



MAKE UBC EDUCATION MORE ACCESSIBLE

INTRODUCTION

Despite UBC's commitment to equity and inclusion, as promised via the Inclusion Action Plan 2018-2028 (UBC, 2020), our university is not meeting its commitments to disabled students and to those who require additional support. The rigid nature of postsecondary education – such as in-person-only lectures, inflexible attendance policies, inappropriate and ineffective accommodations, and lack of inclusive teaching supports – disproportionately affects vulnerable populations across campuses. Amongst the most affected groups are disabled¹ students, neurodivergent² students, parenting students, international students and low-income students.

Moreover, UBC's policy for accommodating students with disabilities, called policy LR7³, demonstrates a significant need for the input and voices of disabled students. The procedures involved in LR7 for allocating accommodations to students are far from adequate and fail to provide adequate support to disabled students. First, the subjectivity of 'reasonable accommodation' allows too much room for individual interpretation and thus subjects students to being denied fair accommodations on the sole basis of non-concrete language. Second, the policy disregards autonomy of disabled students by giving them no knowledge of the accommodations available and gives the role of allocating accommodations solely to the Centre for Accessibility. Additionally, the policy makes no mention of the role and responsibilities of accessibility advisors and those who directly assign accommodations and does not specify the training they receive upon recruitment.

With 22% of UBC's student population identifying as disabled, UBC has a responsibility to provide adequate support for its disabled students. This responsibility becomes even more prominent by the concerns raised by disabled students of the inadequate accessibility on campuses, as mentioned in recommendation #49 in the AMS Academic Experience Survey Report (Burham et al., 2019). In the following 2023 report, over half of students emphasized that "they would prefer if courses provided more flexibility in terms of assessment with weighting of assessments, variety of methods and flexibility of due dates being the most pertinent types" (Kanji et al. 2023). Indeed, embracing learning formats made to accommodate unique student's needs can benefit everyone.

Accessible learning formats benefit a wide variety of students. For example, lecture recordings are shown to support disabled students' learning (Nightingale et al., 2019) and help to "attenuate the challenging aspects of lecture environments" (Hall & Ivaldi, 2017). Students with disabilities report that they prefer the greater control granted by online lectures (Kotera et al., 2019). Aside from disability status, many students would benefit from accessible learning. A systematic literature review of 71 journal articles found that students "almost unanimously voice their support in favour of lecture capture" (Banerjee, 2021). In particular, students with English as an additional language are likely to find recorded lectures extremely valuable (Leadbeater et al., 2013). Students currently struggling through the BC housing crisis would also benefit from these accessible learning formats⁴.

In order to ensure true accessibility in classrooms, lecture recordings should be implemented in combination with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a widely-accepted and empirically-backed approach to education, emphasising the importance of fostering multiple forms of engagement and facilitating learning on an individual level (CAST, 2018). This approach has been shown to aid in the education of students while also demonstrating long-term positive outcomes for educators (Xie & Rice, 2021). While UBC has engaged in some pilot UDL initiatives, such as the UDL Fellows program⁵, the implementation of UDL at UBC is far from comprehensive or satisfactory.

UBC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that adaptations to the delivery of education for the well-being, health, and safety of all students is achievable (Ono, 2020). This has proved that creating and implementing accessible learning methods and materials is a feasible and worthwhile process. The BC government's and UBC's strict adherence to in-person courses is counter-productive, erasing recent progress towards accessible education (Kang, 2021). UBC can and should provide accessible learning formats. It is an essential step towards embodying the inclusive values of our school.

Overall, it is clear that students at UBC, both disabled and non-disabled, are dissatisfied with UBC current quality of learning and are in need of more accessible learning options. Yet despite these prevalent concerns among UBC students and faculty alike, UBC has not responded to feedback from the disabled community members. We call on UBC to prioritize accessible learning formats: it is a necessary step towards inclusivity and equitable access to higher education.

OUR AIMS

1. Accessible Course Formats
 - a. Promoting online, hybrid, and multi-access course options
 - b. Integrating UDL into faculty curricula
 - c. Increasing technological and TA support for professors
 - d. Hosting faculty training opportunities for accessible learning formats
2. Disability-Friendly Policy
 - a. Creation of a Disability Task Force⁶
 - b. Allowing flexible attendance
 - c. Improving the disability accommodation process for students, staff, and faculty

DEFINITIONS

Accessibility Fund. A new budget item to finance, where necessary, the implementation of alternative solutions to UDL-informed Online, Hybrid or Multi-access attendance options to reduce academic consequences to a student's absence.

Accommodation Policy. A UBC policy that facilitates and formalizes the accommodation process for staff, faculty, student workers, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students.

Hybrid. The course activity has a mixture of mandatory in-person and online activities as designed by the instructor.

Hybrid Work Program. A UBC program designed to allow hybrid work for staff, faculty, student workers, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students. Specific positions, such as those in faculty are currently excluded from this program.

Multi-Access. The course activity gives students the choice to attend either in person or online, as designed by the instructor.

Online. The course activity is fully online and does not require any in-person attendance to complete.

Policy Development Committee. A group of community shareholders who develop proposed amendments for a specific UBC policy and prepare a draft proposal in which its recommendations will be implemented.

Punitive Attendance Policies. Any academic policy or procedure based on in-person participation or attendance that negatively affects a student's overall grade. This includes regulations implemented by the department and within faculty-specific circumstances.

Students with Disabilities. Any UBC student who experiences (1) a significant and persistent mobility, sensory, learning, or other physical or mental health impairment, (2) functional restrictions or limitations of their ability to perform the range of life's activities; and (3) may experience attitudinal and/or environmental barriers that hamper their full and self-directed participation in University activities.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA (UBC)

We call upon the UBC and its governing bodies to act upon the following nine (9) recommendations:

1. That UBC ensures all required classes, labs and tutorials in all faculties are offered with UDL-informed⁷ Online, Hybrid, or Multi-access course sections. In circumstances where achieving such options are completely impractical or interfere with essential learning outcomes of the course, alternative solutions should be implemented by the instructor in collaboration with their department, funded by a central UBC Accessibility Fund, to reduce academic consequences to a student's absence.
2. That UBC provides ample support for professors and teaching assistants navigating these modes of delivery, including but not limited to providing technical support and teaching assistant support; and supporting the intellectual property rights of faculty members when implementing these modes of delivery.
3. That UBC requires graduate students' oversight body (i.e., College of Graduate Studies/Faculty of Graduate Studies) to provide guidance to, and clear policy for, graduate students and graduate student supervisors outlining their options for accessible learning and research, including providing financial support for graduate students to access necessary accommodations.
4. That UBC joins the Access4All campaign in lobbying the provincial government for continuous funding to support Students with Disabilities, including additional support for Online, Hybrid and Multi-access courses. This includes amending UBC's mandate letter where necessary to facilitate UBC's accession to these demands.

5. That UBC supports faculty who choose to teach online courses instead of in-person, and to give priority to disabled faculty to teach online courses. Faculty must be included in and have access to the Hybrid Work Policy in order to choose the mode of delivery for their courses that best supports their accessibility needs. Additionally, UBC must clearly state which professors are recording their lectures and the mode of lecture delivery on their respective student service platforms and in the class syllabi for all courses in all departments.
6. That UBC reinstates training on appropriate technology (e.g. Echo360), hosts annual UDL faculty workshops, and adequately compensates professors and teaching assistants for attending. In addition, these changes must be documented with benchmarks and yearly progress reports.
7. That UBC Punitive Attendance Policies be eliminated unless completely impractical and/or are essential to learning outcomes of the course⁸. In those circumstances, alternative solutions should be implemented to reduce academic consequences to a student's absence, such as the use of UDL learning approaches, which center on engagement rather than in-person presence.
8. That UBC's Board of Governors and Senate announce a public strategic plan with concrete objectives and steps to dismantle ableist structures at UBC and commit to implementing systemic changes to support disabled students and faculty, including:
 - a. The creation of a 'Disability Task Force', led by and for the disability community at UBC. Disability Task Force members should be compensated equally.
 - b. A full policy consultation of the 'Policy LR7: Accommodation for Students with Disabilities' by December 2025, with disabled students and/or DUC members making up a large majority (80% at the minimum) of the Policy Development Committee; and commit to implementing the aforementioned committee's recommendations.
 - c. The creation of a formal Accommodation Policy for all disabled faculty, staff, and student employees, created and led by the Accessibility Committee in collaboration with multiple disability groups on campus and the Disability Task Force. Additionally, the work by these disability groups must be equally and adequately compensated.
 - d. That members of the Accessibility Committee must be fully and equally compensated for the duration of their membership and have equal access to the Hybrid Work Policy and the Accommodation Policy.

9. That UBC provides free face masks at building entrances or at designated pick-up points and that UBC commits to applying for provincial funding to secure adequate PPE for our campus community.

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APPENDIX

1. We acknowledge that the disability community encompasses diverse beliefs and practices in terms of language and identity, such as using person-centered (“person with a disability”) or identity-first language (“disabled person”). Due to this fact, we have chosen to use both interchangeably in order to represent as many facets of the community as possible.
2. Learn more about ‘Neurodivergence’ [here](#).
3. Policy LR7 can be found [here](#).
4. Current economic conditions have put a significant strain on students’ ability to live on or near campuses. In a survey comprising 18,513 students across Canada, results found that student renters generally pay a higher rent than all other renter households. This gap is most prevalent in Ontario and British Columbia, where it reaches almost +57% (or \$722) and +31% (or \$400), respectively. This highlights the financial impact of housing costs on students, especially those in BC (Gherbi-Rahal et al., 2022). This housing affordability crisis in BC has led to low enrolment numbers at universities such as UVic, VIU and Camosun College. In turn, this has led to

widespread budget cuts across almost all departments and services (Linsley, 2023). Increased access to online, hybrid and mixed-learning formats within universities or colleges can lead to increased enrolment rates, since some students may not otherwise be able to attend university or college. Access4All benefits academic institutions financially. But most importantly, it increases disabled and non-disabled student satisfaction and creates accessible campuses.

5. See more information about the UBC Fellows Program [here](#).
6. See Disability Affinity Group on their work for a UBC 'Disability Task Force' [here](#).
7. See article for examples on successful UDL implementation in online learning environments [here](#).
8. Attendance policies indirectly target vulnerable populations including, but not limited to, disabled students (Birdwell & Bayley, 2022), nontraditional students, and parenting students, many of whom cannot regularly attend in-person classes. Attendance policies may additionally lead to students and faculty risking exposure to illness, as students who are ill are more likely to come to class to avoid losing marks, putting others at risk. Furthermore, research suggests that attendance policies do not improve either course performance or attendance itself (Rendleman, 2017).