

FOR INFORMATION

PUBLIC

OPEN SESSION

TO: University Affairs Board

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DATE: April 1, 2022 for April 20, 2022

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Annual Report: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2021-2022

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The University Affairs Board has responsibility for Equity Issues and Initiatives (Section 5)

Section 5.6 of the University Affairs Board Terms of Reference states: ‘The Board receives annually, from the appropriate administrators, reports on services within its areas of responsibility, including but not limited to multi-campus services and offices, Campus Police, Human Resources and Equity, crisis response, and campus organizations.’

GOVERNANCE PATH:

1. Planning and Budget Committee [for information] (April 13, 2022)
2. **University Affairs Board [for information] (April 20, 2022)**

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

At its meeting of January 14, 2015, the Planning and Budget Committee received the AODA/ODA Plan 2017-2018 for information only. Following this meeting it was determined that it would be useful for other Board Committees of Governing Council to view the document, specifically University Affairs Board.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The AODA Report and Plan is produced each year in order to satisfy the requirements of the AODA to report on how the University is meeting compliance and adhering to its

accessibility plan. The report outlines the significant work that occurs across all three campuses, multiple divisions, and various departments that assists in working towards an accessible University environment. The report also conveys our broad commitments to accessibility and inclusion beyond the point of compliance.

The report is structured into several sections covering a year in review of the AODA Office, National AccessAbility Week, accessible built environment, accessible communications, accessible service delivery, pedagogy, and mental health. Recognizing that accessibility is a shared responsibility, the report also highlights the work of the University's Divisions and the University community as a whole to address and eliminate barriers.

Over the reporting year the University has continued to make significant progress in creating an environment that is intentionally inclusive and that treats every member of the community in an equitable manner. The University has continued this progress despite the accessibility issues caused and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, we have taken this opportunity to engage students, faculty, librarians, and staff in a collective act of rethinking how our institution can define, represent, and speak about disability as well as how we can tap the creativity and expertise within our community to remove barriers for those with lived experience of disability.

Our work is measured broadly against our compliance with the AODA, the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, as well as our adherence to the University's Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities. However, we also recognize that fostering a fully accessible environment means going beyond compliance. This work requires constant input, support and participation from all members of the University community. Therefore, the AODA Report and Plan also outlines next steps the AODA Office and its partners will take to realize the potential of a universally designed, barrier-free University.

We would like to thank all those who have made a positive impact towards increasing accessibility and invite all members of the University community to engage with us to move forward together to advance equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None.

RECOMMENDATION:

For Information

DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:

AODA Report and Plan 2021-22



Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (AODA) Report, 2021

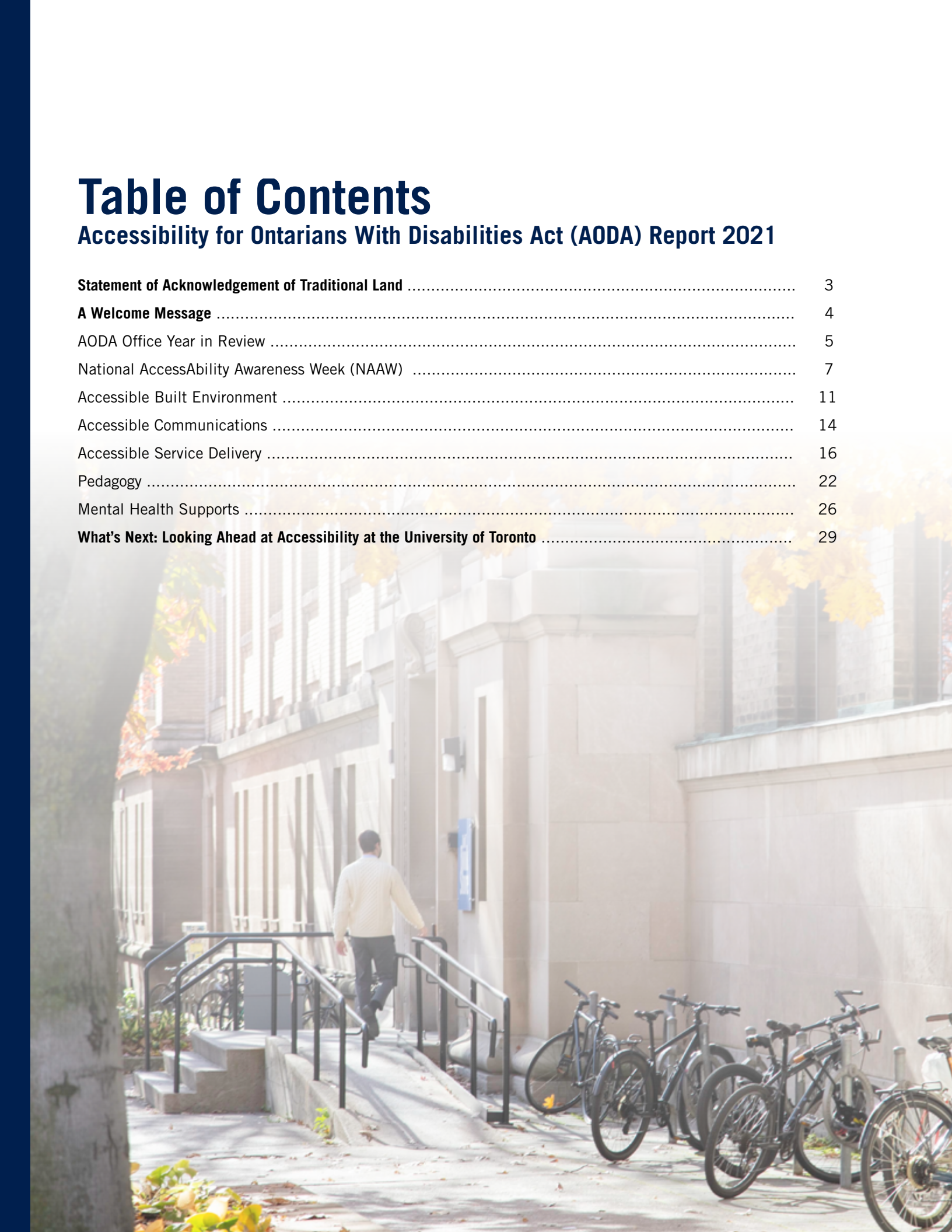
**Office of the Vice-President,
People Strategy, Equity & Culture**



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Statement of Acknowledgement of Traditional Land

A blue-tinted photograph of a tree-lined street in Toronto. The CN Tower is visible in the background, rising above the trees. The street is lined with trees and street lamps, creating a sense of a quiet urban path. The overall mood is serene and respectful.

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.



A Welcome Message

To mark National AccessAbility Week (NAAW) 2021, the University of Toronto made a bold commitment to reframe disability through our words and our actions. The only Canadian university to undertake a full week of NAAW programming, we engaged students, faculty, librarians, and staff in a collective act of rethinking how our institution can define, represent, and speak about disability as well as how we can tap the creativity and expertise within our community to remove barriers for those with lived experience of disability. Our NAAW programming emphasized the broad spectrum of lived experiences of disability at U of T. Such breadth and variation require an equally diverse range of strategies to

make our learning and working spaces more accessible and inclusive. The urgency of this work remains clear. Results from the 2021 Employment Equity Survey confirm that an increasing number of our applicants and tri-campus employees self-identify as “persons with disabilities.”

“Reframing disability” encapsulates the aims of the activities and initiatives described in our 2021 AODA Report and affirms our way forward as an institution. The complexity of the past year continued to supply ample evidence of why such reframing needs to be an ongoing and evolving activity. Managing the transition to in-person learning and working for many Faculties and divisions required us to develop new strategies for navigating physical spaces. As we collectively return to our campuses, we have an exciting opportunity to apply what we have learned since March 2020. Many of the innovations we have made to create more universally-designed classrooms, meetings, and events can be integrated into our post-pandemic work, with the goal of ensuring the spaces in which we work and learn are and remain barrier-free.

As our community strives to embed inclusive design principles into our pedagogy and built environment, to improve our communications tools or reframe our language, and to amplify the voices of those with lived experience of disability, it is important to remember the goal that we are working towards: an institutional culture of belonging. When every member of our community experiences a sense of belonging, they can do their best work, be their most creative, and make their greatest contributions. Our learning, working, and research environments will in turn be enriched by a wide range of lived experiences and ideas. When this happens, we achieve excellence, as we support everyone’s full participation in all the activities and initiatives that define the University.

Thank you to the students, faculty, librarians, and staff whose efforts are captured in the 2021 AODA Report, and who continue to help the University of Toronto shift our culture from “inclusion” to “belonging.” We have the capacity to lead our peer institutions in excellence. Integrating universal design principles into everything we do—from policy to construction to programming—will remain a critical component of this leadership, both now and in the years ahead.

Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture

Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students

Jodie Glean, Interim Executive Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Ben Poynton, AODA Officer, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Officer

Kelly Hannah-Moffat
Vice-President, People Strategy,
Equity & Culture

The Role of the AODA Office

The AODA Office is responsible for ensuring that the University meets its obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities, and the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Office provides training, consultation, support, and advice to all members of the University community on how to meet these broad accessibility requirements. The Office also acquires feedback on the accessibility of University services and works collaboratively to resolve concerns.

AODA Office Year in Review

Key Highlights

AODA Office Training: Accessibility and Language

In 2021, the AODA Office focused on building our community's knowledge and skills around ableism, accessibility, and language. In a session entitled "Accessibility and Language" and in collaboration with Accessibility Services (St. George), the Office provided members of the University community with a critical and fundamental understanding of ableism and how it impacts the words we use every day. Together, participants explored attitudinal barriers created by ableism, the impact this has on our spaces, and strategies to address these barriers proactively. In a post-event survey, many of the 313 participants reported that facilitators created the space to allow these conversations to be genuine and meaningful.

The impact of this initiative went far beyond the University with requests from multiple partners for the Office to lead opportunities with their organizations. Subsequently, the AODA Office offered sessions to the Inter-University Disability Issues Association (IDIA) and Sunnybrook Hospitals as part of their Annual Conference in November.

Further AODA Office Training: From Front-line Services to Procurement Processes

The AODA Office also engaged community members in facilitated sessions aimed at eliminating barriers to accessibility in multiple areas of University activity. These sessions covered front-line library services, online events, social media, and procurement processes. In each capacity-building initiative, participants received a grounding in the definition of accessibility, explored how to embed accessibility into their own work, and engaged in dialogue about next steps to create meaningful change. In total, over 380 participants attended these sessions and provided positive feedback.



Inclusivity and Accessibility in Registrarial Services

In September, the AODA Office partnered with the Provincial Equity and Outreach Recruitment Committee (EORC) of the Ontario University Registrars Association (OURA) to participate in a discussion on how registrarial offices can advance inclusivity, belonging, and accessibility for their teams and clients. As a panelist on a session entitled “Cultivating Belonging: How can we raise awareness and push the boundaries on inclusivity within Registrarial Services,” Ben Poynton, AODA Officer, offered insights into how registrarial professionals can bring an anti-ableist and universal design approach to policies and processes not designed with accessibility in mind. Over 200 registrants in various registrarial capacities from across Ontario attended this session.



Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO) Accessibility Session

In November, the AODA Office partnered with the Canadian Association of University Business Officers to provide a session entitled “Accessibility & Inclusion Through Employment.” The webinar examined procurement processes and determined strategies to embed accessible design criteria and features into the decision-making process. Nearly 90 participants from across the country and representing a broad range of university activity—including procurement, strategy and planning, administrative leadership, financial services, and operations—explored the definitions of accessibility and accessible procurement, and how to include accessibility in university procurement practices.

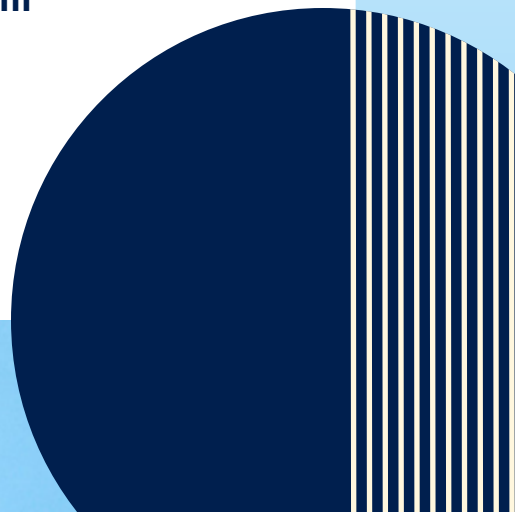




National AccessAbility Awareness Week (NAAW)

To mark **National AccessAbility Week, May 31 – June 4, 2021**, U of T invited students, staff, faculty, and librarians to engage in several sessions exploring ways to reframe disability and embed intentional inclusivity, eliminating barriers to accessibility. Each day, the AODA Office and its partners hosted transformational and multimodal discussions covering accessibility in healthcare settings, co-designing peer support networks, demystifying brain injury, and inclusively designing curriculum.

The University of Toronto was the only Canadian university to arrange a week of programming in recognition of National AccessAbility Week.



Indigenous Perspectives

The NAAW session entitled [“Reclaiming the Narrative: Indigenous Perspective on Accessibility and Disability”](#) explored the intersectional realities of disability and accessibility from an Indigenous perspective. The University of Toronto Mississauga hosted the session through the Indigenous Centre; Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Office; and Accessibility Services; with Victoria Herrera, Educational Development Consultant, Sheridan College as facilitator. The session highlighted Indigenous understandings of holistic accessibility, exploring how the University can work to shift how it teaches and learns about disability while de-centring whiteness. In doing so, it engaged participants in examining how to challenge colonial projections of disability and transform our social model in a way that embraces Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.



Your Shape: A Discussion on Physicality, Health, and Disability

Participants joined student Beau Hayward to learn about his role as a peer leader at Kinesiology and Physical Education a peer leader at Kinesiology and Physical Education (KPE). Beau took participants through his efforts at KPE to create more opportunities for students with disabilities to engage in physical activity. Beau also discussed lessons in adaptation, progress, goal setting, and how he remained healthy during isolation with a physical disability. A discussion then ensued between Beau and participants on how to build community among students with lived experience of disability.

Read more about Beau's experiences and efforts at the University in an article for International Day for Persons with Disabilities, [“Bocce Ball and Beyond.”](#)



Beau Hayward
Student, Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education



Supporting Individuals with Brain Injury

“Demystifying Brain Injury and Concussion”

explored the hidden and under-acknowledged effects of Acquired Brain Injuries (ABI) and how we can better support individuals living with such injuries.

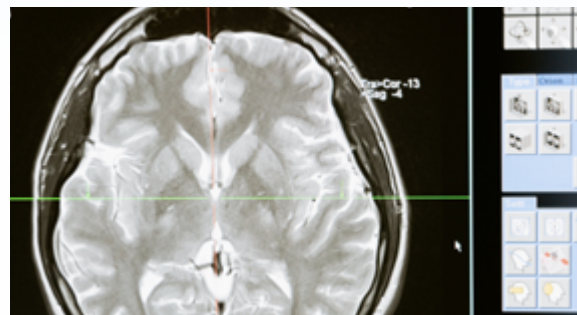
The session included a candid discussion with Philiz Goh, a U of T alumna and student living with a brain injury. Philiz shared how she worked with U of T’s Accessibility Services (St. George) team to connect to supports and services that helped her navigate accessibility barriers on campus. The session also included a talk with Irene Sullivan, Neurologic Team Lead at Accessibility Services (St. George), who addressed some of the common myths surrounding ABI and provided practical advice on eliminating barriers, especially in virtual spaces.

Co-designing Employee Peer Networks

This session focused on leveraging the collaborative power and expertise of the U of T community to create a peer group for employees with disabilities. It provided employees with a framework on how to co-design an affinity group that is inclusive and responsive. Participants heard from a panel of affinity groups from across U of T who shared their experiences with creating a peer network and included breakout groups where participants could discuss the scope and nature of an affinity group focused on accessibility. Discussions with employees interested in leading a peer group have continued, and the AODA Office welcomes anyone who would like to join this group to [get in touch](#).



Philiz Goh
Alumna, Masters of Health Systems Leadership and Administration



Alone in the Ring

[“Alone in the Ring”](#) explored the importance of cultivating accessible workspaces for students and professionals. The session included a live performance by the Inclusive Campus Project, a research-based theatre program from the University of British Columbia that uses storytelling to bring attention to inclusive workspaces.

The project works to identify and address barriers to accessibility in teaching settings as well as understand the success and challenges of building inclusive and accessible spaces at work. “Alone in the Ring” is a culmination of over three years of research and includes stories from interviews conducted with over 150 students and clinicians who self-identify as living with a disability. Participants reported that the performance was very powerful as the presenters discussed how their research and data informed the scenarios.



Pedagogy Session

[“Centring Disability and Accessibility in Curriculum Design”](#) examined how faculty can help make education more accessible and inclusive. The session highlighted the work of U of T Associate Professor Anne McGuire and Assistant Professor Keith Adamson, faculty members who are working collaboratively with the University community to create courses using co-design principles.

The discussion explored how instructors can implement accessible course design into their work and deliver an inclusive curriculum that allows all students to fully participate in learning environments. The session also included a panel of diverse educators, exploring practical ways in which instructors can create inclusive, person-centred curriculum across our classrooms and learning spaces.



Accessible Built Environment

This section focuses on accessibility in relation to U of T's buildings and public spaces. Last year, U of T met and exceeded Ontario's built environment standard, and in planning for a safe return to campus, the University prioritized accessibility in physical spaces and operations across the tri-campus.

Accessibility Improvement Program – St. George Campus

In 2021, Facilities & Services (F&S) on the St. George campus began implementing a new Accessibility Improvement Program. The program is managed within the Property Management Group of F&S and contains three main aspects:

- **Creating, publishing, and implementing U of T Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS) for the built environment;**
- **Implementing proactive improvement projects on the St. George campus; and**
- **Acting as a tri-campus resource for capital projects, renovations, or related topics.**

In September, F&S hired a new Project Manager, Accessibility to focus on delivering the Accessibility Improvement Program. This staff person has begun providing guidance on several capital project design reviews by sharing feedback on schematic design and construction drawings.

F&S and the AODA Office also made progress on institutional Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS). A tri-campus Technical Working Group reconvened in late 2021 and worked with world-leading accessibility consultants DesignABLE Environments to identify regulations and universal design principles appropriate for U of T's built environments. The Group ultimately adopted the Ontario College of Art & Design University's Facility Accessibility Design Standards as a framework and has begun customizing these standards for our context.

The Technical Working Group will continue to seek input from across the U of T community, aiming to publish final standards in mid-2022 on the [F&S Standards webpage](#). Once finalized, these standards will be applied to all new capital projects, including renovations, and updated as needed in consultation with members of our community with lived experience of disability.

New College Library Accessibility Projects

New College enhanced the accessibility of library spaces by installing tactile, reflective strips on the stairs for visually impaired users moving between levels and introducing adjustable desks to accommodate users in mobility devices.

In addition to these physical enhancements, the library also added new, accessibility-focused Fusion Pro software to selected desktop and laptop computers. The application converts text-to-speech for documents, applications, and interfaces for visually impaired students or auditory learners and provides advanced zoom on text to make documents and interfaces more accessible to those with vision loss.

Renovating the Centre for Innovation and Research Support

In 2021, the Gerstein Information Science Centre opened a new dedicated space for the Centre for Research & Innovation Support (CRIS). Keeping accessibility in mind throughout all stages of the project, the U of T project management team installed new barrier-free provisions, such as an automatic door operator at the main entrance and barrier-free doors and light switches throughout.

Hart House Renovations

Located on the lower level of Hart House, the Arbor Room has welcomed students, community members, and other visitors for almost 70 years. Hart House collaborated with U of T's Office of University Planning to enhance physical access to this meeting space and to exceed AODA compliance wherever possible. The accessibility-focused transformation relied upon extensive student and community input as well as specialized guidance from the Rick Hansen Foundation.

Accessible features of the renovation include:

- **Wider doorways;**
- **A trip-free concrete floor;**
- **A new floor plan to improve traffic throughout;**
- **Enhanced visual contrast through texture and colour schemes;**
- **Tables with clear knee space and counters at accessible heights; and**
- **AODA-compliant signage.**

Additional renovations at Hart House include a new “universal” washroom and new entry ramp extending from the Hart House Circle to the front door of the restaurant. Built at a more gradual slope and equipped with automatic snow-melting technology, the ramp leads to an automated door.

Wallberg Building Ramp Construction

Under the Accessibility Improvement Program, the University began planning for an accessible entrance addition to the Wallberg Building. The project is currently at the schematic design stage, which involves extensive consultation with students, faculty, and staff who learn and work in the building as well as members of the University community with lived experience of disability.

“
Under the Accessibility Improvement Program, the University began planning for an accessible entrance addition to the Wallberg Building.



Accessible Social Distancing Markers – University of Toronto Libraries

Recognizing that pandemic responses such as physical distancing can create new barriers to accessibility, Robarts Library introduced a pilot project to install [Accessible Social Distancing Markers](#) from STIL Solutions. The markers, installed in the Library's high-traffic areas, provide individuals with both a tactile and a visual indication of where they should wait and can be felt distinctly underfoot and through mobility devices.

Other initiatives to improve accessibility include replacing revolving doors with sliding doors to ensure safe and dignified access for all.



Accessible Communications

As of January 1, 2021, all publicly accessible University of Toronto websites, new or existing, must comply with the Web Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 to Level AA, including captions for videos, colour contrast, and keyboard operability. This past year, the AODA Office and staff across the University addressed barriers to information and communications and created—and maintained—accessible institutional online spaces.

Institutional Web Accessibility Supports

In 2021, the AODA Office's Web Accessibility Specialist provided ongoing guidance and expertise, building our community's skills, and fostering a vibrant web accessibility community of practice. Regular training sessions addressed accessible design techniques. Intensive, two-day sessions focused on Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 and 2.1, tools for authoring accessible content, and strategies for testing AODA compliance of digital content. Sessions were well attended, and participants reported high satisfaction with session content and detail.

The Office also hosted weekly drop-in sessions on Document Accessibility and Web Accessibility. These provided attendees with specific time and guidance to pose questions about documents and web projects currently in progress. Over the course of the year, the Office provided over 60 consultations, which ranged from in-depth accessibility testing support to strategic guidance on web development projects. The Office continued to provide accessibility testing reviews both by request and proactively for strategically significant websites. The AODA website now hosts [information about accessing these supporting resources](#).

Facilities & Services (F&S) Website Redesign

Facilities & Services launched a redesigned website in June 2021. The site provides campus partners and contractors with more resources, important news, and information and offers an improved, more accessible user experience by making the website compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA, or better.

Considering accessible design from the project start, the UX designer and content manager took part in training offered by U of T's AODA Office, including the Web Content Accessibility crash course and Accessibility and Language training sessions.

The content audit and review process focused on moving away from PDFs, where possible, and redesigning resources as web page content. The team also added a site map and redesigned PDF forms within existing workflow processes into fillable PDFs that follow accessibility best practices.

Other key priorities in the design process included a more accessible colour contrast ratio (7:1), providing enhanced keyboard accessibility for users, and including alternative text for images. To ensure compliance, the AODA Office's Web Accessibility Specialist reviewed the final website design.

Increasing Awareness and Building Digital Accessibility Capacity at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)

OISE’s Digital Accessibility Specialist continued to provide support and build capacity for digital accessibility through virtual sessions on digital accessibility for remediation assistance, developing and sharing accessibility articles and videos on web accessibility requirements, and promoting awareness of assistive technology. This work advanced efforts to make OISE’s digital content fully accessible through over 300 engagements with content writers, site owners, developers, and designers.

Accessibility of Information & Communications in Research

In 2021, the portfolio of the Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation (VPRI) took a holistic approach to content accessibility. Their Accessibility Editor & Search Engine Optimization Analyst work-study student supported the ongoing conversion and maintenance of web content into accessible formats to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and ensured that the new VPRI Onboarding & Training Portal meets accessibility requirements. In addition, the portfolio updated its existing training modules to ensure AODA compliance.

University of Toronto Entrepreneurship and the Innovations & Partnerships Office also released several new AODA-compliant modules, incorporating alternative image text, perceivable colour contrast, and transcripts of every session.

Ongoing Web Accessibility Improvements at the Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering (FASE)

The FASE web team upgraded five sites to meet AODA requirements—the main [Faculty site](#), [Future Engineering Undergraduates site](#), [Engineering Alumni site](#), [Engineering Graduate Studies site](#), and the [Engineering Outreach site](#)—to a new WordPress theme. This updated theme includes AODA-compliant features such as “skip to content” and proper heading structures.

The FASE web team also developed resources to support departments in creating accessible content. These included an AODA-compliant and on-brand homepage template for use on department websites and an AODA-focused page in the Engineering Website Handbook.



Accessible Service Delivery

The University of Toronto prioritizes accessible options for the broad range of services provided to our community. The work profiled in this section demonstrates how the University fulfils its commitment to advance an equitable and intentionally inclusive environment that meets the needs of all our members.

Who is Included? How U of T is Becoming More Accessible

Since issuing its first commitment in 1981 to improving accessibility for students, faculty, librarians, and staff with disabilities, U of T has removed or reduced many obstacles in the learning environment—ranging from physical obstructions to communication barriers. With the introduction of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) in 2001 and the AODA in 2005, the University continued to operationalize its commitment by exceeding AODA requirements. Today, the University is working to improve accessibility by promoting a broadened definition of disability, by creating inclusive online courses, and by increasing support outside the classroom in experiential learning, events, and mentorship.

Accessibility advisors at U of T collaborate with faculty and students at the three campuses to remove obstacles that may limit students with disabilities from fully participating in their courses and research. Removing obstacles often means developing alternate ways (or “accommodations”) for students to meet the essential requirements of their academic work. Beyond sign-language interpreters, these accommodations can include specialized desks or lab equipment, assistive technology, extra time to complete assignments, and different exam formats.

Recent student surveys show that, because of stigma, those with invisible disabilities tend to be the most hesitant about registering for accessibility services. For this reason, Accessibility Services (St. George) is adjusting its communication strategy so that students with non-evident disabilities know that the office is also there for them. Over the past five years, the number of students seeking support has grown by more than 60 per cent, with mental health disabilities accounting for much of the growth.



The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework is a set of concrete strategies applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful and challenging learning opportunities.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework is a set of concrete strategies applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful and challenging learning opportunities. It also builds flexibility into courses so that students with diverse learning approaches can thrive. It presents information in multiple formats (text, video, audio), provides different ways for students to engage, and offers choices for evaluating what they have learned. In an online course, this could mean recording lectures on video with captions, running discussion forums and polls, and allowing students to get participation marks without having to appear on video.

U of T's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Office helps hundreds of educators implement Universal Design for Learning by giving them practical strategies on how to create accessible learning environments where all students can meaningfully engage. With Accessibility Services (St. George), the AODA Office has also helped develop resources on planning and hosting accessible events, both online and in person. Institutional guidelines currently under development will assist the U of T community in incorporating inclusive design principles into as many facets of University life as possible.



Addressing Barriers to Access for Employees

Health and Well-Being Program and Services (HWB) within the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture continued to support all employees as they adapted to a variety of pandemic-related changes in their life and their work. They collaborated with partners across the University—including the Family Care Office and Occupational Health team within the Office of Environmental Health & Safety—on a wide range of activities, such as developing and reviewing documents and guidelines for employees and managers on a range of work-from-home and return-to-work topics; managing cases for essential employees unable to work on-site for medical reasons; and supporting the implementation of U of T's vaccine mandate. In all this work, HWB recognized that both our pandemic response and any return-to-campus planning would have unique implications for members in our community with lived experience of disability. Providing appropriate accommodations to eliminate these barriers remained a key priority.

Accessibility Services (St. George) – A Year in Review

In 2021, Accessibility Services (St. George) continued to incorporate intersectionality and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into its work; gather and act upon community feedback; and respond robustly to the accessibility challenges posed by COVID-19.

This pandemic response required an entirely new remote/virtual accommodations process. Creating a face mask accommodation workflow ensured students confronting a wide variety of disability-related barriers could fully participate in their academic studies while maintaining the University's core values and teaching standards. This work entailed extensive collaboration with multiple Faculties, divisions, and senior University leadership.

In February, Accessibility Services staff participated in Anti-Black Racism training and received additional training on Ageism and Indigenous Cultural Competency. Further, as part of a broader response to the Report of the Steering Committee for the University of Toronto Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Accessibility Services created new Indigenous Peer Guide and Indigenous Accessibility Advisor roles and conducted a review to include culturally appropriate supports such as Elders and Indigenous Healers. Ongoing work to Indigenize spaces at Accessibility Services will help create an environment that both welcomes and reflects Indigenous culture and values.

In June, U of T Professional Faculties hosted the third annual Accessibility and Inclusion Professional Development Conference, focused on sharing innovative and best practices at U of T with external partners. The free and virtual conference had over 300 participants from across North America and Australia.

New programming included a “Transition to In-Person Learning” series, which approached the return from three angles: learning strategies, navigating accommodations, and building community. These sessions included student panels, Q & As with an Accessibility Advisor, and a review of key learning strategies. Accessibility Services also introduced “Writing Tests & Exams In-Person” workshops, which reviewed booking test/exam accommodations; procedures for writing at Accommodated Testing Services; learning strategies for time management; and test-taking strategies.

Lastly, Accessibility Services significantly updated the format and offerings of Moving Forward, an annual summer transition program specifically designed for new, incoming students living with disabilities who are entering post-secondary education at any institution. Offering multiple sessions between May and September and tailoring sessions to different populations—such as Arts & Science students, ProFacs, International/ Out of Province students, and Grad students—contributed to a 13% increase in the program's attendance from the previous year.

Classroom Accommodations and Accessibility Co-Design

In partnership with Accessibility Services (St. George), the Classroom Accommodations & Accessibility Co-Design Project builds on the Innovation Hub's previous work exploring student and instructor needs in the classroom accommodations process.

Through consultations, the Innovation Hub sought to better understand the experiences of the accommodation process between instructors and students. It found that students are increasingly seeking out Accessibility Services for support in their learning needs and coursework accommodations. This support is partly arranged between instructors and students, but it can be complex, given the diversity of students' and instructors' needs.

Students and instructors shared that the accommodation process can feel bureaucratic, but that when their learning and teaching needs were valued through mutual respect, they felt empowered to collaborate in making classrooms and coursework accessible together. They also reported that when instructors integrate accessibility in frequent, small, and often creative ways, these incremental changes can build to become larger, more meaningful and sustained improvements. These findings reinforce the notion that accessibility is a daily responsibility for all community members.

In response to the findings, the Innovation Hub is now developing

a series of design thinking sessions, sharing its research with the community, and brainstorming ways of bringing its conclusions to life at the University.

Health Equity Grand Rounds: Queerness & Disability

In the first of the Health and Mental Health Equity Rounds (2021-2022) series at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW) in November, award-winning Disability Awareness Consultant Content Creator Andrew Gurza addressed the realities of ableism and its impacts on those who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ and disabled.

Health Equity Grand Rounds are an opportunity for FIFSW students to engage in critical dialogue about intentional ways to take a health equity approach to social work. All are welcome to attend these sessions, and FIFSW students receive a certificate for attending four out of five sessions.

Student Equity Census

Led by the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students (OVPS) and open to all U of T students, the U of T Student Equity Census is a demographic data collection initiative with a set of eight questions. The questions ask students about gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, Indigeneity, race and ethnicity, and the educational attainment of their parents/guardians.

In January, OVPS established an [Advisory Roundtable](#) composed of 31 student, staff, faculty, and librarian members. The Roundtable included students who self-identified as having a disability as well as staff representatives from

a variety of U of T Equity Offices and Accessibility Services. Their primary mandate was to recommend a strategy to process annual reporting of the data to the U of T community; advise on data-use to facilitate meaningful change; review and consider feedback on the Census questions and process; and provide recommendations on necessary changes.

Based on student feedback, the Roundtable reframed the Census question on disability. The introductory text of the revised question now recognizes that disability emanates from societal barriers and may be evident or non-evident. Student feedback on this update has been positive.

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Centre for Global Disability Studies

Launched in 2020 at U of T Scarborough, the Centre for Global Disability Studies brings together faculty, researchers, and graduate students from our three campuses conducting anti-ableist research in any discipline. With the goal of improving the campus climate for researchers and audiences with disabilities across U of T, the Centre aspires to foster critical conversations that advance the reframing of disability.

“Ableism” refers to discriminatory attitudes in society that devalue the potential of people with disabilities.

The Centre’s mission is to support research focused on creating a more just future for people with disabilities.

While most centres for disability studies examine issues at the regional or national level, the Centre for Global Disability Studies is founded on the idea that the social and historical systems that perpetuate ableism—including colonialism and racism—are global.

The traditional way of defining disability in education, health care, and other systems emphasizes physical or cognitive differences in individuals. It often focuses on medical diagnoses that need to be managed or cured. In contrast, many disability studies researchers today define disability as something—such as an attitude or a physical environment—that is created by barriers in society. This definition shifts attention to how to create a barrier-free society.

The Centre is also committed to improving accessibility on campus. It offers small grants to cover access needs for researchers with disabilities, such as the cost of bringing support people to academic conferences. It also provides matching funds for investments in accessible events, such as providing captioning and interpreters.

In partnership with Accessibility Services at U of T Scarborough, the Centre hopes to one day establish a disability cultural centre, which would act as a hub for events and for student life around disability issues.

Advocate for Disability Justice Awarded Prestigious Professorship

Ron Buliung, a professor in the Department of Geography, Geomatics, and Environment at the University of Mississauga (UTM) and Graduate Chair of Geography and Planning at U of T, received the 2021 Micky Milner International Professorship. Buliung is a transportation geographer who focuses on improving access to transportation and education for children with disabilities.

As part of his award, Buliung presented the keynote address at Holland Bloorview's 16th annual [Bloorview Research Institute's \(BRI\) symposium](#) on November 15, 2021.

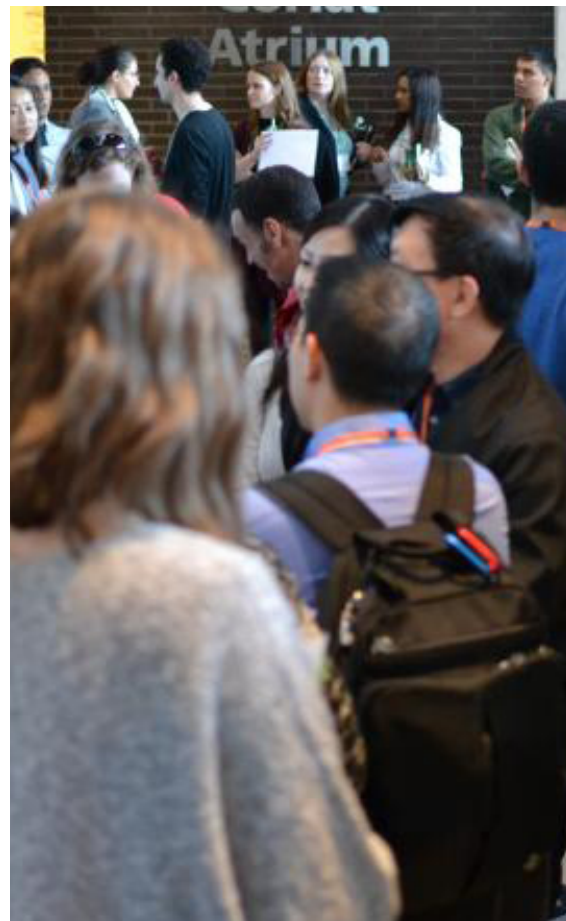
The annual BRI Symposium is Canada's largest hospital-based, pediatric disability health-research conference that combines research and the family perspective.

Drawing on his own experiences as the father of a daughter with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) type 2 and his research and advocacy related to childhood disability, Buliung highlighted barriers to education and food insecurity for people with disabilities in his keynote.

The Micky Milner International Professorship is named in honour of Dr. Mickey Milner, a renowned pioneer in the field of childhood disability.



Ron Buliung
Professor, Department of Geography, Geomatics, and Environment

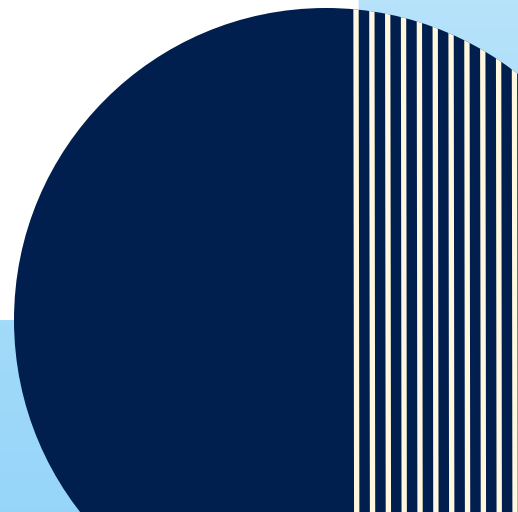




Pedagogy

The University of Toronto is committed to finding ways of offering our students universally-designed learning environments. A critical component of this work involves supporting our educators and offering opportunities to build their knowledge and skills.

Across the tri-campus, Faculties, units, and offices have worked hard this past year to develop new resources and training for our instructors. They have also provided exceptional technological support. Such efforts will help U of T move beyond AODA compliance and reach our ultimate goal: to embed universal design into all our teaching and learning activities.



Tech2U - Supporting Access in the Classroom

The [Tech2U program](#) humanizes classroom technical support to foster excellent and innovative teaching and learning in increasingly technological classrooms. Through the collaboration of Learning Space Management (LSM) and the Innovation Hub, the program provides real-time, personalized technological support for instructors through a technical support team, moving from a room-based approach to one focused on instructor needs. The program uses a needs-based model that enables instructors to focus on accessibility and meeting accommodation requirements.

By providing technology and support at the course level, Tech2U has addressed several accessibility barriers for students and instructors. Tech2U provides portable audio and video technology to enable participation by students who require remote accommodation. For courses requiring the use of chalkboards for formula development, video cameras with on-site operators capture the content on the blackboard and share it with students. Instructors who cannot attend their courses in-person can attend a classroom full of students remotely through a mobile Tech2U teaching station. This technology allows instructors to engage classes in discussion.

Ongoing support for Accessible Pedagogy at CTSI

The Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation (CTSI), in conjunction with Academic and Collaborative Technologies (ACT) and the Teaching Assistant Training Program (TATP), continued to provide support, resources, and guidance on

accessible pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to educators at U of T. One series, “Making Learning Accessible,” brought together U of T experts on accessibility, accommodations, and inclusive teaching. Another, “Student Wellness and Online/Remote Teaching,” introduced topics such as course design for empathy, flexibility, and enhancing student confidence. CTSI also integrated UDL throughout their 2021 Teaching & Learning Symposium, offering sessions on working with students-as-partners, co-designing lab experiences, and anti-oppressive teaching.

The TATP provided both learning opportunities and resources for Teaching Assistants (TAs) to embed accessible design and UDL into their own tutorials and materials. The session “Applying Principles of UDL to Course Design” introduced TAs to the UDL framework, focusing on how it can be applied to course design to reduce barriers to learning and create a more inclusive environment.

[The TATP Teaching Toolkit](#) now features a section on Accessible and Inclusive Teaching, with several revised and new resources: Privilege, Power, and Justice in the Classroom; Anti-Oppressive Practices for Teaching Assistants at the University of Toronto; Using Accessible Visual Aids in the Classroom; and Fostering Accessible Learning.

Recognizing that educational technology support is an important part of accessible and universal design, ACT provided educators with captioning support for lectures, videos, and recordings. This assistance evolved into training sessions throughout the year as well as several “Captioning Clinics,” where educators could ask questions about their own content.

Fostering Accessible Pedagogy – Faculty of Information (iSchool)

Over the last year the Faculty of Information expanded and enhanced how it supports accessible pedagogy in virtual and in-person spaces. Instructional support staff learned [how to develop accessible content in Quercus](#), create accessibility guides for instructors and students, ensure that live captions are enabled for online sessions, and include accurate closed captions in recordings of classes and Faculty events.

Moreover, the Faculty created the role of Technical Support Assistants (TSAs) to help instructors deliver online learning. These positions quickly evolved into Technical & Accessibility Support Assistants (TASAs) through the newly formed Learning Hub. TASAs provide a range of supports, including recommending accessibility enhancements to course design and assisting with live captioning. Accessibility consultations for instructors are also now available.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering (FASE)

Focusing on how to embed Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into their support resources, documents, and program offerings, the Education Technology Office (ETO) at the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering helps educators deliver accessible virtual content.

Through series and programs like [Lessons Learned Webinars](#), the EdTech Blog, Lecture Capture, and the EdTech Workshops, the ETO provides practical tips and tools for educators to successfully embed UDL into course design and delivery. Supporting educators in [recording their in-person lectures](#) proved especially critical, as lecture capture eliminates several barriers to accessibility for many students and has been associated with [improved student performance](#).



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM)

Over the last year, the Educational Developer, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre at UTM provided accessibility and design work to the educational community. This involved hosting the event, “Inclusive Pedagogy: equity approaches” with Fran Odette, George Brown College, which highlighted the importance of disability and accessibility framing in teaching and learning. The Educational Developer also collaborated with instructors to create more accessible course content and documents. Such efforts support the Centre’s goal of framing all consultation work in terms of accessibility and inclusion when covering topics such as pedagogy, educational tools, activities, and assessments.

Kindness-based Teaching Pedagogy and Inclusive Design Principles

Writing in *Times Higher Education* in August 2021, Fiona Rawle, a faculty member in UTM’s Department of Biology and Associate Dean, Undergraduate, outlined a “pedagogy of kindness” that falls within the scope of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Her 12-step pedagogy includes “build in flexibility,” which recommends incorporating flexibility through strategies such as date windows for assignments. Collectively, Rawle’s 12 steps demonstrate that a teaching philosophy emphasizing kindness, empathy, and flexibility can be compatible with holding students to rigorous academic standards. Studies have shown that increased feelings of connection and inclusion improve student learning and wellness, underscoring the need to build kindness into course design from the start.





Mental Health Supports

The University of Toronto serves a large and diverse student, faculty, librarian, and staff population, and is dedicated to fostering a supportive and healthy environment that enables all members to thrive.

To support that commitment in 2021, Faculties, divisions, campuses, and services worked to build our community's knowledge and understanding of non-evident disabilities, mental health, and wellness.

“

...dedicated to fostering a supportive and healthy environment that enables all members to thrive.

Ongoing support at the Faculty of Arts & Science (FAS)

Throughout 2021, the Office of High Risk, Faculty Support & Mental Health within FAS focused on capacity building, programming, and helping our community better navigate institutional supports. The Office developed over 80 workshops—with more than 2,200 attendees—on topics such as [Five Ways to Well-being](#) and [Identify, Assist, Refer](#). Mental health programming centred on initiatives promoting a culture of care and included the launch of a mental health-focused Instagram account and a Wellness in Practice Series. The Office also provided a local point of contact for those needing help identifying and accessing internal support resources.

Employee Wellness Resources

The Integrated Wellness Consultant at the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture led efforts to foster a supportive culture of wellness at U of T. Learning sessions for leaders focused on understanding burnout and the mental health impacts of COVID-19, while all-employee sessions addressed the mental health impacts of COVID-19, challenging mental health stigma, and understanding re-entry anxiety. To complement these sessions and provide opportunities for further support and learning, the Integrated Wellness Consultant also created tip sheets for U of T employees on managing return to work anxiety, building a supportive culture, and prioritization and workload, among others.

Details of these tip sheets and information on future webinars are available on the [Wellness Hub](#).

St. George Health & Wellness Resources

St. George Student Health & Wellness implemented same-day counselling services in 2021 in direct response to a [recommendation](#) of the Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health. Same-day counselling appointments provide access to support when students need it. Students can explore concerns, learn about resources, and identify next steps with a professional counsellor.

Health and Wellness also continued to offer peer support services, building on work started in 2020. Students can speak with a trained University of Toronto student peer at short notice. Support is offered in a one-on-one, drop-in, non-judgmental, confidential, and accessible virtual space. Health and Wellness also launched the tri-campus groups program, The Pathways to Wellness. Offered through six weekly sessions, these groups are inclusive, supportive, and uplifting spaces in which students learn strategies for managing well-being. Group sessions are open to all U of T students and provide an opportunity for building skills while building peer networks.



Increasing Resources and Capacity Building in Mental Health at the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering (FASE)

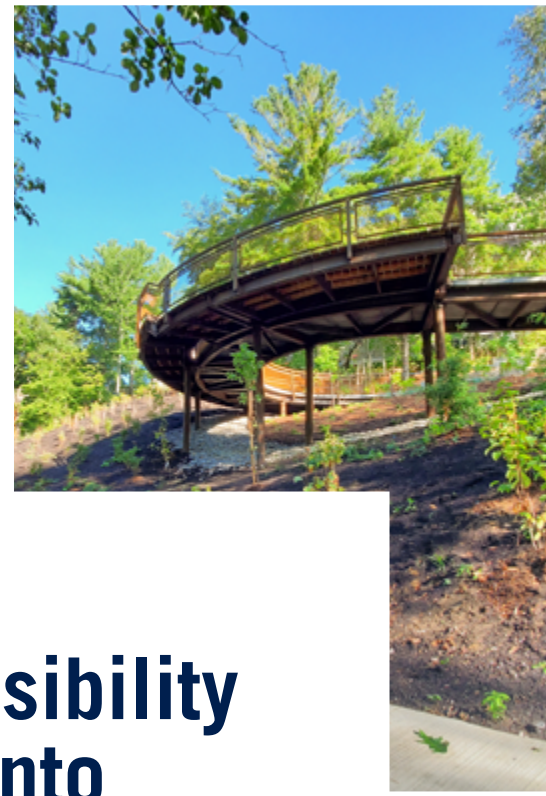
In 2021, FASE developed and shared two resources to provide staff and faculty with tools to support student mental health. [The Bringing Mental Health into the Classroom Reservoir](#) is available to FASE staff and faculty, providing them with a variety of ways to support student mental health and foster a culture of care. The Reservoir contains content for syllabi, including FASE's Syllabus Statements on Inclusivity, Accommodations & Mental Health Support; guided breaks slides to encourage stretching, mindful practice, and taking a break in a lecture; and trainings and resources to build skills in supporting students as staff and faculty. FASE also developed the U of T Engineering Student Well-Being Resource Guide for Faculty and Staff, which outlines additional considerations and resources for those supporting U of T Engineering students navigating mental health challenges.

Battling Burnout: Well-Being During the "COVID Winter"

Administrators, faculty members, librarians, and students at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) expressed the many ways they dealt with pandemic-related stress in a series of videos called "Battling Burnout." In the first video, UTM Vice-President & Principal Alexandra Gillespie shared some of her family's own coping mechanisms, such as making sure to get outside every day and cooking together.

Dealing with the mental health challenges posed by COVID-19 continued to underscore the importance of individual wellness strategies. The UTM initiative helped normalize pandemic-related anxiety and provide real-life tips for personal well-being.





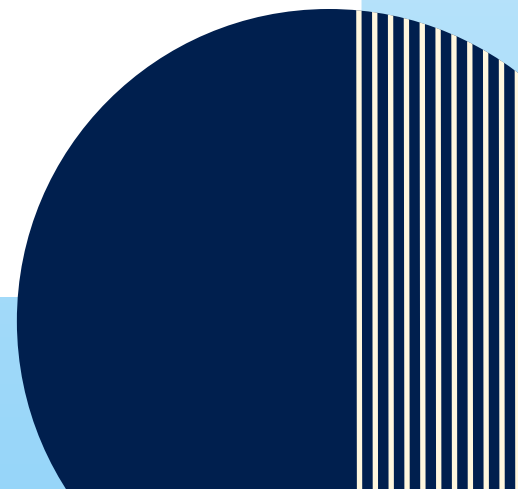
What's Next: Looking Ahead at Accessibility at the University of Toronto

The AODA Office: Beyond the Pandemic

Despite ongoing uncertainty caused by an evolving pandemic, the University found practical solutions in 2021 to address the accessibility needs caused and/or exacerbated by the pandemic. U of T also prioritized accessibility in planning for a safe return to campus.

In 2022, the University's AODA Office will focus on three areas of compliance activity: improving web accessibility resources, updating online training, and renewing the institutional multi-year plan. The Office will go beyond compliance by expanding offerings in capacity building, developing systems to plan for implementation of the proposed postsecondary education standards, and creating new opportunities for peer-led resources.

The Office will also focus on providing new training and engagement opportunities in universal design. Through the development of tools and resources, these efforts will support the University community in creating systems, processes, and services that can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all. The Office will continue to find ways of supporting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) initiatives across the University.





What's Next: Looking Ahead at Accessibility at the University of Toronto

2022 National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities: Addressing Ableism, Disability, and Accessibility in Canadian Higher Education

On December 3, 2022, coinciding with the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) will convene a national conversation to explore barriers to learning and working in the post-secondary education sector for persons with disabilities and facilitate the co-creation of solutions that provide an inclusive environment for these students, faculty, and staff to fully access and participate in the life of their institutions, to flourish, and to feel a meaningful sense of belonging. The conversation will engage

participants from across the Canadian higher education landscape and experts from outside the sector. It will critically address structural ableism in the Canadian academy; inclusive curriculum, learning design, work facilitation, and research supports; and inclusive infrastructure, design, and planning, among other topics.

The December 2022 event builds on the inaugural 2020 National Dialogues and Action, a two-day virtual event hosted by the University that led to the co-creation of the [Scarborough Charter](#) on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education.

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