UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

50 YEARS | GOVERNING COUNCIL

FOR INFORMATION   **PUBLIC**   **OPEN SESSION**

TO: University Affairs Board

SPONSOR: Heather Boon, Acting Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity &
CONTACT INFO: Culture, 416-978-4865, vp.psec@utoronto.ca

PRESENTER: Ben Poynton, AODA Officer
CONTACT INFO: 416-978-7236 | ben.poynton@utoronto.ca

DATE: April 12, 2023 for April 19, 2023

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Annual Report: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2022-2023

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 12, 2023)
2. **University Affairs Board [for information] (April 19, 2023)**

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

At its meeting of April 20, 2022, the University Affairs Board received the AODA Report, 2021 for information only

At its meeting of April 12, 2023, the Planning and Budget Committee received the AODA Report, 2022 for information only.

Office of the Governing Council | Simcoe Hall, 27 King's College Circle, Room 106, Toronto, ON M5S 1A1 Canada
Tel: +1 416 978-6576 • Fax: +1 416-978-8182 • governing.council@utoronto.ca • www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca

Page 1 of 2

HIGHLIGHTS:

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Report is produced each year to satisfy the requirements of the AODA and demonstrate how the University is meeting or exceeding compliance and adhering to its accessibility plan. The Report outlines the significant work that occurs across all three campuses as our community continues to embed accessibility and universal design into our systems, processes, and approaches.

Featuring initiatives across the tri-campus, the 2022 Report explores the following themes: enhancing supports to students with lived experience of disability; building our community's understanding of universal design; embracing new standards and best practices; embedding accessibility into institutional activities; creating accessible physical spaces and structures; and centring lived experience of disability. Throughout 2022, the University advanced accessibility in many ways. These include enhancing mental health supports; offering a comprehensive suite of training for the University community; opening one of the most accessible washrooms on St. George campus; and showcasing artists with lived experience of disability exploring rituals to navigate barriers they encounter daily. We also welcomed the opportunity to host the second National Dialogues event "Addressing Ableism, Disability, and Accessibility in Canadian Higher Education" and panel "Disability, Race, Gender, and Diverse Intersecting Communities: Pathways towards Social Justice" (in recognition of National AccessAbility Week). In outlining priorities for 2023 and beyond, the AODA Office reflects on these important conversations and identifies upcoming opportunities to support everyone's full and equal participation in the range of activities the University offers.

Thank you to everyone across the tri-campus whose work is captured in this 2022 Report, and to all those who continue to advance accessibility with ingenuity and resolve. By applying universal design principles and an inclusive mindset to all that we do, we will ensure everyone in our community has an equal opportunity to define success at the University of Toronto—and the support they need to achieve it.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None.

RECOMMENDATION:

For Information

DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Report, 2022

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Report 2022

Contents

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Report 2022

Statement of Acknowledgement of Traditional Land

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

In 2022, we brought important learnings and refreshed perspectives to once-familiar environments.

We also held important conversations about accessibility and ableism. These conversations—which included programming for National AccessAbility Week and the second National Dialogues event, "Addressing Ableism, Disability, and Accessibility in Canadian Higher Education"—centred lived experience of disability. They became important sites of resistance, spaces where long-held assumptions about academia and academic success could be examined and rigorously challenged. They connected us to networks beyond our institution, and to experts from a wide range of sectors. They also underscored our individual and collective responsibility to ensure all members of our tri-campus community can participate in the full range of activities offered at the University.

These insights, generated from pandemic disruptions and thoughtful dialogue, are critical ingredients for making change. We need to retain them, cultivate them, and enable them to enrich our ongoing efforts to dismantle barriers for members of our community with lived experience of disability.

We present the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Report 2022 as a record of these insights and a call to do more.

Thank you to everyone across the tri-campus whose work is captured in this Report, and to all those who continue to advance accessibility with ingenuity and resolve. By applying universal design principles and an inclusive mindset to all that we do, we will ensure everyone in our community has an equal opportunity to define success at the University of Toronto—and the support they need to achieve it.

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

Heather Boon
Acting Vice-President, People Strategy,
Equity & Culture

About the AODA Office

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Office is responsible for ensuring that the University meets its obligations under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, the **University of Toronto Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities**, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. We also support the University community in finding ways of going over and above compliance to truly embed accessibility and universal design into our systems, processes, and approaches. Through this work we hope to create spaces that are barrier-free, flexible, and responsive.

The Office provides online and in-person training, consultation, support, and advice to all members of the University community on how to create these spaces. It also acquires feedback on the accessibility of University services and works collaboratively to resolve accessibility concerns.

If you would like consultation regarding the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act standard obligations, embedding Universal Design, or have feedback regarding services provided by the University of Toronto relating to accessibility, please contact us.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Office
Faculty Offices, Room 356
155 College Street
416.978.7236
aoda@utoronto.ca

# 1 Enhancing supports to students with lived experience of disability

Our statement of institutional purpose affirms the University's dedication to "fostering an academic community in which the learning and scholarship of every member may flourish." To ensure that students with lived experience of disability can flourish at U of T, we all need to consider the broad and unique range of barriers created by assumptions that have long determined how post-secondary institutions are built, what defines academic success, and what learning and teaching "should" look like.

Last year, our tri-campus community engaged a range of strategies to support students with lived experience of disability in meeting their academic goals, accessing services, and building meaningful networks at the University.

Accessibility Services at University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) maintained flexibility in their service and program delivery to ensure multiple access points for students, inviting them to choose a mode of engagement that best suited their comfort level and accessibility needs. Throughout the year, students interacted with staff or attended advising appointments in-person, on the phone, and via Microsoft Teams, and participated in academic workshops and social events in-person and virtually.

At **University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), AccessAbility Services** launched a new interactive process to support accommodation requests that automates tasks, enables students to submit relevant documentation and forms easily and securely, and provides more efficient and responsive service. Moreover, because the process supports 24/7 access, students can use the system at their convenience. A new series of online modules also explains the accommodations process and helps students with key tasks such as registering with AccessAbility Services and self-renewing accommodation requests.

Accessibility Services on St. George campus augmented their accommodations support services by providing several engagement and development opportunities for prospective and current students. **The Moving Forward Summer Transition Program** helped prepare students entering post-secondary education (at U of T or elsewhere) who self-identify as having disabilities. Students currently working or preparing for careers post-graduation attended the session "**Disclosure and Accommodation Strategies for the Workplace**," offered in collaboration with the Career Exploration
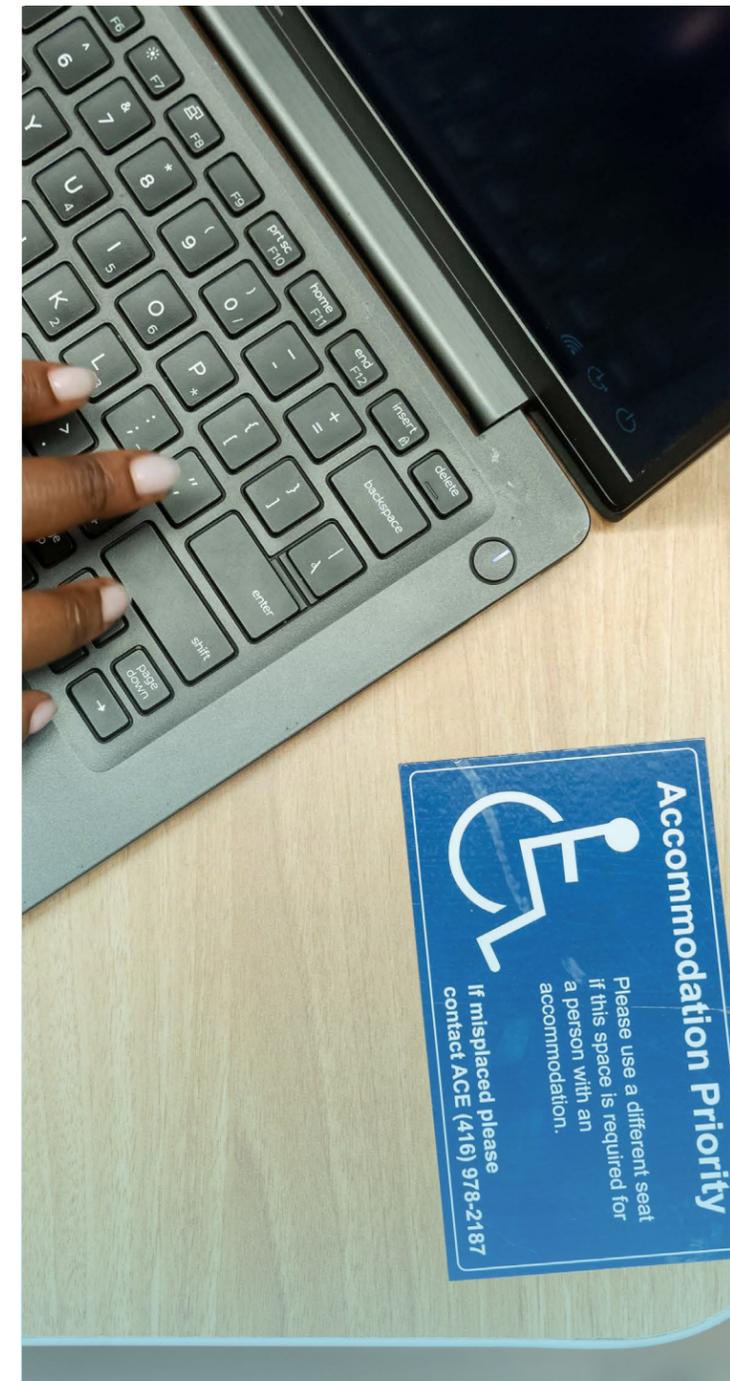
& Education Centre, which introduced strategies for students to talk with employers about disclosure and accommodation. Accessibility Services also partnered with the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation to support students' learning experiences by helping instructors understand their role in accommodating students who require special needs in the classroom. The lunch-and-learn session "**Myth-Busting Your Work with Accessibility Services**" addressed common misconceptions, clarified how instructors can facilitate accommodation requests, and identified the range of temporary and ongoing accommodations available to students at all stages of their academic careers.

In addition to this work to enhance awareness and understanding within our community, Accessibility Services St. George fostered supportive environments for students with lived experience of disability to learn, share experiences, and build relationships. They collaborated with Career Exploration & Education and the Access Us Peer Mentorship Program on a hybrid **networking event in honour of National Mentoring Day**, which enabled students registered with Accessibility Services to connect with upper-year mentors, peer mentors, and Accessibility Services staff in-person or online. Participants reflected on their personal strengths, values, and goals; learned tips on delivering an effective elevator pitch; engaged in a round of speed networking; and received supplementary resources.

The weekly **Peer Connections program** at Accessibility Services St. George, open to self-identifying students who may or may not have a formal diagnosis, offered supportive, judgement-free spaces where students could connect, discuss their experiences, engage in activities aimed at promoting mental and emotional well-being, and build a community of resilience. The program hosted three spaces: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Peer Connections for Women & Trans Students, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD) Peer Connections, and Mental Health Peer Connections. Peer facilitators, accessibility

advisors, and program coordinators facilitated sessions focusing on stigma, burnout, navigating the holidays, sleep and rest, and advocacy, among other themes.

The University also enhanced supports for students with epilepsy. Accessibility Services St. George partnered with Epilepsy Toronto and York University to develop online **Seizure Education Modules** that promote understanding about epilepsy; dispel common myths; identify accommodations for students with epilepsy; and convey how faculty, librarians, and staff can respond effectively and knowledgeably to students having a seizure. The modules emphasize the importance of building awareness among community members in a variety of student-facing roles, from professors and librarians, lab coordinators, and teaching assistants (TAs) to invigilators and residence dons.

The University significantly advanced its goal to improve mental health services and supports for students in 2022. In their administrative response to the **final report of the Review Committee on the Role of Campus Safety (Special Constable Services) in Responding to Students in Mental Health Crises**, leaders affirmed their commitment to provide compassionate and trauma-informed responses to students in mental health crises that rely on close collaboration among Campus Safety teams, student mental health services staff, and peer support teams across our three campuses. The initial Administrative Response identified five areas to focus efforts to address the Review Committee's recommendations. These included achieving tri-campus consistency in Campus Safety operations and enhancing training as well as recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and retention strategies for Campus Safety staff. Establishing a tri-campus safety leadership table—attended, where relevant, by subject matter experts in health & wellness; equity, diversity, and inclusion; and other areas of expertise—became the first major outcome of the Report. Detailed strategies and timelines for implementing recommendations will be communicated in Spring 2023.


The work of re-envisioning institutional responses to students in mental health crises will complement efforts already completed or underway to respond to the **recommendations made by the Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health**. Priorities include enhancing the stepped model of care that offers increased access to care at various degrees of intensity. The model supports a diverse student body with wide-ranging needs, is strengths-based, and emphasizes treatment over lengthy assessments to reduce wait times. Indeed, in September 2022, with the return to on-campus, in-person academic activity, the University successfully launched same-day access to mental health counselling, as well as the University of Toronto Navigation Service (UTN) in partnership with CAMH. Combined, these two services now provide students with timely and accessible supports to address both moderate to complex mental health needs.

Another improvement currently underway involves the physical redesign of health and wellness spaces across the three campuses. Plans are in place to consolidate health and wellness services on a single floor at the Koffler Student Services Centre on St. George campus. A new, five-storey hub with a dedicated health and wellness floor will be created at UTSC. UTM's Health & Counselling Centre is also being renovated to better integrate care and to create a brighter and more spacious atmosphere for student clients. The renovations will allow for the expansion of the number of counselling staff and mental health navigation and triage staff.

These improvements, **among many others**, will help address the need for timely and appropriate care for students and meet them where they are at the right time.

2

Building our community's understanding of universal design

Universal design is the opposite of ableist design: it meets everyone's needs, not merely the needs of people whose bodies look, think, and function in a particular way. Applying universal design principles throughout a project's lifecycle—from the conceptual stage to implementation—will ensure its outcomes can be perceived by and are meaningful to all.
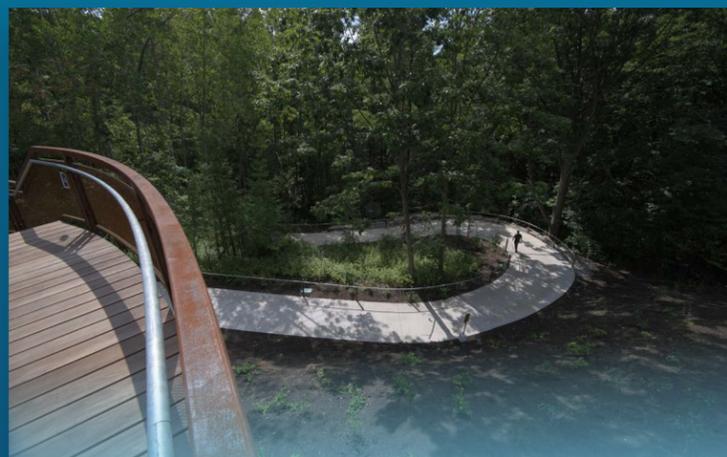
As an institution, we are working towards the goal of integrating universal design principles into everything we do. Tri-campus efforts to increase our community's understanding of universal design significantly advanced this goal in 2022.

The University's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Office, in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy at UTM, developed the new training "**Universal Design 101**" to assist staff, librarians, and faculty in understanding universal design and how to embed it into their own work and, in turn, the policies, processes, and services at our institution. The AODA Office delivered a version of this workshop focusing on the universal design of administration to new and ongoing academic administrators in June 2022.

At UTM, several training opportunities expanded awareness and understanding of universal design. A **three-day Summer Camp for Instructors** (co-facilitated by members of the Educational Development team at the **Teaching and Learning Collaboration or TLC)** demonstrated universal design principles and shared information and resources on inclusive pedagogy and universal design. A **Universal Design for Learning Basics & Guidelines Workshop** advanced understanding of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concepts. The TLC also developed several resources to expand understanding of inclusive pedagogy, including **Universal Design for Learning**, which provides a high-level overview of UDL principles and strategies that can be integrated into curricula and implemented in the classroom.

To support these initiatives, the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy at UTM worked with UTM's Career Centre to provide training
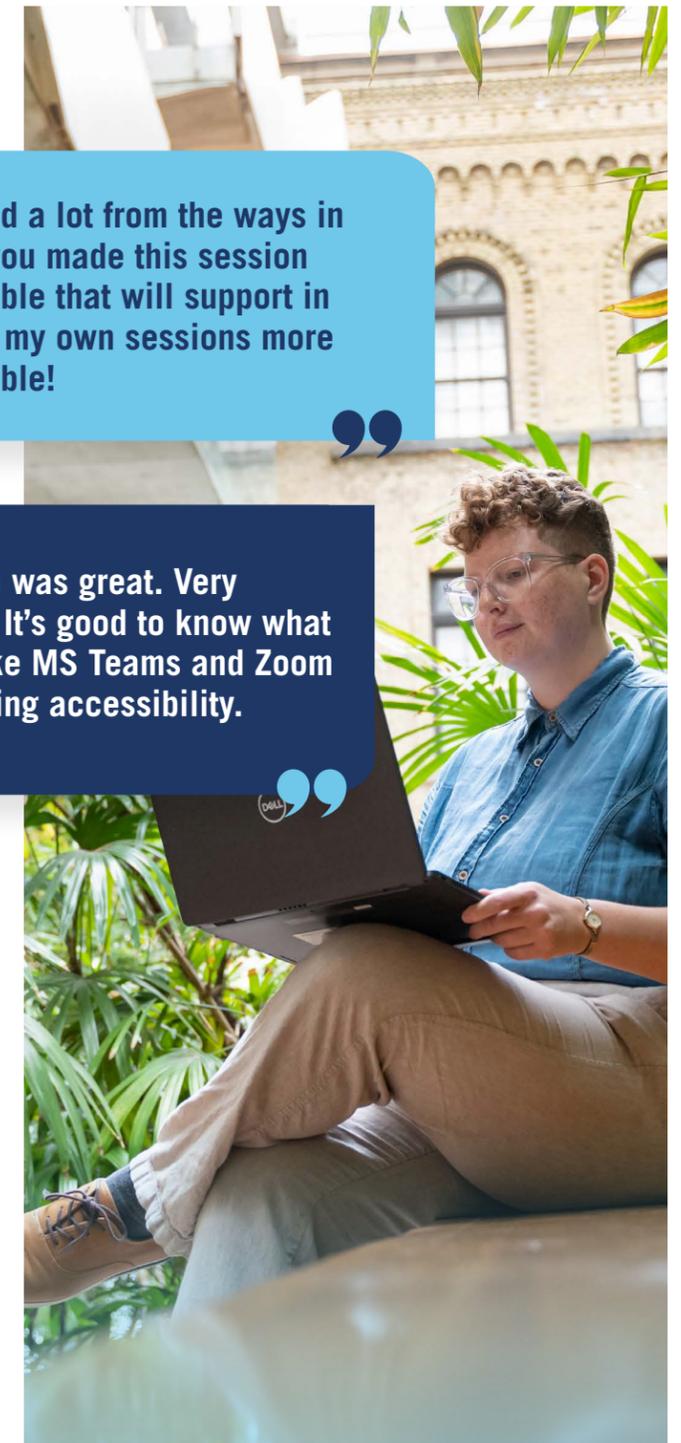
> " I learned a lot from the ways in which you made this session accessible that will support in making my own sessions more accessible! "

> " This session was great. Very informative. It's good to know what platforms like MS Teams and Zoom have regarding accessibility. "

and support in embedding a **UDL framework into the Career Centre's workshop design**. Instructors, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate students also received individual consultations to support the implementation of accessible pedagogy and UDL in assessments, activities, and courses.

At UTSC, educators enhanced their understanding of universal design through a variety of means. The UTSC Teaching and Learning Resource Hub for educators introduced a **UDL module** including strategies for getting started with designing UDL-based curriculum. Faculty interested in understanding how to design accessible learning opportunities using UDL practices could also request **individual consultation**.

Delivered in partnership with AccessAbility Services, an **orientation session for new faculty members and librarians** at UTSC addressed academic accommodations and how to use UDL practices to create flexible learning environments. New orientation courses will be added in 2023, including an inclusive course design session that embeds UDL practices and anti-racist pedagogy.

UTSC's decision to create a new role, **Educational Developer – Universal Design for Learning**, in the Centre of Teaching & Learning marked an important development in the evolution of accessible pedagogy at the University. The Educational Developer now supports faculty in designing accessible curriculum that addresses learner variability, with particular focus on the unique needs of students with lived experience of disability. The new role is one of the many outcomes of UTSC's **Curriculum Review (2020-2022)**, which aimed to ensure that programs and pedagogical approaches reflect the diversity of UTSC students as well as the histories, epistemologies, and pedagogies that have been historically devalued or erased.

On St. George campus, **THE500 Teaching in Higher Education**, a hands-on course for PhD and postdoctoral students offered by Woodsworth College, featured an increased focus on Universal Design for Learning. Guest speakers from Accessibility Services complemented discussions of UDL principles. The course integrated UDL from several different perspectives: using technology, syllabus writing, assessment preparation, large and small class teaching, and UDL awareness in the classroom space itself to ensure all students can engage in rigorous and meaningful learning. In doing so, it provided an excellent training ground for those interested in pursuing a teaching career in the post-secondary sector.
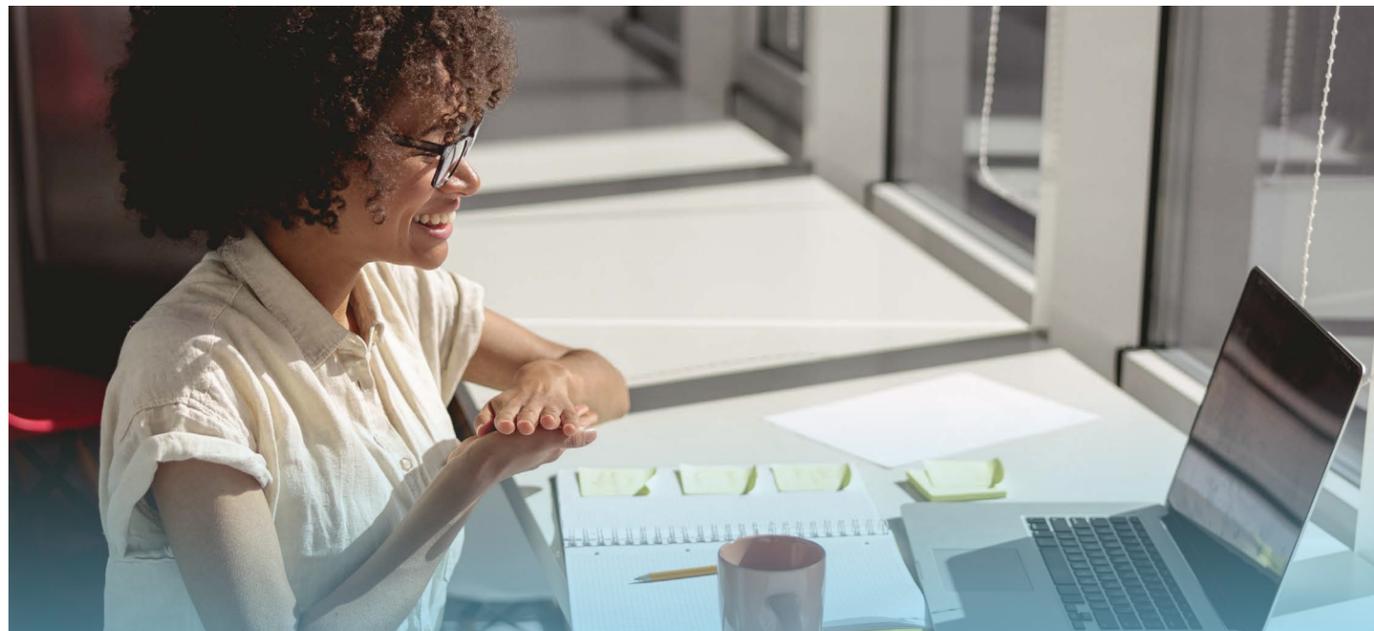
3

Embracing new standards and best practices

To make comprehensive and long-lasting change across our three campuses, we need new guideposts to orient our work—standards and best practices that are relevant to our own context and are informed by those with lived experience of disability.

In 2022, we embraced new standards and best practices to improve how community members with lived experience of disability can navigate physical spaces on our campuses, participate in events, and fully engage with healthcare-based learning, research, and teaching.

As part of the University's Accessibility Improvement Program led by U of T's Property Management Group, a tri-campus Technical Working Group continued work to finalize **Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS) for U of T's built environments**. The Technical Working Group is customizing industry standards that strongly reflect universal design principles and ensure our adherence to provincial regulations. Once complete, these standards will be published on the University's **Facilities & Services website** and applied to all new capital projects at the University, including renovations. They will not remain static, however: future updates will be made as needed in consultation with members of our community with lived experience of disability.

Under new Terms of Reference, the Hart House Accessibility Working Group began developing a **Standard of Practice for Planning and Delivering Accessible Events and Programs**. The standard of practice will be applied to all events and programs offered by Hart House, which hosts a broad range of events for the U of T community as well as wedding, meeting, and event services in a facility featuring an athletics and aquatics facility, an art gallery, a theatre, and other programming and event spaces. Given its breadth, the standard of practice may well serve as a useful reference for other U of T facilities and departments across our three campuses.

At the Temerty Faculty of Medicine, the new **Disability Justice Working Group** launched with an overarching aim to create a focused plan to foster disability justice across the Faculty. The Working Group subdivided into smaller groups exploring best practices in accessible pedagogy, infrastructure, data, and system navigation in the many locations used by Temerty's internal and extended communities. Collaborating with departments, hospitals, community groups, and members of Temerty Medicine with lived experience of disability, the subgroups will identify barriers that prevent equitable accessibility and full, dignified participation in the Faculty's activities and environments.
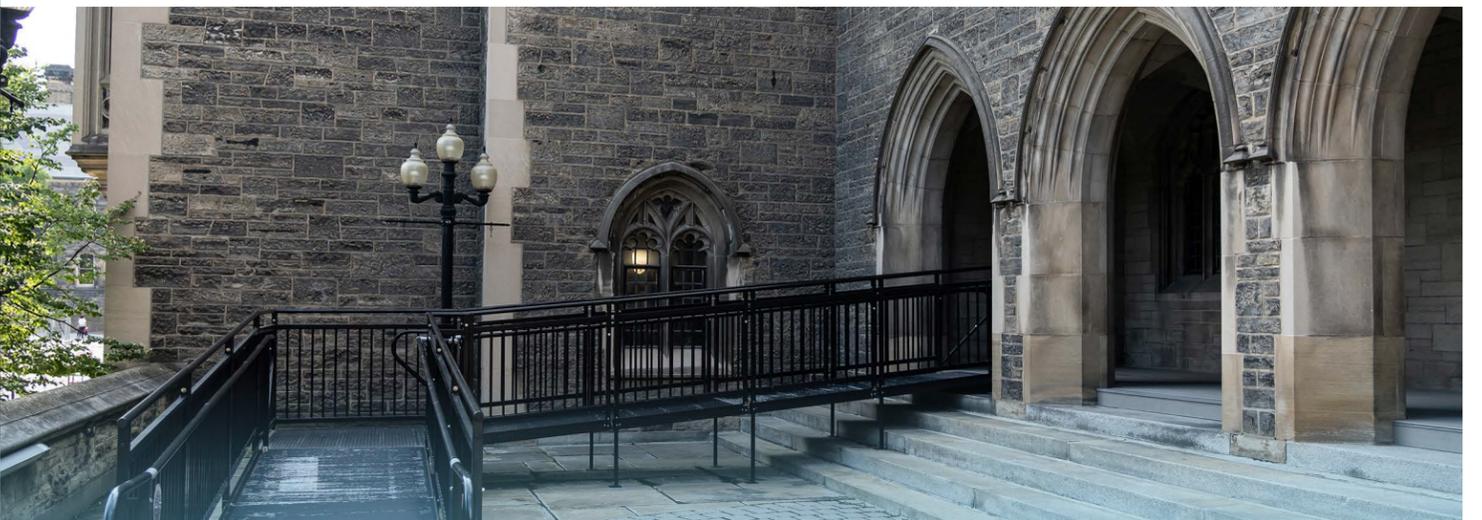
4

Embedding accessibility into institutional activities

The urgent work to support members of our community with lived experience of disability requires a multi-pronged approach. The complexity and size of our institution—and vast array of activities in which we engage—defy a single solution.

Last year, our tri-campus community made the University of Toronto more accessible to everyone by innovating how we teach and learn, creating more inclusive practices, and changing how we communicate to our internal and external communities.

Innovating how we teach and learn

Keith Adamson, an assistant professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, received accolades in 2022 for championing a collaborative approach to curriculum and teaching that engages families and clients with lived experience of disability.

Adamson, recipient of a **2022 Early Career Teaching Award**, turned to his clients at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital when asked to create a course that emphasized how social workers can better support people with disabilities. The Master's-level course, **"Social Work and Disability Practice: A Client and Family-Centred Approach,"** was co-created alongside community partners, PhD students, clients, and their families to ensure that their lived experiences are reflected in the course content. The course also relies on six clients or families to actively participate in the teaching process for an entire semester, addressing topics such as language barriers, being a newcomer to Canada, racism, intersectionality and disability, sexuality and disability, and the complexity of how to navigate the system. Moving away from traditional lectures creates an opportunity for students, clients, and families to co-create new knowledge. The course, launched in January 2020, has been **recognized as the first of its kind in Canada by the Ontario Hospital Association** and was taught for a fourth time in the 2022-23 academic year.

A 2021-22 pilot launched to improve the learning experience of students who rely on closed captioning also received exceptional feedback in 2022. As part of a **Closed Captioning Service**, five work study students at New College edited over 119 hours of closed captions for lectures in a variety of programs, ranging from African Studies and Caribbean Studies to Psychology and Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity. Shared with more than 700 students, the edited captions assisted visual learners and note-takers as well as those who are Deaf or hard of hearing. At the pilot's conclusion, enrolled students praised the service and instructors unanimously supported its continuation, prompting its relaunch in the 2022-23 academic year. Work study students reported gaining a deeper understanding of accessibility through their participation.

Keith Adamson

Creating more inclusive practices

Across the tri-campus, our community assessed how we design and deliver events and innovated practices to engage and support all members of our community. The **Health and Well-Being Team in the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture** reconceived the annual Healthy Workplace Month Health Challenge, a key component of U of T's efforts to raise awareness of mental and physical wellness in the workplace. In contrast to past years, where employees counted steps or performed other physical challenges as individuals or as teams, the 2022 Health Challenge promoted greater inclusion by embracing a range of physical activities, such as chair stretches, yoga, mindfulness, and meditation.

As part of its commitment to accessibility, the **Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation**

established the inclusive practice of offering hybrid delivery to accommodate those who cannot attend their events in-person. The Centre also **designated a staff member** to address any event-related requests for accommodation by our community.

Last year, the **Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation** made several changes to their event and education protocols. All VPRI events and initiatives now use platforms that support live captions. Universal design principles are embedded into the design and delivery of online sessions and workshops to ensure they are perceivable by all and do not present barriers to participation. Finally, event and session recordings are captioned and posted to MyMedia to support asynchronous modes of engaging with content.

Changing how we communicate

Our community's critical work to meet the University's **legal obligations for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0** continued in 2022. **UTM's Library and Information & Instructional Technology Services**, for example, improved their website's accessibility by altering colour contrast, using more descriptive link text, and adding core accessibility features with an updated user guide that includes specific accessibility resources.

As divisions, Faculties, and campuses revised or relaunched their websites to ensure compliance, they frequently called upon the **AODA Office** for customized support, detailed website reviews, and in-depth training sessions.

Recognizing the important role that social media plays in our tri-campus communications, the **AODA Office** also encouraged communications professionals across the University to take foundational training on accessible social media strategies. The session complemented the popular offerings "**Web Accessibility Crash Course**" and "**Language and Ableism**," which provided participants with an intersectional and expansive appreciation

of disability, explored what we mean by accessibility and ableism, and applied these concepts to areas of University activity. Supported by this knowledge, divisions such as **UTM's Office of Advancement** committed to providing alternative text on all images posted to social media, building on work to ensure their website meets WCAG 2.0.

In addition to making necessary updates to communications vehicles such as websites and social media, our tri-campus community enhanced its understanding of how to create accessible documents. **The Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation**, for example, partnered with the AODA Office to deliver an **online Accessible Documents Training session** for all VPRI staff. Attendees received guidance on meeting the accessibility needs of a wide range of users, and can now refer to a recording of the session and supplementary resources as they work with U of T's research communities.

5

Creating accessible physical spaces and structures

Each of our campuses at the University of Toronto has a unique built environment in which our community learns and works. It is our responsibility to remove physical barriers and create accessible spaces that support in-person learning, research, and teaching and enable everyone to access campus facilities with ease and dignity.

In 2022, we met and exceeded Ontario's built environment standard and completed both new-build and renovation projects designed to be inclusive, flexible, and welcoming to all members of our community.

As part of their Accessibility Improvement Program, the **Project Management Group** within Facilities & Services undertook two capital projects on St. George campus last year. The first involves adding an **accessible entrance to the Wallberg Building**, which is currently only fully accessible by ramp from the conjoining Pratt Building. The second project will create an **accessible entrance and washroom for the Centre for Industrial Relations**. With schematic designs complete and under review, construction is expected to begin in late 2023 or early 2024. In addition to these efforts, the Project Management Group continued to **provide project consultation on request** to Capital Project Managers and Property Managers to support accessible design and construction at the University. Services included drawing review for new builds as well as feasibility studies to add or improve accessible features within an existing building.

Students played an instrumental role in the construction of a **new universal washroom at Hart House**, opened in October 2022. Initiated by the University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU) in 2019, the project engaged student

feedback as well as the expertise of the **Rick Hansen Foundation**. Designed to be equitable, flexible, and intuitive, the washroom aims to support the needs of any individual, including those with attendants or requiring additional support. Its space is large enough for fully motorized mobility devices and features an adult-sized powered change table, a power ceiling lift system, and fully powered doors and emergency alert push bars. One of the most accessible on St. George campus, the washroom affords critical dignity to people who often struggle in less accommodating environments.

Also on St. George campus, **New College, University College, and the Gerstein Information Science Centre** improved the accessibility of their physical spaces in a variety of ways. At New College, new accessibility lifts at **Wetmore Hall and in the William Doo Auditorium** make the entire lower level of Wetmore Hall accessible, while wireless assistive technology and multiple viewing options support those requiring hearing or vision assistance. The **D.G. Ivey Library** at New College also increased the accessibility of its technology and furnishings by providing computers installed with vision assisting software and new height-adjustable tables.

At **University College**, a longstanding revitalization project opened in 2022 with significant accessibility upgrades. Including features such as ramps with landing-delineated borders, automatic door openers, and a new elevator, the upgrades received praise by *Canadian Architect Magazine* for their high quality and seamless design.

The Gerstein Information Science Centre welcomed the **Centre for Research & Innovation Support (CRIS)** into a new, more accessible home that will better serve the faculty,

librarians, and staff who rely on CRIS services. The new space provides such accessible and barrier-free provisions as a main entrance door equipped with automatic door openers, doors with a barrier-free width, and barrier-free light switches. This new space also enables CRIS visitors and staff to use the accessible washrooms and elevators within the Gerstein Library.

At the University of Toronto Mississauga, **UTM Facilities Management and Planning** worked hard to ensure barrier-free access to their built environment. In addition to installing new automatic-door operators on all three floors of the [Maanjiwe nendamowinan](#), they replaced push button operators across campus with hand-wave activated operators. The UTM Facilities Management and Planning also updated their construction standard for door openers to ensure all new operators would be hand-wave operated. This new standard exceeds Ontario Building Code standards and helps to future-proof UTM's new buildings.

The [University of Toronto Scarborough Valley Land Trail](#), completed in 2019, received a 2022 national Urban Design Award (NUDA) in the Civic Design Projects category for providing an accessible link for students and the community to the Highland Creek Valley. The trail features a wheelchair charging station and LED strips built into handrails that illuminate the trail at night without disturbing nocturnal wildlife. The NUDA selection committee praised the project for its attention to detail, inclusiveness (accessibility), and ecological sensitivity, noting that the trail establishes an environmental and accessibility legacy for communities at and beyond UTSC.

Meanwhile, research at the University of Toronto is building an accessible legacy for children and families at play. In partnership with the Steadward Centre at the University of Alberta and Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Associate Professor Kelly Arbour-Nicitopoulos and her team from the **Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education** have published a comprehensive report called "[Creating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Playbook of Considerations and Strategies](#)" that provides an invaluable resource to municipalities, schools, community groups, practitioners, and families living with disability. The report addresses a variety of topics, including community engagement, play programming, playground surroundings, and maintenance, and expands upon the [13 recommendations for inclusive playground design](#) that Arbour-Nicitopoulos and her team developed through a long-term project with Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities.

6

Centring lived experience of disability

Providing spaces to centre the perspectives and expertise of individuals with lived experience of disability can go far in disrupting ableist norms at our University and in our society. These spaces offer opportunities for celebration, defiance, and critique. They build awareness and understanding. Not least, they inspire conversations that can drive future change.

Last year, a collaborative exhibition and archive and two events engaging experts inside and outside the University became important forums for centring lived experience of disability.

Multi-sited and multi-platformed, the innovative exhibit **#CripRitual** invited artists with lived experience of disability to create works sharing rituals they use to deal with barriers in their daily life. In the words of co-curators Aimi Hamraie, Cassandra Hartblay, and Jarah Moesch, these rituals are "strategies for surviving ableism," and can be "secular, spiritual, or in-between." The exhibit evolved from a collaboration involving the **Critical Design Lab** and two art galleries: UTSC's **Doris McCarthy Gallery** and the **Tangled Art+Disability Gallery**, located in downtown Toronto. From February to April 2022, two in-person installations of the show ran concurrently in each gallery with a **virtual exhibit**, complemented by virtual programming. Over 20 artists participated.

#CripRitual took its name from a movement to reclaim the term "crip"—a shortened version of a slur for those with disabilities—and "crip theory," a concept in disability studies that explores how societies define "normal" bodies. Its physical installations included works that hung lower on the walls to challenge the idea of "standard" height and make those using mobility devices feel seen. A QR code at each work presented accessibility features when scanned, including American Sign Language translations and image and video descriptions. All versions of the exhibit encouraged feedback and conversation, with areas to showcase visitor comments and engagement (using the hashtag title) on social media platforms. The virtual components of the exhibition, initially developed in case pandemic restrictions prevented in-person gathering, have extended the life and power of the exhibit: it now exists as an ongoing virtual archive that invites ongoing feedback from internal and external communities.

In June 2022, the University recognized **National AccessAbility Week (NAAW)** and encouraged discussion and awareness around a little-known topic: how individuals experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination—including lived experience of disability—have been uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hosted by the AODA Office, and in partnership with Student Life and AccessAbility Services, UTSC, the virtual event "**Disability, Race, Gender, and Diverse Intersecting Communities: Pathways towards Social Justice**" brought experts from U of T, peer institutions, and community organizations together in conversation. More than 200 members of U of T and external communities gained perspectives from research, professional, community, and personal lived experiences and considered how they could be applied to the post-secondary context. Participant feedback emphasized the new insights and learnings gained from the discussion and the diversity of experiences shared.
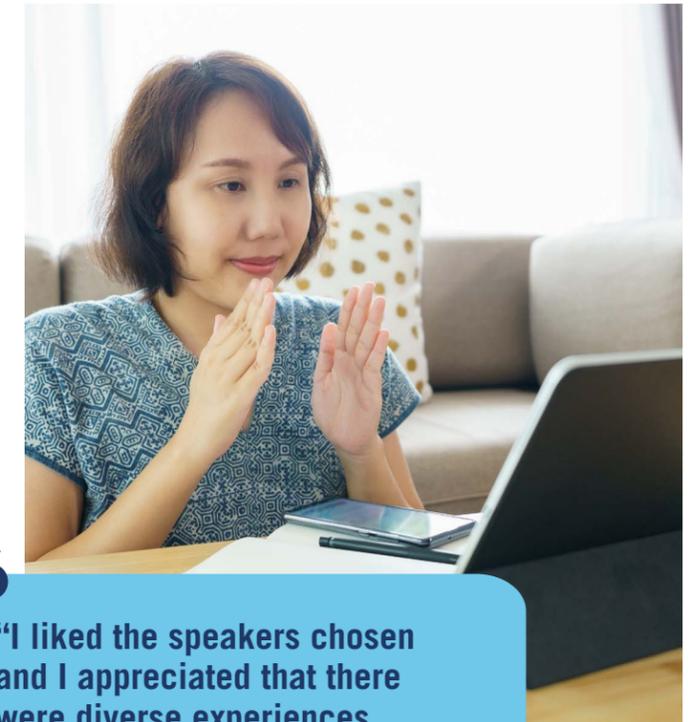
"I liked the speakers chosen and I appreciated that there were diverse experiences represented and an effort toward accessibility."

"I really learned a lot from this session, especially the new vocabulary and hearing from the speaker's personal experiences."

7 2023 and Beyond

The **second National Dialogues event** capped the year, focusing on the theme "**Addressing Ableism, Disability, and Accessibility in Canadian Higher Education**." The virtual event—a collaboration between the AODA Office, Institutional Equity Office, and UTSC—brought together nearly 1,000 participants from across Canadian higher education and experts from outside the sector. Participants explored barriers to learning and working in the post-secondary education sector for persons with disabilities, igniting discussions about how institutions across Canada can dismantle structural ableism and build inclusivity and an intersectional perspective into everything they do—from teaching, research, and curriculum planning to infrastructure, communications, and design. The day-long event emphasized the necessity of ongoing dialogue around how to create environments, practices, and policies that meet everyone's needs, and the benefits of doing so: creating learning and working environments where all members of the community can feel a sense of belonging, in a place where they can do their best work, be their most creative, and make their greatest contributions. The event's conversations will be captured in a report published in 2023, providing support and direction to institutions as they make necessary changes across the full range of their activities.

> " The panelists were all extremely knowledgeable, and listening to their discussions about disability in post-secondary education was incredibly enlightening and paradigm-shifting. "

> " "A lot of information I did not know, really enjoyed the conversation around data. Most impactful was the women with disabilities—they made it real." "

Priorities of the AODA Office

In 2023 and beyond, the AODA Office will conduct consultations and support the creation of a new institutional report to identify barriers faced by members of the University community with lived experience of disability, and to recommend strategies for addressing these barriers. We will encourage and sustain communities of care and connection within the workplace, advancing efforts to support the development of a new employee affinity group for members of the University community with lived experience of disability. We will also develop new resources for our tri-campus community about how to apply universal design to all our activities. Only by understanding these applications can we hope to ensure our practices, policies, and initiatives are inclusive from the start.

Moreover, the AODA Office will continue to lead the University in understanding our current AODA requirements and provide guidance on new requirements that may arise from recommendations made to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee. The **Committee's Final Report**, released in Spring 2022, identifies eight barriers faced by students with lived experience of disability and issues an urgent call for the post-secondary sector to support experiences of belonging and future career success. We look forward to engaging with the provincial government as they review these recommendations and make legislative changes.

Finally, the AODA Office will continue to engage with the strategic goals of the University and the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture, and support leading a culture shift from equity to belonging at our institution. To do so, we will draw on lessons learned from successes this past year: the positive impact of creating spaces of support and connection for students with lived experience of disability, for example, and the importance of building strategies that consider the intersections of ableism and other forms of discrimination. We will also reflect on the important conversations held in 2022 with external experts as well as peers in the post-secondary sector. Spanning everything from healthcare policies to procurement practices, they will remind us of the innumerable ways that ableism finds expression in our society, our language, and our University.

Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students

Jodie Glean, Executive Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Allison Burgess, Acting Executive Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

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

Image Credits

Cover: UTSC, Doris McCarthy Gallery *#CripRitual* installation view (2022) - Toni Hafkenscheid

p.1: UTM, Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre (2014) - Randy Landicho

p.3: UTSG, Terrence Donnelly Centre for Cellular and Biomolecular Research (2020) - U of T Engineering

p.4: Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture (2022) - Moussa Faddoul; Heather Boon, Acting Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.5: UTSC, Valley Land Trail (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.8: UTSG, Woodsworth College (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.10: SVPS Centre Staff in Counselling Room (2022) - Matthew Volpe

p.11: UTSC, Valley Land Trail (2019) - Don Campbell

p. 12: UTSG, Terrence Donnelly Centre for Cellular and Biomolecular Research (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.13: AdobeStock Photo

p.14: UTM, students in the William G. Davis Building (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.15: UTSG, University College (2021) - Matthew Volpe

p.16: UTSG, Hart House (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.17: UTM, Staff (2019) - Lisa Sakulensky

p.18: UTSG, Keith Adamson (2022) - Polina Teif

p.19: UTSG, Robarts Library (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.20: UTM, Maanjiwe nendamowinan (2022) - Moussa Faddoul; AdobeStock Photo

p.21: UTSG, University College (2021) - Matthew Volpe

p.22: UTSG, Robarts Library (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

p.23: UTSG, Robarts Library (2022) - Moussa Faddoul; Cover photo from *Creating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Playbook of Considerations and Strategies* - Landscape Structures

p.24: AdobeStock Photo

p.25: UTSC, Doris McCarthy Gallery *#CripRitual* exhibit; installation views; Shannon Finnegan, *Anti-Stairs Club Lounge,* 2020 (2022) - Toni Hafkenscheid

p.26: AdobeStock Photos

p.27: Accessible lab table (2022) - Summer Leigh

p.28: UTSG, Robarts Library (2022) - Moussa Faddoul

Back cover: AdobeStock Photo