ACCESSIBILITY FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Issues and Resources
Motivation for report

• Need for report materialized through GSA-UW’s advocacy
• The GSA-UW is interested in understanding issues that graduate students with disabilities face and existing available resources
• Report serves as starting point for further data-gathering and action
Funding

• **Ontario/Canada government grants**
  • Covers certain services and equipment
  • Maximum funding limits per year
  • Must be OSAP eligible – excluding many graduate students

• **Internal awards**
  • No identified UW-specific awards or grants for students with disabilities

• **External awards**
  • Searchable database: [www.disabilityawards.ca](http://www.disabilityawards.ca)
  • Many are disability-specific or otherwise limited in scope

• **Health and Dental plan**
  • Administered by GSA
  • Funds some access to mental health resources, medication, etc.
• **AccessAbility Services**
  • Service for disabled students at UW
  • Assists with an accommodation plans for graduate *academic* career

• **Campus Wellness**
  • Counselling Services offers counselling support for all UW students
  • Health Services offers on-campus health supports (covered by OHIP and UHIP) to all UW students

• **Campus Housing**
  • Accessible on-campus housing available with application

• **Equity Office**
  • Assists students, faculty and staff from underrepresented groups
  • Develops equity-related initiatives on campus, ie. **Equity Survey** (deadline: October 31st)

• **Centre for Teaching Excellence**
  • Offers accommodation tips for classroom instruction
Background

- Disabled students disproportionately underrepresented in post-secondary degree attainment
- Graduates have much higher unemployment rates, more difficulty repaying education debt than peers
- History of ableism in academia, with promotion of eugenics ideals in late 1800’s to early 1900’s
- Disability Rights movement from 1960’s onwards
  - “Nothing about us without us”
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)
  - Goal of accessible Ontario by 2025
  - Post-secondary institutional standards currently under development
Issues

• Lack of data on ableism and access issues in post-secondary education
• Lack of funding of disability resources, gaps in support
• Historic lack of inclusion of disabled voices in policy that affects population
• Continued culture of stigma and ableism
• WUSA survey
  • Issues in price and availability of accessible housing
  • Issues in accessing appropriate support through AccessAbility Services
  • Navigating transitions, accessing program break accommodations
• Graduate students have multiple roles
  • AccessAbility only supports academic accommodations, not staff roles
  • Lack of centralized accommodations process
  • No large-scale study of graduate students with disabilities in US and Canada
Recommendations

• GSA-UW issue survey examining experiences of graduate students with disabilities
  • Preserve confidentiality in data collection and storage
  • Opportunities for coordination with UW Equity Survey, WUSA Accessibility Report
  • Consider diversity amongst population and graduate student specific issues in survey questions

• Support students through advising service
  • Career transitions
  • Disclosure, accommodations and stigma
  • Issues with supervisor relationship

• GSA-UW improves access to getting involved
  • Ensure communications are accessible
  • Hold accessible events
  • Support unit associations in ensuring access
Questions?

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