

# An Analysis of the NEADS Town Hall Meetings: A Qualitative Review



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## Overview of the study

The experiences of students with disabilities in the post-secondary education sector (PSE) are determining in the likelihood of obtaining decent employment and by extension, their income level. While there is a growing literature on the experiences of students with disabilities in PSE<sup>1</sup>, this report focuses on a series of workshops offered by the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) in seven (7) universities across Canada during their national hybrid ‘State of the Schools’ tour. This analysis of the workshops provides an understanding of the experiences of students with disabilities enrolled in PSE and captures the concerns, themes, and contents of the discussions. This study provides an analysis of the experiences of students with disabilities in PSE across Canada, of the conditions they face in terms of social and physical barriers to access and obtaining accommodations but also the individual and collective strategies the students, their organization and allies employ to put in place inclusive educations. The aim of the study uses qualitative analysis of the 7 sessions and identifies the emerging themes to create an understanding of situations that students are facing, which allows us to identify key aspects surrounding inclusive education in post-secondary education.

In this report, researchers at Eviance analyzed the material presented throughout the ‘State of the Schools’ tour. Taken from publicly accessible NEADS YouTube website, our analysis focuses on talks by speakers at NEADS, local disabled student groups, members of Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), and other key stakeholders. The material has been processed and coded using NVIVO to identify themes, ideas, and practices directly from what the speakers shared. This method allowed us to situate the analysis at a level which represented speaker and student perspectives.

## Limitations

While the results of the analysis provide useful evidence for understanding the state of access and accommodations in the Canadian PSE setting, it contains the following limitations:

- As only seven universities throughout the country were part of NEADS tour, the analysis might not be applicable or representative of every PSE context in Canada. Various factors such as financial budgets, the number of students at each university, the population of the city where the university is located, the cost of living, and state of the transportation infrastructure could play major roles in the ways students with disabilities experience PSE.
- The YouTube material has been curated by NEADS and the Questions and Answers portion of the sessions have been excluded from the recordings, limiting the material to an analysis of what the official speakers shared. Thus, the material reflects the position of local disability access centers from each university, as well as NEADS speakers and local faculty. Although students share their experiences during the sessions, researchers at Eviance cannot infer that the analysis captures the whole experiences of students with disabilities in PSE.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, [refer to the Eviance SDG Literature Review](#)

Despite these limitations, the content analysis offered a mapping of the situations faced by students with disabilities in PSE in regard to access and accommodations. It also allowed us to map the difficulties, the barriers as well as the individual, collective, and institutional strategies involved in making PSE more inclusive.

## Context

Founded in 1986, NEADS has the mandate to support full access to education and employment for post-secondary students and graduates with disabilities across Canada. The organization is a consumer-controlled, cross-disability charitable organization. NEADS is governed by a national Board of Directors representative of all of the provinces and territories and their projects, resources, research, publications and partnerships have continuously represented its members across Canada. NEADS functions collaboratively with post-secondary stakeholders, other non-governmental organizations, employers, disability service providers (on college and university campuses) and communities that can improve opportunities in higher education and the labour market for persons with disabilities in Canada.

### National office support and services

The Association effectively delivers several core programs. Primary activities of the organization include: maintaining a Web site ([www.neads.ca](http://www.neads.ca)) and financial aid portal<sup>2</sup>; offering skill training resources relevant to students with disabilities in PSE and employment; conducting relevant research on access to PSE and employment opportunities; and, holding regular regional events across Canada to provide resources and skill development to students with disabilities. NEADS has also developed an employment portal called 'Breaking It Down'.<sup>3</sup>

NEADS provides information and referrals to hundreds of post-secondary students with disabilities through its national office. It also responds to requests for information and advice from: employers, provincial and federal government departments, service providers and faculty members/teachers on college and university campuses, the offices of federal members of parliament and provincial and territorial members of parliament/legislature, and other non-profit organizations.

### The NEADS national hybrid 'State of the Schools' tour

NEADS' 'State of the Schools Tour' was a hybrid cross-Canada tour which visited disabled student groups and PSEs across Canada from November 2022 to June 2023. The project was part of NEADS' 'Virtual Access for All' project. The NEADS team partnered with local disabled student groups, DPOs, and local speakers to host hybrid events focusing on accessibility, accommodations, education, and employment in PSE settings. It also provided an opportunity for students with disabilities to share their experiences and perspectives of postgraduate

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, [visit Disability Awards](#)

<sup>3</sup> For more information, [visit Breaking it Down Portal](#)

education. The tour was held in a hybrid format, meaning people could attend in person and also through the Zoom online platform. Each tour stop was hosted at a university with the participation of a local organization and the NEADS team. The tour visited the 7 following cities:

Location and Hosting Partners	Institution (Zoom links provided)	Date (2022-2023)
St. John's – featuring MUN Student Union <sup>4</sup>	Memorial University Newfoundland	November 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Halifax – featuring Dalhousie Accessibility Inclusion Society <sup>5</sup>	Dalhousie University	November 25 <sup>th</sup>
Montréal – featuring AQEIPS <sup>6</sup>	Université du Québec à Montréal	February 24 <sup>th</sup>
Ottawa – featuring CUCare <sup>7</sup>	Carleton University	February 27 <sup>th</sup>
Victoria – featuring Society for Students with Disabilities <sup>8</sup>	University Victoria	March 31 <sup>st</sup>
Winnipeg – featuring Access Lounge & Disability Justice Collective <sup>9</sup>	University of Winnipeg	April 3 <sup>rd</sup>
London – Featuring the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) <sup>10</sup>	Western University	June 23 <sup>rd</sup>

The main topics discussed during these sessions were accessibility, accommodations, education, and employment in PSE. The speakers were mostly from NEADS and local organizations, and a Q&A was open for students and the audience to ask questions and share their experiences. However, some of the Q&A sessions were absent from the recordings. Thus, the analysis mostly surrounds the discourses of the speakers.

## An Overview of Themes from the Research

The analysis of the material identified themes discussed during the tour. As the material did not contain the Q&A and the students' perspectives or shared experiences of PSE, these themes are related to the speakers' perspectives and the content of their presentations. Our analysis explored a variety of topics relevant to disability, access, accommodations in PSE in Canada. In

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=1356>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=1322>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=1332>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=1329>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=1340>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=1339>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=1356>

this report, we have identified a series of themes. Questions about access and accommodations were shared and barriers were identified at various scales, ranging from ableism as a systemic factor to interpersonal and personal factors which can produce or maintain barriers in PSE.

#### A conceptual clarification: Accessibility and Accommodations in the PSE environment

##### *Accessibility*

In this first section, the report explores the general conditions faces by students with disabilities in the PSE settings by offering a conceptual clarification between accessibility and accommodations based on how they were referred by the speakers during the tour.

The analysis shows that several speakers made a distinction between concepts of “accessibility” and “accommodation” in the context of PSE. This shows a difference in content, orientations and practice of each concept. It also offers a way to understand the different temporalities and scales of each processes. As one of the speakers remarked:

*“I want to acknowledge that accessibility and accommodations are sort of two ends of a spectrum or two sides of the same coin... so, accessibility is to try and make things as user-friendly as possible for as many people as possible. Accommodations are what happens when we can’t make something accessible.”*

During the sessions, participants largely described accessibility in PSE consistently with the way it is described in the research literature<sup>11</sup>, which is as an institutional practice regulated in publicly funded institutions. Accessibility, as a set of physical and social structural factors, aims to enable students, including students with disabilities, to participate fully in educational activities. In one way, accessibility is understood in a broad manner not just associated with disabilities but by offering similar resources to all students. Accessibility is about making educational materials and environments as user-friendly as possible for as many people as possible. By design, access is embedded in the infrastructure and services, and it serves as a precondition for participation. Accessibility is also a concern for elements outside of the school system, such as ensuring accessible transportation so that students can travel safely, accessible buildings and facilities which include installing ramps, elevators, and other accessibility features that make it easier for persons with disabilities to participate. During the tour, speakers commented on the lack of accessibility in both on the university grounds but also in their respective cities. As one student from Carleton University noted:

*“... there’s no secret that post-secondary education comes with a lot of barriers, including but not limited to funding issues, lack of reliable transportation, lack of accessible housing, educational support issues, lack of access to information about support services, and systematic ableism and discrimination.”*

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<sup>11</sup> For more information about inclusive design for learning (UDL), [refer to the literature review that researchers at Eviance completed for this project](#)



In a sense, access situates itself at all levels in society, including institutions, public and private spaces, etc. It requires planning for diversity, implementing standards and normative frameworks in the social and physical infrastructure, and maintaining these conditions of access. For students with disabilities, access means listening to persons with disabilities, involving students in decision making, and finding collaborative ways to remove barriers. However, while students with disabilities benefit from access measures, interventions should be made generally available to the whole population. More specifically, access measures which are embedded in inclusive and universal design principles were mentioned throughout the town hall meetings. The following access measures were mentioned by the speakers and students as preconditions to access and their learning experiences without necessarily discussing them further or defining them:

Access Measures Mentioned by Participants
Accessible transportation (Accessible transportation: buses, subways, paratransit, personal vehicles, but also usable sidewalks, information, etc.)
Accessible housing (affordable housing, accessible features in and out of the house)
Service animals to support students with disabilities)
Flexible attendance policies
Accessible parking (reserved parking spaces for students with disabilities at the university for private vehicles)
Accessible seating (accessible and dedicated space in classrooms where wheelchair users can sit)
Accessible restrooms (Restrooms with sufficient turning space, wheelchair-height toilet, handles, etc.)
Accessible entrances and exits (Automated building doors, wide doors, alternate entrances, etc.)
Accessible elevators and ramps (in and out of building, slopes no more than 1:12)
Accessible technology and software (screen magnification software, alternative keyboards and input devices, voice recognition, etc.).

In terms of accessibility, some of the measures mentioned above are applicable to the university's strategic visioning and ethos, but for the most part, concerns about accessibility fall under the authority of different levels of government. It is to be understood that these elements which might create barriers or act as facilitators, are conditional for students with disabilities to attend PSE but often do not exclusively depend on the university.

### *Accommodations*

In contrast to access, accommodations come into play when full accessibility in the university space cannot be achieved. In these cases, specific arrangements can be offered to students with disabilities. Accommodations can be planned in advance by the PSE institution or negotiated on a situational basis between the student and the faculty and staff. Accommodations are generally

understood as measures taken within PSE institutions when accessibility does not meet the needs of a student.

Speakers from the townhall meetings mentioned the aforementioned alternative arrangements, including about the importance of assistive technology, accessible course materials, and other accommodations that enable students with disabilities to benefit from equitable access to education and employment opportunities. Accommodations are individualized measures that address the lack of access in PSE, but also address the specific needs of students. A non-exhaustive list of accommodations requested by students and offered by PSE institutions were mentioned during the tour:

Accommodation Measures in Undergraduate Studies
Note taker (in class personal support)
Tutoring services (pre-class and after class personal support)
Coaching and organizational skills (pre-class and after class personal support)
Doing an exam with a reader (personal support for exams)
Support person who wrote in the absence of computer for an exam (personal support for exams)
Online exams (technological support for exams)
Flexibility with due dates (procedural support for assignments)
Extensions (procedural support for assignments)
Adapted assignment formats (procedural support for assignments)
Extra time for exams (procedural support for exams)
Credit for course participation (crediting students on attendance and participation)
Scribing services (in-class personal support)
Assistive technologies (in-class personal technologies)
Recording lectures (in class general technological support)
Assistive technologies (in-class personal technologies)
Captioning (in-class general technological support)
Echo360 recording technology (in-class general technological support)
Zoom (in-class general technological support)
Uploading lectures to the cloud (in-class general technological support)
Chat usage (in-class general technological support)
Alternative course delivery methods (hybrid or remote classes)
Remote attendance (refused prior to COVID) (in-class general technological support)

Regarding postgraduate PSE accommodations, a few speakers mentioned the types of accommodations they were receiving. These accommodations were generally discussed and crafted with their faculty advisors in highly individualized situations. The speakers explain that many of the generic accommodations were not applicable as they were done with classes and school work. These include, but are not limited to:

Accommodation Measures in Graduate Studies
Research support (assisting with grants, writing, publication)
Fill out the inaccessible reports or scholarship applications
Assisting with publications as journal websites are often not accessible.
An attendant with them in the laboratory
A support person to go with to a conference to present
Assisting with database research if databases aren't accessible
Partial accommodations to graduate students for travel events

The accommodations differ greatly in terms of types between the undergraduate and the graduate level. For postgraduates, accommodations are more specific to each student as most have completed in-person classes and assignments. For example, graduate students benefited from having an attendant during their lab hours or having a support person to attend a conference with them. Overall, most students stated that they benefit from the accessibility elements regardless of their level in PSE.

#### Accommodations from faculty

During the tour, speakers identified the actors involved in offering accommodation who shaped their roles and functions. For undergrad and graduate students, faculty members play an important role in offering and ensuring accommodations. In the relationship between the student and their professors to determine the accommodations required, many elements come into play. One speaker in Halifax reported that students would tell them:

*"... that professors ask what their disability is, and they disclose it. So, although I say it's an important part of disclosure, it's really the accommodation you are disposing. But students with disabilities can ensure that they receive the support they need. Even though it's challenging, it's an important step on the road to success. So, you know, that's ... framing advocacy, and there are lots of kinds of supports around how to advocate, and what [the] tools to use [are]."*

Even if it is not necessary to obtain accommodations, the process of disclosing disability plays an important role to ensure accommodations are in place. However, disclosure does not guarantee that the student will obtain the accommodations they need or that they requested. During the tour, disclosure is referred to both as providing an explanation of an impairment or disability, or as a disclosure of needs and discussing the required accommodations. As the previous quote demonstrates, the process of disclosure is often confusing for students and can lead to different ways of approaching the matter but also producing different outcomes. For example, one speaker noted that some professors may resist or challenge accommodation decisions, which can create barriers for students with disabilities. As one student stated, "[s]ome professors still resist and... challenge accommodation decisions." At other times, faculty

members might offer the accommodations to the best of their capacity, but limited resources and support may be available to them to fully meet accommodation obligations.

To counterbalance these uncertainties regarding obtaining accommodations from faculty, one speaker in London suggested incorporating universal design for learning (UDL) in the form of “accessibility [as] first philosophy” instead of considering measures as accommodations by. As they stated, the most important task is to figure:

*“... out what that accessibility basic is and then [bring] that to life. I think we mean... students don’t have to go and make micro accommodation requests and clog the official accommodation system with all of these tiny requests.”*

At the same time, the speaker mentioned that they:

*“... recognize and acknowledge that professors in many instances are in spaces where they haven’t been trained in how to do these things from an accessible perspective. And I think that ethical resourcing leads to ethical pedagogy in a lot of spaces. So, I think this will be best served as a teamwork approach, nothing about us without us, but there also has to be the without us part.”*

The absence or inadequacy of accommodations can be a significant barrier for students with disabilities who require accommodations to fully participate in the classroom and other spaces in PSE settings. It has been suggested that to avoid these situations, it is important for professors, staff and administrators of the university to be aware of their legal responsibilities and duties related to accommodations and to work with students to determine the most appropriate accommodations for their needs. As one student stated:

*“We also need to have a lot more understanding that the instructors should not have a say in what students get. There are a number of recommendations that, some of them I actually received myself, that [are] actually [put in place] if approved by the instructor.”*

To obtain accommodations, students often have to negotiate accommodations individually with faculty members and thus depend on their willingness to accommodate them. This creates an uneven accommodation practice for the students and expectations can differ from what is offered. As one participant from the London townhall stated, giving more power to students in the accommodation process is important for realizing inclusivity in PSE:

*“Disabled students and faculty shouldn’t merely be consultants whose perspectives can be ignored when the university finds it convenient, but partners with power and authority, particularly with respect to any issues that disproportionately affect the disabled community... sharing of power and*

*authority rather than just treating disabled students, faculty, or outside resource organizations simply as consultants”.*

During the discussions, one student asked the following question concerning the possibility of training professors and staff on accessibility:

*“My question is, as disabled students, we’ve probably all experienced professors not understanding disability and causing barriers or... not even [be] willing to talk to us. So I was wondering, maybe for Carleton and other universities to bring in programs and trainings for professors themselves, so students are not needing to be the trainers for the professors”.*

This suggestion questions why students should carry the epistemic (knowledge production and dissemination) burden of their accommodations. As much as students with disabilities are the experts of their own needs and accommodations, the institution should not expect them to play the role of trainers for their faculty as other students without disabilities are not playing that role.

Speaking from personal experience as a professor, one speaker in Victoria enumerated requirements which would support professors to enable access and accommodations in their class room. In summary, they stated that:

- Professors must be aware of the potential barriers that students with disabilities may face in the classroom, including physical barriers such as inaccessible buildings or classrooms, as well as attitudinal barriers such as negative attitudes or stereotypes about disability;
- Professors must work to eliminate these barriers and create an inclusive environment where all students feel welcome and valued. This may involve using UDL principles in teaching, which aims to create learning environments that are accessible to all students, regardless of disability; and,
- Professors can also communicate with students to ensure that they are aware of the accommodations that are available to them and work with the school’s disability services office to provide appropriate accommodations.

The requirements point towards adequate training of faculty on access and accommodation needs, and the responsibilities of faculty in their own classroom and modifying their pedagogies, ways of teaching, information formats, evaluating students, etc. It also points towards the responsibility of the institution to place in place inclusive access measures to ensure that students fully participate in their learning experiences.

Several references were made by speakers about services and supports offered to students with disabilities in PSE. These services play a crucial role in ensuring that students have equal access to education and are able to fully participate in campus life. In each university, accessibility

centers or organizations act as service providers regarding access and accommodations. Parallely, student groups will offer support and advocacy.

#### Accessibility centres

In one way, most universities have their own accessibility centres which coordinate accessibility measures and provide students with disabilities with different services regarding access and accommodations. Centres are responsible for the local student accommodation policies and associated procedures. Accessibility centres act in accordance to the university policy and differ in their scope and practices related to inclusive practice. For example, the Carleton Disability Awareness Center (CDAC) provides social support regarding disability and accessibility, acts as a forum for disability issues, provides advocacy, and organizes events. CDAC is designed to foster social opportunities and involves the Carleton University Student Association (CUSA) membership in disability education and inclusion. The staff provides a safe and welcoming space for students with disabilities to connect with one another and to access resources and support. Other disability centres, such as the Student Accessibility Centre in Halifax facilitate access to academic courses and programs, facilities, services, and activities. They also identify issues and barriers to students' learning experience. They would advocate on behalf of students and assist them in accessing funding.

However, not all of these centers necessarily respond to their mission. One student described some of the difficulties they faced in receiving support from the centre in Halifax. As they stated:

*"... they haven't responded to any of my emails regarding exam deferrals or accommodation deferrals or accommodation extensions... all of my accommodations say that I can have these things. So, legally you'd think the school would be good at that, but they're not."*

Other elements related to accommodations in PSE institutions were mentioned, such as the absence of clarifications for decision appeals, lack of staff training to read medical notes and understand diagnoses, and discriminative language and behaviour being used by administrators. It was also noted that the advocacy role played by accessibility centres is limited and that departments within the same universities can implement their policies or recognize accommodations in various ways. For example some implement accommodations such as hybrid learning, online exams, and closed captioning while others do not.

#### Student Advocacy groups

There are several examples of student advocacy groups which were noted by participants during the townhall meetings. For instance, the Society for Students with a Disability (SSD) in Victoria is an organization that provides support and advocacy for disabled students. When asked to do so, the SSD staff is willing to chat with instructors who want ideas on how to problem-solve accessibility barriers that students might face, learn about those barriers, or assist with

providing accommodations. SSD also provides various resources and support services, including peer mentoring, advocacy, direct funding, a food security program, etc.

One speaker described the Equity Committee in Halifax, which is part of the Occupational Therapy School, as a group separate from the administrative or faculty sides of the university. It comprises students with concerns about accessibility who get together to exchange ideas.

The Disability Justice Committee (DJC) (formerly UWS Access) is another student group from Winnipeg that significantly contributed to building a sense of community among students with disabilities. As one student noted:

*"[They] look forward to attending, whether it was to share an interesting article or video, exchange in labs, discuss the and implement measures necessary to improve accessibility off campus, or to receive or offer support in the face of profound struggle that only those who traveled a similar path would ever deeply understand."*

The DJC provides a non-judgmental space and a healthy outlet for students to voice frustration, share resources, exchange ideas, and offer support to one another. The meetings opened for larger discussions over access on campus and developing political consciousness and solidarity, which led to change in the university. As one participant said:

*"It also created a space for discussions that increased my understanding of the phenomenon that we call disability and shaped the advocacy that I would go on to support in my time. In fact, it was in the midst of the Disability Justice Collective that I had my earliest conversations regarding inaccessible doors on campus. As such discussions continued, beyond the student group, but within the parent list of even personal door issues for the students. There were stories of students with disabilities, of how grateful they were to considerate peers who offered assistance opening doors for it wasn't for them to not be able to enter and exit the classroom."*

These students' discussions led to a larger accessibility project through a UWSA campaign in collaboration with the University:

*"These voices, combined with the responses in a UWSA accessibility survey highlighted a bold need for change. From this, the UWM's More Than a Door campaign was launched on November 18, 2020. Soon afterwards, collaboration began with the University of Winnipeg, and discussions were held about barriers, budgets, and which door locations to prioritize when it came to accessibility. The university shared the UWSA's vision for this requirement, and happily partnered with us in putting plans into action. The result of this work is that 78 new products for operators have been purchased,*

*with 35 of them already installed in the location. Additionally, four existing... faulty operators have been replaced to ensure more reliable functionality. While it speaks to the purpose of the campaign, I'm confident that it also captures the strength of student disability communities and encompasses the spirit of what is possible when individuals unite for the better."*

The testimony from this speaker exemplifies how student advocacy groups can lead to greater change in achieving accessibility on campus through ongoing discussions which lead to setting aims and objectives for inclusive PSE. The discussions during the tour show that there are possible collaborations between disability advocacy groups and the administration, which can provide positive changes in terms of accessibility while taking into consideration the expertise and knowledge of students with lived experiences.

Other groups are pushing for accommodations to become more mainstream access policies. For example, the CU Care Act, founded in 2021 in Ottawa, is a grassroots movement emphasizing the importance of caregiving services for students with disabilities. As one participant said:

*"The group was established in 2021 after disabled students were denied a return to campus alongside their non-disabled peers for the fall semester. They have advocated for care programs like Carleton's attendance services to become standard practice for post-secondary institutions and for recentering care on clients."*

The group organized protests and walkouts after the COVID-19 rehaul of remote attendance so that students with disabilities could still attend their classes remotely. The speaker continued:

*"Disabled students were left out of the equation. Attendant services announced that it would be keeping its doors closed. And despite the new phase, referring to the so-called health risks involved in our personal care. So we weren't allowed in... I was not allowed on the property because I require help using the washroom...about 60 other people joined me in protest that day outside the library. They skipped class because I couldn't get in... I'm happy to say that the program was re-established in January of 2021. Since then, CU Care's mission is to expand awareness on why a model like the one we have at Carleton shouldn't be so exceptional."*

This example shows how disability-led advocacy groups can engage with the whole of the community and engage them in solidarity with students with disabilities and the experiences of exclusions they face. Another organization worth mentioning is the Tulik Disability Alliance in Halifax, which was formed under similar circumstances.

The aforementioned examples demonstrate the complex ecosystem that students, faculty, staff, administration and groups navigated within PSE to achieve accessibility. However, the type of



relations between these groups or how they negotiate is a topic that was not explored in the discussions, and requires further investigation.

### High-Level Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the NEADS townhall meetings, we have provided a range of recommendations and ideas for PSE institutions for enhancing access and accommodations policies and in the delivery of inclusive services for students. Informed by the content of our analysis, the following are our top-level recommendations to inform how Canadian higher learning institutions can meaningfully improve the PSE experience of students with disabilities.

#### Building a PSE framework for access and accommodations:

- 1- Develop a coherent and clear framework to be used by universities, including goals and objectives, time frames for implementation and monitoring tools to increase the effectiveness of accessibility measures and accommodations for all students by adopting an intersectional approach<sup>12</sup> considering different needs and experiences. The evidence produced should be used to assess the performance of universities in enrollment, satisfaction and graduation of students with disabilities.
- 2- Review and update current access and accommodation policies to allow for easy and seamless access for students with disabilities in a timely manner so they do not carry the burden of trying to obtain the information and accommodations with associated delays.
- 3- Create task forces to address the epistemic exclusion of students with disabilities. These task forces would aim to research and understand epistemic injustice based on a deficit of knowledge to gather data and produce concepts and practices aimed at including marginalized knowledge.

#### Developing indicators of progress to assess best practices

- 4- Document best practices from each Canadian university and college at a local level and publicize the catalogue in a national repertory to inspire other PSE institutions to develop their access features and accommodation offers.
- 5- Develop indicators of performance on access and accommodations regarding rates of progress of students with disabilities and access to decent work.
- 6- Rank and score Canadian universities for their levels of access and accommodations. This should incentivize administrations to implement efficient measures and offer elements for an informed choice for students with disabilities willing to pick the best environment for their PSE.

#### Review and develop a new model for accommodating students with disabilities.

- 7- Replace the policy regarding the requirement of a doctor's note or other documentation for qualifying for accommodation. Switching disclosure from a medical model of disability to a social, intersectional, and human rights model should ensure that needs are addressed.

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<sup>12</sup> For more information about [Eviance's approach to intersectionality and reflexivity, please visit Eviance website](#) and [our report on disability and intersectionality](#)

- 8- Incorporate an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) lens that includes accessibility while bringing the community and the advocacy groups together to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities.
- 9- Consider a social model of disability for advancing issues of accessibility in PSE. This would allow people not to see the impairment as the source of the disability but the inadequate physical and social factors of the PSE environment as the source of disabling situations and discrimination towards students with disabilities.
- 10- Incorporate an intersectional approach towards accommodations which considers the diversity of the population of students with disabilities. An intersectional approach would be beneficial in meeting the diverse needs of students and ensuring their right to accommodation.
- 11- Develop a format for accommodations aligned with inclusive design which is tailored to the individual needs of each student. Tailored accommodations would respond more directly to their needs, in the way generic and predefined accommodations might not.
- 12- Adopt flexibility for all students as an access measure. Flexibility could be applied to course delivery and format, attendance, exams, etc. Allowing students to benefit from different elements according to the style of learning or requiring a different arrangement of space or time to study or work, for example, people with sensory processing challenges, PTSD or students who are hypervigilant, etc.
- 13- Learn from the pedagogical methods and access measures developed through the COVID-19 pandemic and include them in the access and accommodations toolbox. Students with disabilities gained.

#### Coordination between actors in planning and delivery

- 14- Ensure better coordination between the administration, faculty and students in the planning and delivery of accommodations.
- 15- Reduce delays in the planning and delivery of accommodation. Students should benefit from the requested accommodations throughout their school year without interruptions or negative consequences.
- 16- Review the accommodation protocol to offer accommodations automatically when students voice their needs to faculty or staff. This would reduce delays and would ensure that students' needs are met.

#### Access to information about accommodations and communication:

- 17- Offer a full informational package about access and accommodations to new students in PSE programs. Admission into programs should include the information and forms to request accommodations to allow students to start their school year with the proper tools to succeed.

#### Training of staff and faculty regarding disability, access and accommodations:

- 18- Inform staff and faculty of their obligations to accommodate students with disabilities and inform them of the various needs they might have.

- 19- Encourage faculty and staff to adapt their language to avoid ableist language and tropes as it reproduces stereotypes and negative attitudes towards students with disabilities to allow for a more inclusive and respectful environment.
- 20- Train staff and faculty on accessibility to barriers that students with disabilities can face in the classroom, such as physical, informational, pedagogical, and attitudinal barriers, through an intersectional lens and from a disability-led perspective.
- 21- Develop a sense of accountability for staff and faculty by encouraging them through engagement with students and a greater sense of participation in their PSE experience. The current lack of support and incentives is detrimental to staff and faculty engagement.
- 22- Augment funding to access and accommodations. This would offer resources and investments to staff and faculty to offer a more comprehensive understanding and response to the needs of students with disabilities.
- 23- Train staff and faculty on principles and ways they can facilitate student access by working with them to find the most appropriate accommodations for their needs.
- 24- Encourage staff and faculty to work together to eliminate barriers in their area of responsibility.
- 25- Ensure seamless communication between faculty, staff and students on accommodations and access. Students have the right to be informed and answered in a timely manner when they request accommodations and during the decisional or revision processes.

#### Student Advocacy and Knowledge

- 26- Survey students on their access needs and the best accommodation practices of their universities. Take account of their suggestions in a yearly implementation plan.
- 27- Define a partnering role for students with disabilities and their organizations by giving them power and authority over issues affecting the community members with disabilities.
- 28- Organize intersectional workshops and information sessions for students to inform them of their rights to access and accommodations and share advocacy resources and recourse.
- 29- Survey students on their access needs and the best accommodation practices of their universities. Take account of the suggestions from students with disabilities in the yearly implementation plans.
- 30- Allow students with disabilities or their representatives to participate in the decisions at the administrative level which concern them in terms of access and accommodation.
- 31- Support workshops of disability groups and outreach campaigns on campus for students to know their rights, to be able to connect with peers, and grow networks.

#### Individual recommendations for students with disabilities in PSE:

- 32- Address your needs directly with the university's access centre and faculty in a manner that makes you feel comfortable and assertive.

- 33- Communicate needs and advocate for oneself in requesting access and accommodations. Negotiation skills are necessary for students with disabilities as they are at a disadvantage in a non-inclusive PSE environment.
- 34- Join networks of other students with disabilities. By exchanging information with peers and building solidarity, students should feel empowered to express their needs and demands.
- 35- Join local advocacy organizations in their university for information and support on which accommodations can be requested and how to do it.

We conclude this report with a preoccupation concerning the burden of accommodation being placed on students with disabilities in a PSE environment. As much as individual strategies should be considered in non-inclusive environments, and we want to recognize their importance in advocating for oneself, we must express that in some ways, each of these strategies are necessary only in part due to the failure PSE institutions to ensure access for their students. These strategies compensate for an environment which normalizes barriers and treats access needs as exceptions, therefore, placing the burden on students to incite change. A truly inclusive environment would ensure that PSE institutions address their responsibilities and offer accessible experiences to students with disabilities in environments which respect their rights. In our recommendations, we have offered tips and ways PSE institutions may achieve the goal of ensuring inclusive and respectful educational experiences for each student. In the next section, we delve into some of the broader structural issues in PSE concerning inclusivity.

### Issues and Strategies for Inclusivity: A Deep Dive into the Analysis

During the NEADS tour, speakers discussed the strategies utilized by students with disabilities during their PSE years often navigating between the legal obligations of accommodations, limitations and personal preferences from faculty, staff or the PSE institution. It was suggested that students should engage in self-advocacy by communicating with their professors about their needs and advocating for accommodations. For example, a student noted that they were able to advocate for themselves by being clear about their needs and not accepting 'no' as an answer. As a student stated:

*"I called the accessibility office. It's like every time I go to a new university, I told them what I needed and I was really clear about it. And I didn't really let them say 'no'. Like there was nothing in my accessibility plan that they could legally say 'no' to. And I knew that".*

By being clear about their needs and advocating for themselves, the student was able to secure the accommodations they needed to succeed academically. However, other students stated that the accommodations they requested were not available or denied. As it can be a useful strategy to obtain accommodations, self-advocacy is not guaranteed and its success will depend on the openness of the faculty, the negotiation skills, and preparedness of the student. While this was not covered during the tour, some students might not be in a position or be comfortable with self-advocacy for different reasons. This should come as no surprise as many students with

disabilities might not have the energy, time, resources, or capacity to engage in self-advocacy processes to secure these accommodations. The students are at a disadvantage in PSE as they might not receive the support or accommodations they require but also have a right to. In a more critical manner, as much as self-advocacy could be a valuable strategy to obtain accommodation at the individual level, resorting to it also expresses the institutional limitations imposed by the to students with disabilities who are left to compose with them.

#### Qualifying for scholarships

Institutional arrangements can provide a better framework for accommodations in PSE settings if the processes are integrated without the mainstream mode of functioning of the university. For example, during the tour stop in Montreal, a representative from UQAM's Office of Inclusion and Student Success discussed the state of PSE accommodations in Quebec. He highlights that reasonable accommodations are not a matter of personal preference on the part of the university or its human resources but a legal obligation in Quebec, rooted in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms<sup>13</sup>. Providing an historical context and how the definitions of a person with a disability in Quebec was influenced by the 1976 Charter of rights, he also mentions the Act to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration in Quebec. This legal definition recognizes that disability can be situational, or temporary rather than permanent, challenging the medical model of disability. While the creation of a service for students with disabilities at UQAM was still based in the medical model of disability like other universities, the representative explained that with inter-university governments of counsellors<sup>14</sup>, university counsellors for students with disabilities proposed adopting the Human-Development Model – Disability Creation Process (HDM-DCP), which looks at disabling situations. Such a model attributes the responsibility of disability not to the person but to external challenges, and barriers. Through the adoption of the HDM-DCP relational and interactional model, the representative discussed the evolution of intervention structures, plans, and resources to support students with disabilities in the schooling system which are flexible and adaptive. When speaking of scholarships, for example, they stated:

*“... so UQAM has accepted, same with the student financial aid program or AFE in Quebec. They recognize that a person with disabilities who is taking two courses can also be recognized as having a full-time schedule. So we have scholarships according to this.”*

Disability specific scholarships are complementary to other grants and offer funding to support students with disabilities. This recognition of needs provides a way to compensate for the financial gap faced by students with disabilities which generally have a low income and are at a greater risk of poverty.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/c-12>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.aqicesh.ca/etablissements/universite-du-quebec-a-montreal/>

### The changing field of disability categorization

The representative from UQAM also spoke about the changing landscape of disability categorization, noticing the social awareness of moving from a focus on physical disabilities to incorporating cognitive disabilities like mental health, ADHD, and autism spectrum:

*“...up to 2015, in fact, the reality was that 70%, And then 80% and 90% now, disability is no longer motor, visual, or on the hearing level, [but is rather recognized as] more cognitive [as well]. So, learning disabilities, ADHD, and recently with autism spectrum disorder. So, this reality had a greater impact on teaching staff that had a challenge on evaluating testing the learning of these students in a context where the challenge for them was to be able to complete the evaluation.”*

This shift in the prevalence of disability types and needs has posed new challenges for teaching staff in terms of evaluation and testing but also in terms of access and accommodations. The representative from UQAM concludes that the traditional model of “reasonable accommodations” had reached its limits, particularly in the context of exams. The need for a more equitable evaluation system that considers the diverse needs of students, such as required time and physical arrangements, is emphasized and that a new model should be developed.

### Flexible course delivery

Additionally, one speaker mentions their own experience and how support measures were made available to the entire class rather than singling out persons with disabilities. They highlighted the importance of shifting the approach to accommodations from being solely based on disability to a broader perspective of EDI. The speaker acknowledged that while reasonable accommodations are a legal necessity, a focus on equity can reduce the need for numerous accommodations by making the arrangements more accessible and flexible. This shift in mindset is seen as a way to make society more accessible and responsive to accommodation requests. The speaker emphasized the interconnectedness of various marginalized identities and the need to break down silos in advocacy work. They stress that accessibility should not be limited to disability but should encompass everyone’s access needs, such as those related to caregiving or work schedules.

In Victoria, a speaker spoke about flexibility not as a form of accommodation, but an accessibility measure which would replace the rigidities of the institution and its policies:

*“I think having hybrid... access and recorded lectures can make a big difference for, uh, as folks have said, like not just disabled students, but other students who, uh, struggle with getting to in-person classes or just balancing a lot of different responsibilities.”*

*And really, I think, too, from a pedagogical perspective, anyone can benefit from being able to rewatch their lectures. There's this kind of ingrained mentality that I find in academia that lectures in higher education are this ephemeral learning experience where you have one shot to take in the material, and if you don't, then you're out of luck. And I think any student who is willing to spend time studying by reviewing their lectures and improving their notes should have that chance."*

Flexibility is mentioned not only in regard to assignments but on the different ways the courses could be offered and forms of attendance. Hybrid classes could be understood as a form of accommodation but could also be built right into the structure of PSE, offering another level of access to students who would prefer to attend from their homes or other places, and for different reasons based on their specific needs. By giving the empirical example of remote and hybrid classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, the speaker explains how beneficial the hybrid and remote modes can be for every student in PSE as they all face different circumstances. In that sense, hybrid access to the course is seen as an inclusive complement to an accessible campus. As one student mentioned:

*"For disabled students in particular, alternative course delivery methods cannot just remove barriers, but really be imperative to their academic success. I know that's true for myself. But for folks living with chronic pain and chronic fatigue, not having to come to campus can make it possible for them to still participate in school while managing their symptoms. For folks with ADHD, learning from home can mean they can stem in ways to help them focus, like including ways that would be disruptive in a classroom, like pacing or tapping.*

*Being able to rewatch a recorded lecture is also great for neurodivergent folks or anyone who has symptoms that can transiently impair their ability to focus. For people who are immunocompromised or even just living with someone who's immunocompromised, not having to sit in a classroom full of unmasked people during flu season and amidst COVID risk is a really big benefit."*

By diversifying the dispensation modalities of education, instead of imposing a universal and singular model for all students would offer new accessible ways to students with disabilities but also to every student as they might benefit with this diversity of access measures.

#### **Ableism and discriminatory practices in PSE**

During the tour, speakers mentioned ableism as a systemic issue that is present in institutions, policies, and societal values that disadvantage students with disabilities in PSE based on societal values of knowledge, intelligence, physical ability, and cognitive, and psychosocial abilities. On one level, speakers referred to systemic ableism as the presence of discriminatory practices and policies within institutions and society as a whole and at a macrocosmic level. Through, systemic

issues tend to transcend scales and can also be found at the level of the community and institutions but also at the micro scale, which is in the current and daily lives of people.

During discussions in one of the townhall meetings, one speaker said that ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people need to be fixed, implying that they are somehow incomplete or inferior to non-disabled people. The speakers often recognized that ableism is pervasive and often goes unnoticed in PSE. The following example highlights the issue of systemic ableism in educational systems:

*“I mean, in an academic and in other contexts, really trying to get beyond an accommodation model, because the accommodation model is about fitting these supposedly different people into institutional norms. And a different way we can go about that is to try and recognize where and how ableism is baked into these norms and to work on changing those. It means really recognizing that a lot of our conventions are in fact conventions. They’re cultural norms, they’re practices, traditions that are, they’re changeable.”*

The importance of recognizing and addressing ableism in everyday language and interactions was also discussed. Ableist language perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. As a response, it is suggested that the use of inclusive and respectful language that does not demean or marginalize students with disabilities be used in everyday language and can contribute to creating a more inclusive and respectful environment. Expectations and preconceptions related to cognitive functioning of students are also concerns. For instance, one student from London noted:

*“The one system that is probably set up more than any system for neurotypical people is the PSE system, in my opinion. It comes with this sort of idea that we have to show up with a strong set of executive functioning skills. We need to be able to emotionally regulate. We need to be able to sit still. We need to be able to take in large amounts of verbal information. We need to be able to take notes in a way that is supposed to make sense for later. We need to make due dates that may not make a lot of sense for us. And I think on top of that, there’s also this sort of idea and this kind of perception of why people with ADHD or neurodivergent folks function the way that they do.”*

Another concern is the way accommodations are offered to students without taking into account the particular needs of students or the services they require. This accommodation model often goes unchallenged by a large portion of faculty and staff. As student from Ottawa stated:

*“Another [issue] is blanket accommodation. So different disabilities need different accommodations. Me as a deaf person, I would generally need captioning. However, other people might not need that. The next one kind of goes into captioning, choosing videos and films that do not have captions. A*



*lot of profs do that. Yes, they do. They always say they're very sorry about it. But you know, you can just choose a film that has captioning. So often these support issues are born out of systemic ableism."*

An intersectional approach to understanding ableism was mentioned by students as well, as many face multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, race, socioeconomic status, neurological functions, and other factors. For instance, students with disabilities who are women may experience sexism, racism, and ableism simultaneously, leading to compounded discrimination. The systemic and structural discriminations that many students underscore the need for an inclusive approach that addresses the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds.

#### Faculty member responsibilities

In terms of education, faculty members may encounter barriers when trying to make their courses more accessible or when delivering courses in alternative formats. These barriers can include a lack of resources, limited training on accessibility, an absence of resources and investment on the part of the institution, and resistance to change both by institutions and by faculty members. By acknowledging these barriers, educators in PSE settings can take accountability for their role in promoting accessibility in the classroom and in the broader institutional arrangement and work towards overcoming these challenges. One of the issues of accountability resides on the definition of the responsibilities of each actor.

Speakers during townhall meetings explained that it is not just the attitudes and barriers of society that required to be changed to produce inclusive environment, but also, our own views and attitudes towards ourselves, bodies, capabilities, goals and life horizons which need to be modified. In terms of solutions and mobilization regarding the epistemic character of ableist structures of post-secondary education, one faculty member during the London session explained how we should privilege the experiences, knowledge, and expertise of students with disabilities as they offer different standpoints on how education and services should be offered:

*"We're trying to find ways to push back against these systems that harm and exclude. I really believe that the place we need to look for guidance is to those who occupy diverse bodies and minds because they, we have experiences that really beget a privilege to knowledge about the value of community, about the inevitability of our interdependence, things like sustainability and creativity and care. So I would say that at the same time, we might say that ableism harms disabled people by creating systemic disadvantage. It really also harms us all by blocking out knowledge and wisdom about other ways of being and doing."*

The speaker continued by stating:

*"My hope for the future of our universities is to foster truly accessible campuses where disability is anticipated, where everybody knows about the*

*best practices for accessible events, and where we can proudly share about our accessible pedagogy and classroom practices. Because imagine the possibilities if instead of stopping at acceptance and accommodation, we were actively advertising and recruiting.” (London, add rest of quote)*

### Requesting accommodations in PSE

A list of issues was mentioned during the tours regarding requesting accommodations. As speakers initially expressed uncertainty about how to approach the broad question of barriers to receiving the correct accommodations, they went on to discuss some of the challenges they have encountered in advocating for themselves and others with disabilities. The first issue relates to the medical model of accommodation. Students with disabilities in PSE are required to provide documentation as proof from a medical professional about the nature of their accessibility needs. As one student from Victoria noted:

*“The medical model of accessibility services and the fact that students with disabilities register for a service and must provide, in most cases, medical documentation to validate their need for and receipt of the services.”*

In most instances, students are required these documents to process the demands, evaluate their needs and only then, offer services. As it is expressed in the following quote, this process include bureaucratic steps, including both medical assessment and the accessibility office in their particular PSE setting, which can impede timely access to required services and accommodations:

*“... an example that comes to mind of a practice that is not as inclusive as it could be here is that our Center for Accommodated Learning requires like up-to-date paperwork proving your disability before you can access any of the services... having to liaise with your doctor or otherwise provide paperwork can be a poor start to first year. Because if you don't have your accommodations in place before you start, sometimes it takes a couple months to set up and then you don't start with a good foot. If you are first generation or have never had a family member going to university, you may not even know to start the paperwork before you get here or that you can.”*

Not having a doctor, or not finding other ways to receive documentation is a reality for many students with disabilities. As a result, students may not be able to obtain an assessment until their course/program is well under way, at which point they may be beginning to fail or have significant problems in their coursework due to the lack of the basic conditions needed for securing the practical supports they need for their coursework. The very beginning of the process of obtaining accommodations produces barriers and limitations on students and puts them in precarious situations regarding a successful PSE experience.

Financial limitations, or rather budget allocations, can hinder accommodations through a lack of resources, investment or support created for students with disabilities as well. For example, a

university may not have adequate funding or staffing for disability services, or may not provide accessible physical spaces or technology. This lack of resources or support can make it difficult for students with disabilities to access the accommodations they need and can create additional barriers to their success.

Another barrier to advocacy that one speaker mentioned is the complexity of navigating systems and bureaucracies. For example, the speaker describes their own experience of not knowing what an accessibility centre was when they first arrived at their university. This lack of knowledge made it difficult for them to access the resources and support they needed, and they had to spend a lot of time getting to know their options for accommodations before finding what worked for them. The speaker noted that this kind of complexity can be overwhelming and discouraging for many people with disabilities, and can make it difficult to advocate effectively.

Qualifying for accommodations and navigating the complex bureaucracy of the university to receive accommodations can also take an emotional toll that impedes self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities. Some speakers noted that advocating for oneself or others can be exhausting and frustrating, particularly when progress is slow or even non-existent. This can be emotionally draining and can lead to feelings of frustration, anger, or hopelessness. One speaker emphasized the importance of self-care and support systems for individuals engaged in advocacy work, as well as the need for allies and advocates outside of the disability community to help push for change.

Another related factor to these struggles within PSE is the internalized ableism that many students with disabilities experience in attempting to request accommodations. Sometimes students do not know their rights or what they can benefit from. For instance, two speakers in Victoria explained that ableism can be internalized by students with disabilities as an effect of ongoing discrimination. The first quote is from a faculty member in Victoria and the second is from a student in Ottawa—both of whom describe their experiences about internalized ableism:

*“Internalized ableism can be a really significant factor that makes disabled students not want to speak up about their access needs. And it’s especially difficult when, like many of us as disabled students also do have experiences with profs who are dismissive or ableist towards us when we bring up our access needs or offer input regarding accessible course design.” (faculty)*

*“Internalized ableism readily impacts my thoughts, my actions, and my aspirations. And yet, it’s a concept that remains obscure by everyday practices is inflicted by misguided judgment, unsolicited advice, and preconceived beliefs. It is a cause of ableism and the result of impacts.” (student)*

One of the main issues regarding structural ableism and with disclosure is the fear of stigma, discrimination, and privacy violations that can arise from disclosing a disability to either faculty or staff. As one speaker notes:

*“[I] often feel like we can’t advocate for ourselves because it reflects badly on us. It will affect us academically and in our careers. So I’m constantly mindful of that. And just as someone with just a variety of disabilities, oftentimes invisible, they’re not understood. And yeah, there’s a lot of just misunderstanding and judgment going on.”*

The reluctance to advocate against structural ableism can create a sense of vulnerability, as students and faculty alike may worry about negative consequences such as being treated differently, not having the necessary energy to advocate for oneself, or not being taken seriously. This lack of understanding can create additional barriers to disclosure and make it harder for students to receive the support they need. Power dynamics also play a role in the process of disclosure. Having varying experiences and objectives as a PSE students can influence the ways and the willingness to disclosure disability or needs. Students who are pursuing research/academic careers might even be less willing than students who don’t pursue similar objectives.

Another issue with disclosure is the pressure that some students may feel to disclose their disability to their professors, even though it is not necessary. As one speaker noted, “[s]tudents would often tell me that professors ask what their disability is, and they disclose it.” This can be problematic because it can lead to misunderstandings and stereotypes about disability instead of grasping contextual accommodations needs as being separate from impairments or diagnosis. Additionally, some students may be hesitant to disclose their disability because they fear discrimination or negative consequences. This adds a serious challenge to benefiting from the accommodations they have a right to, as some students would not ask for them in fear of consequences if they disclose their disability.

However, the speakers emphasized the importance of disclosure in order to receive the accommodations and support needed to succeed in PSE. By disclosing their disability and working with their disability services offices, staff, faculty, or supervisors, students can receive the accommodations they need to participate fully in academic and extracurricular activities in PSE. However, many speakers recognized that disability disclosure is not necessary and should not be enforced.

#### Institutional inadequacies in offering or approving accommodations

Speakers in every location during the tour mentioned that there were issues at the institutional level of universities when it comes to accommodations. Speakers reported that administrations and faculty from many departments would deny or simply forget about accommodations. The structural barriers that were mentioned during the tour vary between undergraduate and

postgraduate levels, but they may also stem from historical elements, or conflicts or absence of communication between the institution and its organizations.

One speaker during the townhall meetings attributed to these complications to the 2022 Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) who explained that 31% of student respondents self-identify as having a disability, but also mentioned that an external review documented that only 9% of students declared having a disability. This discrepancy shows a problem of representation of students with disability in PSE or of disclosure. Either way, this leaves a portion of the students without accommodations throughout their PSE experience. The speaker also indicated that there is a lack transparency in PSE institutions, and that many had feelings of suspicion regarding the decision-making process regarding accessibility. The speaker also reported that the Student Accessibility Advisory Committee (SAAC) in their area is often “muzzled”, and “tokenized” by the administration, which impedes accessible practices. The speaker also noted that accessibility is a process, and not simply a one-time investment, but should be embedded in the culture of PSE institutions.

General access in PSE may mean that more students with disabilities will attend PSE. In turn, the needs of this population will change and need to be taken into account in the accessibility measure put in place by the institutions. One speaker, however, points to a possible resolution in the form of a more direct engagement between the administration and the student disability community and its representatives and proactive about change:

*“Currently, the paternalism kind of comes very strongly from Western [University] itself. It means engaging with us. It means taking meaningful action that reflects the words and statements that we hear all the time, but we just don’t see the actions reflected from those. And it will take an honest and hard work, but it is possible.”*

The speaker also adds that social norms, policies, and expectations at their university are built upon neurotypical experiences which do not take in consideration the experiences and barriers that students with disabilities might face in these environments. Additionally, speakers reported that accessibility training is generally not offered by the institution to faculty or staff. As a student stated:

*“I recognize and acknowledge that professors in many instances are in spaces where they haven’t been trained in how to do these things from an accessible perspective”.*

This contributes to the lack of understanding on the part of faculty, staff, or administrators about the needs of students with disabilities. This finding demonstrates how difficult it is for staff to provide accommodations, promote accessibility, implement inclusive measures, and support that students with disabilities who require these resources to succeed academically.

In another context, one speaker from Halifax retells their recent experience in law school, and explained how the role of historical privacy policies reduces the possibility of self-disclosing disability:

*“The law school prevents students from doing what you just said, which is going up to your professor and disclosing your disability and telling them that the accessibility office doesn’t work and that you need help. The law school prohibits that because it’s a type of self-disclosure you’re not allowed to do. And if I am a disabled student writing about disabilities, I can’t disclose that in a paper either because it could lead to self-disclosure in my grades. So there are really strong private policies that are from the 80’s when disability was shamed upon. And if someone was disabled at law school, which they weren’t, but if they were, then lawyers and your professors wouldn’t be able to discriminate against you because of it. So, they had good intentions in the 80’s, we are in 2022, unfortunately for us. And, and those policies are still in place. And it’s just like a cultural and public awareness around disability.”*

As the speaker explained, policies are context emergent and tend to reflect the current preoccupations, common knowledges, and opinions of a certain moment; as the context changes over time, policies might become outdated. In certain instances, outdated policies can become counter-productive and produce and maintain barriers. In the current context and as this case shows, refraining people from self-disclosing their disabilities in PSE might limit their possibilities of obtaining accommodations. One solution proposed would be that norms and policies should be adapted to reflect the cultural content and usages as the needs and preoccupations of students change.

The bureaucratic network of instances involved in decision-making can also be detrimental to obtaining accommodation. This also distances the lived and specific experiences of students and their accessibility and accommodation needs from the decisional level and intricacies of these networks. Other speakers commented on the denial of accommodations on the part of the university which negatively impacted their learning experience. For example, one voiced that they requested accommodations throughout the length of their program, and these accommodations were constantly denied. Specifically, they asked to attend class remotely when they had episodes of their illness. As one student from Halifax noted:

*“So the entire time I was in university, I asked for accommodations such as being able to attend classes when I was ill online. And the university continued to, until the day I graduated, say, we’re not able to do that. We’re not able to do that... and then COVID happened. And within like two weeks, they were able to do that. Not for me, but for the entirety of the world which is a big slap in the face.”*

Prior to COVID, refusal of hybrid learning on the part of the schools was frequent, and the possibility of remote learning was seemingly impossible. One story is particularly telling to

explain the shift created by remote education as the speaker compares their pre-COVID and COVID experiences with the school system:

*“Hybrid learning is something I’ve wanted and dreamed of for a very long time. It is something that was so impossible to receive in high school. I did all of my work from like either my hospital bed or my partner’s bed in high school. Like I didn’t go to classes because you can’t sit in a room full of like 32 hormonal teenagers and be autistic and have ADHD and have celiac disease and be on the toilet at the same time. It’s just impossible... I literally had a 4.0 GPA during the pandemic just like it never happened in my life and I had it because I was able to attend from like the comfort of my home where my sensory life is and like I have autistic heaven at my apartment.”*

COVID measures and stay-at-home regulations generalized the accommodations requested by some students with disabilities to the entire student population, especially during the height of the pandemic when remote learning was the norm. During this time, many students with disabilities thrived during this time because they received the accommodations they required for the first time. As one student from Halifax stated:

*“And then COVID happened. And within like two weeks, they were able to do that (provide remote learning options). Not for me, but for the entirety of the world which is a big slap in the face.”*

The COVID emergency being ruled out, students came back to the school either in hybrid classes or mandatory in-person attendance classes. For many students with disabilities, this also marked the end of some of the accommodations they benefited from. As a student from Halifax noted:

*“We had this feeling that COVID would come and somewhat go, and universities would not acknowledge that they just, they just deleted all of our accommodations that they had given everyone. And that is very much where I stand today.”*

COVID demonstrated the potential of hybrid forms of learning in PSE.<sup>15</sup> It also showed that traditional educational structures in universities can be improved to consider the diversity of their student population. Students with disabilities benefited from the flexible learning options during COVID, but as the quotes above demonstrate, these options can be eliminated by the discretion of PSE institutions. The evidence shows that universities may not be willing to craft their programs and methods to accommodate students with disabilities, even when they have the opportunity, knowledge, and empirical evidence to do so.

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<sup>15</sup> This finding is congruent with [the findings from the SDG literature review](#) that researchers from Eviance undertook.

### Consequences of delays or receiving accommodations

Speakers during the townhall sessions explained how delays receiving both a diagnosis and accommodations can have implications for student progress. An absence of support and access to information related to the process of demanding accommodations can cause substantial delays and jeopardize the learning experience of students, and in some cases can lead to some students dropping out of PSE. As one student shared:

*“This [delay] can be problematic for youth or high schoolers who’ve had their ... diagnosis or paperwork for their diagnosis... So having to liaise with your doctor or otherwise provide paperwork can be a poor start to first year [in PSE]. Because if you don’t have your accommodations in place before you start, sometimes it takes a couple months to set up and then you don’t start with a good foot.”*

Throughout the discussions, speakers shared their experiences of navigating the challenges of accessing accommodations. The experiences and needs varied greatly, as do the types of accommodations requested. So, they question the “blanket model” of accommodations in which the individuals’ needs should fit in the “pre-packaged” accommodations. Instead of adapting a they suggest that accommodations should be crafted individually to meet the specific needs of each student. The current process of requesting accommodations.

Speakers explain that students need to know in advance and be informed of the current accommodation request processes, especially if paperwork is involved in the approval. This would allow students to benefit from the necessary accommodations as soon as their school year starts and avoid delays, deficits and difficulties in the learning process.

At the individual level, the speakers emphasize the importance of self-advocacy and self-determination. They argue that individuals with disabilities need to be empowered to advocate for themselves and to make decisions about their own accommodations. They also stress that students need to be prepared and document their needs and be on top of the requesting processes with the institution and with faculty. However, this adds an additional level of stress, preparedness, and organization for individual students that other students don’t have to deal with, generating an invisible burden.

At the institutional level, the speakers explained that accommodations need to be tailored to the individual and their specific needs. And this customization cannot come from a blanket model of accommodations. To meet the specific needs of students, the types of accommodations need to be discussed, understood and prepared in a timely manner by the institution, staff and/or faculty.

Accommodations needs also should include, not just accommodations in themselves and access measures but timely access to information and help in navigating the process of requesting accommodations from day one.



The speakers emphasize the importance of involving individuals with disabilities in the design of accommodations and creating a culture of inclusion that values diversity and promotes equity. Crafting support services for accessing accommodations with sufficient communications towards future and current students could be one solution to put in place.

Other strategies for requesting accommodations

### *The individual level*

During the tour, various speakers offered tips, strategies, and recommendations for students to access accommodations. The speakers provided some tips and strategies for students with disabilities in PSE to navigate the process of requesting accommodations at the individual level. One approach that speakers mentioned was for students to build a support network of peers, mentors, and disability advocates who can provide emotional support and encouragement. As one speaker notes in, “by building a support network, students can share the burden of advocacy.” This can help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety associated with disclosure and provide a sense of community and belonging. Some speakers mentioned how students with disabilities can ensure they receive the appropriate accommodations in PSE by taking proactive steps to advocate for their needs:

*“Students would often tell me that professors ask what their disability is, and they disclose it. So, although I say it’s an important part of disclosure, it’s really the accommodation you are, you’re disposing. But students with disabilities can ensure that they receive the support they need. Even though it’s challenging, it’s an important step on the road to success. So, you know, that’s kind of framing, framing advocacy, and there’s lots of kind of supports around how to advocate, and what tools to use.”*

Incorporating students’ personal narratives into creating solutions for inclusive PSE is important. As stated above, there is a need for the students to assess their own past experiences to identify which accommodations worked the best and which did not. In addition, if students are aware of their rights, they may be better positioned to identify their needs in advance. It was also suggested that students practice being assertive in their demands, as is exemplified in the following quote:

*“Knowing your rights and vocalizing your needs and taking responsibility for your disability, not expecting others to problem solve or make decisions for you. But this is really tricky too, because sometimes, you know, being assertive”, we don’t always know how to do it. And it takes practice. And sometimes also, it can feel like when you’re assertive, like you’re being angry. So sometimes getting somebody else to read over an email or a letter can be really helpful.”*

This speaker went on to suggest that students should prepare for their meetings by outlining accessibility needs and possible accommodations by providing an example of their own experience:

*“I often prepare a list of what I need, what’s worked in the past. So, I will come in and say, I’m a grad student. So, I don’t need a lot of the accommodations on offer: I don’t need a note taker, I don’t need extra time for exams. But here’s what I do need. And generally, because they’re not standard accommodations, it’s a bit of a process. But I’ve prepared in advance, and I know what I want to say. And identify goals and desirable outcomes as well. Understand duty to accommodate and undue hardship. I recognize and acknowledge that professors in many instances are in spaces where they haven’t been trained in how to do these things from an accessible perspective. And I think that ethical resourcing leads to ethical pedagogy in a lot of spaces. So I think this will be best served as a teamwork approach, nothing about us without us, but there also has to be the without us part.”(London)*

While recognizing the expertise and value of students with disabilities as they specialize in different domains and fields, one speaker mentioned that they are not necessarily experts on accommodation, universal design, or about their role educating the institution just because they have disabilities.

*“It’s important that our perspective is heard, but we’re also not educational design experts for the most part... we’re an expert in a different field and asked to be an expert in disability studies just because we are ourselves disabled. So I feel like it really is necessary to bring in these outsiders, these other stakeholders who can hold the university accountable and offer them this wealth of knowledge, implement those solutions that we already have, instead of time and time again bringing in a student and asking them to do an immense amount of labour almost never compensated on top of the work that they’re doing, on top of the work that they’re doing to try to get their accommodations or just account for being a disabled person in an extremely inaccessible environment. All of that labour falling on them, having been the party who was harmed, now trying to find a solution that they themselves probably will never even get to experience the benefit of, because it’ll be implemented maybe 10 years after they’ve graduated. So that’s, I think, I think we need to be really careful how we include students, and really aware of how many resources are out there that we could also be calling on in collaboration with that.”*

The speaker addressed an important issue regarding the burden put on students with disabilities to act as experts when it comes to disability, access and accommodations. As much as students should participate in these important questions which directly concern them, they should not necessarily be expected to do the work advancing accessibility. Partnerships with

external stakeholders who are trained professionals and experts in disability access, inclusive design, etc. are fundamental to make sure that PSE institutions are preemptively made accessible. This would avoid timely bureaucratic processes and which would ensure an accessible environment for each student. As reported, barriers can take a long time to eliminate on a situational basis and students could encounter these barriers all through their PSE experience before they are being removed or even addressed.

### *The collective level*

One way to address the lack of accommodations is to increase awareness and understanding about the needs and experiences of students with disabilities. For example, PSE institutions can provide training and education for faculty and staff about disability issues, such as how to address appropriate accommodations and support, how to create accessible course materials, and how to interact with students with disabilities in a respectful and inclusive manner. Another way to address this issue is to provide adequate resources and support for disability services and accommodations. For example, ideally, universities would increase funding and staffing for disability services, and could also provide accessible physical spaces and options regarding technology. This would help to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the accommodations they need to succeed, such as assistive technology, accessible course materials, and accessible physical spaces. Additionally, universities can provide peer support groups, mentorship programs and funding for students with disabilities to ensure support and a sense of community.

Another theme that emerged from the townhalls was that PSE institutions should also create clear policies and procedures for addressing disability-related issues, such as how to request accommodations, how to report discrimination or harassment, and how to file a complaint. Additionally, universities can hold faculty and staff accountable for providing appropriate accommodations and support, such as by conducting regular evaluations of disability services and accommodations, and by providing training and education on disability issues.

Finally, fostering truly accessible campuses where disability is anticipated and best practices for accessibility are known is crucial. For example, universities can create accessible physical spaces, such as by providing ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. They can also provide accessible technology and course materials, such as by using captioning and audio descriptions in videos, providing text-to-speech software, and using accessible document formats. Additionally, universities can ensure that events and activities are accessible to all students, such as by providing sign language interpreters, captioning, and accessible seating.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See footnote above about the SDG literature review; many of the conclusions in this section are congruent with what Eviance researchers found in the existing literature.

## Concluding Thoughts on Recommendations for Inclusion

During the tour, different strategies were discussed by the NEADS presenters, speakers and students. These strategies have different objectives, different scales and involve different levels within the university structure. We have identified three scales to organize the elements mentioned: Structural, collective and individual. As these elements can be attributed to one level in particular, they also often address the other levels. In reality, strategies are often transversal and combined with other strategies, either at the same level or situated at other levels.

- 1- **Structural:** This includes strategies aimed at addressing factors at the macro level of the PSE institution, such as laws, norms, funding, resources, types of teaching, paradigms, and different instances which can act on the reality of the university.
- 2- **Community:** This includes strategies aimed at addressing factors at a collective level, including programs, events, and physical spaces, but also what happens in the classroom which may benefit many students. This includes different formats or media, captioning, but also types of engagements with the faculty of staff, including negotiations, collective advocacy, flexible dates and modes of evaluation, inclusive pedagogy, tools and resources offering to students, and types of collective actions such as workshops, protest, forming groups, trainings, etc.
- 3- **Individual:** This includes strategies aimed at addressing factors at a personal level, including ways of communicating needs and goals, self-advocacy, organization skills, managing relations with the faculty or the staff, taking care of oneself, and sharing your experience and connecting with others.

A speaker in Victoria who is both a person with disabilities and a teacher explained that connections are the key to building a strong movement both with the staff, the faculty and other students. One important point made is that these efforts need to be collective as they can't rely on one individual to maintain both a network and continuity over time. Similarly, a speaker in Halifax made points on the topic of mutual support, the importance of the group but also the importance of each person constituting it as each individual brings knowledge and their own personal take and contribution to the collective.

*“Mutual peer support is really empowering. Other students are likely in a similar situation. So, finding those groups on campus, or if you don't have them off campus, fun fact, there's lots of resources at NEADS.ca... So, know your rights and ask your student union or a student representative if you're in doubt. And do your research and make sure that you've got tools in your arsenal and navigate self-advocacy with collective advocacy... valued presence of disability communities on campus through student unions or other disabled groups is huge. We're stronger together, our voices are bigger together, we're louder together.”*

Student unions and collective were also discussed in detail. For example, in Halifax the SOGS represents 7000 graduate students each year and represents the interests of thousands of master students, while in Montreal, a new organization called the Office for Inclusion and Student Success reaches out to students with disabilities and others who identify as a part of the LGBTQIA+, First Nation, immigrant, and parent communities, which allows them to connect with professionals for support. Comparatively, in Nova Scotia, the DISC is a student union associated with their respective undergraduate student union and plan to expand their advocacy towards graduate students and professional students. There are many benefits to these collectives for students with disabilities. For examples, one speaker from Winnipeg spoke about their experiences joining a self-organized student union and how it fostered a strong sense of community for the involved students:

*“I joined a student group called the Disability Justice Collective, or the DJC... usually held in the WSA (Winnipeg Students Association). At this time, the group existed for a duration of approximately four years under different titles. Members were students who had self-declared disabilities as well as their assistants, companions, and allies... It’s fair to say that the DJC significantly contributed to building a sense of community among students with disabilities. During the group’s most active years, students would look forward to attending, whether it was to share an interesting article or video, exchange in labs, discuss the and implement measures necessary to improve accessibility off campus, or to receive or offer support in the face of profound struggles that only those who travelled a similar path would ever deeply understand.”*

#### Other recommendations and further areas for advocacy

During the tour, speakers voiced recommendations regarding the state of accessibility and accommodations in PSE institutions. One speaker in London proposed the creation of a taskforce to address the epistemic exclusion of students with disabilities in PSE. As the speaker noted, the taskforce should be focused on “researching and understanding epistemic injustice” and “should have the capacity to pursue original research that involves both data collection and the production of conceptual resources.” The same speaker recommended that mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the accountability and responsibility of PSE institutions to address the ‘harm caused by inaccessibility’. Finally, the speaker recommended the universities reach out to DPOs to inform policies and improve support systems as well as to “ensure the voices of those with lived experience are heard and hopefully valued”. Through comprehensive disability-led training for all staff is necessary to foster an understanding of disability-related differences and develop support systems that are based on lived-experience knowledge.

One speaker also suggested a solution at the institutional level to incorporate EDI practices that includes accessibility while bringing the community and the activists involved “to ensure that we’re not leaving out members of the disability community from being a part of institutions, being professors, or leading the way”. Another speaker in Victoria also mentioned EDI trainings as a solution and as a way to be intentional about the required long-time change required

within the university structures. However, they also stated that EDI might be used for other purposes:

*“I think sometimes EDI work and reconciliation work gets weaponized and it gets used as a branding mechanism rather than actual deep investment and openness to sustainable change. So how can we hold our institutions accountable for these things that they’re committing to in their strategic plans and not let these movements that we’re a part of be co-opted or, you know, appropriated.”*

Another recommendation aimed at connecting the commitments to inclusion through an intersectional lens instead of approaching them individually, and as one faculty member stated, “oversimplifying the unique circumstances and needs of each lens or of each different justice issue.” The speaker gave an example of their teaching pedagogy:

*“I use a trauma-informed pedagogy to really guide me in all that I do, that gives me the lens then to ask those questions about how people have experienced trauma differently in their lives, based on using intersectionality as a way to consider trauma, and seeing how all of this is operating within a context of settler colonialism. So in my classes, tying in history, or helping people to acquire the language, and some of that, you know, that those frameworks to perceive power dynamics, not only in terms of make helping them make sense of it, not only in terms of: ‘Oh, here are issues that we’re covering as content in the course’, but to talk about our responsibilities to one another in a classroom and laying that out transparently.”*

An intersectional exploration of individual experiences through sharing personal stories connects to existing power systems which produce group privileges and discriminations. This analysis applies to addressing ableism and how disability impacts experiences of anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.

The experiences of students with disabilities in PSE remain an essential component to addressing social inequities. An analysis of the NEADS townhalls focuses on understanding the perspectives of various stakeholders within PSE to provide more inclusive and equitable solutions to address ableism within institutions. In addition to capturing the attitudinal, social and physical barriers that many students encounter, we also outlined how accessible measures and individual accommodations may benefit all students. A qualitative analysis of the townhall meetings identifies the themes with the intention of identifying key aspects surrounding inclusive education in post-secondary education.

## Appendix 1: Speakers from participating organizations<sup>17</sup>

Information about NEADS staff

### **Carly Fox, Communications & Partnerships Director**

Carly Fox (she/her/elle) is a queer, neurodivergent, and disabled young woman based out of Algonquin Anishinabe Territory (Ottawa, ON). Fox is NEADS' Communications & Partnerships Director, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities' International Chair, a disability advocate, and recently attended the 15th Conference of State Parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a member of Canada's Delegation. As a disability advocate and blogger, Fox aims to raise awareness on different types of invisible disabilities and the interactions between them, and aims to use her privilege to dismantle systemic forms of oppression to create space for others to share their lived experiences. Fox is currently in her third year at uOttawa, where she majors in International Development and Globalization and minors in Human Rights and Conflict Studies. You can find her on Instagram and Twitter (@ItsCarlyFox, @CarlyFox\_DisabilityAdvocacy), or on [her blog](#).

### **Katja Newman, NEADS Student Awards Programs Director**

Katja Newman (she/her/elle) is the National Educational Association of Disabled Students' Student Awards Scholarship Program Director. A resident of Halifax Nova Scotia, she is in her final year of an online Masters in Grant Writing and Program Evaluation from Concordia University Chicago. Prior to her Masters, Katja received a Bachelor's of Social Work from Carleton University and a Child & Youth Work Diploma from Georgian College. Outside of the classroom, she enjoys hiking, tandem bike riding, baking, cooking and educating audiences on the accessibility and inclusion related highs and lows that come with living life as a blind post-secondary student who navigates the world with the help of a guide dog.

### **Elizabeth Mohler, NEADS Research Consultant**

Elizabeth Mohler currently works for NEADS as a Research Consultant, where she leads the Virtual Access for All Project and writes its quarterly publication, State of the Schools. She also works for Left Turn Right Turn as an accessibility specialist; sits on the Canadian Institute for Health Research external advisory committee on systemic ableism and accessibility; and, is an experienced presenter, keynote speaker, lecturer, and published writer. Elizabeth is currently a doctoral candidate at Western University in the Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Program. Her work explores how discourses and practices within Direct Funding shape how disabled persons access services, and in what ways service users resist and negotiate these discourses. Follow [Elizabeth's work on her website](#).

### **Junique Gooden, NEADS Researcher**

With her background in Communications and Media Studies and as a Researcher for NEADS, Junique Gooden (she/her/elle) works alongside various disabled student groups to compile data supporting research on current trends and difficulties caused by structural, systemic, and societal

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from [NEADS website](#)

processes affecting students with disabilities. Junique curated NEADS' COVID-19 Guide for Students with Disabilities, which provides an in-depth look into programs and funding for students with disabilities at federal, provincial, post-secondary, and student union levels. Junique updates the events page, the disabled student group directory, and on-campus service provider contact information found on NEADS.ca, finds relevant job postings and resources for BreakingItDown.NEADS.ca, and is always looking for new research topics to bring attention to. Outside of NEADS, Junique runs Enfematic, a 100% natural and organic skincare business dedicated to making high quality goods accessible at low costs. Junique also enjoys playing with her newly adopted brown tabby cat Oscar.

### ***Aliyah Petzak-Grant, NEADS Website Manager***

Aliyah Petzak-Grant (she/her/elle) is NEADS' Website Manager, a creative and driven website designer, and a passionate disability advocate. Aliyah aims to educate others about online accessibility and assistive technology through her work. As NEADS' Website Manager, Aliyah oversees multiple sites including [disabilityawards.ca](https://disabilityawards.ca) - the largest online directory of disability-specific financial aid. When time permits Aliyah also does freelance and on occasion volunteer website design and accessibility consultations. Past work experience includes Researcher for the Accessible Career Transitions Project (now ACT to Employ) at Carleton University. While earning her degree in Psychology at Carleton focusing on Human Computer Interactions (HCI) and accessible technology user experience, Aliyah also volunteered with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities. Outside of work, Aliyah enjoys playing board games, Dungeons and Dragons, and spending quality time with her dog.

### Information about host partners

#### **MUNDISC, Memorial University**

A Memorial University of Newfoundland's Student Union resource centre, the Memorial University of Newfoundland's Disability Information Support Centre (MUNDISC) offers peer support for disability-related topics, to advocate for the rights of students and raise awareness of these topics within the university and in the community. The centre works to remove barriers faced by students with disabilities, and aims to promote a more accessible education and campus. Find them on-campus at UC2002, through Facebook @MUNDISC, or by email at [accessibility@munsu.ca](mailto:accessibility@munsu.ca) and [disc@munsu.ca](mailto:disc@munsu.ca)

#### **Dalhousie Accessibility and Inclusion Society, Dalhousie University**

The Dalhousie Accessibility and Inclusion Society (DAIS) is a society dedicated to improving accessibility and accessibility services at Dalhousie University, and is supported by the Dalhousie Student Union.

Nova Scotia has the highest rate of disability across all Canadian provinces, and the lowest university graduation rates - a result of the lack of complete accessibility, support, and inclusion in their communities. The society aims to increase the accessibility services at Dalhousie for both the students and the community, and aims to hear their student population's concerns about



Dal's accessibility - whether it be any physical constraints or technological concerns - and work together to make an impact.

### **Students for Barrier Free Access, University of Toronto**

Students for Barrier Free Access (SBA) at the University of Toronto is a student-led, volunteer-driven, non-profit which advocates for intersectional access, equity and inclusion. SBA advocates for disability justice and shapes all of its programming and advocacy through this framework. SBA holds free, skill-building workshops for members to build their community's expertise, while also giving members the ability to learn skills transferable to many workplace settings. At this time, SBA is working to support members virtually, with movie nights, workshops, and a food-sharing program. On campus, they run a community drop-in centre where members can enjoy a respectful, social, political and creative space.

### **Quebec Association for Equity and Inclusion in Post-Secondary Education (AQEIPS)**

For the past 20 years, the AQEIPS has been advocating for equal opportunities in education for post-secondary students with disabilities. The association is made up of persons with disabilities who were able to attend regular classes in elementary and secondary school and who, as a result, had the option to pursue post-secondary education. The promotion of the Social Model of Disability and of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guides their efforts towards building a truly inclusive society, one in which the cycle of poverty and isolation can be broken by ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the same level of education as students without disabilities do. AQEIPS organizes many activities and collaborates on research projects to support collective advocacy for SWD, and manages a yearly scholarships program.

### **Society for Students with Disabilities, University of Victoria**

The Society for Students with a Disability (SSD) is an advocacy group for University of Victoria students who self-identify as having one or more disabilities. Their goal is to reduce barriers faced by students with disabilities in all aspects of student life, and to promote full inclusion within academic and social environments. The SSD offers a range of programs and events, including a food security program, community care week, funding support, book club, peer support groups, speaker events and panel discussions, community outings, and more! Find them on Instagram and Facebook @uVicSSD or check out [SSD website](#).

### **University of Winnipeg Access Lounge, University of Winnipeg**

The Access Lounge is a University of Winnipeg Students' Association Initiative created in 2016 with the support of the Disability Justice Collective - a student group working to bring together, advocate for and support students with disabilities/disabled students/mad students/students who are mentally ill/neurodivergent students. The Access Lounge is a space on campus dedicated to students who are disabled by barriers. This space is for those students to study, hang out or complete course work. The Lounge offers power operated doors, powered window blinds, dimmable lights, a height adjustable desk, a computer with adaptive software, a sofa, and a kettle. Students with self-identified disabilities are welcome, as well as allies and support system members.