

## **V-TOP Professional Development Scholarship**

**Name:** Jessica Pappagianopoulos

**Title:** Third-year Doctoral student

**Institution:** University of Virginia, School of Education

**Role:** Clinical and School Psychology Doctoral student

**Membership registration or conference attended:** International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting, May 11<sup>th</sup> – May 14<sup>th</sup> 2022, Austin, Texas

**Provide a brief overview of that membership or conference opportunity and why you selected it – this should be a summary/story of need – why is this opportunity critical to your current work and career goals to advance work-based learning opportunities for students?** Due to the global pandemic and the nature of my previous job, INSAR was the first conference I was fortunate enough to attend post-COVID. While INSAR broadly has a focus on autism research in a myriad of domains, a specific category of presentations is often focused on both higher education and employment research, supports, and/or interventions for autistic individuals. In addition, INSAR, based on a policy brief distributed in 2019, is dedicated to innovations centered around supporting individuals with different abilities in succeeding in the workplace by reducing barriers and improving environmental supports.

**Share the story of the value that this scholarship added to your professional work. What did you learn from the professional development opportunity and how does it relate to advancing work-based learning for students? Be specific. Every type of conference or membership offers opportunities for networking and learning best practices, new resources. What sets this opportunity (conference or membership) apart? What did you learn that will help you advance work-based learning opportunities for students?** My experience at INSAR allowed me to listen to a wide array of presentations, engage in critical discussions, and network with other professionals. One session that stood out to me was about the development and implementation of a transition to employment intervention program for neurodiverse students. The program includes components of coursework, counseling, and an internship to support improvements with executive functioning, self-determination, and emotion regulation. This information was extremely helpful to hear so that I could research this program further. It was interesting to reflect on the commonalities and differences between this intervention and the prior work I had done as an Associate Program Manager at the Aspire Program through Massachusetts General Hospital with a College Boot Camp program, as well as my involvement in a current pilot research study at UVA examining the effectiveness of a mentoring program that involves building social and executive functioning skills in the workplace, coupled with data science coursework.

**How do you plan on using what you learned in your day-to-day responsibilities and current role?** I have shared the information that I obtained from INSAR sessions and conversations with my colleagues, and I plan to implement what I have learned as I continue to think about ideas for future implementations of interventions aimed at increasing employment opportunities as well as how to set autistic individuals up for success in the workplace. I will also continue to cultivate

the working relationships I have built through networking experiences at this conference. In addition, the conference left me thinking about the importance of research in pushing the needle towards change in increasing supports and decreasing barriers for autistic individuals in employment settings. Since the conference, I collaborated on a manuscript focused on work participation of autistic adolescents that has recently been accepted for publication in an upcoming journal issue of *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

**How will this opportunity benefit the students you work with?**

The information obtained will support me as I work to best support neurodiverse clients I work with as they think about their future and make plans for higher education and prepare to enter workforce. On a broader scale, I hope to use the information learned from INSAR and the collaborations to think about further research focused on increasing supports and decreasing barriers for autistic adults in college and the workplace.

**What else would you like to share about the conference/membership experience?**

I am incredibly grateful to V-TOP for considering my application and providing me with this opportunity to attend INSAR. I learned valuable information from research talks and discussions, and I was able to network with many professionals (faculty, researchers, and peers) in the field. I left the conference feeling inspired by new ideas, additional questions, and a thirst to continue learning!