

## **CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 1-20-23**

### **Participants in Attendance**

- Alison Wessel (University of Delaware)
- Amber Kelley
- Andrea Haas
- Andrew Lampi
- Andy Lecture (Furman University)
- Anita Rehberg (Harper College)
- Anushey Ahmed
- April Seabourn (Austin Community College)
- Arin Carter (Aurora University)
- Ava Gurba (Stony Brook University)
- Beth Felsen (Spectrum Transition Coaching LLC)
- Brett Binkowski (Ohio University)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- Candyce Eskew (Austin Community College)
- Charla Dubes
- Charles Kransberger
- Cortney DeAngelo (Austin Community College)
- Denise Davidson (Loyola University Chicago)
- Doralena Yanes (Austin Community College)
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Gina Davidson
- Hannah Morton (Oregon Health & Science University)
- Helen Rottier (University of Illinois Chicago)
- Jane McLeod (Indiana University)
- Jayme Miller
- Jen Mozina (Aurora University)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jess Monahan (University of Delaware)
- Jill Underhill (Marshall University)
- Julia P. Gorman (Boise State University)
- Kayden Stockwell (University of Virginia)
- Katie McDermott
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Lauren Baczewski (UCLA)
- Lauren Collier (Northeastern University)
- Laurie Ackles (RIT)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Marisa Serrano (Austin Community College)
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)

- Meaghan Krazinski (Syracuse University)
- Mikala King
- Nat Wilik
- Nate Hughes
- Patrick Dwyer (UC Davis)
- Susan Hedges (Appalachian State University)
- Susanne Bruyere (Cornell University)
- Talyn Steinmann
- Tom Beeson (Clemson University)
- Wes Garton (University of Delaware)
- Zoe Robertson (University of Virginia)

## **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](mailto:can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org)
  - [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
  - College Autism Summit 2023 announcement: Oct 18-20 at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN

**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! Several of the items listed here stem from recent postings on the CANVAS list-serv.

1. New Article: [Exploring Autistic College Students' Perceptions and Management of Peer Stigma: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis](#) (<https://rdcu.be/c17VL>)
2. [Research Study Opportunity: Survivors of Sexual Assault with a Disability \(While in College\)](#) - Researcher: Val Erwin
3. "We are looking to see if anyone in the CANVAS community can recommend a scale that measures the degree to which an autistic student perceives/views their post-secondary environment as inclusive or acceptance of autistic students." - Carly McMorris; email Carly ([camcmorr@ucalgary.ca](mailto:camcmorr@ucalgary.ca)) or Jennifer Williamson ([camcmorr@ucalgary.ca](mailto:camcmorr@ucalgary.ca))
4. Research Study Opportunity: Recruiting Autistic Adults, DBT clinicians, DBT clinic leaders for a Research Study on Dialectical Behavior Therapy; email Alana McVey ([adora123@uw.edu](mailto:adora123@uw.edu))

## Research Presentation

**Presenter:** Kayden Stockwell (Ph.D. Student, Department of Psychology, University of Virginia)

**Presentation Title:** “I just had to figure out what I was doing and hope I was correct”: Autistic young adults navigate higher education

### Notes:

- This project was a big collaboration amongst many individuals connected with the University of Virginia.
- What guides this study is an understanding that autistic university students lack supports regarding their academics, experience loneliness, face stigma from non-autistic peers, and lack sensory safe spaces
- The team developed materials and interview questions in late 2021/early 2022. Participants could choose from individual, text-based, and focus group interviews.
- Participants entailed 13 undergrads and 1 grad student. Ages ranged from 18-28.
- Kayden worked with this data as part of his master’s thesis.
- They used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), as it supports both inductive and deductive theme generation, and even his own lived experiences, too. RTA was also appropriate to serve actionable recommendations within the university.
- The initial version of the research question that guided the project was “how do autistic people experience university life” Later, in becoming familiar with the data, they were thinking about if resources or opportunities that participants indicate actually exist. Ultimately, the final question was “what are the factors that influence autistic university students’ access to information about resources and opportunities?”
- Kayden oriented individuals with some common terms, including *information behavior* (searching and seeking behaviors used to resolve one’s need for information), which has both formal and informal components. An inform instance might be hearing about something via word-of-mouth incidentally.
- The team honors participants’ mix of person-first and identity-first language
- Theme #1: Navigating the Interactions Required to Access Information is Challenging
  - Individual focus entailed some participants mentioning that their distinct autism characteristics as contributing to certain difficulties in social situations. For example, one person described not “catching on as quickly as other people.” Reciprocal misalignment can also unfold during participants’ interactions (e.g., not knowing when to engage in group work).
  - Resources/opportunity access was limited due to the “right kind” of information being unavailable. Some participants shared experiences about aiming to access resources, but not being able to fully obtain it. One discussed how it was hard to reach out. Another didn’t know how to request for certain food options in the dining hall. Those help-seeking behaviors were consistently difficult. These examples underscore the literature that focuses on how autistic people tend to be more risk averse due to fearing a negative or unpredictable outcome.
  - Although individuals could wonder why the participants did not take initiative, indeed they were taking charge. For instance, one individual seeking social

opportunities was looking up websites for student organizations. Barriers to access relate to more structural than individual issues.

- Theme #2: Access to Information is Limited by University Expectations
  - Some participants felt they did not align with the expectation of the “implied student.” For instance, the idea of the university valuing neurotypical students led one to feel like they could not communicate their needs as much.
  - Often university classrooms that incorporate group-based activities for grade outcomes lead to autistic students struggling in that space. One participant mentioned that group work caused increased self-regulation, and then they had struggles with processing information and maintaining composure.
  - Often mass information, university-sanctioned events are developed in a way that suggest everyone should participate. These are sometimes harder for autistic students who may not enjoy crowded, loud spaces. Consequently, some students may avoid engaging in these events, but not attending could contribute to struggling to access information or developing new friendships.
  - Since universities expect that most students are not disabled, then that means they do not put enough resources into disability services. Often there are only a few staff running disability services, meaning institutions like University of Virginia have a very high ratio between staff and disabled students. Sometimes students do not think they are eligible for accommodations and thus do not reach out. Limiting access to information can undermine students’ experiences. Even if some students can access accommodations, they may not know how to employ them. Universities should not hold the expectation that disabled students know what to do.
- Communicative misalignment in real-world settings unfolds. What is hard is that autistic people may interpret situations as individual faults.
- Expectations about neurotypicality can also be defeating.
- Information marginalization refers to how people are excluded from accessing info to fully participate. When needs go unmet, that contributes to autistic students’ difficulties.

#### Q&A:

- Lee: “Would you say your respondents prefer to have the help of disabilities pros, or want to advocate for themselves?”
  - Likely a mix. Often participants wanted formalized supports from the university, though some felt the potential of being stigmatized. The campus features a disability alliance, but participants weren’t asked about that.
- Lauren: “As someone who works in a university disability-related service office, I 100% agree with the observations you made about the under estimation of the amount of disabled student, resulting in a lack of resources for the disability office, leading to gate-keeping information about disability-related services. I’m wondering if you could say more about this issue and what steps we could take to raise awareness and make information more accessible?”
  - Kayden was thinking about how disability services is often funded around \$250,000, on average, less than singular top administrators at a university. At Kayden’s undergrad, Binghamton University, they send out info about disability

services in the acceptance packet. The university also conducted a website audit of accessing info.

- Wes: “I'm curious to hear your thoughts about that apparent tension between the trend of higher ed recommending more active student engagement with the needs of autistic learners for processing information in different ways - did your participants share thoughts about that (e.g. ways of navigating group work, etc.) or have any recommendations about how to reconcile that?”
  - Kayden said he also grapples with that, as group work is both a common expectation and yet particularly difficult for participants. Yet group work may be necessary for certain professions.
- Nat: “on information behavior - do autistic individuals that participate in information behavior (or any of your participants) often find themselves over-communicating information to other people? as sort of trying to give the detailed information they wish they were receiving?”
  - Kayden was thinking about this topic for a while. There is little research on autistic people and information seeking, with what exists limited to academic library settings. Several participants said they felt badly about over-explaining themselves based on past experiences
- Beth: “If the curriculum calls for group work would a request for working individually be an accommodation or a substantial change to the curriculum and thus not allowed?”
  - Last semester Kayden offered individual options in his class.

## Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

Fri, Feb 17 at 12pm ET:

- **Presenter:** Elinor Lim (PhD Student, University of Portsmouth)
- **Presentation Title:** Supporting autistic university students: Perspectives of autistic students and disability support staff
- **Description:** Elinor's research focuses on increasing inclusivity in higher education; specifically, how institutions can better support their autistic students. She will be presenting findings from her recently-completed MSc research, which involved interviewing autistic university students as well as university disability support office staff members to better understand processes and experiences of supporting autistic university students in the UK.

Fri, March 10 at 1pm EST

- **Presentation Title:** CANVAS 5th Anniversary Panel: The State of Research on Autism in Higher Education
- **Presenters:** Helen Rottier (Doctoral Student, University of Chicago at Illinois); Dr. Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (Associate Professor, College of Staten Island), Dr. Jonathan Vincent (Lecturer, Lancaster University), and Dr. Theo Bakker (Professor, The Hague University of Applied Science; Researcher, Vrije Universiteit)

Fri, April 7 at 2pm EST

- **Presentation Title:** Autism, Adulthood and Employment Challenges: The Double Empathy Problem and Perceptions of an Autistic Employee in the Workplace.
- **Presenter:** Kathy Szechy (LMSW, PhD Candidate, Wayne State University School of Social Work)