

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 11-11-22

People in Attendance:

- Alison Wessel (University of Delaware)
- Aylin Ulker
- Azedah Bolhari (UC-Boulder)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Heather Logan (Carleton University)
- Jane Theirfeld Brown
- Jen Wheeler (Carroll Community College)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Kathryn Szechy (Wayne State University)
- Katie McDermott
- Kayden Stockwell (University of Virginia)
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Laurel Bastian (University of Oregon)
- Lauren Mathews (University of North Texas)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Mai-Wah Cheung (CUNY College of Staten Island)
- Margot Margarones
- Michele Marjason (Letourneau University)
- Mikala King
- Stephanie Lui (College of Staten Island)
- Tom Beeson (Clemson University)

Meeting Plan

CANVAS Updates

1. Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
 - Click [here to join](#)
 - Send email to the list
<https://groups.google.com/a/collegeautismnetwork.org/forum/#!forum/can-canvas/join> by emailing can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org
 - [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
 - [CAN Consultants Collective](#)
2. **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!
 - Heather shared this article: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/what-universities-can-do-support-their-autistic-employees>

Research Presentation

- **Presenters:** Dr. Aylin Ulker, OTD, OTR/L & Tom Beeson, EdS (Clemson University)
- **Presentation Title:** Sensory Inclusion in Higher Education: Neurodiverse and Neurotypical Experiences and Perspectives
 - Clemson is an R1 in the south, located in a rural setting. It serves more than 20,000 undergraduate students.
 - The Clemson University Spectrum Program (CUSP) is offered for autistic college students, serving about 30 students now. It has grown significantly over its past few years.
 - The literature review entailed understanding individuals' sensory systems. Common characteristics associated with autism include restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior. With some autistic individuals, they are hyper- or hyporeactive to sensory input, or have an unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment.
 - Many autistic individuals may experience sensory challenges, which can directly or indirectly contribute to feelings of loneliness, socialization difficulties, stressful situations, and distraction from academics. Universities are not intentionally addressing this issue.
 - Aylin conducted a needs assessment of nine students in the CUSP program in Fall 2020. From this survey, they identified the prominence of noisy environments in inhibiting students' living and learning experiences. The cafeteria, classrooms, and housing were common settings where students experienced negative sensory sensitivities.
 - In the spring Aylin conducted a focus group with six students, as well as two interviews with additional students.
 - The team shared examples of how various sensory sensitivities manifested for students. On the visual front, bright lights caused distraction and frustration. Auditory difficulties entailed feeling bothered by loud students in the residential halls, sounds that echoed, and small noises that provide distractions. Dining venues did not always offer comfortable food choices.
 - One question asked about what sensory inclusion meant to students. Aylin highlighted student quotes that centered on the utility of quiet spaces, adjustable lighting, and a sense of belonging instead of feeling isolated due to their sensory differences.
 - A campus survey on sensory inclusivity was sent all across campus; the survey was sent to Clemson's Office of Institutional Research, students registered with Student Accessibility Services, and the Access and Equity office list-serv. In the end, 503 individuals participated. 56% of participants were undergraduate students, 13% were graduate students, 8% were faculty, and 23% were staff. 49 participants identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder. In all, 199 identified as neurodivergent broadly.
 - 72% of neurodivergent participants felt negative sensory experiences served as barriers to education, much higher than their neurotypical counterparts (38%).

74% of neurodivergent individuals said they would be likely to use a sensory space on campus.

- The word cloud illustrated the participants' descriptions of their ideal sensory space, showing common words like *lighting, quiet, comfortable, seating, natural*, and other terms.
- The survey asked about preferred locations for a sensory space on campus. Community spaces accounted for nearly 2/3 of the responses. One-third said the library would be the most preferred location.
- Clemson is beginning to take initiative in inclusion, including athletics aiming to make events more sensory inclusive. Clemson Home is exploring a potential sensory-friendly dining location. Cooper Library is working to develop sensory-friendly study areas. They are working on potentially having a tactile wall.

Q&A

- Lee: "Have you sensed any reluctance or pushback from those who find high-energy, high-noise activities to be central to the sense of community at Clemson?"
 - Aylin, having reviewed the responses, did not come across any comments that indicated such feedback. Athletics, in partnering with KultureCity, aims to reduce the aversive sensory experiences with games. CUSP is going to have an orientation ambassador more sensitive to student needs, thus perhaps reducing the negativity that some sensory overloaded students may experience in those spaces. Aylin would welcome universities offering sensory-friendly orientation days.
- Mai Wah: "what about dormitory? Any plan to improve the design/furniture to support?"
 - Tom said there are no current plans for that, though discussions have unfolded with housing about making those spaces more sensory-inclusive.
- Brett asked if any colleges have utilized some of the sensory supports mentioned.
 - Jane said that campuses have transformed unused spaces for sensory purposes.
 - Jennifer mentioned in the chat they have a new sensory/room lounge that was very encouraging.
- Elinor, based in the UK, mentioned the University of Portsmouth students finding initial freshmen week to be very overwhelming, almost like a "sensory assault." An earlier transition week can be very helpful to orient them to university life.
- Laurel (University of Oregon) said the campus benefits from having allies across many units/offices. However, for campuses that don't have consolidated efforts, Laurel was wondering if there are specific partners/roles who support such strategies?
- Lauren mentioned that working with UNT's Dean of Students was effective because of their receptivity.
- Lindsay: "Are you planning to approach the library again to potentially find a space that isn't related to studying?"
 - Tom said the library was very receptive and have taken initiative, so they do not want to be too pushy in how they engage with them.

Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

Spring 2023 details to be announced over the coming months; stay tuned!