

Subject: CAN's newsletter in your inbox: Think of it as our valentine to you. 🥰

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College Autism Network News and Notes

February 2025

WHAT NOW?



It has been a rough couple of weeks for our community of autistic and neurodivergent students and the professionals and researchers who support them. There's a surrealness to it all, but unfortunately, it isn't surreal. It's very real and very discouraging. If you're feeling this way, please know that you are not alone. I wish I could say something unequivocally upbeat, like "Hang in there! It'll get better soon," but unless someone has access to a time machine that can either take us back to rewrite the script that has brought us to this point, or take us forward past the

Newsletter Highlights

What Now?

Disruptive Students: Case Studies and Discussion webinar, February 27

College Autism Summit Update (Pittsburgh, November 2-5)

Square One Returns! Virtual Workshop for New Autism Programs, June 11-12

Frist Center Announces Summer Internship Opportunities, Deadline February 14

Interesting Stuff from Around the Internet



disastrous decisions and actions we are seeing take place every day, we're stuck here, in February 2025.

We are, though, stuck here together, and that's no small thing. The College Autism Network, its members and its many supporters, is a remarkable community of committed professionals, brilliant scholars and above all, courageous self-advocates. If anything will get us through this, it's our community. Here are some things you can do to maintain your composure during these very frightening days:

- Stay informed. Don't shy away from news or conversations, as tempting as that might feel right now. Make sure you have a reliable source of information. For example, this [website](#) is the information and resources page for COGR which describes itself as "the national authority on federal policies and regulations affecting US research institutions." Find other sources you can trust.
- Don't be distracted by focusing solely on the issues closest to you. There is more afoot, and at stake, than this attack on people with disabilities and DEI efforts.
- Lead, don't just follow, the conversations on your campuses. Campus leaders are as concerned and uncertain as the rest of us when it comes to what's going to happen next. Be a source of information yourself. Make sure your campus leaders (and communications offices) know useful, quotable, information about your programs and services. Share statistics, successes, and the impact of your work, especially around these areas:
 - Recruitment and retention of autistic and neurodivergent students;
 - Impact of evidence-guided practices on our national and local workforces and the economy in general. Your students and alumni, in part because of your efforts, help businesses and organizations be successful.
- Ask questions. If you're sensing that some decisions are being made too soon, or pre-emptively, ask for clarification. Is there a legal mandate behind this decision? Or just caution? You might not like the answer you get, but at least you'll know where your campus leaders stand.
- Center your program's promotional and descriptive language in the language of the ADA. We know that

your work far exceeds what the ADA requires, but the woke police care mostly about tripping you up, and anything that smells like DEI is a target. Yes, it pains me to say this as a long-time student affairs professional whose whole professional life has been committed to making our campuses diverse and inclusive. But unless the legislative branch grows a collective spine and/or the judicial branch opens a law book written after the 1800s, no one is going to save us but ourselves.

- Stay healthy. It goes without saying that the stress we're feeling is detrimental to our physical and mental health. But allowing that stress to compromise our ability to care for ourselves, our families, our communities and our students is exactly what this administration and its supporters are hoping for. "Shock and awe," right? Do not let the uncertainty eat away at you. We can, and must, tolerate the unknown by reminding ourselves of the known: we are doing good, important work.

I'll end with some words from my niece who texted me this week, reflecting on a trans person she cares about who is feeling a great deal of understandable fear. She recently read the graphic novel *Persepolis* (which I highly recommend, by the way). She wrote, "Many people have had to live under fear/hate/oppression like this for decades, for their whole lives. And people find ways to persist, to live in spite of it, to stay true to themselves and find joy even within that type of oppressive context. I keep thinking of *Persepolis*. There were so many scenes of the parents discussing, in hushed tones, how to carry on and still finding ways to have parties with friends, read books, etc. I recognize that this is not an actual war zone like in that circumstance but I am reminded of ways people are resilient through all types of oppression."

We have no better role models than the autistic and neurodivergent students who have overcome a lot just to be in your charge. They need you to mirror that resilience back to them and in doing so, encourage both of you.

--Lee

**DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS WEBINAR, PART 2,
FEBRUARY 27 AT 4 PM ET**



If you joined us in November for an interesting discussion about the legal and ethical obligations and strategies for responding to students whose disruptive behavior may be tied to a documented disability, you'll want to follow that up with a discussion using case studies to further consider what might work best for all involved. John Caldora and Alli MacNamara, participants in our first discussion, will be there again along with Cathy Cocks, one of higher education's leading experts on student conduct, Title IX and higher education law pertaining to student behavior.

This event is free for CAN members and for non-members who paid for the first webinar (all registrants from November will be getting an email with fee waiver details). Non-CAN members who did not register for the November event can register for \$50. [Register here.](#)

COLLEGE AUTISM SUMMIT UPDATE: REGISTRATION AND CALL FOR PROGRAMS



Are you joining us in Pittsburgh, November 2-5, for our ninth College Autism Summit? Excellent content, amazing networking, interesting exhibitors, great lunches. What's not to love? The Summit is for autism support practitioners and researchers, employers with an interest in neurodiversity, and autistic college students who want to make a difference on their campus and beyond through

networking and advocacy efforts.

Registration will open on March 1 and the Call for Programs will open on March 17. Bookmark our [website](#) and check back often.

SQUARE ONE: AN EXTENDED WORKSHOP FOR NEW PROGRAM COMING IN JUNE



Are you in the process of developing a new autism support program? Or do you have a new program and want to supercharge it with proven strategies? You'll want to sign up for Square One, a two-day virtual instructional series for higher education professionals interested in launching a campus program or initiative to support autistic and other neurodivergent students.

Our faculty this year are Amy Rutherford of College Autism Spectrum (former director of UT-Chattanooga's Mosaic Program) and Lorraine Wolf, former Director of Disability Services at Boston University and co-author of "Students with Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for College Personnel" and co-developer of "Strategic Education for the Autism Spectrum," a widely adopted support model for students on the autism spectrum in higher education.

Sessions will be held June 11th from 12 pm to 5 pm ET and June 12th 12 pm to 2 pm ET. Mark your calendars now and check our March newsletter and [the CAN website](#) for more information as we post the details.

FRIST CENTER ANNOUNCES OPEN APPLICATIONS FOR SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

THE FRIST CENTER FOR Autism AND INNOVATION

Applications are now open for the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation's Autism Summer Internship Program. These are in-person internships at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN, for undergraduate students who identify as neurodivergent. Through this internship, participants will create and pursue a STEM project with a faculty member as a mentor and support from the Frist Center. Stipends and support for travel are included.

The program will take place between May 27th and August 1. The application deadline is February 14th. Please visit the [Frist Center's website to access the application](#).

INTERESTING STUFF FROM AROUND THE INTERNET



This is an [interesting article](#) from Psychiatry Advisor about the high co-occurrence rate of autism and ARFID (Avoidant and Restrictive Food Intake Disorder). It is a meta analysis of 21 studies, and suggests the importance of screening when working with patients who have one or the other diagnosis.



[This article](#) covers potential legislation in Virginia that, if passed, could make it easier for students to access accommodations and services by utilizing IEPs as evidence of disability. This could lessen the reliance that colleges and universities have on more formalized documentation that can be costly and difficult for students to access.

This newsletter is published monthly by the [College Autism Network](#), an independent 501(c)3 organization supporting the success of autistic college students and the professionals who work with them. Want to share an article? Feature an upcoming event? Post a job opportunity in autism support services? Our monthly newsletter reaches over 2900 self-advocates and professionals. Send it [to Lee](#) and we'll share it.

Was someone nice enough to forward this newsletter to you? We're happy to add you to our mailing list to receive it directly. [Send us a note.](#)

If you appreciate our work, please consider [joining CAN](#) to receive additional information and discounts on some of our resources and to support our work. Individual and organizational memberships are available.

The [College Autism Network](#) is supported by the [Frist Center for Autism and Innovation](#) at Vanderbilt University.

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