

## **CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 8-25-23**

### **People in Attendance**

- Alison Wessel (University of Delaware)
- Amber
- Amy Tavares
- Ariel Cascio (Michigan State University)
- Bella Kofner (College of Staten Island)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- Carolyn O’Laughlin (Saint Louis University)
- Christine Dalton
- Clarissa Barnes (Defiance College)
- Dave Caudel (Vanderbilt University)
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Gabriella Velazquez (SUNY Purchase)
- Gary Burdette (University of Saint Mary)
- Hannah Morton (Oregon Health & Science University)
- Jacob Krehbiel (Michigan State University)
- Jeff Edelstein (Berklee College of Music)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Lauren Lestremau Allen (SUNY Empire State University)
- Lauren Collier (UMass Amherst)
- Lee Burdette Williams (College Autism Network)
- Mark Tapia (University of Texas-Austin)
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)
- Melissa Chabot
- Sasha Zeedyk (California State University, Fullerton)
- Summer West (Universität Kassel)
- TC Waisman (Autism Training Academy)
- Tony Banning (Liberty University)

### **Meeting Plan**

#### **CANVAS Updates**

- 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](mailto:can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org)
  3. [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
  4. Sign up to attend a [Foothills Academy event](#): a one-hour webinar by Dr. Emily Rothman to discuss how to help students build connections, especially

- around friendships and romantic relationships. This event is free for College Autism Network members and will be held on Wed, Sept 6 at 4pm ET.
5. College Autism Summit 2023: 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!
    1. Attendee: "Just read this article yesterday, interesting review of some empirical studies on "applying" neurodiversity. I'm not saying I endorse all of it, just saying it was a nicely broad review:  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41252-023-00348-z>"
    2. Elinor Lim: "Elinor doing some shameless self-promotion here: recently published my first 1st authored paper, based on my undergraduate dissertation project - on the experiences of autistic and non autistic students in higher education in Singapore. It's the first paper on this topic for Singapore (I believe) and we were selected to be on the cover for the journal's Aug issue which was released today 😊 <https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/13/8>"

## Presentation

Title: Acts of Resilience and Resistance: Persistence by Autistic College Students

Presenter: Dr. Carolyn O'Laughlin (Assistant Instructor, Saint Louis University)

## Presentation Notes:

- Dr. O'Laughlin has worked in higher education for more than 20 years, including music conservatories, Ivy Leagues, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and more.
- Carolyn is the neurodivergent parent of an autistic teenager and struggled to find content from autistic perspectives.
- Often Carolyn was not learning from autistic people directly.
- Prior research shows that autistic people lack the same persistence and graduation rates as their non-autistic peers. This inquiry influenced her research question: what experiences do autistic college students identify as leading to college persistence?
- Key terms influencing Carolyn's work included *identity-first language*, *neurodiversity*, *persistence*, *subjective well-being*, and *academic ableism*.
- Carolyn drew from Critical Disability Theory, Critical Autism Theory, and Crip Theory. Additionally, she used Schlossberg's Transition Theory.
- Regarding positionality, Carolyn sought to amplify autistic experiences, despite lacking that personal identification. Carolyn accounted for this by de-centering herself in the collection, analysis, and presentation of data.
- This was a narrative inquiry study that drew on the AASPIRE Guidelines for ethical research with autistic participants. Carolyn engaged in two one-hour

virtual semi-structured interviews where she and the participant co-developed a virtual timeline of their journeys. Carolyn shared questions ahead of time, provided financial incentives for participants, offered breaks, and incorporated other thoughtful measures.

- Carolyn drew on her network for enlisting participants, as well as CAN, Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, etc. To be eligible, students needed to identify as autistic (no formal diagnosis needed), completed at least one year in college, and currently in a matriculated college program. In total Carolyn had eight participants who engaged in all the processes. There was diversity in institutional type, gender identity, and geographic location.
- Coding entailed narrative procedures for emerging themes (drawing on interview transcripts, researcher notes, and the timelines) and then cultural narratives. Later Carolyn wrote a narrative summary of each participant and engaged in member checking with each person to confirm their understanding. Ultimately Carolyn employed axial coding, dramaturgical coding, and drew on theatrical terms to shape themes (or acts and scenes).
- The three main themes, or acts: belonging, relevance, and making space. The prologue centered on students' mental health stories. Meanwhile, the epilogue focused on coping.
- Act 1 (Belonging) entailed students thinking about their belongingness, or lack thereof. Autistic students questioned to what extent their experiences were centered or represented, if they had to mask their identities or be authentic, and if they felt appreciated or accommodated in particular settings. Some students felt like they kept having to prove themselves, showing their documentation of paperwork akin to a dog. Carolyn demonstrated a list of words that related to appreciation and accommodation.
- Act 2 (Relevance) related to students asking if the college experience mattered to them. The first scene, or sub-theme, highlighted high-impact practices, or highly relevant experiences, that students engaged in (e.g., on-campus employment, internships). Sometimes, though, professionals discouraged autistic students from engaging in certain measures. At times students also had to navigate mismatched policies, which provided irrelevance and obstacles. Ultimately students were aiming to determine relevance; this entailed a profess of enduring, questioning if they had to deal with certain experiences, adjusting, and perhaps eventually feeling a sense of thriving.
- Act 3 (Making Space) involved a sense of existence as resistance. Carolyn exhibited some key quotes that showed how students aiming to reclaim their roles in society. They developed relationships with other people, created boundaries through self-advocacy, and formed community through autistic spaces and advocacy.
- Autistic students who feel a sense of relevance feel more determined to address academic demands. Carolyn suggests adding a rationale to messaging about the requirements of various procedures.
- Future research may explore the role of neurodivergent social cognition impacting moral/ethical development, intersectional identities, mental health, and employment pathways.

## Q&A

- Summer asked if Carolyn could elaborate about her coding strategies.
  - She aimed to illustrate many experiences, using narrative, axial, and other types of coding. Carolyn aimed to capture the variety of student experiences in an authentic manner and engaged in member checking, deferring to the participant that everything was framed accurately.
- Tony: “Did using disability theory as your framework limit your opportunities to express the strengths of the autistic experience in any way?”
  - Perhaps. Carolyn struggled with figuring out where to situate certain terms. Ultimately, she aimed to take the best pieces of everything.
- Mark: how did you operationally define "persistence"?
  - Carolyn drew on college transition work.
- Jeff: “The theatrical framing is interesting! Did you consider/are you considering adapting your dissertation into a theatrical form or other form of presentation?”
  - Carolyn is on pause for now and wants to publish related work. Yet many participants were theatrically focused and would love to work with them into vignettes or monologues. To be determined.
- Jacob: “Do you agree that your participants' use of theatrical language correlates with the common autistic need to apply meaning to their existence, like it's a story?”
  - Yeah. There are definitely some meta elements of this.
- Lauren: “do you have suggestions or examples of how universities can make the shift towards a culture of appreciation for the ASD community?”
  - Carolyn feels Universal Design as more of an expectation would be promising.

## Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

**Date:** Fri, Sept 15 at 1pm ET

**Title:** Insights from emerging research on the narrative writing of autistic students

**Presenters:** Seri Shevchuk-Hill (Graduate Student, College of Staten Island, CUNY), Dr. Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (Associate Professor, College of Staten Island and the Graduate Center, CUNY), and Bella Kofner (Teacher, College of Staten Island, CUNY)

**Description:** In an exploratory study, the team qualitatively coded the narrative writing of autistic and non-autistic college students. While the students' writings were largely similar between the two groups, autistic students were more likely to produce stories at a higher reading level, which contained fewer syntactic errors, and were less likely to have clear points of climax. Autistic students also had higher writing affect and nonverbal intelligence. The team will interpret those findings and discuss recommendations for future research (e.g., studying writing across multiple revisions) and policy (e.g., allowing students to communicate via their preferred methods).

**Date:** Fri, Oct 13 at 2pm ET

**Title:** Effects of a Peer Coaching Intervention for Young Adults with Autism on a College Campus

**Presenter:** Dr. Leslie Ann Bross (Assistant Professor of Special Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

**Description:** This presentation shares results of an alternating treatments design study conducted on a college campus to compare the effects of a peer coaching intervention alone versus peer coaching + goal setting. Four young adults with autism (ages 22-23) participated in the study during their regular lunch sessions with peers without disabilities serving as conversational partners. The dependent variable was percentage of conversational engagement during 10-minute audio recorded sessions. Results indicated there was not a strong difference between the peer coaching intervention alone versus the additive effects of goal setting. Implications for practice related to creating social contexts for students with autism and peers without disabilities on college campuses will be shared.

**Date:** Fri, Nov 10 at 3pm ET

**Title:** Is Academia a Good Career for Autistics?

**Presenter:** Sandra Thom-Jones (Consultant, Autistic Professor)

**Description:** In a first of its kind study, this project collected detailed reflections from autistic people working in academia on their thoughts, experiences, triumphs and challenges. A total of 37 autistic academics from around the globe participated in the study over a 12-month period. This presentation provides an overview of their reflections on the positives and negatives of academia as a career choice for autistic people. It also shares their recommendations for autistic people considering a career in academia.