

CANVAS Meeting Mins, March 19, 2026

People in Attendance

- Alissa Monette (Roberts Wesleyan University)
- Amanda Marino (Integrate Advisors)
- Amber Davis (Johns Hopkins University)
- Andrea Haas
- Audrey Scaer (Eastern Michigan University)
- Barbara Pazey (University of North Texas)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Pittsburgh | College Autism Network)
- Christy Giambastiani (Sonoma State University)
- Douglas DeHaan (Towson University)
- Harley Crisp (The Ohio State University)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jo Elda Castillo-Alaniz (Texas A&M University-Kingsville)
- Karen Johnson (University of North Texas)
- Kellen Hackett (Boston College)
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Lauren Mathews (University of North Texas)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Lindsay Hill (Michigan State University)
- Michael Ota

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.
- **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!
- **New Open-Access Article**
 1. *Did you know?* There are **135K–286K** autistic students in US colleges. Read the free, open access journal article at...
Cox B.E., Stockwell, K.M, Kepple, C. R., & Francis, C.B. (2026; Online First). The Prevalence of Autistic College Students in the United States. *Autism in Adulthood*. 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25739581251405705>

Presentation Details

Presenters: Dr. Karen R. Johnson (Associate Professor, University of North Texas) and Dr. Barbara Pazy (Associate Professor, University of North Texas)

Presentation Title: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Experiences of Autistic University Students: Informing the Future of Higher Education

Presentation Notes

- COVID-19 presented massive disruptions to students' emotional and psychological well-being, including reduced access to support services and abrupt changes in how their courses were delivered, thus elevating stress.
- Their study sought to understand the experiences of autistic university students prior to, during, and after the COVID pandemic took place.
- Self-determination theory, a theory of motivation, accounts for three psychological needs. These include belonging and relatedness, autonomy and choice, and competence and belief in one's ability (for instance, in affecting certain outcomes).
- They employed a qualitative narrative case study design. Participants who were eligible needed to have (a) attended the university before the remote switch, (b) taken courses during the more remote period, and (c) still been enrolled once the university switched back to an in-person format.
- Subsequently, they profiled each of the four participants:
 - Anna, a white female diagnosed with autism in her 50s, sought support in the classroom due to difficult experiences. Following wrapping up her doctorate, she was working to create a college support program for autistic students.
 - Micah, a 46-year-old white male, said it would have been helpful if he had been diagnosed much younger, as opposed to at age 41. He, too, was wrapping up his doctorate, albeit seeking a career in educational and instructional technology.
 - Angela, an aspiring telehealth therapist, was a 25-year-old African American female who had been recently diagnosed, though was anticipating an ADHD diagnosis. Her degree was in social work.
 - Emily, a 22-year-old white female, received a recent diagnosis and had experienced disdain for her learning and behavioral differences. She was seeking a degree in integrated studies.
- Belongingness and Relatedness theme
 - Prior to COVID: participants tended to experience challenges with connecting with classmates and social anxiety around peers. Micah, for instance, experienced brain freezes when enlisted to speak up in class.
 - During and after COVID: students had varying experiences with online courses. Whereas Anna and Angela benefited from the format, Emily found the nonverbal communication component more difficult and Micah felt disconnected from peers. The pandemic shifted how they engaged in peer interactions.
- Autonomy & Choice theme

- Participants expressed how they sought more options in how they could learn and engage with course content. For example, Micah felt there should be different ways of participation beside discussion boards.
- They also wanted control over their learning environments so they could avoid overstimulation.
- Competence & Belief in One's Ability: Adjusting to Changes theme
 - All four students experienced challenges in returning to the university because of their anxiety; they no longer had the same structures.
 - Leaving home and having to interact with other people prompted anxiety.
 - Emily, for instance, very much wanted to attend classes in person.
- Accessibility of Support theme
 - Prior to Covid students had more resources at their disposal, but once the pandemic hit, fewer services were offered online and it was more difficult to connect with their professors.
- Recommendations
 - Structure the learning environment to offer supportive conditions for development of autonomy, competence and relatedness for neurodivergent students
 - Provide autism awareness training for faculty, staff, and non-autistic peers
 - Employ counselors with experience in working with neurodivergent students and adults
 - Use multiple forms of communication to meet each student's preference
 - Offer a hybrid learning environment to satisfy students' preferences for online v. in-person courses
- Limitations
 - Four participants, while appropriate for a narrative study, offered few perspectives.
 - Two participants were diagnosed in their early 20s, others later in life.
 - Potentially, students were hesitant in sharing their pandemic-related experiences out of fears of negative perceptions.

Q&A

- Alissa: “does anybody have experience with students using Google Notebook LM or other study/class tools?”
 - The presenters were not familiar.
 - Michael (in the audience) mentioned having personal experience with this platform and found it to be very useful on many fronts, including understanding the overview of an article and helping figure out what to focus on. It can also create a podcast, allowing the user to ask a question or leave a comment, prompting the system to jump to the most relevant aspect.
 - Harley shared how Genio is a very useful resource, too, albeit costly for advanced features unless the university covers it.
- Lindsay: “I'd love to hear some examples from the first recommendation about supportive conditions.”
 - Karen said participants preferred a more hybrid approach that would enable them to have greater flexibility. Having a variety of modalities allows for students to choose

options that resonate with them. Barbara added that the institution's definition of hybrid is that the student can attend one session per week or 50% in person; the rest can be online. Thus, professors can gauge what the students lean into. It's helpful for students to be able to directly share their needs; unfortunately, many professors lack training on how to listen to students.

- Lee wanted to find out how autistic students have pivoted back from online, especially in dealing with unexpected changes in circumstances.
 - Lauren Mathews mentioned how many spaces became busier due to the online shift, thus requiring how to deal with things once back in person.

Upcoming CANVAS Presentations

Date: Tues, April 14 at 12pm ET

Meeting Link: <https://pitt.zoom.us/j/93794054859>

Presenters: Dr. Brittany E. Hayes (Associate Professor, University of Cincinnati) Francesco DiRienzo (Graduate Student, University of Cincinnati), Dr. Cooper A. Maher (Assistant Professor, Michigan State University), and Dr. Leah E. Daigle (Professor, Georgia State University)

Presentation Title: Victimization Among Autistic College Students

Presentation Description: Autistic college students face elevated risks of multiple forms of victimization. This presentation examines the victimization experiences among autistic college students. The presentation concludes with implications for campus policy, prevention programming, and tailored supports to better protect and support autistic students in higher education.

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Date: Tues, May 12 at 11am ET

Meeting Link: <https://pitt.zoom.us/j/97209427271>

Presenters: Dr. Clive Trusson (Senior Lecturer, Loughborough University) and Dr. Cheryl Travers (Reader, Loughborough University)

Presentation Title: Autistic Students' Experiences of Employment and Employability Support While Studying at a UK University: Lessons for Higher Education

Presentation Description: We report on a study that was primarily conducted for internal purposes of better supporting autistic students studying business programmes which mandated a one-year placement/internship. Twelve autistic students completed an in-depth online qualitative survey. Analysis revealed several themes/findings: placements are highly valued; underlying

self-confidence; common workplace difficulties; support incoherence and deficiency; and a capacity to self-advocate support requirements. Recommendations for HE include: provision of expert coaching (e.g. on disclosure, coping techniques and advocacy of needs), regular check-ins during placements, peer-support, and maintaining a database of 'autism-friendly' employers. The study was published in 'Autism in Adulthood'.