

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL SENDER] College Autism Network - May 2021 Updates

**Date:** Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 5:01:27 PM Eastern Daylight Time

**From:** College Autism Network

**To:** Jackson, Brittany 1.

[View in browser](#)



**COLLEGE AUTISM NETWORK**  
ADVOCACY | RESEARCH | TRAINING

**College Autism Network Newsletter**  
May 2021

**Moving the Research Needle**



I just attended the Autism at Work Research Conference (AWRC), hosted by the University of Maryland, the University of Washington and Microsoft, and was excited to see the breadth of research relevant to CAN members who support their students as they search for internships and employment. But just like most research about autistic college students, these scholars face the familiar “N” problem: how to get a large enough sample size to arrive at valid and reliable findings. This is a challenge familiar to those who work across programs. I remember a conversation I had with Jane Thierfeld Brown about the number of times she is contacted by researchers seeking to use her connections to reach out to autistic students to fill out a survey, or agree to an interview. Jane shared that she was always reluctant to provide that information--not because she doesn't value research, but because it's a burden on the research subject (and on the staff who would have to ultimately make the request).

In the several years since that conversation with Jane, I've become very sympathetic to her viewpoint, because CAN is often viewed as a potential resource in much the same way. And, like Jane, I'm reluctant to place a burden of response on either our professional members or on the students they serve (for whom a "simple" survey or a "short" interview is often not an easy task). And because, like all of you reading this, I know that not every autistic student is in a support program, or even registered with their disability services office. So sampling the portion of the population that has found its way to support services does an injustice to the many autistic students on campuses who are not as easily identified but who have so much perspective and insight to offer.

And yet, funders of research (foundations and federal agencies) often want grant applicants to promise large data sets. Publishers of research also tend to look more favorably on three-or four-digit sample sizes.

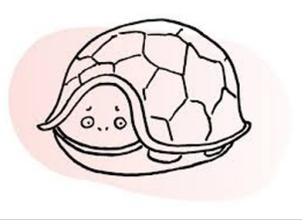
*So how do we resolve this dilemma? Can we create a shared database of respondents that could be tapped for different types of research, depending on the research? For example, autistic women, or first generation autistic students, or nonbinary autistic students, or those who have no interest in STEM fields? What other ideas do you have?*

We need to bring together the collective expertise and wisdom of our Network to wrestle with this. The AWRC is a great place to do that, as are CAN's own monthly CANVAS calls, coordinated by Brett Nachman. And of course, the Research Symposium that is part of our College Autism Summit (October 26-29) is a great mat (or ring, depending on your wrestling preference) on which to try out ideas for supporting the research necessary to deliver on our promise of "evidence-guided practices." Together we can move the research needle and use that learning to support students, improve campus environments, assist employers, and benefit from all that a truly neurodiverse campus--and world--promise.

**--Lee Burdette Williams, Executive Director, College Autism Network**

---

**Getting Back to Campus? Or Going for the First time? A Useful Article Looks at Anxiety in the Covid Era**



It's the time of year when students are making decisions about their fall plans, whether it is to begin a new adventure as a college student, or return to that role following some time off, or maybe just returning physically to a campus left behind in the pandemic. Regardless of timing or role, there is no dearth of anxiety as this next transition looms. Here's an article by some of our CAN members, just published in the Developmental Disabilities Network Journal, that will get you thinking about responding to that anxiety, or perhaps even preventing some of it. Congratulations to Jess, Laurie, Amy, Brian, Pam, Sara, Cherie and Jane for getting this important research out so quickly.

*Autistic College Students and Covid-19: Anxiety, Support Needs and Responses by Specialized Programs in Developmental Disabilities Network Journal.* <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/ddnj/vol1/iss2/11/>

Jessica Monahan, Laurie Ackles, Amy Edwards, Brian Freedman, Pamela Withers Lubbers, Sara Gardner, Cherie Fishbaugh, Jane Thierfeld Brown

From the Abstract: "In this exploratory study, 76 college students with autism from across the country answered a series of questions about their anxieties related to COVID-19 and attending college. Results revealed that students are most anxious about getting sick or spreading COVID-19 to others and least anxious about wearing masks and needing to socially distance. This paper also profiles the adjustments made to several college autism support programs (led by the authors) in order to accommodate the changes to college campuses and the impact on student needs. The survey results and recent experiences across programs will inform recommendations for colleges as they build toward more inclusive, supportive campus environments and respond to crises like the pandemic."

---

**This month's ASD Program Directors' Call:  
Wednesday, May 19, 3 pm ET**



Our monthly calls are an opportunity to connect with people from the US, Canada and beyond who oversee or work within autism support programs on (or near) campus. If you've ever felt like no one on your campus fully appreciates the challenges and rewards of your work, this is the group for you. We connect, share ideas, ask questions, and hear from one of the group members about a current initiative or challenge. This month we will hear from Tom Beeson at Clemson University. If you'd like to be added to this mailing list, contact [Lee Williams](#) directly.

---

## Upcoming CANVAS Call: May 20 at 2 pm ET

**Join us for our next CANVAS Meeting**, a monthly meeting of autism-focused scholars and practitioners who want to learn more about research going on around the world.

- Thurs, May 20 at 2pm ET
  - Meeting Link: <https://meetings.ringcentral.com/j/1485534420>
  - Meeting Agenda: [Sign up to participate](#)
  - Presenter tbd (late change--we promise it'll be good)
- 

## Seeking Future CANVAS Presenters

Are you in the midst of a research project? About to publish something? We are lining up our future slate of CANVAS presenters. We seek higher education practitioners who host an autism program on your campus and have recently conducted a research endeavor/evaluation related to your program as well as researchers who have recently published a study (or have one in the works) on autism/postsecondary education. We hope you'd like to talk about this work with the broader CANVAS community. Reach out to Brett Nachman ([bnachman@wisc.edu](mailto:bnachman@wisc.edu)) by **Fri, May 14** to indicate your interest in presenting!

---

## Legacy Farms in Virginia: Paid Apprenticeships Offer Opportunity for Future Entrepreneurs

At [Legacy Farms](#), we help neurodiverse individuals develop job skills through our mentor/apprentice program. We have a 7-step framework for our paid apprentice program that includes job interviews, training, mentor feedback and more. We are piloting a transition program where we place a mentor and apprentice with business partners and fade the mentor and financial support for the apprentice when they are ready to contribute as an employee. We are also conducting research on emotional regulation and on the benefits of teaching self-regulation practices.



Our apprenticeships start in our produce and flower gardens, but we also have apprenticeship opportunities in all aspects of running our non-profit, including graphic design, marketing and distribution, sales, etc. In 2021, we are implementing an entrepreneurial program in which we are launching several new product lines, such as our Floral CSA business. Our apprentices develop a go-to-market plan, define unit economics, create promotional and marketing material, develop sales goals, distribution relationships, and are involved in all aspects of the product development.

We consider ourselves at the “seed stage” in our program development. We continue to evolve our apprenticeship program with the goal of creating a scalable model to help solve the unemployment problem for neurodiverse individuals (e.g. up to 85% unemployment in the Autistic community). We are always interested in research partnerships and advisors to help us improve our job training model!

**-John Keeling, President, Legacy Farms**

---

## Webinars from Vanderbilt’s Frist Center for Autism and Innovation: Available to All

I wanted to share with all of you that we have now uploaded recordings of our first two Autistic Pride Month webinars to Youtube. Our first webinar, *The*

*Intersectionality of Autism and Gender (4/2)*, can be found here: <https://youtu.be/0qKnz8Ofrl8>

Our second event, *How do we Empower and Support Autistic Talent in the Workplace? (4/6)*, can be found here: <https://youtu.be/gZHBWezg1KI>

In addition, here is the link to our most recent Autistics' Roundtable Webinar, from 3/30, about autism & disability in the media: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4hQXcnZzsE>

**-Claire Barnett, Communications Coordinator**

---