

CANVAS Meeting Minutes 2025-08-12

People in Attendance

- Andrea Haas
- Aley O'Mara (SUNY Empire State University)
- Amy Stalker (Georgia State University)
- Audrey Scaer (Eastern Michigan University)
- Ben Schwartzman
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Pittsburgh | College Autism Network)
- Christine Moeller (University of Washington)
- Colleen Grilo (University of Central Florida)
- Colleen Shinn
- Gretchen LaBonte
- Hala Annabi (University of Washington)
- Jo Elda Castillo-Alaniz
- Jodi Duke (George Mason University)
- Kamille Roesse (Claremont Graduate University | UCLA Tarjan Center)
- Kathy Szechy (University of Windsor)
- Kaycee Gnatowski
- Kimberly Douglass (Douglass Consulting Group | University of Tennessee)
- Kirsty Lauder (Cornelle University)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Nava Klopper
- Pamela Childers (Santa Fe College)
- Sine
- TC Waisman

Meeting Plan

CANVAS Updates

- 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
- **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!
 - Kimberly Douglass [shared an older article](#) she published related to the presentation topic of libraries.

Presentation Details

Presenters: Dr. Christine M. Moeller and Dr. Hala Annabi, University of Washington Information School

Presentation Title: Uncovering the Subtle Differences and Commonalities in the Workplace Experiences of Autistic and ADHD Librarians

Presentation Notes

- Funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, this project features many studies that unveils the experiences of neurodivergent librarians in the context of their work. This project involves leaders Dr. Annabi and Dr. Moeller, as well as Dr. Michelle H. Martin. Previously Dr. Moeller was an academic librarian and instructional designer, institutional lenses they bring to the project.
- The team reminded audiences that everyone has needs, including the ability to select captions on. Understand that questions may need to be repeated; feel free to stim.
- Academic libraries have an important role in serving neurodivergent faculty and staff. Librarianship tends to appeal to neurodivergent people, though the literature has not quite focused on their experiences. Dr. Annabi reminded everyone that the core values of librarianship are not consistently applied to library workplaces. Consequently, the team has endeavored to better understand this space from an employment perspective.
- This particular study – the third of a series of studies – have been aimed to improve the capacity of libraries to recruit, onboard, retain, and advance neurodivergent librarians. They were interested in understanding neurodivergent librarians’ barriers and enablers related to workplace inclusion and empowerment, how neurodivergent employees can be better supported, and what inclusive practices may be instituted.
- Dr. Annabi and colleague Dr. Locke had earlier developed a framework – the Organizational Interventions Mitigating Individual Barriers Framework (OIMIB) – applied to this context of libraries. The framework, as they modified it, accounts for individuals’ differences, embodied knowledge, the knowledge and attitudes of neurotypical librarians, barriers and opportunities in the library workplace, and professional cultures among librarians.
- Their multi-year project, carried out over four phases, takes a critical and interpretive lens. Initially they conducted interviews with neurodivergent librarians and supervisors, as well as with neurotypical colleagues, to identify barriers, enablers, and best practices. From there they conducted a nationwide survey of public and academic librarians. Later they engaged in participatory design sessions that worked toward creating trainings and resources for managers and employees. Ultimately, they are constructing a toolkit.
- This presentation focuses on the survey results of neurodivergent library workers and supervisors (268 participants). They engaged in descriptive and statistical analyses of multiple-choice responses, as well as content analyses of open-ended questions.
- First, under **physical and sensory environment** (e.g., layout, temperature, lighting), more autistic and AuDHD participants ranked physical and sensory environment as a major barrier compared to ADHDers. This analysis was helpful in figuring out unique needs based on neurotypes.

- Second, regarding the impact of **neurotypical expectations**, autistic and AuDHD participants ranked this as a major barrier compared to ADHDers.
- Third, **fear of discrimination** surfaced highly for autistic and AuDHDers compared to ADHDers.
- Fourth, **identity disclosure** ranked as significantly different between autistic and AuDHDers (less likely to disclose) versus ADHDers (more likely to disclose). They accounted for differences across disclosing to co-workers and supervisors.
- Finally, **masking** came about more often for autistic and AuDHDers, ranking it as a major barrier, whereas ADHDers noted it as more of a minor (or no) barrier).
- Interestingly, the team recognized that there were no significant differences across all three groups as it pertained to enablers (e.g., flexible schedules, autonomy, having private workspaces with control over their sensory environment). What this shows is that they were dealing with a common array of difficulties.
- They highlighted one participant quote focusing on how libraries boast a strong percentage of neurodivergent employees, in part because of the strengths that they bring in the profession.
- Key takeaways of the study include that autistic, AuDHD, and ADHD librarians experienced similar workplace barriers but to differing degrees and there are not significant differences in success enablers. Nuances surface when looking at the roles of race, gender, and other demographic data.
- Workplaces have long ignored practices that would be neurodivergent-friendly (e.g., expressing explicit expectations).
- Future work is to focus on differences across neurodivergent and neurotypical librarians.
- Their neurodiversity employment in libraries toolkit will debut this autumn, inclusive of trainings, resources for supervisors, success kits for neurodivergent librarians, and more!
- This is one of the first studies that focused on neurodivergent supervisors within a single profession.
- Dr. Moeller offered a few guidelines for posing questions, including “does the question ask the speakers to do work that you might need to do yourself?”

Presentation Q&A

- TC: Of those who experienced major barriers, did they identify how these barriers affected them in significant ways?
 - Christine said not only did barriers lead to employees feeling excluded and isolated, but also feeling a personal toll once they returned home. They felt burnout and were wondering if they should remain in the profession.
- Kimberly: About a decade ago Kimberly and a co-author examined the tensions that academic librarians with gaining faculty status. Kimberly is wondering about tenure promotion and faculty status?
 - This was difficult to address in a nationwide survey because it’s hard to advance in those ways as public librarians. Within academic libraries, there’s a variety of statuses. During interviews, there were further conversations about neurodivergent expectations.
- Jodi: “Can you share any specifics about what physical and sensory elements were most challenging for the participants? We are finding similar experiences for autistic educators with specific challenges of lighting and sound.”

- Many libraries may lack natural light or make it hard to adjust lighting. The absence of private spaces for engaging in deeper work can also be difficult. It's hard for some librarians to work in open spaces such as at front desks. Lacking adaptability in the spaces they occupy is hard.
- Brett asked about the role of geographic location in influencing people's locations.
 - Hala said that smaller, less-resourced libraries often mean that librarians are more overwhelmed and depleted. Christine added there was an intersectional impact in terms of regional culture (e.g., places where libraries are targeted and experience book bans) and where those with multiple marginalized identities feel it harder.
- TC: What suggestions do you have for those who work with supervisors who are not ND knowledgeable/affirming?
 - Self-awareness around knowledge and intentionality around educating oneself about neurodiversity is a great first step. Creating alignment and expectations within a team and across supervisor-supervisee relationships are so important. They need to figure out standards around autonomy, detail, and communication, among other topics. Neurodivergent individuals must figure out in what ways to advocate for themselves in the workplace.

Upcoming Presentations

Date: Thurs, Sept 18 at 12pm EST

Presenters: Katie Tobin McDermott – Consultant, Karly Ball Isaacson – Michigan State University

Presentation Title: Belonging on Their Terms: Friendship Experiences of Autistic College Students

Presentation Description: This presentation highlights autistic undergraduate college students' perspectives on friendship using data from PEACES project, a national longitudinal, mixed methods study. We present key findings related to participants' engagement in autistic spaces, practicing autistic authenticity, and bonding over shared interests. Drawing from these findings, we discuss strategies for higher education professionals and researchers to support belonging among this unique student group.

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Date: Tues, Oct 14 at 10am EST

Presenters: Dr. So Yoon Kim (Assistant Professor of Diversity and Special Education, Korea University) and Dr. Shannon LaPoint, Assistant Professor of Special Education, Florida State University)

Presentation Title: Transitions, Adjustments, and Persistence: Autistic Undergraduates Navigating Higher Education

Presentation Description: Drawing from two in-depth qualitative studies, this presentation highlights autistic undergraduates' experiences of transition, adjustment, and persistence in college. Early transition was shaped by proximity to home, family support, new social relationships, transition programs, structural changes from high school, and logistical barriers such as transportation and housing. Students felt adjusted after developing familiarity with campus routines, achieving academic success, and forming meaningful peer connections. Persistence was driven by intrinsic motivation, the value of a degree, and family expectations. Findings highlight the need for autism-tailored, neurodiversity-affirming transition programs, proactive academic advising that fosters routine, predictability, and engagement with academic interests, and expanded peer engagement opportunities to help students navigate college and persist.

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Date: Fri, Nov 21 at 11am ET

Presenters: Elinor Lim, PhD Candidate, University of Portsmouth

Presentation Title: The Role and Impact of Family in Autistic Students' University Journeys

Presentation Description: This presentation will discuss findings from 3 studies conducted during my PhD: A scoping review on the role of family for autistic higher education students; an interview study on autistic students' family relationships and family support; and a quantitative online survey exploring links between autistic students' family support and student outcomes. I will also share reflections on the participatory elements of this research (steering group; consultation) as well as implications of the studies' findings.