

## **CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 2-20-24**

### **People in Attendance:**

- ☐ Amy Accardo (Rowan University)
- ☐ Annette Carpenter
- ☐ AnnMarie Thorpe (UMass Amherst)
- ☐ Bertrand Monthubert (Atypie-Friendly, France)
- ☐ Bethany Bradley (Rochester Institute for Technology)
- ☐ Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- ☐ Brian Irvine (University College London)
- ☐ Chris Hand (Rochester Institute for Technology)
- ☐ Clarissa Barnes (Defiance College)
- ☐ Daniel Greenberg (University of Kansas)
- ☐ Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- ☐ Gary Burdette (University of Saint Mary)
- ☐ Gary McManus (Rochester Institute for Technology)
- ☐ Heather M. Brown (University of Alberta)
- ☐ Jacob Cohen
- ☐ Jan Smith
- ☐ Jill Underhill (Marshall University)
- ☐ Jomarie Coloriano (Gateway Technical College)
- ☐ Katie Bednarczyk (Rochester Institute for Technology)
- ☐ Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- ☐ Kendra Evans (Rochester Institute for Technology)
- ☐ Lauren Baczewski (Children's National Center for Autism)
- ☐ Lauren Collier (UMass Amherst)
- ☐ Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- ☐ Lori Wischnewsky (Texas State University)
- ☐ Margot Margarones (University of Maine)
- ☐ Mark Tapia
- ☐ Megan Riedl (SUNY Canton)
- ☐ Natasha Vance (Marshall University)
- ☐ Samanvitha Dammalapati (Virginia Tech)
- ☐ Siva priya Santhanam (Bowling Green State University)
- ☐ Theo Bakker (Vrije University Amsterdam | Hague University of Applied Sciences)
- ☐ Tom Beeson (Clemson University)
- ☐ Tony Banning (Liberty University)
- ☐ Wes Garton (University of Delaware)

## Meeting Plan

### **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](mailto:can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org)
- ☐ [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.

**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!

- ☐ Siva privya shared this new journal article: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2024-50372-001>
- ☐ Brian shared information about an upcoming CRAE webinar: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/autistic-professionals-and-the-triple-empathy-problem-tickets-763341744707>
- ☐ Eric just wrote a new article: <https://www.topcollegeconsultants.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/JCA-Winter24-ConfidentandEmpowered-1.pdf>
- ☐ Heather provided this announcement: "We are excited to announce the launch of the ANSWER Scholars Program, a pioneering initiative under the AIR-P network. This program is dedicated to supporting Autistic doctoral students and Autistic healthcare professionals in their autism-related research endeavours across six areas (i.e., primary care & healthcare services, community-based lifestyle interventions including mental health & wellbeing, healthcare transitions, sexual, gender & reproductive health, neurology, and genetics)."

### Upcoming CAN Programming:

- ☐ **Tues, March 12, 4 pm ET: Program Leaders' Discussion** about state and federal funding sources, with Liz Green, an OT with a lot of experience in this area. More on this later, but here's [the link](#): Also free and open to all (please invite interested colleagues if you'd like).
- ☐ **Thurs and Fri, March 21 and 22: Square One**, a virtual 2-afternoon workshop for anyone looking to start a new program or ramp up a current initiative. I realize

this listserv likely doesn't include those interested in starting a new program, but if you know of a school that is, please send them [this link](#).

- **Thursday, March 28 and Thursday, April 4: Halfway to the Summit.** This is a virtual two-afternoon "mini-conference" with some of the best speakers and most popular topics from the 2023 Summit. If you attended the Nashville Summit, there are probably some sessions you didn't get to that you wish you had. And if you didn't join us in Nashville, [here's a chance](#) to see for yourself what everyone has been talking about. The schedule is designed to provide a lot of discussion. Very reasonably priced at \$50 for CAN members, \$125 for non-members.

### **Presentation Details**

**Presenter:** Gary McManus (Spectrum Support Program Specialist, Rochester Institute for Technology)

**Presentation Title:** How Autistic College Students Define Success

#### **Presentation Notes:**

- Rochester Institute for Technology (RIT) boasts more than 15,000 students per semester, a research and STEM-focused university with much diversity and rigor. The disability services office has 430 autistic students registered. Many autistic students on campus also identify as being neurodivergent and/or part of the LGBTQ+ communities.
- The starting point for this assessment was in drawing from hundreds of coaching sessions over two consecutive terms. Gary aimed to capture some of those experiences.
- The Spectrum Support Program (SSP) features more than 100 student members each year, possessing a mix of weekly individualized and group coaching, social meetups, on-campus housing groups, a neurodiversity hiring initiative, and more. Most students are in computing and engineering, though also major in other fields, too.
- The SSP team at RIT include seven individuals; none of the staff members are autistic, and they consider the students to be the experts. Staff aim to be effective allies.
- Gary recognized that they aim to make assessment practices more inclusive and student-oriented.
- Scholarship tends to look at common definitions of success around graduation, retention, etc. Gary drew on a piece by Accardo and colleagues on definitions of success related to self-awareness, goal achievement, and more.
- Even before Covid, the staff recognized that first-year SSP students had greater issues with attrition.
- First-year student retention rates are helpful to know, with SSP numbers in many ways matching RIT (despite differences in sample sizes, of course), but do not

tell the whole story. “They reduce the students’ experience down to an outcome... or a percentage point.”

- They wanted to find out how students make sense of success, realizing that these goals and experiences may exist outside traditional, institutional metrics.
- The coaching process entails specific topics per week of the semester; whereas the beginning of the semester focuses on syllabi reviews, later they center on course enrollment and final exam plans. Goal setting is the emphasis between weeks 2 and 4. Most of the content from this presentation stem from semi-structured conversations with students at the end of the semester.
- At the start of the semester students set priorities for what they want coaching to focus on, discuss motivations and challenges, and choose from shared goals. From there they discuss personal strategies that work for them. Students obtain reminders and recommended resources related to their goals.
- At the end of the semester, they find out from students what happened regarding their priorities and to what extent they made progress with their respective goals.
- They are not asking students if they measure up to benchmark ideas. Students set goals, they reflect on their progress, and then the program figures out to what extent they were helpful in supporting students’ progress.
- The question guiding this work is “do our students set priorities outside academics?”
- Fewer students focused on social connections and self-care (about 39-40%) versus planning. Nonetheless, this opens the door to additional definitions of success.
- Based on year level, we can see how first-year students tend to focus on social experiences compared to students further along in their schooling. On the other hand, third-year students are more focused on academics and finding a job.
- By the spring, differences across cohorts of students tend to vanish. They’re all seem more focused on academics and/or finding a job at that point.
- Students tend to want to connect with their peers across the following topics, including meeting up with friends in an informal manner, participating in clubs or campus events and activities, and spending time with students in their major, among other social goals.
- The most common barriers to social connection relate to mental health issues, introversion, and other self-preservation efforts. Some see faults in themselves, failing in others, or just the difficulties of college more generally.
- SSP students participate in a huge range of clubs.
- The most common strategies for social connections entail playing games, meeting with people over meals, and talking.
- Health and wellness goals tend to center around keeping a consistent sleeping and waking up schedule, obtaining regular physical exercise, and spending time on hobbies, pastimes or creative pursuits.
- Among the barriers to health and wellness are intrinsic goals related to mental health, motivation, and executive functioning issues, as well as extrinsic ones like being busy and feeling distracted.
- About three-quarters of SSP members who filled the survey indicated having prescribed medications. Nearly half obtained mental health support.

- The SSP Top 5 Strategies for Health and Wellness were (from highest to lowest) routines and reminders, physical fitness, pastimes/passions, reaching out, and healthy eating.
- The assessment showed that students are engaged in a variety of physical wellness activities, pastimes, routines and reminders, and avenues for reaching out to others for support.
- In the fall semester, third-year students tended to more regularly discuss social, self-care, and self-advocacy issues much less than the first- and second-year students. It appears that, over time, third-year students more regularly discuss co-op prep and planning for the future.
- Students tended to note more significant improvement in self-care and co-op prep if they discussed them regularly. Even students who discussed topics “sometimes” felt they had improved.
- On the other hand, if students rarely discussed topics with their coaches, they tended to not feel improvement in those spaces.
- Gary reaffirmed how coaching seems to be very effective in providing spaces for students to discuss these topics and make changes. “It’s good to talk.”
- Students expressed seeking more connection with other people at RIT and wanting more students to benefit from SSP services.
- Gary’s goal for this year’s assessment cycle is that the program more saliently honor students’ multiple, intersecting identities. They can still incorporate student-centered approaches to embrace the full spectrum of neurodiversity.

#### **Q&A:**

- Theo: “Did you notice any differences in the importance of these goals between fall and spring (or are these the 2 colors)?” This is in reference to the point about self-care.
  - Gary: If students are viewed as a cohort (85% response rate in fall, 89% in spring), in each semester there was a slight diminishing of the overall *areas* of social connections, self-care and self-advocacy, while Academic Planning and Co-op Prep stayed relatively consistent. They did not measure the variability of specific individual goals within these five areas.
- Lee: “What about gender differences? Or gender/identity?”
  - That has been on top of mind. One question they ask is about if identifying as an LGBTQ+ student is important to them. They piloted that question, but it was not cross-matched into this part of the assessment cycle. Doing so is a major goal of the current assessment cycle when they’ll have a complete sample.
- Tony: “Of the social challenges experienced by autistic students, how much is due to autism and how much seems driven more by mental/physical co-occurring conditions?”
  - SSP surveys students outside of coaching about questions related to students’ autistic identity and community. Of the students who indicate that identifying as autistic is (or might be) important to them, the #1 impact on

their experience at RIT is on friendships. However, friendships is not the students' #1 priority for coaching. So there's a tension there.

- Lauren: "You mentioned that some students chose multiple goals to focus on. On average, how many goals did each student have per semester? Were the goals the same in Fall and Spring or did they update them each semester? and did you notice if having more goals than average had any positive/negative impact on the outcome?"
  - One question they didn't get to in their assessment work is related to the relationship between the number or choice of goals and the students' overall success. They're aware of findings that fewer goals are better, and on their coaching materials they recommend that students pursue one or two goals in each area. So that would be of further interest.
- Wes: "To what extent do you think the quality of the student-coach relationship had influence or bearing on students' perception of success? (if at all)"
  - At the end of the continuing experience survey that students take, they are asked about the quality of coaching. Students tend to be highly engaged in coaching and very appreciative of their coaches, an indication of the quality. What remains to be seen is the relationship between quality of coaching and perceptions of success.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

**Date:** Fri, March 22 at 12pm EST

**Link:** <https://ncsu.zoom.us/j/98991011042>

**Presenters:** Chiara Latimer (Co-Director Center for Neurodiversity, PATH Program Coordinator, Rowan University); Dr. Amy Accardo (Co-Chair and Associate Professor, WISE Department, Rowan University); and Dr. Casey Woodfield (Assistant Professor, WISE Department; Faculty Fellow, Center for Neurodiversity, Rowan University)

**Presentation Title:** Affirming Neurodiversity Culture on Campus: Priorities of Neurodivergent Students, Faculty and Staff

**Presentation Description:** Through the lens of the neurodiversity paradigm and holding the understanding that neurodiversity is valuable to society, we gathered the perspectives and priorities of neurodivergent university students, faculty, and staff via a mixed method sequential two-phase study and a qualitative study on the impacts of neurodiversity affirming professional development certificates . Research questions included: What are the perspectives of neurodivergent students, faculty, and staff around neurodiversity culture on campus and what are recommendations for improvement?

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**Date:** Fri, April 26 at 1pm EST

**Link:** <https://ncsu.zoom.us/j/95595277598>

**Presenter:** Mark Tapia, Ph.D. (Researcher)

**Presentation Title:** Self-Advocacy at the University Level: Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder to Advocate for Their Needs

**Presentation Description:** Research provides some evidence to support self-advocacy skills, but little has occurred to explore how best to teach these skills at the postsecondary level. To that end, there is a positive model that emphasizes the unique needs of persons with autism, and it is the video model. Video modeling has a solid evidence base; however, studies involving video modeling for undergraduate students to advocate on college campuses are non-existent. The current study sought to explore how the use of video modeling, paired with a task analysis and role-play, impacted the ability of undergraduate students with ASD to use self-determination and self-advocacy skills in a university setting successfully

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**Date:** Tues, May 7 at 2pm EST

**Link:** <https://ncsu.zoom.us/j/96337840057>

**Presenters:** Dr. Cindi May (Professor of Psychology, College of Charleston) and Dr. Christopher E. Whelpley (Assistant Professor of Management, Virginia Commonwealth University)

**Presentation Title:** Biases in the Hiring Process for Job Candidates with Autism...and Solutions That Might Help Level the Playing Field

**Short Description:** Our research demonstrates a clear bias against prospective employees with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the job interview process. This bias stems from differences in social style and interaction rather than the perceived competence or qualifications of candidates with ASD. We consider different approaches to addressing this bias, and recommend two steps for leveling the playing field for candidates with ASD. Our approach emphasizes educating employers rather than masking employees' autistic traits.