

## CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 3.18.22

### Participants in Attendance

- Amber Meyers (Tarrant County College)
- Amy Accardo (Rowan University)
- Ava Gurba (Stony Brook University)
- Aylin Ulker (MUSC/Clemson)
- Brad Cox (Florida State University | College Autism Network)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (CAN | NC State)
- Dave Caudel (Frist Center for Autism and Innovation, Vanderbilt University)
- Elizabeth Bruce (UTDallas)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Florencia Ardon (Cornell University)
- Faith Frost (James Madison University)
- Jane Thierfeld Brown (College Autism Spectrum)
- Jeff Edelstein (UMass Amherst)
- Jill Underhill (Marshall University)
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Lee Williams (CAN)
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Lisa Pennisi (University of Nebraska-Lincoln)
- Madison Overbey (University of Colorado Denver)
- Margaret Camp (Clemson University)
- Matthew Segall (Emory University)
- Sarah Goodfield
- Sasha Zeedyk (Cal State Fullerton)
- Shevaun Lewis (University of Maryland)
- Victoria Ledford (University of Maryland)
- Silvia Velasquez Casado
- Tom Beeson (Clemson University)
- Yasamin Bolourin (UC Riverside)
- Three other individuals joined in as well, though only usernames were listed

### 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  
<https://groups.google.com/a/collegeautismnetwork.org/forum/#!/forum/can-canvas/join> by emailing [can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org](mailto:can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org)
3. [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
4. [Summit Collections](#) (access recordings from College Autism Summit 2021)

**Share a Resources!** 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. [“St. Joseph’s University to open residence hall for students with autism”](#) (Nachman will mention it)
2. Aylin is seeking to gather autistic perspectives regarding sensory inclusion initiatives on college campuses. College Sensory Inclusion Voices: <https://forms.gle/A56CbBWKNd6Cv2kX6>
3. Brad mentioned the NASPA conference, as he and Lee will be delivering a presentation there on “Disability, Difference, and Neurodiversity.” Tom Beeson and Taimi Olson are also presenting on autism-related work.
4. Amy mentioned their team is having a Neurodiversity and Intersectionality Series of events. People can join in on Zoom. For more details, [check out this flier](#). Presenters include Nick Walker (3/24/22 at 4:00) and Morenike Giwa Onaiwu (4/20/22 at 4:00).
5. Margaret said registration for the AHEAD conference in July has opened; there will be a whole strand on autism. Lots of autism representation.

### **Research Presentation**

**Victoria Ledford** (Doctoral Candidate, Communication Science and Social Cognition, University of Maryland) & **Dr. Jill Underhill** (Associate Professor, Communication Studies & Director, Writing Across the Curriculum, Marshall University)

**Presentation Title:** Autistic Student Success in Public Speaking Courses

**Note:** *This presentation was delivered by Victoria due to Dr. Underhill being under the weather, and reflects research that they and a co-author conducted.*

### **Presentation Notes**

- This presentation reflects research conducted by Victoria, Dr. Underhill, and their co-author Dr. Hillary Adams on autism stigma and communication, as well as how instructors can address some of these issues.
- Marshall boasts the Allies Supporting Autism Spectrum Diversity program. This works to train instructors on autism. Dr. Underhill directs the public speaking course, which served as a platform for their research.
- Victoria offered some common understandings of public speaking, including that it represents a top fear, even above death. Several public speaking challenges emerge in the classroom. For one, communication apprehension includes feeling anxiety over sharing one’s perspectives (featuring a range of behaviors). Commonly first-year students are enrolled in these communication courses, enabling students to get to know one another in small group settings. Speech anxiety sometimes enter the mix, as do challenges around executive functioning.
- Victoria mentioned how courses should entail opportunities for all learners to obtain context about different ways people learn, per Universal Design for Learning tenets. Embracing a strengths-based pedagogy is key. Rubrics should be framed that do not prioritize a certain way of communication. Embracing strengths-based approaches is vital.
- The purpose of both of their studies entailed obtaining perspectives of peers’ perceptions about autistic students in these public speaking courses.

- Victoria shared how developing social supports are key to meeting academic objectives; consequently, cultivating classroom community for all is essential. Students must feel connected to others in their classrooms.
- Research questions centered on peer attitudes and knowledge about peers with autism; Victoria contended that individuals need more than knowledge. Questions also focused on attitudes toward interacting with peers featuring “atypical verbal and nonverbal behaviors,” and perceptions about autism diagnosis disclosure.
- The methods entailed having 216 undergraduate students read a vignette and answer an online survey featuring close- and open-ended questions.
- Findings illustrated how knowledge alone was not predictive of openness. More positive attitudes contributed to feeling less social distance.
- Victoria shared the vignette that entailed a story about a fictional student who became frustrated with a classmate, raised his voice, and left class. Student participants were asked about their attitudes toward interaction with a student. In coding the open-ended responses, the most common themes entailed empathy/sympathy, tolerance for inclusion, and external attributions. Some indicate hesitance in interaction. Victoria shared some examples of students’ responses, which illustrated the range of openness. Hesitation illustrates stigma and negative attitudes over behaviors.
- The vast number of individuals felt it was a personal decision for the student to disclose, and a smaller number recognized privacy, the lack of necessity, and benefits, respectively. One student response Victoria highlighted shared how it was the student’s business to decide whether or not they should disclose.
- With their second study, the authors wanted to explore peers’ perceptions more deeply. Research questions focused on peers’ knowledge of autism and how that would influence engagement in communication classrooms, what beliefs they held about peers, and attitudes toward learning more about autism. Participants also entailed students in public speaking courses.
- A large number of participants mentioned communication challenges, with lack of awareness, social challenges, and behavioral challenges as other main themes. These responses were often more deficit-based in nature.
- Betterment, benevolence, and fairness entailed primary beliefs about inclusion. One exemplar quote noted how speaking does not represent the only form of communication.
- Many students endorsed the idea of learning more about autism in a communication course.
- In summarizing the themes, Victoria mentioned the importance of faculty needing to construct their classrooms in ways that are more inclusive, peers require explicit instruction regarding how they can engage in more inclusive behaviors (e.g., avoiding stigmatizing language), and communication courses can serve as venues for including all learners.
- The Communication Across the Curriculum initiative that Dr. Underhill oversees at Marshall University features a variety of courses and professional development opportunities.
- Jill mentioned in the chat about conversations regarding if and how autistic students should participate in classes. Victoria added how the data illustrated that student peers still welcomed their engagement.

## Q&A

- **Amber**, as a self-advocate and communication educator, said how she self-discloses her autism and this disclosure helps build a better sense of community for everyone. Amber aims to modify curriculum and encourage other faculty to do the same in accounting for the various ways people learn. Many fields do not require public speaking, although

communication broadly is helpful. At Tarrant County College, they have instituted greater options for students to take communication courses.

- **Matt:** “I may have missed this but did you all vary (or consider varying) the vignette to include one in which the student's diagnosis was disclosed. I wonder if peers would have expressed some different reactions, and maybe that tells us something about the value and impacts of disclosure.”
  - **Answer:** No, this wasn't varied. Later a question was added about students' feelings about disclosure. They had various perspectives on this.
- **Brett:** Did any participants identify as disabled or autistic? Did this influence their perspectives?
  - **Answer:** Some had a personal connection and were more empathetic.

### Upcoming Meetings

#### **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.