

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 5-5-23

Participants in Attendance:

- Adero Allison
- Alex Newsom (University of Oregon)
- Amy Tavares (Carnegie Mellon University)
- Beth Felsen (Spectrum Transition Coaching)
- Beth Roland (Santa Fe College)
- Brett Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- Brittany van Beilen (University of Toronto-St. George)
- Caroline Scannell (Northeastern University)
- Chloe M. Davidson (University of Texas at Austin)
- Clarissa Barnes (Defiance College)
- David Top (Utah Valley University)
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Florencia Ardon (Cornell University)
- Grace Francis (George Mason University)
- Jodi Duke (George Mason University)
- Katie McDermott
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Lauren Collier (Northeastern University)
- Lee Burdette Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Megan Rutter (Kutztown University of Pennsylvania)
- Michelle Rigler (University of Tennessee-Chattanooga)
- Morgan Strimel (George Mason University)
- Samahra Zatzman
- Shannon Glynn (Berklee College of Music)
- Taite Lehov (University of Toronto, St. George)

CANVAS Updates

- 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.
 - [College Autism Summit 2023](#): Oct 18-20 at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN
 - Lee mentioned [Square One](#), a workshop series this June that helps campuses launch autism support initiatives

Presentation

- **Presentation Title:** “Looking at the Whole Student:” Identities and the Higher Education Accommodation Process”
- **Presenters:** Dr. 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)

Presentation Notes:

- The presentation stems from an article published in *Journal College Student Development*.
- The guidance on determining accommodations varies, meaning that requirements are inconsistent across institutions. Requiring documentations serves as a financial barrier for many. Many processes are deficit-centered and not focused on disability only. This research is grounded in a need for recognizing and incorporating broader student identities. Students’ backgrounds shape their experiences. Disability services need to more saliently recognize that component.
- The purpose of their study was “to explore disability resource professionals’ (DRP) perspectives on the role of student identities in the accommodations process and how identities are incorporated into accommodation decisions.”
- An interpretive qualitative design entailed surveys and interviews. Morgan leveraged her connections through AHEAD and CAN for recruiting participants. 13 participants engaged in interviews, mostly identifying as white women across the United States.
- Questions centered on accommodation decision-making processes, perceptions of identities in the accommodations process, and how students’ identities related to the accommodations processes used.
- One primary theme: it’s important to embrace a holistic perspective when accounting for students. Participants noted that one cannot separate disability from other important, intersectional identities in their lives (inclusive of, but not limited to, race and language). DRPs must be mindful about marginalized identities and how they shape accommodation processes, for example.
- Another primary theme: DRPs must recognize disability as a complex identity that differs for each person. Respecting their identity development is vital. Empowering students to undo damage of stigma is essential.
- The third theme: embracing intersectional identities and the accommodations process. Early on, DRPs must consider access to documentation in relation to identities (e.g., DACA beneficiaries, financial limitations). Many students cannot engage in initial conversations because of lacking that material, which can be quite inhibiting. Making accommodation decisions that are best for the whole student is crucial; for instance, account for how students may have access to certain technology. Connecting students to other identity-based offices, as appropriate, can help in making them feel a higher sense of community. Avoiding assumptions about students’ identities and managing biases also honors this notion of honoring the whole student.
- This study offers many implications. For one, using a holistic lens embraces this notion of students as multifaceted. Evaluating policies and procedures around accommodation decision-making would be helpful in serving students better. Engaging students in discussions about their identities and experiences values their perspectives. Thinking

critically about the threshold of reasonableness is useful; everyone may have different interpretations. Finally, developing reflexivity-informed practices enable a sense of managing biases around identities and experiences.

Q&A:

- **Caroline:** “As disability specialists, what are some examples of questions to ask in the intake process to assess where students are at in terms of disability as an identity, or understanding how other factors impact them in the college setting?”
 - Jodi mentioned the wide variability in autistic students sharing their diagnoses, and similarly in how they may not always be aware of the challenges that college present. This difficulty stems from not always having the space to reflect on their diagnoses. Jodi said useful questions related to helpfulness of supports in high school. Social interactions, communication, and sensory differences are important for DRPs to entertain. The team is often seeing major differences between what parents share versus their autistic children. Using a social identity wheel with entering students can help in honoring the whole student and having an entry point to address conversations.
- **Beth:** “Wondering if you touched on staffing and funding at all in how offices operate. Since it isn't required to disclose a disability at any point in the application (nor should it be!) schools have no way of knowing how many students they'll need to support in any given year.” Beth offered more context to her question. Often disability services offices are overwhelmed with an influx of students seeking services, especially after students have already enrolled. Beth was wondering to what extent, if any, participants discussed the processes they used to inadvertently gatekeep students.
 - Participants often sought using different models in engaging with students. Morgan shared many institutions have a staff-student ratio of 1:150. At George Mason it's a 1:650 ratio, which often requires students to wait 3-4 weeks for an intake meeting. Jodi said there are often limits to how many visits students can have with mental health counseling, which is further inhibiting, thus leading to referrals outside campus. Providing more supports regarding mental wellness in high school offers a more proactive piece. Grace said that many faculty are unaware of resources, which perpetuates the cycle.
- **Lauren:** “Are there specific intake questions to ask to open the discussion about students' intersection of multiple/marginalized identities that allows them to take the lead and give a clear indication of how they view themselves in that regard?”
 - Partnering with DEI offices alone is inhibiting, because disability is often excluded from those conversations. Universities leading the charge are getting those disability cultural centers are off the ground. Morgan mentioned the University of Arizona has a strong disability emphasis. Engaging with other identity-based offices is essential. Morgan feels getting in front of different offices helps.
- **Beth:** “Have you thought about education/PD that Disability Professionals might need in order to be able to engage holistically and think about intersectionality as they meet with students – what key knowledge/framework do they need?”
 - Digging into reflexivity and shifting mindsets away from objectivity/reasonableness is very vital.

- Getting faculty, disability services, and other personnel on board to think deeply about their biases is vital.
- Compensating autistic people must be more commonly implemented.
- Enlisting passionate insiders is vital.
- PD should be mandatory for all.
- George Mason has been working on building authentic working groups about supporting students more holistically.
- **EMAIL THE TEAM:** Morgan (mthomp26@gmu.edu), Jodi (jduke4@gmu.edu), Grace Francis (gfranci4@gmu.edu)

Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

- **TO BE ANNOUNCED; RETURNS IN JULY 2023**