

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 11-10-23

Fri, Nov 10 at 3pm ET

People in Attendance:

- Alex Newson (Oregon State University)
- Ariel Cascio (Michigan State University)
- Brett Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- Chloe Davidson (City of Irvine-Disability Services)
- Daniel Batkin (CUNY Graduate Center)
- Dee
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Gary Burdette (University of Saint Mary)
- Heather M. Brown (University of Alberta)
- Jacob Krehbiel (Michigan State University)
- Jae Edelstein (Berklee College of Music)
- Jinx Mylo (Bowling Green State University)
- Katie McDermott
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (College of Staten Island)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Margot Margarones (University of Maine)
- Mark Tapia
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)
- Megan Walser (Michigan State University)
- Michael Canale (UMBC)
- Patrick Dwyer (LaTrobe University)
- Patricia Haberkorn
- Sandra Thom-Jones
- Summer West (Universitaat Kassel)
- Tara Connolly (Carleton University)
- Tony Banning (Liberty University)
- TC Waisman (Autism Training Academy)

Meeting Plan

I. 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 Recap; we boasted 300 attendees and a bunch of programming, including dozens of breakout sessions, panels, pre-conferences,

Russell Lehmann as our keynote, and more. We are currently exploring where the 2024 Summit will be located.

- CANVAS survey: <https://forms.gle/RpE3P92SbpPAASCX9>

Presentation Details

- **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.

Notes

- Sandra was long wondering if academia is indeed an ideal career option for autistic people, but if that remains true, why are there so few in academia?
- The study is part of a larger longitudinal project that involved monthly written reflections from 37 autistic academics.
- 21/37 identify as female, 9/37 as male, and 7/37 as non-binary; 32/37 had an autism diagnosis; and participants came from a variety of countries, including Australia (n=13), the United States (n=11), Canada (n=5), United Kingdom (n=5), and a few others as well.
- Sandra recognized that this project represented insider research. Sandra wanted to make sure that their accurate reflections were captured.
- Sandra asked about barriers and facilitators being autistic in academia.
- The responses ranged from 189 to 2,965 words.
- It is difficult to be an autistic autism researcher.
- One key theme is that social interaction is complicated; there are complexities and challenges in these spaces. Not everyone can interpret and abide by social conventions and how other people engage with autistic people.
- There was joy in how academics could share their knowledge with students and contribute positive differences.
- Another common challenge was in how much there is for autistic academics to juggle, reflective of how much work is on their plate (research, teaching, administration), and also the performance aspect of the role. Sometimes perfectionistic qualities can contribute to one's burden. Even more, the frequency of having to "perform" in front of others can be draining, especially if one is to mask their autistic characteristics.
- On the other hand, academia offers much flexibility and autonomy, which can represent a big positive.
- Autistic individual, often with different operating systems, means that they may seek information in different formats and experience executive functioning challenges.
- The cognitive aspects of academia – focusing on an area of interest very intently – provided much joy, as those special topics are distinctly valued.

- Autistic people often speak different languages (e.g., challenges in receptive and expressive communication). For instance, some people require more time to process information. Not everyone always accepts that.
- Academia enables autistic people to use their special interest as a conversation starter, which can be beneficial in a variety of venues, such as conferences. Being able to connect with other people over shared interests makes social situations easier at times.
- Senses are typically working in overdrive, though many academic roles let people work and study in different settings.
- Sandra then shared the second part of the study, focused on common advice stemming from participants about what to consider if seeking a career in academia (as autistic). The recommendations entailed the following:
 - Know the role. Be familiar with the position based on having an internship or communicating with people in those spaces. Find out the measures of success and learn about the hidden curriculum. Those insights can be very helpful.
 - Find the right people. Selecting the right doctoral advisor or supervisor can enable one to figure out if the space is comfortable. Finding mentors, both autistic and non-autistic) and developing networks can expand support systems.
 - Know (and value) yourself. The research shows that many autistic people cannot always recognize their strengths. Knowing both these and one's challenges will help in figuring out how to attain and expand skillsets. In tandem, gaining resilience can help.
 - Maintaining balance. Less than half of the participants had disclosed their autism, with many experiencing difficult experiences in others' receptiveness. What often helps with their success is in achieving self-care, having flexible work schedules, lessening sensory input in their settings, and advocating for themselves to have their needs met.
- Sandra referenced how entering academia entails proceeding with caution and passion.

Q&A:

- Mark: Mark noticed that there tends to be more autism acceptance in certain countries (e.g., US, United Kingdom, Australia), but not as much in others. Why so?
 - Sandra thinks that some acceptance is more superficial and that it really exists at the individual level. In Sandra's experiences, having disclosed autism caused some people to think that skill performance will differ. Although more understanding is happening with autistic children, there is a long way to go with adults.
- Daniel: Daniel is a graduate student at CUNY. Grad students must attain teaching experience, though it represents the hardest part of the program. Much social anxiety surfaces when teaching, particularly because of perfectionistic tendencies. Daniel wonders how Sandra navigated teaching?
 - Sandra shared how many participants and she expressed such stressors as well. In Australia, if someone garners enough research grants, they can buy themselves out of teaching.
- Brett: What was the biggest takeaway of this work?

- Sandra said she realized how significantly autistic people internalize the stigma of autism. Many autistic people only ask for accommodations if they do not think others will be inconvenienced or upset.
- Tony: How do you navigate masking when communicating this research with other people?
 - Masking varies according to context. Zoom presentations make it easier (e.g., stimming without people noticing). Looking at the list of participants can help; if Sandra knows them, that's helpful. Sandra does not present more than a couple of presentations each week; that helps.
- TC: What did you learn about yourself through this process? Did anything change in terms of how you see our academic Autistic community?
 - Sandra learned that she is indeed okay. Many people have felt validated in hearing their stories in one another.

Upcoming Meetings

Stay tuned for details on our slate for the Spring 2024 semester!