



College Autism Network News and Notes

October 2026

The Summit is Around the Corner (A Corner in Baltimore)



The tenth College Autism Summit is just a few weeks away. There's still time to register (regular rates change on October 7) if you want to join us for three days of exceptional learning and networking with some of the best higher education autism support professionals anywhere.

We had a number of programs submitted that start with the word "Beyond," so to whet your appetite a bit, join us for:

- Beyond "Just Ask for Help:" Low-Friction Supports for Executive Function, Self-Advocacy and Follow-Through
- Beyond Academics: Rethinking College Readiness for Neurodivergent Students
- Beyond Accommodation: Creating Neuroaffirming Career Environments in Higher Education
- Beyond Accommodations: Learning What Works for Neurodivergent Students in Post-secondary Apprenticeships
- Beyond Autism Alone: Supporting College Students with Co-occurring Disabilities and Intersectional Identities
- Beyond Behaviorism: Using Social Work as a Lens to Help Autistic College Students Grow Into Themselves
- Beyond Buzzwords: What Makes a Campus a Safe Harbor for Neurodivergent Students

Newsletter Highlights

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CANVAS October Session Focuses on Chinese Higher Education Efforts

Talkig to a Chatbot? Autistic People Figured This Out First

ASAN's Useful Resources for Autistic Self-Advocates

Landmark Offers Certificate Programs

Have You Bought Your CAN Swag Yet? Holiday Shopping is Sooner Than You Think



- Beyond Compliance: Supporting Autonomy-Sensitive Autistic Students in Higher Education Through Universal Design

If you can't find a few sessions on that list that interest you, you are beyond help. So please join us for these and another 50 sessions, keynotes, plenaries, fun activities and our amazing low-sensory room. See you in Baltimore.

Register Now!

CANVAS to Discuss Autism in Chinese Higher Education



Our next CANVAS session will be Thursday, October 15 at 12 pm ET. “The Impact of Video-Based Intervention for Improving Attitudes Towards Autism in Chinese Higher Education: A Pre-Post Study” will be presented by Dr. Yinghui Xia (Education Research, Lancaster University) and Dr. Peng Wang (Joint International Research Unit on Neuroplasticity, CERVO Brain Research Centre, Laval University).

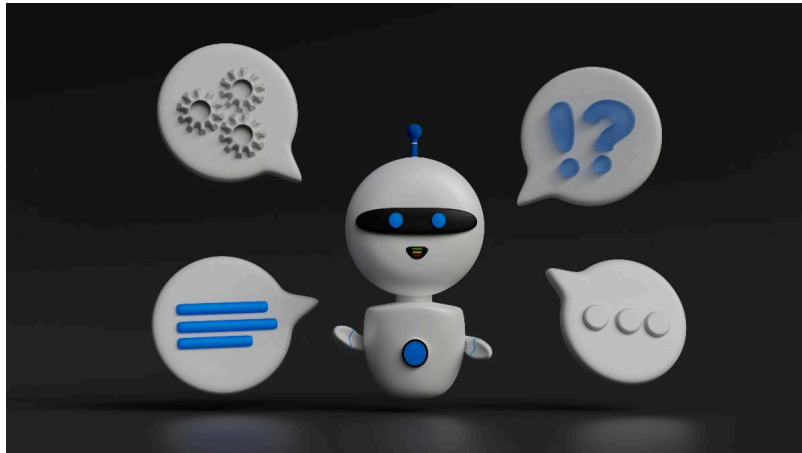
This presentation will introduce a pre-post study examining whether a brief video-based intervention can improve attitudes towards autism in Chinese higher education. Drawing on data from 1,158 university students and staff, the study used the Autism and Neurodiversity Attitudes Scale before and after a six-minute autism-awareness video. The talk will summarize the study design, key findings, and what they reveal about the possibilities and limits of short awareness interventions. It will also discuss implications for autism acceptance, neurodiversity-informed practice, and the development of more sustained, context-sensitive support within university communities in China and beyond, in higher education settings today globally.

To make it a smoother process for joining our meetings (and getting reminders), we are now asking everyone to [please](#)

[register](#) for the event in advance. Upon registering, you will be emailed a Zoom link with more information, as well as an event invite.

To be added to the CANVAS list, contact [Brett Nachman](#)

Talking to a Chatbot? Autistic People Figured This Out First



If you find AI chatbots' false modesty and endless flattery off-putting, you're not alone. We asked one how to get more useful answers, and its advice (be direct, be specific, skip the filler) sounded a lot like what autistic people have been saying about good communication all along. The following is from a Claude conversation:

What is the best way to guide a chatbot to provide honest feedback, even with pushback rather than being always agreeable?

Claude: Good question, this is genuinely a solvable prompting problem. A few approaches, roughly in order of effectiveness:

Give explicit permission and instruction to disagree.

Something like: "I want honest critical feedback, not validation. If you think I'm wrong, say so directly and explain why. Don't soften disagreement or hedge it with compliments first." Models respond well to being told the "rules of engagement" up front, because it overrides the trained instinct to default to agreeableness.

Ask for the counterargument explicitly. Rather than "what do you think of this plan," try "what's the strongest case against this plan" or "steelman the position that this is a bad idea." This sidesteps the sycophancy pattern entirely because you're not asking for a verdict, you're asking for a specific adversarial task.

Ban the tells. Tell it directly not to open with praise, not to say "great question," not to use phrases like "you're absolutely right." Naming the specific verbal habits you find fake often works better than a vague "be more honest,"

because those phrases are trained defaults it can consciously avoid when flagged.

Ask it to rate confidence or flag uncertainty. "Tell me your honest confidence level in this, and what would change your mind" pushes toward calibration instead of performance.

Use role framing. Asking it to act as a specific skeptical persona (an editor, a critic, a devil's advocate, a blunt colleague) gives it permission structure to disagree that a generic "be honest" instruction sometimes doesn't.

Repeat the instruction if it drifts. Sycophancy tends to creep back in over a long conversation as the model tries to keep things pleasant. If you notice it softening again, just restate the instruction. It's not a one-time setting, it's something you may need to reinforce.

Test it. Occasionally state something wrong or a weak opinion on purpose and see if it corrects you. If it just agrees, that tells you the instruction isn't sticking and you may need to be blunter about wanting pushback. The through-line in all of these: you're giving the model a task or persona where disagreement is the job, rather than just asking it to have a personality trait like "honesty," which is vaguer and easier for the trained politeness to override.

Autism Self-Advocacy Network Creates Valuable Resources



We think very highly of the excellent work done by our colleagues at the Autism Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN), and were particularly impressed with two currently important resources they are providing. The first is ASAN's ["Plain Language Round-up to explain the integration mandate"](#).

The integration mandate is law--it requires schools, businesses and communities to provide opportunities for integration of people with disabilities. It is under threat by an administration that would like to limit those opportunities. The second great resource is ["They Work for Us: A Self-Advocate's Guide for Getting Through to Your Elected Officials."](#) If you're mad as hell and want to let your elected officials know what you think about the administration's efforts to limit the rights of people with disabilities, this guide will give you some concrete ways to make your voice heard.

Landmark Announces Next Online Course for Autism Professionals



For education professionals and autism advocates, Landmark College is offering “**Academic and Cognitive Supports for Autistic Students**”, a graduate-level, online course running November 20 – January 24.

The application deadline is October 25. This and other November courses can be taken individually or as part of Landmark College’s highly regarded online [certificate program in Learning Differences and Neurodiversity](#) with a choice of specializations in Autism on Campus and Online, Executive Function, or Postsecondary Disability Services.

For more information or to apply, see the certificate [website](#) or contact Carol Beninati, Certificate Program Coordinator, at institute@landmark.edu or (802) 387-1662.

CAN Has a Swag Shop!



If you'd like to help promote CAN by wearing some CAN-branded clothing, we've got you covered (literally).

[Visit our CAN Sideline Store](#) to order sweatshirts, t-shirts, fleeces, hats, tanks, hoodies--you name it. Three logo options available--our colorful network globe-wearing-mortarboard, a single-colored logo with our name, or, for a limited time only, the 2026 Summit logo.

A portion of the proceeds helps support CAN's work, so place your order! All the cool kids have CAN swag.

CAN's 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 almost 4000 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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