

## **CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 2025-01-16**

### **Participants in Attendance**

- Amy Radochonski (College Living Experience)
- Andrea Haas
- Angela Williams
- Ariana Garagozzo
- Audrey Scaer (Eastern Michigan University)
- Brad Cox (CAN & Michigan State University)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Pittsburgh)
- Carlos Castañeda (St. Edward's University)
- Clarissa Barnes (Defiance College)
- Dave Caudel (Frist Center for Autism and Innovation, Vanderbilt University)
- Devin Johannis (University of Michigan)
- Elgiz Sener
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Em McClintock (CAPS, Cornell University)
- Erin Morpeth-Provost (Florida State University)
- Florencia Arden (Cornell University)
- Gianna Osborn (SUNY Purchase)
- Gina
- Hannah Morton
- Jack Parker (George Mason University)
- Julia Gorman (Boise State University)
- Cassidy Tocco (University of Alabama)
- Kathy Szechy (University of Windsor)
- Katie McDermott
- Kelly Coons (College Autism Network)
- Kirsten Brown (USUHS)
- Krista
- Laura Graham Holmes (Hunter College)
- Laura Kettle
- Lisa Yates (Moreno Valley College - Southern Cal)
- Lori Wischnewsky (Texas State University)
- Mackenzie McNamara (University of Rhode Island)
- Mahea Aki (University of Utah)
- Mario Crown (Boston University)
- Megan Riedl (SUNY Canton)
- Meghan Hanlon (SUNY Empire)
- Meera Rastogi (University of Cincinnati, Clermont)
- Melissa Cabot (George Mason University)
- Michael Canale (University of Maryland Baltimore County)
- Roxana Samaniego (University of Arizona)
- Summer West (Universität Kassel)
- TC Waisman (Autism Training Academy)

Two other individuals whose names were not captured also joined in

## **Meeting Plan**

- 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)
- [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
- [Building Bridges to College and Beyond for Autistic Students](#) (Feb 20 & 21 in Mesa, AZ)
- College Autism Summit: Nov 2-5 in Pittsburgh, PA; more details to be shared soon
- **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. **Fraud/Bot Protection**
    - a. See the CANVAS listserv for several recent posts and shared resources.
    - b. [Presentation on Countermeasures](#): a list of 30 types of countermeasures and some examples of how they work. From the PEACES Project. [Brad Cox](#) is happy to consult with anyone else or join my colleagues in discussing it further should anyone else want to learn more.

## **Presentation Details**

**Presenters:** Nicole Noble, PhD, LPC-S (Assistant Professor, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center) and Carlos Castañeda PhD, LPC, NCC (Tenure-track Professor, St. Edward's University)

**Presentation Title:** Exploring Romantic Experiences of College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Seeking and Maintaining Relationships

**Presentation Description:** This webinar explores the romantic experiences of college students with ASD, focusing on their efforts to seek and maintain romantic relationships. Drawing from nine years of data, including 1,805 written reports from monthly meetings with support personnel working with 124 college students with ASD, the presentation identifies key themes, such as the perceived benefits of engaging in romantic relationships and the barriers encountered throughout the process of seeking, attaining, and maintaining them.

### **Presentation Notes:**

- This presentation unites two separate studies, one on college students with autism seeking relationships, whereas the other focuses on maintaining relationships. These are distinctly separate skillsets.

- Dr. Noble and Dr. Castañeda are both licensed professional counselors and tenure-track professors.
- This is the Connections for Academic Success and Employment (CASE) program, aimed to help college students with ASD and other disabilities in achieving their unique goals. Nicole served as PI to best understand how the program operates at Texas Tech. Program participants meet with a learning specialist each week, as well as have wraparound meetings with other community professionals to meet their personal, academic, and professional goals.
- 124 participants engaged in the program over a nine-year period; hundreds of meeting notes
- 83.9% of the participants identified as male, 13.7% as female; 1.6% as trans
- Thematic analysis guided looking through 1805 meeting notes
- Team members identified dating and romantic relationships as notable
- Multiple studies came out of this project, including those related to the impact of COVID-19 on college students with autism and the factors impacting counseling use.
- The first article they covered is on seeking and attaining romantic relationships.
- Participants desired for and recognized the benefits of romantic relationships. No matter the discomfort in seeking them out, they wanted to push themselves.
- Barriers to seeking and attaining romantic relationships included the following:
  - feeling uncomfortable in initiating conversations
  - fears in seeking them out (especially for those who lacked experience in dating; on the other hand, those who had dated before felt more capable)
  - holding uncertainty regarding forming connections
  - wondering if potential romantic partners would reject them (e.g., dealing with unanswered messages, being stood up on dates)
  - having excessive attention/difficulty in understanding romantic cues
- Some participants identified strategies in dealing with challenges
  - Attending counseling
  - Participating in workshops on flirting, making friends
  - Engaging in student organizations and activities with people who held common interests
  - Figuring out potential conversation topics
  - Identifying strategies to ask out crushes
- Some participants made connections with individuals across long distances, including out of the country, though that presented challenges.
- Catfishing (faking identities online) also manifested at times unfortunately.
- Technology contributed to participants' growth, in terms of adapting strategies, acting more cautiously, or even feeling more confidently at times.
- A separate study explored the process of *maintaining* romantic relationships. Common challenges entailed:
  - Fears once within the relationships (e.g., uncertainty of appropriateness of self-expression behaviors, communicating their needs)
  - Romantic partner rejection (participants set boundaries to share their needs as a mechanism for avoiding certain difficulties)
  - Difficulty engaging in reciprocal communication of needs within

- The literature shows that autistic individuals may have additional mental health concerns, but it's worth validating that their concerns are often larger ones among people seeking and maintaining relationships.
- That said, the complexities of navigating social interactions and engaging in rigid routines add further nuance to romantic relationships.
- The team contends that counselors should incorporate unique strategies unique to ASD individuals. Social counseling has merit and is growing in interest. Offering feedback on social behaviors and engaging in role playing can also be helpful.
- Some limitations exist with this data, including the single data source of drawing on meeting notes and written records from one program, lack of follow-up questions, and notes crafted by learning specialists.
- Future research may entail applying specific counseling theories, considering specific intervention techniques, and targeting additional communities and identities of participants.
- The team has future projects underway, including dating life during the COVID lockdown period, in which they compared autistic and neurotypical individuals. Another centers on the role of artificial intelligence in professional counseling and counselor preparation.

#### Q&A:

- Kelly: "What was the information on participants using dishonesty through technology themselves (e.g: photo manipulation, using AI to send messages, not disclosing demographic information)?"
  - Sometimes individuals faked photos, though participants were generally savvy in detecting them. Using AI likely didn't factor in because data collection ended in 2021.
- Lori: "Did you see a difference in relationship success/health in cross-neurotype relationships versus in same neurotype relationships?"
  - It's hard to know exactly about who the participants were having relationships with.
- Kelly: "How did desire/not desiring sex factor into this data set?"
  - Sometimes participants mentioned using pornography and hoping to quit it as a means of seeking out actual human connection.
- Mark: "I came in late, so I'm not sure if you discussed this or not, but I was wondering if you would like to generalize to this study to autistic adults outside the "typical" college age range"
  - The challenge would be in finding the appropriate dataset. This study drew on a program that was accessible
- Em: "I'm also curious about if parasocial relationships came up at all." Parasocial relationships are commonly when people serve as followers of online or celebrity figures, and assumes they are a closer relationship than what is actually experienced, as Em described.
  - That did not come up. The time frame may be a factor in play here given that the data is a bit older.
- Lori: "Did participants report having issues with Title IX when they were seeking or exploring relationships?"

- Some were immersed in student conduct issues
- Kelly: “Was there anything in the data about the “disclosure debate”?”
  - Participants struggled if and when, how much to share with their romantic interests based on past challenges on that front.
- Brett: What’s your sense of the accuracy of media depictions of autism/dating.
  - Nicole: It can be helpful in providing exposure, but may not always be natural due to being filmed.
  - Carlos: He often approaches it from the perspective of a counselor. Carlos mentioned how one of the cast members on *Love on the Spectrum* was frustrated with the infantilization of some participants on the show.

### **Future Meetings**

**Date:** Tues, Feb 25 at 12pm EST

**Presenters:** Anirudh Subramaniam (Student, The Ohio State University) and Andrew Buck, PhD (Research Scientist, Nisonger Center at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Centre)

**Presentation Title:** Integrating Neuroinclusive Pedagogy into Practice

**Presentation Description:** This presentation examines the prospects of a faculty and staff, self-paced, neurodiversity training program that is informed by literature, survey research, and student voice. The purpose of the training program is to promote awareness of neurodiversity and neurodivergence and cultivate neuroinclusive pedagogy amongst faculty and staff members, in order to foster an accessible, inclusive, safe, and equitable learning environment for all students. Research suggests that postsecondary educators lack awareness of issues experienced by students with disabilities and confidence in teaching neurodiverse/neurodivergent (ND/NDT) learners. Preliminary survey results indicate that educators at a select institute of higher education were less likely to agree that their ND/NDT students are truly succeeding, understanding and applying concepts, and communicating easily with them. While laws enforce academic accommodations for students with disabilities, there is still a need to create conducive classrooms that meet the needs of ND/NDT college students and adult learners who choose not to disclose their disability. Ensuring that faculty and staff integrate neuroinclusive pedagogy into their practice is essential to advance equitable educational outcomes for all students.

**Date:** Fri, March 21 at 12pm EST

**Presentation Title:** Managing Academic Burnout: A Qualitative Study of Neurodivergent College Students

**Presenters:** Adam Lalor, Ph.D. (Vice President of Neurodiversity Research and Innovation, Landmark College) and Rick Bryck, Ph.D. (Senior Director, Institute for Research and Training, Landmark College)

**Presentation Description:** This webinar will describe both the process used to mentor a student led research project—undertaken by neurodivergent college students—and the methods, results, and implications of the study results. Previous research highlights that academic burnout significantly affects college students' academic performance (Madigan & Curran, 2021) and that neurodivergent students encounter unique challenges in higher education compared to their neurotypical peers (Shmulsky et al., 2021). Yet, there is a lack of research addressing the coping mechanisms utilized by neurodivergent students to manage academic burnout. Responses were obtained from 37 college students, with one or more neurodivergent profiles, via open-ended survey questions. Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis and focused on student reported methods for coping with burnout. Results fell into two broad themes, comprised of several sub-themes, of reported support strategies. Implications of the findings for educators and practitioners working with neurodivergent students will be discussed, along with insights into co-creating a research study with students.

**Date:** Tues, April 15 at 1pm EST

**Presenter:** Lauren Mathews M.S., CCC-SLP (Clinical Professor, Department of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology, University of North Texas)

**Presentation Title:** Neurodivergent Students' Perceptions of Their Social-Emotional Well-Being and Related University Support Services

**Presentation Description:** This presentation provides the results of a qualitative pilot study examining four neurodivergent college students' perceptions regarding their social-emotional well-being and university supports. Their descriptors and perceptions of their lived experiences provide real-life examples of their social-emotional strengths/challenges experienced while attending a 4-year university located in the north Texas area. The gained insight into their experiences and support preferences/deterrents can facilitate informed decision making on what should be in place to best support all facets of their well-being.