

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 1-21-22

People in Attendance:

- Abby LaForge (Kennesaw State University)
- Alison Wessel (University of Delaware)
- Amanda Goldstein (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Mansfield Hall Coach)
- Amy Radochonski - College Living Experience
- Annette Kendall (University of Missouri-Columbia)
- Ariana Riccio (EDC)
- Ava Gurba (Stony Brook University)
- Aylin Ulker (Clemson/MUSC)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (NC State | College Autism Network)
- Brian Irvine (University of Birmingham)
- Cecilia Gigante
- Cheryl Widman (North Central College)
- Clarissa Barnes (Defiance College)
- Courtney Butler (Rutgers College Support Program)
- Dave Caudel (Frist Center for Autism and Innovation, Vanderbilt University)
- Dayna Holbel (Emory Autism Center)
- Desmar McDuffie
- Eilidh Cage (University of Stirling)
- Elinor Lim (University of Southampton/University of Portsmouth)
- Erin Loughlin (Mansfield Hall - Burlington, VT)
- Florencia Ardon (Cornell University)
- Gary McManus (Rochester Institute of Technology)
- Gina Davidson (Shenandoah University)
- Gittie Freeman (SUNY Purchase)
- Hannah Morton
- Helen Rottier (University of Illinois Chicago)
- Jeff Edelstein (UMass Amherst | National Center for College Students with Disabilities)
- Jessica Johnson (UCLA)
- John Caldora (University of Kentucky)
- Jomarie Coloriano (Gateway Technical College)
- Kayden Stockwell (University of Virginia)
- Ke'Andrea Brown Spears
- Katie McDermott
- Katrina Brown (Tarrant County College)
- Keandrea Brown (Tarrant County College)
- Kelsey Bohlke (Agnes Scott College, Atlanta)
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Kirsten Brown
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- LaTrice Tiller
- Lee Williams (CAN)
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)

- Megan Ames
- Miriam Ruiz Mock (Tarrant County College)
- Patrick Dwyer (UC Davis)
- Rachel Schuck (UC Santa Barbara)
- Ris Swank (Bellevue College)
- Sara Gardner (Bellevue College)
- Silvia Ines Vel
- Sophie Lasserre
- Summer West (Universität Kassel)
- Tom Beeson (Clemson)
- TC Waisman (Autism Training Academy)
- Vacochia Moss (Tarrant County College)
- Zoe Sargent (University of Virginia)

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
<https://groups.google.com/a/collegeautismnetwork.org/forum/#!/forum/can-canvas/join> by emailing can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org
 3. [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.

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!

1. Our recent paper might be of interest (Eilidh Cage & Ellie McManemy) "Burnt Out and Dropping Out: A Comparison of the Experiences of Autistic and Non-autistic Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic" (open access):
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.792945/full>
2. Conducting a study that will investigate the beliefs that undergraduate and graduate autistic students/with autism have about their academic abilities as well as the relations they have with faculty at the university. If you wish to participate, please read the linked [Study Information Sheet](#) and follow the link below:
<https://forms.gle/QoqHSG9BtUwCCBN1A>
Please reach out to jessicajohnson@g.ucla.edu if you have any questions. I would truly appreciate your participation. Thank you so much.
3. Kayden was asking about textbook chapters that introduce autism as nonstigmatizing a way as possible; he's aiming to switch out how it's presented in the current class he's involved with. A few suggestions emerged from the community:
 - <https://www.pavpub.com/mental-health/the-neurodiversity-reader>
 - https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/9781138106123?gC=098f6bcd4&gclid=CjwKCAiA0KmPBhBqEiwAJqKK46LrVfzFLAen9iBU6R1mSAtLCTw2C_v2m3mtr1cLLx7jbt6ikE3QhoCo-4QAvD_BwE

- <https://www.amazon.com/Disability-Higher-Education-Justice-Approach/dp/1118018222>
- 4. Summer described having space for autistic and non-autistic participants on her study related to power, place, race, gender, and identity. All participants are submitting written responses to prompts. Feel free to email her at summer.n.west@gmail.com
- 5. Jeff mentioned the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network has opened up spaces for its annual Autism Campus Inclusion training. Jeff is also conducting a study on disabled doctoral students' experiences; while there may be enough participants, more perspectives are always helpful. You can email Jeff at jedelstein@umass.edu

Featured Presenter

- **Helen Rottier** ((PhD Candidate and Research Assistant at the University of Illinois Chicago/Institute on Disability and Human Development); hrotti2@uic.edu)
- “Constellation Mentoring- Evaluating a Novel Approach to Support Autistic College Students”

Notes

- Helen identifies as an autistic and otherwise neurodivergent individual. Her dissertation features three phases, with the first phase focused on comparing peer mentoring programs for autistic students (e.g., who are the mentors, what training they have about autism and mentorship, and what expectations and assumptions that autistic students possess).
- In offering context on mentorship and autistic college students, it is a common support for them, though there's limited evidence on programmatic efficacy. Many programs do not draw from significant autistic stakeholder input, as insights tend to come from other stakeholders.
- She defines peer mentoring as often relating to an experienced peer guiding an inexperienced peer through a shared lived experience, with the peer typically existing at the same status (e.g., student).
- She is examining more than 130 programs at U.S. colleges and universities; she thanked the CAN institutional initiatives database for; if not listed in the database, please reach out to Helen.
- Peer mentors typically comprise undergraduate students and occasionally graduate students. Data she has examined found they receive 0-20 hours of training in autism and peer mentoring, often not stemming from the program directly. Students typically come from clinical fields or special education. Rarely are such mentors other autistic, neurodivergent, or disabled students. Sometimes they are paid employees; if not, unpaid volunteers.
- Her questions entail the following: 1) what constitutes peer mentoring with a mentee population of autistic undergraduate students?; 2) what assumptions do programs make about the mentee population?; and 3) how do these assumptions reinforce neurotypical expectations and systemic ableism?
- Constellation mentoring entails group mentoring (with two or more people) and co-mentoring (reciprocal mentoring relationship with an exchange of support and guidance).
- Constellation mentoring aims to: disrupt traditional power dynamics that exist in mentoring relationships (everyone holds multiple roles); eschew neurotypical social expectations; addresses logistical considerations related to the capacity of

mentors/interest of mentees (there's often a variable number of participants); and empowers everyone to serve as leaders, problem-solvers and resources for one another. Consequently, this is not a hierarchical program.

- Helen often hears there's not enough autistic mentors to mentor autistic students; meanwhile, the constellation approach disrupts that notion.
- The Chicago CANS program meets a couple of times per month in a virtual format; anyone can share their recent experiences, challenges, and goals, leading to opportunities for problem-solving. At times these problem-solving dialogues entail the majority of the meeting time. Later they have a group discussion on a relevant topic (e.g., meta goal-setting, masking, gender and sexuality).
- Events comprise socials and programs with local organizations.
- Chicago CANS also engages in advocacy efforts that stem from group members' priorities; they have also engaged with the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network. She referenced its Autistic Campus Inclusion training.
- Helen is working on developing a guide for creating constellation mentoring. This would entail the following steps:
 - 1. Build your constellation
 - 2. Get to know others and yourself
 - 3. Develop a structure
 - 4. Check in with participants to ensure they're obtaining benefits
 - 5. Incorporate feedback to enhance the model
- Her research would entail examining other peer mentoring programs, as well as engaging in interviews with students participating in constellation mentoring to find out how they would modify the program, what they see as goals, etc.

Q&A

- Lindsay: "How do the majority of participants identify?"
 - Answer: Most identify as autistic, though some also have ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, or co-occurring conditions like anxiety and bipolar disorder. Helen is prioritizing those who identify as autistic for her dissertation work.
- Jeff: Jeff liked the idea of the informal structure of mentorship, and was wondering if there have been participants who have joined the group and gradually determined autistic/neurodivergent identities. In their experience, some have moved from allies to identifying their own autistic/neurodivergent affiliation.
 - Answer: Many participants communicate how they question they identify, and CANS serves as a space for them to think more about it.
- TC: "Can you say more about minimum number of Autistic participants you think is necessary to serve as mentors for a program like this?"
 - Answer: While not all individuals may want to serve as mentors right away, there are opportunities for engaging in initial dialogues. There could be as few as three or four participants. This type of program could exist for disabled students, for those who find social interactions to be difficult.
- Mary: "Do you have any type of funding or financial support for management of the group? Or is it a full volunteer structure? How do you find folks to lead? Wonderful model and work!!"

- Answer: Part of Helen’s job is to engage in this program, and she mentioned how students lead the work. They generate the discussions.
- Ris: “How does the constellation approach impact campus culture, especially regarding Neurodiversity awareness and accessibility on campus?”
 - Answer: This is where advocacy efforts come into play.
- Sara: “Helen, is there a facilitator or staff member at the group meetings?”
 - Answer: Helen is present at each of them. The group stemmed from a clinician-led support group for autistic college students at Illinois. Since they have changed it, and the clinician isn’t necessary; it changes the vibe.
- John: “Can you recommend an article or framework that gives a good overview of constellation mentoring?”
 - Answer: Helen discussed the formation of this group.

Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

Fri, Feb 18 at 3pm ET

- **Dr. Sally Reis** (Letitia Neag Morgan Chair in Educational Psychology, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor), **Dr. Joseph Madaus** (Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Director, Collaborative on Postsecondary Education and Disability), and **Dr. Nicholas W. Gelbar** (Associate Research Professor); all at the University of Connecticut
- **Presentation Title:** Understanding the Academic Success of Academically Talented Students with ASD
- **Description:** In this session, the team will present an overview of new research about students who are academically talented with ASD (2e/ASD). The focus of this research was interviews with 40 2e/ASD college students attending or recently graduated from highly competitive universities or colleges and the strategies and experiences that supported their academic success in both high school and college. Specific research results will be shared about what we learned and how educators can support the academic strengths and interests of this group of students to help them realize their academic potential.

Fri, March 18 at 12pm ET

- **Dr. Jill Underhill** (Associate Professor, Communication Studies & Director, Writing Across the Curriculum, Marshall University)
- **Presentation Title:** Autistic Student Success in Public Speaking Courses
- **Description:** Most colleges require students to take oral communication courses within general education requirements. Presentations are also frequently required within disciplines. These requirements can pose unique challenges for students on the autism spectrum. In this presentation, Dr. Underhill will discuss her research on how peers can support students on the autism spectrum within public speaking classrooms. Dr. Underhill will also discuss practical strategies for success within oral communication contexts.

Fri, April 29 at 2pm ET

- **Dr. Brittany L. Jackson** (Online Learning Manager, Hiram College)

- **Presentation Title:** Postsecondary Social Support Programs for Students with ASD as Described by Students, Directors, and Staff
- **Description:** In this presentation, Dr. Jackson will present her recent study, which surveyed students, directors, and staff at 2-year and 4-year postsecondary institutions known to have a social support program (SSP) for students with ASD. The study sought to learn how students, directors, and staff described why students decided to attend their institution and the SSP. It also examined the advantages, disadvantages, challenges, and areas of improvement that those surveyed felt described their SSP. Dr. Jackson will discuss the survey responses and the insight the responses provided about SSPs from this study, which will be relevant for institutions that currently have SSPs and institutions that are considering implementing SSPs on their campus.

Fri, May 20 at 1pm ET

- **Kayden Stockwell** (PhD Student, Department of Psychology, University of Virginia)
- **Presentation Title:** Understanding the Experiences of Autistic Undergraduates at the University of Virginia
- **Description:** Using a mixed-methods approach, we are interested in understanding what it's like to be an autistic undergraduate at UVA. The experiences students share with us will be used to provide feedback to the university on where support has been working and recommendations on how it could be improved.