CANVAS Meeting Minutes – April 15, 2025

People in Attendance:
- Aishat Sadiq
- Anika Jain (Carnegie Mellon University)
- Audrey Scaer (Eastern Michigan University)
- Becky Colgan (Gettysburg College)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Pittsburgh | College Autism Network)
- Brittany van Beilen (University of Toronto)
- Dana Jenkins-Post
- Danielle Flores (Triton College)
- Darren Butler (Carnegie Mellon University)
- Elinor Lim (University of Portsmouth)
- Emine Gurbuz (University of Portsmouth)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Erin Morpeth-Provost
- Felicia Flores (Occidental College)
- Florencia Ardon (Cornell University)
- Francisca Juarez Delgado (College of Staten Island)
- Gina Oviedo Martinez (Hillsborough Community College)
- Hilary Meyer (Triton College)
- Jan Smith (The Cottage School)
- Javier Motta-Mena (Arizona State University)
- Jennifer
- Julia Gorman (Boise State University)
- Kassidy Tocco
- Kelly Coons (College Autism Network)
- Kelly Searsmith (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)
- Krista Puruhito (Arizona State University)
- Laura Kettle (USC)
- Lauren Mathews (University of North Texas)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lesley Criag-Unkefer
- Lori Wischnewsky (Texas State University)
- Sabrina Paglia (University of Toronto)
- Sierra Hicks (Cornell University)
- Susan Hedges (Appalachian State University)
- TC Waisman
- Tarrah Kinney (University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma)
- Victoria Morsette (Rochester Institute of Technology)
- Yvette Doss (University of California Santa Barbara)

Meeting Plan

CANVAS Updates
o   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
    3. CAN Membership Details We appreciate the support your membership provides to
        help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
    4. College Autism Summit: Nov 2-5 in Pittsburgh, PA
    5. Partnering with Inclusive Academia over the summer for a four-part college readiness
        webinar series; see details here
o   <mark>Share a Resource!</mark> 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!
    •   Hilary mentioned that Triton College has posted a job listing for a second full-time
        coordinator in their Center for Access and Accommodative Services
    •   Kelly shared there is a new book by Professor Sol Smith: *The Autistic's Guide to Self-
        Discovery*
    •   Darren said this week their college is starting a new project for teaching technical and
        communication skills for artificial intelligence careers for autistic community college
        students.

Presentation Details

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 Notes:
•   Lauren has been working in higher education for 21 years and is pursuing a PhD in
    higher education. She has supported many of UNT's autism programming.
•   She identifies as neurodivergent and has relatives as part of the community, too. Much of
    her expertise has related to her role as a speech-language pathologist.
•   There has long been work on the social-emotional needs of neurodivergent college
    students, including on relevant programming, but we don't know how effective they are.
•   This study aims to examine neurodivergent students' lived experiences regarding their
    social-emotional well-being and interactions with institutional social-emotional supports.
•   Through hearing about students' lived experiences, we can better appreciate real-life
    examples of social-emotional strengths and barriers.
•   Lauren employs the Social Model of Disability, specifically the Capability Approach that
    recognizes how that there are a valued set of functions, capabilities, and opportunities as

foundational to an individual's well-being. We account for negatives and positives, as well as values, beliefs and sense of self. People should look for resources and experiences that support their well-being; in tandem, society shouldn't say what the norms should be. Nussbaum features ten central capabilities: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imaginations, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment.

- Lauren built trustworthiness through having credibility measures (e.g., drawing on neurodivergent students as peer reviewers, allowing participants to read and approve transcripts/interpretations) and dependability procedures (recording in-depth notes, capturing nonverbal and verbal observations).
- This study was conducted at the University of North Texas, which features a variety of resources and programs that support neurodivergent constituents. Through the UNT Neurodiversity Network, students can participate in social opportunities, an organization, communication group, and more.
- Four study participants engaged in one or more of these UNT offerings. Lauren drew on criterion-based purposeful sampling. Students ranged in their level in school and, save for one, had additional disability diagnoses.
- Lauren employed a phenomenological qualitative approach that followed the AASPIRE Guidelines. Semi-structured interviews pulled on questions inspired by Nussbaum's ten central capabilities. At least one question fit within each of them. Deductive codes also came from these categories.
- Inductive coding essentially emerged from ideas related to students' control, their social connections, and various supports in their lives.
- Lauren showcased a visual she created, almost like a see-saw, where the supports (theme III) undergirds balancing control factors (e.g., practical reason, environment), and connections (e.g., emotions, affiliation).
- The first theme illustrates how students were accounting for their level of control; the more influence they had, the better their well-being. Sadly, students faced difficulty with managing internal factors, such as emotional regulation and decision making. Daily demands could be compromising, too.
- Second, students illustrated the need for social interactions, though often balanced with having alone time. They also shared the desire to be around people who could understand this desire for balance. In tandem, Lauren identified variability in the types of personal relationships that students cultivated, though ultimately they needed to identify with people in a social group. Quality of friendships mattered more than quantity.
- Third, students expressed that well-being supports come from many spots, including neurodiversity support programs, general college program (ideally those that are run by neurodivergent people and/or are neurodivergent-affirming), and sensory and neurodivergent-accepting spaces. Students enjoyed having access to outside spaces.
- Implications entail the following. On a more practical level, universities should have more neurodivergent-specific support programs and practice more Universal Design practices. In accepting neurodiversity, universities cultivate a better landscape. On the policy front, neurodiversity understanding is crucial and more funding should be allocated to supports beyond accommodations. More research should support larger and more diverse samples of neurodivergent students, as well as explore what facilitates (or doesn't facilitate) their social-emotional well-being.

Presentation Q&A
- Kelly: "Is this perception of less control of daily demands/scheduling part of a continuing trend of themselves within K12 or is it seen as a departure from K12"
  - This participant was discussing the here and now of how they were feeling at that point in time in college. Lauren did not ask, nor did the student volunteer, the role of timing.
- TC: "Aside from needing more control of an environment, could it also be about needing consistency in the environment which breeds familiarity? As an Autie, I can manage/self-regulate in a 'difficult' environment (e.g. noisy student union buildings) if there are consistencies that I see/hear in it because it becomes familiar."
- Kelly: "I'm curious about the idea of accessing supports "when we need them." How does this correlate with the academic calendar (e.g: seeking social support after one semester of "trying out doing it on your own [maybe after trying the social identity of being non-disabled]"?
  - It is important to help students know that they can always come back to the same program. UNT developed five programs with different foci to allow students to come and leave at different times. Their 1:1 support program is structured in a manner to allow for flexibility in frequency/intensity of meetings.
- Brett asked about how campuses without formal programming for neurodivergent students can be detrimental?
  - Lauren hopes to have a more comprehensive picture in her dissertation work.
- Kelly: "What does your "timeline" of support look like? I'm particularly interested in the % of students who go from being program participants to program leaders (e.g: peer mentors)?"
  - No formal peer mentoring program exists; rather it is more of a support group facilitated by others. Students help drive the topic.

Upcoming Presentation

Date: Wed, May 7 at 12pm EST

Presenters: Dr. Sam Brandsen (Research Analyst, Duke University), Shealtiel Weekes (Doctoral Student, Howard University), Liza Tomczuk (Doctoral Student, Drexel University)

Presentation Title: Understanding the Experiences of BIPOC Neurodivergent Students in Higher Education

Presentation Description: Our study aims to understand the experiences of autistic and neurodivergent people of color at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and community colleges to determine what resources or supports are most needed, challenges encountered, and sources of joy for students in higher education. We are excited to share the results of our interviews with neurodivergent students of color as well as interviews with educators at HBCUs and community college. Our presentation will also discuss lessons we have learned throughout the study about how future, similar studies could be designed in a more inclusive and equitable way, as well as insights into the recruitment process.