

The INSAR Student and Trainee Committee (STC) has been active since 2009 and currently runs seven initiatives to support the learning needs of students and trainees with an interest in autism research.

With the goal to increase global representation and accessibility of INSAR activities, the STC has sought creative ways to engage with the student and trainee members of INSAR outside of the in-person conference venue. As we continue to expand our reach, the STC is excited to bring highlights from STC events at the 2022 Annual Meeting (Meet-the-Experts, Preconference Workshop, Student Social, STC Booth) to the readers of the STC Newsletter.

First, we are delighted to share with you career advice from eight distinguished experts in autism research who participated in our Meet-the-Experts Luncheon – an informal event in which groups of students and trainees chat with an expert about their career and ask questions related to career development (e.g., grant writing, networking, and mentorship). We then summarize key messages from a panel of five experts during the Preconference workshop – a workshop focused on career development that includes a panel and small group discussions. Last, but certainly not least, we describe our Student Social and Booth – two opportunities to engage in some lighthearted fun during the Annual Meeting.

The success of these events relies on a wonderful team of STC members and the support of the INSAR Board, and to them we extend our gratitude.



We would also like to thank all faculty members and experts who gave their time generously to support us in the running of our initiatives and in producing this newsletter for our students and trainees. We also thank all students and trainees who expressed interests and/or participated in our events!

Please provide feedback on our events as well as the newsletter by clicking on the survey (mobile phone icon) at the bottom of each page. We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at one of our future events!

Warmest regards,

Dr. Jiedi Lei
STC Chair

Dr. Hillary Schiltz
STC Co-Chair

SPECIAL ISSUE -REVIEW OF OUR 2022 STC EVENTS

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Meet-the-Experts (MTE)



DR. MEGHAN SWANSON

University of Texas -Dallas



DR. CATHERINE LORD

University of California -Los Angeles



DR. SANDRA MAGANA

University of Texas at Austin



DR. CHERYL DISSANAYAKE

La Trobe University



DR. BRIAN BOYD

*University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill*



DR. SUE FLETCHER-WATSON

University of Edinburgh



DR. TEAL BENEVIDES

Augusta University



DR. NOAH SASSON

University of Texas -Dallas



Scan the QR code to learn more
about the Meet-the-Experts
panel of autism researchers.

Meet-the-Experts (MTE)

Experts provided advice on a range of topics related to careers in autism research during our 2022 Meet the Experts event at the INSAR Annual Meeting.

Category	Expert
Early Career	Dr. Teal Benevides, Dr. Sandra Magaña
Developing Research	Dr. Cheryl Dissanayake
Collaborative Research	Dr. Teal Benevides, Dr. Sue Fletcher-Watson
Grant Writing	Dr. Brian Boyd, Dr. Cheryl Dissanayake, Dr. Meghan Swanson
Clinical Work	Dr. Catherine Lord
Networking	Dr. Brian Boyd, Dr. Cheryl Dissanayake, Dr. Noah Sasson
Work/Life Balance	Dr. Teal Benevides, Dr. Sandra Magaña, Dr. Noah Sasson
Mentorship	Dr. Cheryl Dissanayake, Dr. Catherine Lord, Dr. Meghan Swanson

Thank you to our MTE event facilitators who helped the event run smoothly and summarized our experts' excellent advice including Dena Gassner, Shruthi Ravi, Elaine Clarke, Weiwen Zeng, Alana McVey, James Lee, Desi Jones, and Sowmyashree Mayur Kaku.

We would love to hear from you!

We'd like to try to make the newsletter more engaging and use your feedback to inform future events. Every time you see the cellphone icon, it's an invitation to participate. As you read, please let us know what thoughts and reflections you have.





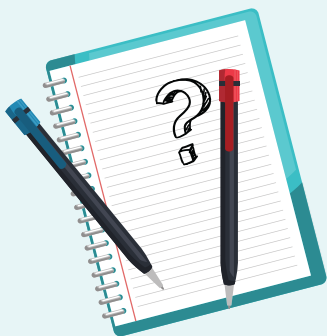
Dr. Sandra Magaña discusses the challenges faced by junior researchers.

Dr. Magaña shared that it is normal for grant applications to get rejected more than once, even if they are filled with great ideas. Her advice was to keep trying. Dr. Magaña recommended seeking opportunities for collaborations and asking for help from mentors and colleagues, which can also help immensely with publications and grant writing. For early career scholar starting their own academic career, she strongly advises students and trainees to plan and make choices strategically. For example, research-intensive universities have very different requirements for their faculty members than teaching institutions.

Dr. Sandra Magaña's Tips for Early Career Researchers

- 1 Keep trying after receiving grant rejections
- 2 Seek opportunities for collaborations and asking for help from mentors and colleagues
- 3 Plan and make career choices strategically

DEVELOPING RESEARCH QUESTIONS



Dr. Cheryl Dissanayake's thoughts on developing research:

For students developing their dissertation subject, Dr. Dissanayake recommended beginning the process by reading a lot and critically evaluating what they read. As they do so, they should ask, "What are the gaps?" This process should also include a method to sort information into what is most applicable from what is less so. She highlighted that a student's mentor can help with this and direct students to the key articles in a particular area of research. Dr. Dissanayake spoke about publishing, describing that every paper is another brick in the wall that others will build upon. This means it is crucial for scientists to share and publish their research.



Reader feedback and engagement [HERE!](#)

A Career of Collaboration with Dr. Sue Fletcher Watson



Dr. Fletcher-Watson shared about her career path, which includes a broad portfolio of work. She highlighted how her path had multiple threads of inquiry. Dr. Fletcher-Watson has been active as a mental health stakeholder and has recently focused on participatory research. Dr. Fletcher-Watson emphasized the importance of

diversifying participants in research and recommended making an introduction to the community one is planning to study. These can be achieved through people that are non-mainstream like community leaders, pastors, caregivers, etc. Further, she described that it is important to approach the research site and process with flexibility. For example, if participants are unable to come to the research set-up or lab, it is important to have an alternative such as taking research into the community (e.g., portable EEG). Dr. Fletcher-Watson mentioned the need for and importance of creating sustainable pathways for future researchers, and stressed the need to manage participant expectations in terms of tools, budget, outcome, and methods of communication.

Relationship Building Throughout Your Career with Dr. Teal Benevides



Dr. Teal Benevides advised establishing working relationships on grants or publications whenever possible and being active in seeking opportunities to collaborate and contribute to others' work. Dr. Benevides also shared that when you reach out to another researcher, you should have clear goals, set expectations ahead about roles, working style, and authorship, and discuss the timeline for any shared work. This can facilitate your way to great and productive collaborations.

Dr. Benevides also discussed career options and what one should consider. An academic job is often a high-stress environment and requires commitment that does not come on a 9-5 Monday through Friday schedule, which might not be for everyone. If an academic work-life balance does not fit with one's goals, there are other career paths in academia and outside academia. In academia, it is possible to join a lab as a supporting researcher, and not as a Principal Investigator. Outside of academia, there are also careers for roles such as Program Officers, paid journal editors, or at non-profit organizations seeking people with research skills to develop and evaluate programs and seek grant funding. To avoid burnout, Dr. Benevides suggested associating difficult tasks with enjoyable activities such as writing in a favorite restaurant or coffeeshop while enjoying a nice meal and planning ahead to reduce stress.



Setting Yourself Up for Success with Dr. Brian Boyd

To develop a successful research career, Dr. Boyd encouraged students and trainees to gain experiences reviewing grants, participating in grant writing, and reading other people's grants as much as they could during the early stages of their career. As an example, he mentioned the National Institute of Health (NIH) Early Career Reviewer program as a great way to get more exposure to federal grant proposals. It is especially helpful to learn what makes a grant proposal fundable. It is also vital to understand different grant mechanisms and how the proposed research would fit into the priorities of the funding agencies.



Seeking Out Grant Funding with Dr. Meghan Swanson

Dr Swanson suggests students assess their career goals, and if there is a need for training in a specific area or methodology, to consider applying for a K grant or foundation fellowship. If there is not the need for additional training Dr. Swanson suggested to seek out pilot research grant funding either through local institutions, foundations, or NIH. She highly suggested graduate students and early career researchers should investigate both options and discuss these with their mentors.



Funding Insights from Dr. Cheryl Dissanayake

Regarding grant writing, Dr. Dissanayake shared that it can be helpful to start with smaller philanthropic grants and build to larger grant funding mechanisms. She highlighted the importance of emphasizing the innovation in one's grants, and the potential impact of the expected findings. She encouraged students/trainees to talk about their project, highlighting its importance to the field.



Embracing alterantive paths to clinclal work with Dr. Catherine Lord



Dr. Catherine Lord emphasized that her career path was often non-linear, particularly early in her career. Dr. Lord emphasized that clinical care and empirical investigation are distinct but equally important and fundamentally related aspects of her research and her career. She noted that it is often difficult to find positions/institutions that will allow you to work as both a clinician and researcher and described various positions in the past in which she was expected to be "just" a clinician or "just" a researcher.

**"It is possible to
engage in both
clinical work and
research as long
as you are
adamant about
both elements
being a priority".**

In her experience, it was possible to engage in both clinical work and research as long as she was adamant about both elements being a priority. Dr. Lord also shared that the first several years as a junior faculty member were the most difficult years of her career and that for many researchers, this professional period also overlaps with starting a family. With that in mind, it is especially important in the early career stage to be very concrete with potential employers about the job expectations an opportunity will entail and to do a lot of homework on the quantity and quality of resources available for junior faculty at a given institution. Overall, she encouraged

students and trainees to think carefully about which aspects of work are most integral to producing good research and to be vocal about maintaining those aspects of work, no matter where you go or who you work with.

Want to learn more about clinical research in autism?

Follow the links to learn more about clinical work in our field.

- [Autism Research \(INSAR\)](#)
- [Read the Science \(Autism Science Foundation\)](#)
- [Chronicle of a Field Retold \(Spectrum\)](#)



Reader feedback and
engagement **HERE!**

Connections and Career Paths with Dr. Cheryl Dissanayake

In terms of career path, Dr. Dissanayake recommended connecting with people who are interested in the work and considering iterative models of embedded research (such as clinical or service).

“Be open to possibilities and have a dream!”

Engaging in Academia with Dr. Brian Boyd

Dr. Brian Boyd advised students and trainees to attend conferences where they could meet other experts in their fields who may potentially be able to provide collaboration opportunities in the future. Dr. Boyd shared his wisdom on being a “good colleague”; he described creating a broader network of people that students and trainees could work with on different projects, including collaborating on grant writing.



Academic Collaboration with Dr. Noah Sassoon

Dr. Noah Sasson emphasized that the future of research is collaborative. Dr. Sasson suggested venturing out of your immediate research bubble, engaging with other people's work that is related to your work, and seeking connections and conversations with these researchers, thinkers, and community members. These sometimes develop

into meaningful working relationships that expand his professional network and produce innovative projects.

2023 INSAR Annual Meeting Networking Opportunities

Dont forget to attend these events at the annual meeting to network with other INSAR members

- Student and Trainee Social
- Student and Trainee Booth
- Meet the Experts



Reader feedback and engagement [HERE!](#)



Casting Your Networking Net Wide with Dr. Meghan Swanson

Dr. Meghan Swanson shared helpful advice about networking and collaboration, career path, time management strategies, and funding opportunities. Dr. Swanson believes strong collaborations are important to build a successful research career. She highly recommended casting a wide net initially. Using professional conferences can help to create this network.

For example, a student or trainee may either reach out to other researchers personally, or may reach out to their mentor to inquire if they would be willing to provide introductions and help you establish connections. Dr. Swanson also shared that from her own career experiences, she learned that flexibility and openness to trying out different experiences are very important in the early stages of a career. Dr. Meghan Swanson recommended creating “individualized developmental plans” at the start of each semester to set clear goals. These plans can help guide conversations about goals and plans between mentors and mentees, and can help students and trainees successfully achieve their desired goals.

Top Tips for Connecting with a Mentor



Connect with potential mentors at conferences and events



Seek out mentors outside of your department, institution, and even your field of study



Make a development plan so you can clearly articulate your goals to potential mentors.

Welcoming Diverse Perspectives with Dr. Catherine Lord

Dr. Catherine Lord highlighted the importance of seeking out mentors, even if they are outside of your department, institution, or even your field of study, and establishing productive relationships with them.



Expert Advice on Avoiding Burnout

Delve into things you enjoy

To avoid burnout, Dr. Benevides suggested associating difficult tasks with enjoyable activities such as writing in a favorite restaurant or coffee shop while enjoying a nice meal and planning ahead to reduce stress.

Dr. Sasson suggested working on projects that genuinely interested you with people whose company and insights you value, to minimize burnout.

Dr. Magaña also advised young scholars to find their passion to avoid burn-out. In case the academic career path does not align with a trainee's interests or goals, it is also worthwhile to explore career paths outside of academia (in industry for example).

Be mindful with your time

Dr. Magaña also discussed ways to maintain work-life balance, and explained that it might be especially difficult in the early career stage, as academia has become more competitive. Her best advice was to compartmentalize time. For example, she recommended ending work at 5 and then devoting some time to family and children.

Also, to avoid burnout, Dr. Sasson suggested sometimes declining invitations and opportunities, especially when you need to scale back to avoid feeling overwhelmed.



Finally, in terms of work-life balance, Dr. Swanson highly recommended setting clear expectations and boundaries and maintaining clear communication between trainees and their mentors.

Focus on Flexibility and Resilience

Dr. Benevides suggested that perceiving setbacks and rejection are the fundamental basis of all pivotal growth. Only good things have come from these types of experiences—use that experience to learn something new and make it positive, and keep in mind that this experience might result in something better in the long run.

Dr. Sasson reminds us that research careers will have ebbs and flows, and it's completely natural to feel more motivated and engaged at some points than others.



STC Preconference Workshop at the Annual Meeting

Written by 2022 Preconference Working Group Leader, Michal Cook

The Student and Trainee (STC) Preconference workshop broadly centers on professional development and networking. This year, we specifically focused on how to market oneself for research positions in academia and industry and how to build and maintain meaningful stakeholder and community partnerships. The workshop began with an expert faculty panel.



Dr. Helen Tager-Flusberg



Dr. Cecilia Montiel-Nava



Dr. Liz Pellicano



Dr. Brenna Maddox



Dr. Haylie Miller

They presented on their career trajectory. Across these presentations, experts highlighted the impact of mentorship in their own career pursuits. They encouraged students and trainees to reach out to more senior faculty for guidance and to seek out mentors who invest in their students and trainees by providing opportunities to gain exposure to the field. Experts also emphasized the importance of collaboration in their work and urged students and trainees to thoughtfully and intentionally build relationships with autistic researchers and stakeholders.

After their presentations, our panelists engaged in a Q&A with attendees in which they provided advice and reflections from their own experiences seeking out mentorship, preparing job materials, and engaging in community-partnered work. For example, experts shared that their career trajectories have not always followed a linear path, and that students and trainees can expect to take some twists and turns in their interests and opportunities before finding their passion.

As one expert put it, this can look a lot like Alice falling down the rabbit hole in Wonderland – scary, uncertain, exciting, and full of possibilities all at the same time. Experts also shared about their successes and missteps in engaging in community-partnered work and reflected on the importance of including autistic researchers and stakeholders not only in studies that involve focus groups, but also as crucial members of the research team before a project ever takes shape. After the Q&A, student and trainee attendees spent the remainder of the workshop in small group discussions with additional faculty facilitators to continue discussions on these important career development topics. We are so grateful to have had such amazing faculty participate in the workshop this year, and it was wonderful to see so many student and trainee attendees participate!



A review of the 2022 Student and Trainee Committee Social in Austin Texas

written by 2022 Social Working Group Leader, Meredith Pecukonis

INSAR 2022's Student Trainee Social was a SMASH hit with well over 100 attendees from around the world! This year's social was held at Smash ATX, a lively restaurant in downtown Austin. The event included activities that encouraged attendees to chat with folks outside of their regular social networks. The ping pong tables presented a great opportunity for folks to feel more comfortable initiating conversations, and not just about their professional lives. Another unique feature of this year's social was that we extended the invite to other early career professionals as collaboration with the Early Career Committee (ECC). This fostered even greater opportunities for networking across ages and career stages. The STC would like to sincerely thank everyone who attended the event, the INSAR Board for supporting the event, and the STC Social Working Group for helping with planning efforts! We hope to see you in Stockholm in 2023!



Have any ideas or feedback that you would like to give about the STC social?

Reach out to our 2023 STC Social Working Group Leader, Meredith Pecukonis, at studentcommittee@autism-insar.org



*The STC Booth was a big hit
at the 2022 Annual Meeting!*

*Written by 2022 Booth Working Group
Leader, Molly McCabe*

The STC Booth at the INSAR Annual Meeting served a particularly important purpose this year.

Following multiple years of canceled or virtual conferences, many new students and trainees inevitably landed in Austin itching to get to know both the conference and the wide range of other INSAR members. We wanted to help facilitate engagement of our fellow students and trainees in the conference, in Austin, and with each other! To do this, we put together an INSAR Annual Meeting Bingo sheet that took students and trainees across Austin. Bingo tasks included sightseeing tasks such as visiting the famous State Capitol Building in Austin. Others

encouraged students to get engaged in the Annual Meeting with tasks such as “attend a poster presentation in an area that is new to you.” Overall, we were pleased to offer a friendly face and a bit of fun to the students and trainees at our Annual Meeting this year.



**Have any ideas or feedback that you
would like to give about the booth
experience?**

Reach out to our 2023 STC Booth Working Group Leader, Molly McCabe, at studentcommittee@autism-insar.org