

Subject: College Autism Network - May 2023 Updates
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From: College Autism Network
To: brittany@collegeautismnetwork.org



COLLEGE AUTISM NETWORK
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College Autism Network News and Notes May 2023

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**Are You Launching a New Autism Initiative or Program?
Not Sure Where to Start? Registration Deadline May 15th!**





Are you considering a new initiative or program to recruit, support and retain autistic and other neurodivergent students on your campus? We've got you covered! We invite you to sign up for this low-cost initiative, *Square One*. **"Square One: Launching a Campus-Based Autism Initiative,"** is a *three-part* online series in early June that will give you all the tools and building blocks you'll need to start your program off in the right direction. Facilitated by nationally recognized autism program experts **Jane Thierfeld Brown and Laurie Ackles**, Square One is a cohort-based week-long curriculum. The class will meet virtually (in real time) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, June 5, 7 and 9, from 3-4:30 pm ET. Following this week of instruction, discussion and planning, a mentor will continue to meet with the cohort during the coming year for resource-sharing, guidance, and mutual support. Only a few seats left! Registration Deadline is **May 15th**.

This is a cost-effective way to launch your program and establish a network of colleagues who will support your efforts. The cost for CAN members is \$550, and for non-members is \$750, and includes all instruction, materials, and a *year of mentoring* by a seasoned professional. Additional participants from the same campus can register at a reduced cost. For more information and to register, visit our **website**.

College Autism Summit Call for Programs and Registration Now Open!

You know you want to do it! You *know* you have a brilliant idea for a program proposal for this year's **College Autism Summit** to be held in Nashville, October 18-20. We seek people and programs that will challenge us to think differently, deeply, and discerningly about our work (points given for alliteration). Our theme this year is "Finding a Balance."



Submit Program

In every aspect of our work, seeking the appropriate balance of sometimes-competing factors is essential to excellent work and a healthy life. We are asking you to consider how to find the balance between:

- Research and practice
- Inclusion and rigor
- Individual and community interests
- How it's been done and what might work better
- What is needed and what is desired

The Summit is a place to *reflect, consider and pursue appropriate balances to improve our commitment* to supporting neurodiversity on campuses and in the workplace.

We are currently accepting **program proposals** for the **2023 College Autism Summit**, to be held in Nashville, TN October 18-20. If you are an autism support professional, a researcher interested in higher education and autism, an employer with a commitment to hiring neurodiverse talent, or, most importantly, a self-advocate who wants to influence these conversations, join us at the Summit. The deadline for program proposals is **June 5**. Notification of acceptance is July 14.

The Emerging Roadmap and Glossary for Neurodiversity Employment

Who doesn't need a map? A matrix? A shared vocabulary? The neurodiversity landscape is getting crowded, and like any community that is growing, it could use a roadmap and a common set of terms to encourage and assist its members in communicating their needs, creating new structures and improving services. That's what motivated the **College Autism Network** and UConn's Center for Neurodiversity Employment and Innovation to host a recent three-part webinar

series, *Helping Higher Ed Professionals Understand the Employment Landscape for Neurodivergent Students*. With help from a series of guests, we introduced a matrix that we hope starts a conversation about neurodiversity employment using commonly-agreed upon terms. It's a work in progress, but what we've started with are four categories of organizations participating in this work:



"Direct Hire Employers" are businesses or organizations that recruit and hire neurodiverse talent as one part of their overall talent acquisition efforts. Neurodivergent employees are hired into positions usually through a ND-informed recruitment and assessment process and become employees of the organization who are integrated onto teams and in roles much like all employees at that firm. The Direct Hire Employer takes on the responsibility of creating a ND-friendly work environment so their ND direct hire employees will thrive in their jobs. Examples of Direct Hire Employers include **Wells Fargo**, **JPMorgan Chase**, **Dell** and **Microsoft**.

"ND/Autistic Majority Businesses" almost exclusively recruit and hire ND candidates. The hiring strategy is often central to their original business model regardless of industry. They then partner with other employers seeking contract employees to perform specific tasks. The ND/Autistic Majority Business provides training and support for the ND employees working in other settings and may also offer training for the partner employer in order to improve the environment for ND employees. Examples of ND/Autistic Majority Businesses include **The Precisionists, Inc.**, **Auticon** and **Ultranauts**.

"ND Employment Consulting/Placement Firms" are those organizations or businesses that are not themselves employers of ND talent, but facilitate the recruiting, hiring and success of ND employees into other companies that are clients of the firm. These client companies hire the firm to help them build neuro-inclusive hiring and employment practices, after which they call on their pool of ND candidates to fill the roles at client companies. These firms or organizations may provide coaching and workplace support for candidates, assist those applicants in

doing well throughout the hiring process, and may continue providing support after the employee is hired. Their work with employers may include climate assessment and training of employers to improve the likelihood that their ND employees will succeed. Examples of these firms include **Neurodiversity in the Workplace**, **Integrate Advisors**, **Potentia**, **SourceAble**.

"*Success Enablers*" are those businesses or organizations that provide tools and resources to help ND jobseekers identify ND-friendly employers and job opportunities, provide upskilling in soft and hard skills to improve their candidacy for jobs, and/or offer coaching support for the job search itself. These include job boards like **Neurodiversity Career Connector** and **Jobs for Neurodivergent**, and **Mentra**, a data-driven, AI-powered tool that allows candidates to maximize their chances of success in the job market. Also in this category are technical skill bootcamps that have been established specifically for neurodivergent students, such as **Vanderbilt's Aspie Bootcamp: Python**, and social/job performance coaching content and workshops such as those provided by **iSocial** and **Be Your Best Academy**.

These categories are not perfect! But they hopefully allow us to begin a conversation about the neurodiversity employment landscape that then allows us to measure and even predict the practices that each group should adopt for maximum success. But perhaps more importantly, it allows neurodivergent job-seekers (and those who support them) to better discern the type of employment opportunities out there for neurodivergent/autistic candidates. Does a job lead to full employment within the organization, or will a candidate be "hired out" as part of a contract with another employer? Both options can work well, but knowing which direction the job will take you is a crucial first step.

Do you find this all pretty interesting? Would you like to be part of this ongoing map-making? Consider attending the **College Autism Summit** in Nashville in October and watch for our fall series of continued conversations with leaders in this field. We'll advertise it here in this newsletter and on our respective websites. And feel free to contact either of us if you have questions or contributions to make. We like having good company on this journey!

Judy Reilly

*Director, **Center for Neurodiversity and Employment Innovation at the University of Connecticut***

Lee Burdette Williams

*Executive Director, **College Autism Network***

Integrate Advisors Offers Unique Opportunity for Autistic/ND Job Seekers



Do you know any autistic and/or neurodivergent students or alumni looking for full-time competitive employment but need to improve their job search skills? **Integrate** is now accepting applications for their Employer Connect Program that gives them the chance to learn from, and network with, professionals from companies from across the US. Candidates should apply online using the following link: **Employer Connect 2023.**

Weaponized Heterogeneity Only Harms the Most Vulnerable Autistic People

This intriguing **article**, published in Spectrum News, was written by an Irish health professional and challenges the belief that sorting autistic individuals into subgroups is a good thing.

“Autistic people with the greatest challenges and support needs benefit from autistic-led research, when those caring for them are open to autistic community wisdom and scholarship.”

Seeking Team Member for CAN’s Autism Friendly Campus Project

The College Autism Network is launching an initiative to create an “Autism Friendly Campus” designation to be awarded to colleges and universities that are making a commitment to a neuroinclusive environment that supports students, faculty and staff. Our planning team is keenly interested in having neurodivergent voices inform this important work. If you identify as neurodivergent and would like to be part of a team that is doing something--let’s just say it--incredibly cool, let us know. The work will take place over the coming year and will involve monthly meetings and lots of emails. Please send an email to **Lee Burdette Williams** indicating your interest.

Asperger’s/Autism Employment Coach Certification:

Summer 2023 Group Begins June 15

This **comprehensive, 8-week program** features weekly, live sessions over the Internet, plus a 6-week supervised practicum. It is approved for 21 Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) credits.

The program is presented by Barbara Bissonnette, Principal, Forward Motion Coaching. She shares tips and techniques honed during her work with more than 1,000 clients.

Group size is limited! For details and to request an application, visit the Forward