CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 2-17-23

Participants in Attendance:

- Alison Wessel (University of Delaware)
- Amber Meyers (Tarrant County College)
- Andrea Haas (University of Massachusetts, Boston)
- Andrew
- Andy
- Anya Goodman (California Polytechnic State University)
- Azadeh Bolhari (UC-Boulder)
- Beth Roland (Santa Fe College)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Arkansas | College Autism Network)
- Brad Cox (Florida State University | College Autism Network)
- Christine McAuliffe
- Dana Kanhai (Michigan State University)
- Dakota Morales (Loyola University Chicago)
- Dave Caudel (Frist Center, Vanderbilt University)
- Dov Kugelmass (Lehman College, CUNY)
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Emily Coombs (University of Calgary)
- Emine Gurbuz (University of Portsmouth)
- Erika Greenblatt (The College of Mount Saint Vincent)
- Heather Burmeister (Florida Atlantic University)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jessica Burnett (SUNY at Potsdam)
- Kate Lukasavage (SUNY, Ulster County)
- Kathy Szechy (Wayne State University)
- Laurie Ackles (RIT)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lisa Pennisi (University of Nebraska-Lincoln)
- Matthew Reep (Appalachian State University)
- Melina Auerbach
- Sofia Arcia
- Steven Kapp (University of Portsmouth)
- Sunwook Kim (Virginia Tech University)
- Susan Hedges (Appalachian State University)
- Tom Beeson (Clemson University)
- Yolanda Smith (Tarrant County College)

Meeting Plan

CANVAS Updates
- o 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.
    4. College Autism Summit 2023: Oct 18-20 at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. The Call for Proposals will debut on April 1.
- o **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. "[Embracing Neurodiversity in STEM](#)" Webinar discussing several NSF-funded IUSE projects and a collection of short videos on STEM for ALL website (posted by Anya Goodman - I am not involved in this research, just found this resource)
    2. Amber Meyers mentioned that she started a neurodiversity club at Tarrant County College. These students could be eligible for studies on autistic college students. She encouraged people to reach out to her if they have ideas. Brad Cox then suggested they engage in the next round of the PEACES project in Fall 2023. Beth Roland (Santa Fe College) also recognized the underrepresentation of autistic community college students in scholarship, and would similarly like to see more of it based on their high enrollment at these institutions.
    3. Matthew Reep and his colleagues at Appalachian State University started a neurodivergent student allies club last semester.
    4. Azadeh Bolhari (UC-Boulder) has an NSF grant with colleagues on innovation self-advocacy in engineering, asking student participants if they identify as neurodivergent. 30% indicated yes. Their team is looking at differences across neurodivergent and neurotypical people. Soon they will be submitting a paper out of this work.
    5. Brad Cox reminded everyone that INSAR notifications have gone out.

Research Presentation
- **Presenter:** Elinor Lim (PhD Student, University of Portsmouth)
- **Presentation Title:** Supporting autistic university students: Perspectives of autistic students and disability support staff

Presentation Notes
- Elinor is a first-year doctoral student exploring autistic students' experiences in higher education. The research featured today comes out of her master's thesis work at the University of Southampton. Elinor uses identity-first language, honoring what most participants used in her study.
- The literature demonstrates that, despite laws across various countries boasting laws to support autistic students, support is inconsistent in quality and implementation. There is a gap between what is required and what should be accomplished.
- Research questions were threefold:
  - 1) What are autistic students' experiences of receiving supports and staffs' experiences of providing/coordinating them?
  - 2) In what areas of higher education are disability support services sought?
  - 3) How can services be improved to meet students' needs?
- Recruitment unfolded online, including through CAN. The project is UK-based.
- Elinor sought to enlist autistic university students and disability support staff.
- Zoom interviews took place up to an hour; otherwise, they unfolded via email exchange.
- 10 autistic students and 8 staff participated; there was much gender diversity. Students mostly identified as white. Students were asked how many staff they worked with regarding support at university, indicating in the 1-10 range, whereas staff were asked the same question and they suggested under 20 to in the hundreds.
- Interview questions focused on types of supports received/given/available, as well as experiences in accessing and providing support.
- Thematic analysis allowed for looking for patterns in the data.
- The first main theme: preparing for university can be a lot of work. One student participant mentioned their diligence in looking up disability services pages and communicating with staff members in advance of enrolling. Disability services staff often host information sessions to orient students transitioning to students, with one staff member mentioning the utility of familiarizing students with possible supports.
- Theme 2: getting support is not always easy. There are often individual barriers to receiving support, such as facing mental health issues and not always advocating for themselves if they needed accommodations. For one participant, feeling awkward or shame inhibited attainment of support. As for external barriers to receiving support, often the campus units were siloed or some faculty did not want to provide support. High student to staff ratios also exacerbate ongoing issues; there simply are not enough advisors to serve all disabled students, as one participant relayed.
- Theme 3: the university experience has room for improvement. Making the university more accessible is key (e.g., no longer requiring medical evidence for support). Additionally, improving delivery of supports will support everyone. One student noted how many institutional staff do not understand what autism is. Neurodiversity training would change perspectives.
- A few limitations entail the lack of perspectives (only students and staff), only a handful of universities represented in this work, and her own positionality in not necessarily having context on certain issues in the autism world. Gathering more autistic input from colleagues would be helpful.
- Elinor recommends that autistic students be prepared (and early), as well as practice self-advocacy. Teaching staff should create more accessible and flexible materials, as well as

engage in neurodiversity training. University and disability services must invest more in training, thus creating more prepared and efficient personnel. Wielding this responsibility lessens burden on students. More resources should be for supporting disabled students. Spaces other than higher education also hold some obligations. Schools must more intentionally teach about self-advocacy. Researchers and community partners must engage in further collaboration.

Q&A:
- Matthew: Were there any units or departments that were better or worse than others in their implementation of accommodations?
  - Not necessarily. Elinor interpreted that autism acceptance represents more of a university responsibility than any particular unit.
- Melina: "Great presentation. Thank you. Wondering about your thoughts re how to push/encourage universities towards UD when there is often no institutional appetite to do so (or no internal champion). When approaches like universal design are not required/mandated and depend both on at the availability of training as well as the willingness/motivation of faculty to engage, what does one do?"
  - Lack of awareness contributes to uncertainty or not knowing about a disability existing. Students must be in a spot where they can share what adjustments they need.
- Susan: "It sounded like your findings of the needs of the students were mostly academic in nature. Were there any other needs of the students that emerged besides academic needs?"
  - Indeed, most had a connection to academics. However, some engaged in social groups that connected autistic students with disabled peers. These were helpful in sharing resources and feeling more of a sense of belongingness. Some worked with the accommodations team to obtain specific housing preferences.
- Brett: What's next in sharing this work?
  - Elinor will be speaking at Reason, a UK-based network. There will be a brief/summary to make the work more accessible to participants and in other public spaces.
- Anya: Are there any particularly effective models that exist regarding flow of information across units?
  - In this study, participants expressed frustration with communication not always being shared. Some universities have case manager systems where disability services staff act as point people who can translate info across spaces. This system makes it easier for students. However, disability services must have the resources to make this possible.

III. **Upcoming CANVAS Meetings**

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)

Fri, May 5 at 11am EST
- **Presentation Title: "**Looking at the Whole Student:" Identities and the Higher Education Accommodation Process
- **Presenters** Morgan Strimel (Doctoral Candidate, George Mason University), Dr. Grace Francis (Associate Professor, George Mason University, Dr. Jodi Duke, (Associate Professor & Academic Program Coordinator, George Mason University)