Land Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the traditional, unceded, territories of the Musqueam and of the Syilx Okanagan nation on which UBC campuses are located.
Outline

• Experiences as Disabled Students
• Experiences of UBCO Students with Disabilities
• Calls to Action
• Discussion + Next Steps
Experiences as Disabled Students

Letter: UBC’s Centre for Accessibility and its outdated policies fail students

Written by Leonie Ledoux, Aug. 23, 2021

When I wrote to the UBC Centre for Accessibility in 2020 to ask for help with a special accommodation, I ended my email with this statement: “I invented a lot of time and effort in my studies, and I don’t think this mistake is representative of UBC.” Almost a year later, I realize that this was not the case. The Centre is not on me; it’s on my disability.

The Centre’s purpose is to provide accommodations to promote human rights, equity and diversity, and to comply with the BC and federal Human Rights Codes in making its services and facilities available to people with disabilities. However, I am not sure if the Centre is truly accessible to people with disabilities.

UBC strives for inclusion — but nearly a third of buildings are inaccessible to disabled students

Written by Bailey Martens, July 29, 2021

In 2012, the latest version of the Accessibility Barrier-Free (ABF) report was published. The report shows that there are still many accessibility issues on campus. For example, the elevator in the science building is not accessible to people with disabilities. The Centre for Accessibility is responsible for ensuring that the Centre is accessible to everyone, but it seems that this is not happening.

Elevator closed for energy saving.

In 2021, UBC’s Board of Governors approved UBC’s latest Climate Action Plan, which includes measures to achieve a 66% reduction in electricity use. This will require closing some elevators on campus to save energy.

#13653

I just wanted to post on here after getting inspired by a few previous posts. I am a student with a disability in my first year at engineering and honestly the shame, guilt, isolation and incompetence I feel regularly has really made life a struggle. I feel so alone here. There are barely any students I know who are disabled in STEM, let alone engineering. I’m even afraid to mention my disability because I’m sure it would be a clear giveaway about who I am. My...
“Graduate degree programs at UBC are tailored to non-disabled students’ needs. Those of us who don’t ‘progress’ in the anticipated fashion or at the anticipated pace find ourselves facing enormous barriers and pressures to drop out.”
“UBC Okanagan is a unique campus with inconsistent procedures associated with policy combined with lack of adequate supports that lead to misunderstands and further barriers to students with disabilities.”

Experiences of UBCO Students with Disabilities
Understanding the context of UBC Okanagan

- The DRC is not meant to provide support or accommodations for students with short-term disabilities or accessibility issues;

- The establishment of a student led and focused accessibility advisory group that aims to
  - Consult with University stakeholders as necessary
  - Audit learning spaces accessibility
  - Provide clarification on procedures to ensure consistency and reduce barriers

- Work must occur at various levels to have impact on the campus
Calls to Action

● Promoting Equity through Administrative Changes
● Improving Existing Disability-Related Services
● Increasing Representation of Openly Disabled Scholars and Staff
● Supporting Disabled Students with Funding, Scholarships, and Research Grants
● Addressing Graduate Student Need
● Making the Built Environment Accessible
● Creating an Accessible Culture in Teaching and Learning
● Ensuring Equitable Public Health Decision Making
Promoting equity through administrative changes

By creating:
- A fully resourced Disability Task Force composed of members of the disability community, with diverse lived experience, and across campuses

By engaging in:
- A “nothing about us without us” approach, and co-creating with the disability community in equity initiatives
- A commission of a review of the current mechanisms and supports for disabled community
- The integration of accessibility in institutional priorities and plans, such as Campus Vision 2050, the President’s Academic Excellence Initiative
Improving existing disability-related services

To address significant shortcomings in current Disability-related services, the University must make the following commitments:

- Modify the current practices of the Centre for Accessibility and the UBCO Disability Resource Centre
  - Shift from a medical model to a social model of disability approach
  - Create a formal feedback and complaints process
  - Fully funding and resourcing these centres
  - Create mechanisms of community outreach
  - Streamlining the process across units and faculties
- Update Policy LR7 re: Task Force recommendations
- Ensure that mobility aids such as the Accessibility Shuttle offers more availability and accessibility.
Increasing representation of disabled scholars and staff

To address and promote academic excellence and diversity of thought, the UBC should engage the academic community by:

- Meet with the Disability Affinity Group
- Increase hiring and retention of faculty and scholars at all faculty ranks
- Uplift disabled scholars’ voices, promote and feature disabled scholars’ research, and create professional development opportunities

UBC should create:

- Permanent Senior Advisor positions to the Provost and President, held by disabled people
- Fully resource a new Centre for Disability Studies and Activism
- Disability affirming cross-campus culture
Supporting Disabled Students with Funding, Scholarships, and Grants

To ensure that funding supports reflect the realities of disabled students, **UBC must provide:**

- Bursaries on an extended timeline for students taking a reduced course load;
- Relaxed course load requirements for disability-related scholarships; and,
- Flexibility around extenuating circumstances.

To eliminate the “disability tax”, **UBC must implement:**

- Accessible housing for the same cost as the lowest-cost housing unit in the residence building; and,
- Free UBC parking passes for those with government-issued disabled parking placards.
Addressing Graduate Student Needs

In order to support disabled graduate students currently falling through the cracks, UBC must address:

- Timeline-related barriers to degree completion, including the time-consuming and patronizing “surveillance without support” approach to degree extensions;
- Inequitable funding timelines and tuition fee schedules;
- Fragmented accommodation for grads in their various capacities as students, researchers, and employees;
- Precarious and power-laden unit-level approaches to graduate students’ access needs; and,
- Inadequate professional development opportunities.
Ensuring Equitable Public Health Decision Making

All public health decisions, policies, and statements made by UBC must include:

● A description of whether and how such decisions will impact disabled students, faculty, and staff;
● An explanation of what steps UBC is taking to proactively mitigate any increased risk to disabled students, faculty, and staff; and,
● Consultation with campus organizations representing disabled staff, students, and faculty.
Creating an Accessible Culture in Teaching and Learning

*Delivering on its educational mission requires that UBC make the following commitments to fostering accessible teaching and learning:*

**By incorporating:**
- Disability rights and disability justice into the curriculum across all disciplines.

**By creating:**
- Training, institutional guidance, and infrastructure for supporting recorded lectures and hybrid programming.
- A permanent position within the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology for an expert on accessible teaching and learning.
Accessible Culture in Teaching and Learning
Cont’d

By providing:
● Opportunities for training, professional development, and staff education.
● Resources for peer-led mentorship programs for disabled students.

By supporting:
● Disabled students in labs and experiential learning.
● Disabled instructors by applying the recommendations from the EIO-funded Professional Development for Disabled Instructors Project.
Making the Built Environment Accessible

In order to eliminate barriers that disabled students face from the built environment at UBC, the University must prioritize accessibility by:

- Seeking to build in accessibility beyond what is mandated in building codes and construction guidelines

Accessible features rated under the Rick Hansen Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC)
Making the Built Environment Accessible (Cont’d)

- Auditing the campus for accessibility on a regular basis and make the results public.
- Providing an accessibility guide for all learning spaces on campus.

*each illustration represents 10 buildings at UBC*
Thank You!
Discussion & Next Steps