students were most concerned about others’ health.

- When asked about preferences for autism support program services, more than half of students indicated a combination of online and in-person services. This data shows the necessity of having a variety of options for students.
- The top three themes that emerged from qualitative questions entailed academic support and considerations (e.g., obtaining services and resources for handling courses), general support (seeking check-ins), and social support (having opportunities to engage with peers and wanting instructions in navigating social life).
- Concerns associated with online learning encompassed attendance and work completion, logistics associated with learning online, and having quality learning experiences in an online format.
- Students also communicated their concerns with in-person learning: catching COVID-19; miscellaneous (a wide range of issues, such as tuition costs and unexpected changes in delivery format), and wondering if others would follow safety procedures.
- Stemming from these findings were a number of recommendations that can be implemented across autism support programs. First, on the academic front, the team identified the need for different types of executive functioning supports in virtual settings (planning apps and processes, such as assignment trackers). Students wanted access to staff and allotting online scheduling options (virtual office hours). They also sought tutoring opportunities, and thus the team suggests the value of online tutoring and faculty having virtual office hours. Very importantly, students wanted check-ins, ranging from meetings to checklists, to ensure their goals could be met.
- The team identified various executive functioning examples, such as students engaging in self-monitoring regarding working on assignments. Students were thinking through various strategies they could incorporate to meet their studying objectives.
- Laurie showcased a weekly to-do list utilized at RIT. They also incorporated Calendly so that students could easily meet with coaches via Zoom.
- Wellness and mental health recommendations are many. In terms of anxiety management, the team sees value in online professional counseling, mindfulness activities, and self-care routines. Mental breaks are seen as very useful, and can include creative activities, timing how much they work on coursework, and finding social opportunities online. COVID-19 preparedness recommendations entailed engaging in university online training regarding COVID-19 precautions, as well as perhaps workshops and sharing healthy practices.
- A survey distributed to students at RIT broadly, and Spectrum Support Program specifically, found that students' mental health improved from Fall 2020 to Spring 2021. Most tellingly, there was a larger increase among students in SSP than the student community broadly. Additionally, SSP students expressed feeling cared for more than RIT students broadly.
- The team recommends more counseling workshops, in terms of frequency, as well as students utilizing effective calming/meditation apps like Calm, Headspace, and The Mindfulness App (top ones used). Shine is also highly used.
- Social recommendations entailed virtual engagement events (including games, group chats, and watch parts), plus using social networks, including campus clubs and events. Many DCAP students ran social events. Running online study halls was also deemed a good idea.

## Q&A

- Theo: “I think this is a very important paper. 1) Did you consider that there are benefits for students with autism? 2) Would you consider comparing these results to students without autism and how these answers would differ?”
  - Jess shared the vitality of turning around the survey fast to quickly inform practice. The team didn’t have time to find a matched neurotypical sample.
- Kristen: “Did vaccines come up as a concern? We have very split and often resistant to change perspectives on vaccines in our mentorship group on Staten Island- lots of misinformation on vaccines seems to be spreading, often from parents to their kids.”
  - This study was conducted too early on (in mid-2020), so vaccines weren’t much of a conversation point at this juncture.
- Patrick and Jen discussed in the chat about the notion of reacclimating to in-person contexts after COVID, and many individuals having concern about that idea. Some people have felt comfortable with remote gatherings through COVID. There are also concerns associated with in-person settings being more active due to some individuals feeling an enhanced desire to gather.
  - Jess said there is vitality in obtaining neurodivergent individuals’ perspectives on coming back to a post-COVID world. Cherie mentioned how most her students have been vaccinated, though there are still concerns associated with Pennsylvania lifting mask mandates.

## UPCOMING CANVAS MEETINGS

- Meetings will resume in July, as we take our common June “summer break.” Details on forthcoming meetings will be shared in the coming weeks. Here are some dates to mark down for now!
  - Fri, July 16 - TBD
  - Fri, Aug 13 at 2pm ET
  - Fri, Sept 17 at 2pm ET
  - Fri, Oct 15 at 11am ET
  - Fri, Nov 19 at 1pm ET